

Meals on Wheels UK – Provider Resource



Developed by the Meals on Wheels UK project, University of Bristol

Attracting and retaining Meals on Wheels drivers and volunteers

Why this matters

Meals on Wheels services rely on a committed workforce, including both volunteers and paid delivery drivers, to operate effectively.

Across the UK, many providers report ongoing challenges in:

- recruiting new drivers
- retaining staff and volunteers
- maintaining reliable delivery capacity

At the same time, research and provider experience show that delivering Meals on Wheels can be a highly rewarding role, offering a strong sense of purpose and connection to the community.

This guide brings together practical considerations and ideas to support providers in attracting and retaining drivers and volunteers.

What motivates people to get involved?

Research and provider experience suggest that people are often motivated by:

- wanting to support others in their community
- making a visible, practical difference day-to-day
- building relationships with service users
- having a flexible and meaningful role
- feeling part of a trusted local service

For many drivers, the role offers something distinctive - combining practical support with regular human connection.

What makes the role distinctive?

Meals on Wheels delivery is not simply about transporting food.

Drivers often:

- become a regular point of contact for people using the service
- notice changes in wellbeing or routine

- provide reassurance through consistent, familiar visits
- contribute to the overall safety and support of service users

This combination of **practical delivery and social contact** is often what makes the role meaningful and rewarding.

Making the role visible

Some providers have found it helpful to:

- clearly explain the role on their website
- include photos or short descriptions of day-to-day delivery
- highlight the impact of the role on people's lives
- share stories or experiences from existing drivers

Even simple, realistic descriptions can help potential applicants understand what the role involves.

Keeping the message simple

When promoting driver or volunteer roles, it can help to:

- use clear, plain language
- focus on what the role involves in practice
- explain the time commitment and flexibility
- outline any support or training provided

Short, clear messages are often more effective than detailed descriptions.

Reaching potential drivers

Providers use a range of approaches to reach potential drivers, including:

- local community networks and word of mouth
- social media (e.g. Facebook, local groups)
- partnerships with local organisations
- volunteer platforms or local councils
- existing supporters and service users' families

There is no single approach - different methods may work in different areas.

Supporting and retaining drivers

Retention is often as important as recruitment.

Providers may wish to consider:

- ensuring drivers feel valued and supported
- providing clear communication and guidance
- recognising contributions (formally or informally)
- creating opportunities for feedback
- maintaining flexibility where possible

A positive and supportive environment can make a significant difference.

Learning from others

Many providers have developed effective ways of:

- describing roles
- recruiting drivers
- supporting volunteers and staff

We encourage providers to share examples of:

- job descriptions
- volunteer role outlines
- recruitment approaches that have worked well

These can help build a shared understanding of what works in practice.

Further information

You may also find it helpful to explore how other organisations present volunteer opportunities.

For example, Meals on Wheels America provides examples of how roles are described and promoted in a different context:

<https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/volunteer/>

Also, Meals on Wheels Australia have a dedicated page for volunteers, with a link to an interesting report:

<https://mealsonwheels.org.au/get-involved/volunteer/>

(Please note that service models and contexts differ, but some approaches to communication may be useful.)

Final note

There is no single model for recruiting and retaining drivers. Approaches will vary depending on local context, capacity, and the nature of the service.

This guide is intended as a starting point - many providers are already using effective and creative approaches.

Help us improve this resource

This guide has been developed based on research and ongoing engagement with Meals on Wheels providers, alongside insights into workforce and volunteer experiences.

We recognise that many providers have developed practical and effective ways of recruiting and supporting drivers and volunteers, often tailored to local needs and circumstances.

We would really value your input to help ensure this resource reflects what works in practice across the sector.

If you have experience in recruiting or retaining drivers or volunteers, we would be very interested to hear from you.

You might wish to share:

- how you promote driver or volunteer roles
- examples of job descriptions or role outlines
- approaches that have helped attract applicants
- how you support and retain drivers over time
- any challenges you've faced and how you've addressed them

We are particularly interested in practical examples, including wording, approaches, or small changes that have made a difference.

Please share your ideas via our [WhatsApp Community](#).

Your input will help build a shared resource shaped by providers and support others facing similar challenges.