

# Appendix 3: MS Society rules for groups

The [Group Handbook](#) sets out the rules for running an MS Society group. When we use the words 'must' or 'we expect you to', we mean specific rules that you must comply with.

This appendix lists all rules in the [Group Handbook](#). It is intended as a quick reference guide – but not a replacement for following the guidance in the handbook as a whole.

If you are not meeting particular rules in this document, ask your [Local Networks Officer](#) (LNO) for support.

## Part A: Group basics

### A1: Introduction and overview

1. The [Group Handbook](#) sets out the principles and procedures that must be followed by MS Society groups across the UK – to make sure we act as one organisation in working towards our goals.

### A2: Requirements, support, tools and resources

2. All groups must meet our basic requirements, and if your group handles money and provides services and activities for people affected by MS, there are additional requirements we expect to be met.
3. All MS Society groups must:
  - Respect our values, and ensure that all volunteers follow our [Code of Conduct](#)
  - Follow our policies and rules, ensure that everything you do is safe, and manage personal data appropriately
  - Keep us informed of your activities
4. MS Society groups that handle money and provide services and activities must:
  - Be available to all people affected by MS in the area, be easy to contact, regularly communicate with members, and ensure

information about MS and MS Society services and activities is available to everyone in your community

- Manage your finances appropriately
- Have volunteers responsible for planning and delivering activities, and managing finances
- As a minimum, raise enough funds to cover the cost of your activities
- All services and activities you provide must:
  - align with our strategy and meet the needs of people affected by MS
  - be available to the whole MS community you serve
  - be safe and high quality

### A3: Our values and how we deal with problems

5. Everybody who volunteers for, or is employed by the MS Society must take personal responsibility for following our [Code of Conduct](#), as must all those connected with, or acting on our behalf.
6. We all share responsibility for following our [Equal Opportunities and Inclusion Policy](#). This means that we all must:
  - Value and respect one another
  - Ensure nobody is harassed, bullied or victimised
  - Report unfair or offensive treatment
  - Seek to include all people affected by MS and not discriminate against anyone when providing services
7. All volunteer involvement is at our sole discretion and we reserve the right to remove an individual from their volunteering relationship with us, for whatever reason.
8. We expect your group to involve people affected by MS in decision making and encourage them to play an active role in planning services and activities.
9. You must make sure all planning and consultation opportunities are accessible to people affected by MS.
10. If a complaint or concern needs to be dealt with formally, you must follow the appropriate policy and procedure:

- Comments, Compliments and Complaints
- Dignity at Work and When Volunteering
- Resolving Volunteer Issues
- Safeguarding
- Whistleblowing

## A4: Our legal identity, policies and rules

11. Our official, legally registered name is **Multiple Sclerosis Society**.
12. Your official documents must display our charity and limited company registration details.
13. You must refer to us as the MS Society, or MS Society plus nation suffix (for example, MS Society Scotland).
14. Under charity law, all of our activities must reflect our charitable objects.
15. The **Board of Trustees** delegates authority via the **Chief Executive** to our volunteer-led MS Society groups.
16. This gives your group the right to use the following assets:
  - The name Multiple Sclerosis Society, more commonly known as the MS Society
  - Our charity registration numbers and company limited by guarantee number
  - Our official branding
  - Our fundraising merchandise and printed materials
17. You must include our name, brand and charity numbers in all official correspondence and publications. You must not misuse these assets, nor permit their misuse by unauthorised groups or people.
18. As an MS Society group, you must follow all of our policies and rules that apply to volunteers and to groups.

## A5: Health, safety and wellbeing

19. All staff and volunteers must comply with our **Health and Safety Policy** and the systems we have in place to keep us all safe, protect the MS Society financially and protect you from personal liability.
20. You must follow our **Lone Volunteering Policy** whenever you undertake activities alone on our behalf.

21. We don't expect our staff and volunteers to make home visits alone and you must never do so.
22. You must complete an **Accident Report Form** after each accident where a person is injured, no matter how minor the injury. The completed form must be sent to the **Health and Safety Team**.
23. If your role involves coordinating fitness, property, transport or events, you must understand and use our **risk management systems**.
24. You must review all **risk assessments** and **events risk guidance** annually and also if things change in between reviews.
25. If your group organises a service or activity that aims to give primary carers a break, you must supply contracted care assistants to provide **personal care**.
26. We don't expect our staff and volunteers to provide **personal care** and you must not do so on our behalf.
27. All volunteers must report safeguarding concerns to the **Safeguarding Responders Group** or call your MS Society national office.
28. If a young person (aged 16 or 17) enquires about using a service your group provides, or you are considering setting up a service for young people, you must contact our **Quality and Safeguarding Manager** for advice before proceeding.
29. Your group must not purchase or accept donations of fitness, mobility or clinical equipment for the purpose of lending it to people with MS.
30. If your group is asked to purchase a piece of equipment for an individual for their sole use, they must submit a **Health and Wellbeing Grant** application.
31. The MS Society is not responsible for maintenance or repair of equipment awarded as a grant.
32. Services, activities and events organised or co-organised by MS Society groups are covered by our central insurance.
33. You must ensure that your group is adequately covered by any further insurance which may be necessary.

34. If your MS Society group runs a minibus, you must hold a [Section 19 Permit](#) and disc to show that you are exempt from certain statutory rules and regulations.

## A6: Handling data

35. All MS Society volunteers and staff must follow our [Data Protection Policy](#) and [Privacy Notice](#) to ensure we comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and protect you from personal liability.
36. We must all take responsibility for ensuring that all personal data we have access to is kept safe and secure, and only used for the purpose/s agreed by the individual.
37. A 'subject access request' is when an individual contacts an organisation to find out what personal information is held about them. All subject access requests must be directed to the [Data Governance Team](#).
38. Whenever you collect personal data from an individual, you must give them our 'privacy statement' of how their personal information will be processed, and for what purposes.
39. Anybody who stops volunteering with us must return all personal data owned by the MS Society to your [Coordinating Team](#) within seven days.
40. You must not publish a person's personal data anywhere unless you have their prior consent in writing for the publication you intend to make.
41. You must be discreet with personal information at all times, and maintain confidentiality where necessary.
42. If your group is approached by the Police or any other authority asking for information about a person in anything other than a life or death situation, you must refer them to our [Data Governance Team](#).
43. When not in use, all personal data must be stored securely. Only volunteers in roles that are allowed to use personal data must be permitted access to it.
44. Paper based personal data must be kept in a locked drawer, filing cabinet or cupboard at all times when it is not being used. If you need to take personal data out with you, you must keep it in your possession at all times.

45. Electronically stored personal data must be held in a password protected file on a computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or on an encrypted memory stick.
46. With the exception of **MS Society email** accounts accessed via Office 365, you must not use cloud based storage (for example, Dropbox, Google Docs or Google Drive) to store personal information and data.
47. A 'data breach' is any situation where personal data is made insecure. You must speak to our **Data Governance Team** to report any potential data breach immediately.
48. You must report a lost or stolen mobile device containing MS Society data to **IT Lab** as soon as you become aware it is missing.
49. You must use MS Society email whenever you handle personal data by email.
50. When emailing more than one person, you must not disclose their email address to others receiving the email.
51. When emailing members, you must use up to date membership data downloaded from the **Portal**.
52. You must store written and digital communications securely and never share them with third parties. You can only share an email with another MS Society volunteer if you need their help to reply to it.
53. You must not use a person's email address to communicate with them unless they have agreed to receive emails from us.
54. You must offer people the option to opt out of receiving written and digital information from us.
55. When you receive an unsubscribe request from a member, you must update the **Portal** or inform our **Supporter Care Team**.
56. You must complete **Data Protection for GDPR eLearning** if any of the following apply to you:
  - Your role involves handling personal information, such as a **Group Coordinator** or **Finance Volunteer**
  - You have access to membership data
  - You use **MS Society email**, our **Portal** or **Online Recruitment**
  - Your role specific **Welcome and Induction Checklist** includes **Data Protection for GDPR eLearning** as 'must do' training

57. You must not use membership data that is more than 28 days old, or that was requested for a different purpose.
58. If a member requests a change to their marketing contact preferences, you must let the [Supporter Care Team](#) know as soon as possible.
59. If a person does not appear on a current membership list you download from the [Portal](#), you must not contact them for any reason.
60. You must obtain a person's written consent to use their image or story publicly and keep it on file until one year after the last use of the image or story. Stories and photos must be stored and used for no longer than three years.
61. Membership data must be downloaded from the [Portal](#) and not held locally other than for the time it takes to complete a mailing or other task.
62. You must not hold personal data on people who apply to volunteer with us. If a candidate is successful, either email or post their application form to our [Supporter Care Team](#). If you don't recruit them, you must destroy it.
63. You must post or email [Accident and Incident Report Forms](#) to our [Health and Safety Team](#) and destroy all copies.
64. Health and safety documents such as [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaires](#) (PARQ) must be reviewed annually and kept for three years after a person stops taking part in a service.
65. If your group awards grants, you must hold grants information for seven years following the issue of a successful grant application. Unsuccessful applications must be destroyed one year after the decision was made.
66. We don't expect [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to hold personal information about people using your [MS Support](#) service, or make case notes about enquiries you have taken, and you must not do so.
67. You must retain personal information such as attendance lists and routine correspondence with individuals about events for one year following the event.
68. Paper records must be shredded or burnt when no longer needed. Electronic records must be deleted from your PC or device's storage, and the 'recycling bin' must be emptied.

69. If your group regularly hires transport or a venue, your service provider must complete a [Third Party Data Protection Undertaking Form](#).

## A7: Keeping in touch

70. Keeping us informed of your activities is a requirement for all MS Society groups. We expect you to do this in two ways:
  - Have regular contact with your [Local Networks Officer](#)
  - If your group handles money and delivers services and activities, use the [Portal](#) to maintain a record of what you provide
71. Before you use the [Portal](#) for the first time, you must complete our [Data Protection for GDPR eLearning](#).
72. We will ask you to complete [Data Protection for GDPR eLearning](#) even if you have completed previous data protection training.

## Part B: If your group handles money and provides services and activities

### B1: Availability, contact and communication

73. Your MS Society group must be available to all people affected by MS in the area. This means:
  - People affected by MS in the area know about your group
  - Your services and activities are accessible to all
74. All venues used by your group to deliver services and activities must be physically accessible.
75. Your group must be easy to contact. This means:
  - Having agreed contact details with named volunteers responsible for the task of monitoring each contact method.
  - Having a named contact and contact details for each service and activity your group provides.
76. You must use [MS Society email](#) whenever you communicate with external organisations or people by email on our behalf.
77. Whenever you use a group or personal account to represent us on social media, you must follow these rules:



- If you set up a group account, your description, biography or 'about us' section must state that the account is run by a group of MS Society volunteers and that 'Views are our own'.
  - When using your personal account, you must add the statement 'Views are my own' at the end of your biography.
  - You must not:
    - Post uncorroborated facts, stories or views of the MS Society
    - Share messages that could be considered as defamation towards the MS Society, any member of staff or volunteer
    - Post content, messages or links that could be considered inappropriate or illegal, including content that might offend someone on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, politics, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender or any other characteristic protected by law
    - Engage in or encourage any illegal or criminal activities
    - Post, share or forward spam, junk or phishing scams
  - All content you post must meet our data protection requirements; you must obtain written consent before posting any form of personal information, including images.
  - Comments, messages and mentions will need to be monitored and moderated each day. Respond to each interaction (especially negative comments) with sensitivity and care. Escalate any remarks that are threatening, aggressive or rude to our [Digital and Content Team](#).
78. If the press contacts you about a matter that concerns national, political or research issues, you must contact the [Press Office](#) before responding.
79. As a national charity, we must not be seen to endorse one political viewpoint, or one political party, over another.
80. If you are concerned about a potential negative story, you must tell the [Press Office](#) straight away.
81. If you are asked to provide a case study, you must follow our guidelines:
- Make sure the person you ask understands where their story will appear and how many people will see or hear it.
  - Only choose someone who is confident at talking about their MS and is happy to give out their name, age and be photographed.

- If you think you might want to use their information again, you must obtain permission in writing using our [consent form](#).

## B2: Using our brand

82. We have a range of logos to suit different purposes. You must ensure you use the correct version and follow these rules:
  - Our logo and registered charity and company numbers must appear on all materials we produce, from letters and leaflets to email newsletters.
  - Our logo must not be redrawn, digitally manipulated or altered.
  - Our logo must have a good contrast with the background and preferably be in the top left corner.
  - Our logo must only be used in relation to MS Society activities.
83. If your group uses social media to share news stories, event images and information about MS, you must use our social media profile image.
84. The [Board of Trustees](#) delegates authority to our volunteer-led groups, giving you the right to use our branded materials when you represent us. You must not misuse our brand, or permit misuse by unauthorised groups or people.

## B3: Giving information

85. Your group must have agreed contact details with named volunteer(s) responsible for monitoring each contact method.
86. We expect the volunteer responsible for each contact method to read this section of the [Group Handbook](#) and use our information resources to deal with enquiries. Our information resources are:
  - Key publications list
  - MS Helpline
  - Local contacts template
87. If your group handles money and delivers services and activities, you must ensure that information about our national grants programme is available to all people affected by MS within your community.
88. We don't expect your group to give advice and you must not do so on our behalf. If a person needs specialist help, we expect you to signpost to a suitable service provider, or contact our [MS Helpline](#) for support.

89. Whenever your group signposts people to products, information or services provided by other organisations, such as in a newsletter or email, you must include our [Disclaimer](#).

## B4: Managing your finances

90. If your group handles money, you must follow our [MS Society Financial Rules for Groups](#).
91. Ideally monthly and at least once a quarter, your [Coordinating Team](#) must meet to make decisions on behalf of the group and review group finances.
92. When you recruit a new [Finance Volunteer](#), you must:
- Update bank account signatories and correspondence address
  - Update HMRC Gift Aid registration
  - Inform our [Supporter Care Team](#) and [Finance Support Team](#)
  - Change your [Online Accounting](#) log in
93. Each year, we expect your [Coordinating Team](#) to put together a plan of what your group will do, and a budget detailing how it will be paid for.
94. If your MS Society group handles money, you must use our [Online Accounting](#) system to record your financial transactions.
95. To ensure your [Coordinating Team](#) has access to current information, we expect your new transactions to be allocated at least once a month.
96. You must retain and securely store your group's financial records (invoices, paying-in slips, etc.) for seven years to meet HMRC requirements.
97. Each year, your [Group Coordinator](#) and [Finance Volunteer](#) must review and sign off the MS Society financial rules for groups and submit it to our [Finance Team](#) by 31 January.
98. If you answer 'don't comply' to any item on the MS Society financial rules for groups, you must include the reason/s why when you submit it.
99. If you are concerned about fraud or financial mismanagement, contact a member of our [Finance Team](#) or an MS Society Director immediately for support.
100. If your group receives a legacy over £20,000, the funds must be sent to [MS National Centre](#) for administration.

101. Under our **Conflicts of Interest Policy**, you must declare any potential conflict of interest and ensure that you do not take part in discussions or decisions made on that subject.
102. Your group is only permitted to bank and hold funds within an MS Society cash pooling account. Your account must include 'MS Society' or 'MSS' in the name.
103. Your group bank account must have three unrelated account signatories named on the bank mandate who are able to sign cheques.
104. Your group must have its own Charities Reference Number issued by HMRC to claim Gift Aid.
105. You must keep all Gift Aid declaration forms and letters, and sponsor forms on file for seven years from the date of the claim.

## B5: Fundraising

106. All MS Society fundraising must comply with the Code of Fundraising Practice and complaints process.
107. Our fundraising standards inform the five important ethical principles we must follow when fundraising for the MS Society - honesty, respect, integrity, empathy and transparency.
108. If you volunteer to fundraise as part of an MS Society group, you must understand the difference between 'on behalf of' and 'in aid of' fundraising. This difference is important as it affects your legal, and health and safety obligations.
109. You must contact your local authority licensing department for advice if you plan to:
  - Provide alcohol or entertainment (including recorded music)
  - Hold a raffle or lottery
  - Do any sort of collection in a public place
  - Put up banners or signs in public areas
110. If you volunteer to fundraise as part of an MS Society group, you must understand the following financial matters:
  - Our income handling rules
  - Gift Aid – how to promote and maximise income
  - Earmarking of funds from national offices
  - Restricted funds
  - Trading activities

- VAT exemptions available for fundraising materials
  - Corporate sponsorship
111. Before applying to a local trust, you must discuss your application with your [Area Fundraiser](#) or [National Fundraising Manager](#).

## B6: Planning and delivering quality services and activities

112. All services and activities your group provides must:
- Align with our strategy and meet the needs of people affected by MS
  - Be available to the whole MS community you serve
  - Be safe and high quality
113. All services and activities your group provides must meet one of our local priorities:
- We provide social and peer group support
  - We support people with MS to be physically active
  - We offer emotional support to people affected by MS
  - We give information and signpost people to local services
114. Any clinical services or complementary therapies your group plans to fund or directly deliver must meet our agreed definitions and criteria for service delivery.
115. We expect your group to use our service level agreement (SLA) template to set up written agreements with service providers.
116. An SLA must not be used to engage a person to carry out an administrative or organisational function for your group that is being fulfilled elsewhere by local service organisers or other recognised MS Society group volunteer roles.
117. You must involve your [Local Networks Officer](#) (LNO) if you plan to develop any service or activity that requires an SLA.

## Part C: Running your group

### C1: Volunteering with us

118. We only offer volunteering opportunities for individuals who are aged 18 or over.
119. All potential volunteers must apply via [Online Recruitment](#) or by completing our paper [Volunteer Application Form](#) to enable us to agree with them how we will use their data.
120. All volunteers who carry out tasks on a particular role description must complete the 'must do' training and disclosure checks required of that role.
121. We reserve the right to remove an individual from their volunteering relationship with us if they fail to complete 'must do' training.
122. Whenever you recruit a new volunteer, or an existing volunteer changes role, you must contact the [Supporter Care Team](#) to update our central volunteer database.
123. As an MS Society group volunteer, we expect you to take part in a three yearly role review.
124. When the time comes for a volunteer to leave us, you must contact our [Supporter Care Team](#) to close their volunteer record.
125. If a [Finance Volunteer](#) or another account signatory leaves, you must also contact our [Finance Support Team](#) to update the following:
  - Bank account signatories
  - Correspondence address ([Finance Volunteer](#) only)
  - HMRC Gift Aid registration ([Finance Volunteer](#) only)
126. We only provide factual references, on request. You must not give a subjective character reference on our behalf.

### C2: Disclosure checks

127. If your volunteer role involves contact with adults with MS when they take part in certain activities, you must complete a disclosure check before taking up the role. Refer to the relevant policy for roles that need disclosure checks where you are.
128. Disclosure checks must be renewed every three years.

129. Volunteers must not start in a role requiring a disclosure check until the process has been completed, and must not continue in a role requiring a disclosure if they have not renewed their check.
130. Your **Coordinating Team** is responsible for making sure that anyone who volunteers for your group completes a disclosure check before they start their role, if required.
131. Individuals who provide services on behalf of your group ('service providers') may also need to be checked. All disclosure checks must be completed before a service starts.
132. Disclosure checks are free of charge for volunteers, but service providers must pay for their disclosure check.
133. Your group must follow the disclosure process for England and Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland, including the process for witnessing identity documents, where appropriate.
134. You must not make or keep photocopies of an applicant's identity documents.

### C3: Your Coordinating Team

135. If your group handles money and delivers services and activities, you must have a **Coordinating Team** that meets regularly to review your finances, plan services and activities, and make decisions.
136. Your **Coordinating Team** must have a minimum of three volunteers, including a **Group Coordinator**, a **Finance Volunteer** and at least one other volunteer.
137. Members of your **Coordinating Team** must all be aged 18 or over.
138. No more than two members of a family can join your **Coordinating Team**, and your **Group Coordinator** and **Finance Volunteer** must not be related.
139. Your group must not split either the **Group Coordinator** or **Finance Volunteer** role between more than two people.
140. Your **Coordinating Team** must hold a minimum of four **team meetings** per year to discuss matters and make decisions on behalf of your group.

141. If you hold one of these roles, we expect you to use **MS Society email** when you represent us:
- **Group Coordinator**
  - **Administration Volunteer**
  - **Lead Support Volunteer**
  - **Finance Volunteer**
  - **Communications Volunteer**
  - **Support Volunteer**
142. Regardless of the volunteer role you hold, you must also use **MS Society email** whenever you represent us in these ways:
- Handling personal data by email
  - Acting as an account signatory on your group's cash pooling account
  - Communicating with external organisations or people by email on our behalf
143. Any decision made by your **Coordinating Team** via **MS Society email** must be agreed by all **Coordinating Team** members. You must record this agreement in meeting notes before the decision can be actioned.
144. Individual volunteers do not have the authority to conduct business on behalf of your group unless they have the agreement of the **Coordinating Team**.
145. We expect your **Coordinating Team** to make decisions in line with our organisational values, policies, rules and group requirements.
146. Your group must not create new employment positions. We will only support you to recruit existing roles.
147. You must follow our policies for dealing with **Conflicts of Interest** and **Accepting Gifts and Hospitality**.

## C4: Membership administration

148. Your group must not charge more than our subscription fee of £5.00 per year, but you can invite additional voluntary contributions from members.
149. A person does not have to be an MS Society member to access our services, nor does membership give any greater entitlement to our support.
150. When a member joins via your group, you must forward their membership form and fee to MS National Centre to be processed.



151. If you become aware of a member's change of details, or the death of a member, you must tell the **Supporter Care Team** as soon as possible.
152. If a member renews via your group, you must let the **Supporter Care Team** know so that their membership record can be updated and to ensure that no further renewal reminders are sent.
153. If a member does not appear on a list you download from the **Portal** list, you must not contact them for any reason.

## Part D: Optional additional services

### D1: Offering MS Support

154. Your MS Support service must only be provided by **Lead/Support Volunteers** who have completed **Support Volunteer Training** and hold a current disclosure check.
155. Our MS Support requirements are the same as those for other services and activities your group may provide.
156. Your MS Support service must meet our MS Support priorities:
  - Offering emotional support
  - Giving information
  - Signposting to specialist advice
  - Help to access financial support
157. We don't expect your MS Support service to offer regular ongoing visits, and you must not provide any of these services on our behalf:
  - Shopping
  - Gardening
  - Meal preparation
  - Personal care
  - Replacement care
  - Companionship/friendship
158. You may be asked to make home visits for people that are isolated. If home visiting is the only possible way to meet with someone, you must ensure that at least two people visit together.

159. We don't expect your MS Support service to provide the following types of emotional support, and you must not do so on our behalf:
- Counselling
  - Befriending
  - Complex problem solving
  - Dealing with safeguarding concerns
  - High end emotional support for strong feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, worry, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation
160. We don't expect **Lead/Support Volunteers** to hold personal information about people using your MS Support service, or make case notes about enquiries you have taken, and you must not do so.
161. You must ask permission from a person before sharing information about them with another **Lead/Support Volunteer**.
162. Safeguarding concerns are one of the few exceptions to this rule. You must report all abuse or suspected abuse to the **Safeguarding Responders Group**, even if you have not been able to obtain permission.
163. We don't expect your MS Support service to offer specialist advice and you must not do so on our behalf. Specialist advice includes:
- Benefits advice
  - Other financial advice
  - Advice on how to apply for health and social care services
  - Care navigation or case work
  - Recommending services such as clinical or therapeutic services that are not regulated
164. Only **Lead/Support Volunteers** who have completed **Support Volunteer Training** must help people to fill in MS Society grant application forms.
165. We don't expect your MS Support service to provide the following types of financial support, and you must not do so on our behalf:
- Completing benefits or health and social care assessment forms on a person's behalf
  - Giving advice about what to include on benefits or health and social care assessment forms
  - Making decisions about an MS Society grant application you have helped with

166. To offer an MS Support service, all the tasks listed on our Support Volunteer role description must be covered, by one or more **Support Volunteers**.
167. All volunteers that carry out **Support Volunteer** tasks must complete **Support Volunteer Training**.
168. All potential **Lead/Support Volunteers** must complete a disclosure check before being allowed to offer any new or existing MS Support activity.
169. If your group sets up a *new* MS Support service, you must ensure that all **Lead/Support Volunteers** complete **Support Volunteer Training** before starting.
170. New **Lead/Support Volunteers** joining an *existing* MS Support service can assist current **Lead/Support Volunteers** to provide activities, but must not offer one to one support until **Support Volunteer Training** is completed.

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