

# Open Your Eyes To Volunteering: An Inside Look Into The World Of Visual Impairment & Blindness!

Managers of Volunteers Meeting  
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## Panel of Speakers

- **Amanda Simpson**, SHARE / Advocates for Sight-Impaired Consumers (ASIC)
- **Shawn Marsolais**, Blind Beginnings/ASIC/Cane User
- **Linda Weber**, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)/ASIC/Guide Dog User
- **Anu Pala**, Neil Squire Society / Cane User
- **Chris Wright**, Neil Squire Society

## Posting Your Volunteer Opportunity

Potential volunteers with visual impairments will come to you through the same mechanisms as any other volunteers – through word of mouth, web-based volunteer postings, or looking up your website.

Many methods of getting the word out about your volunteer opportunity assume the potential volunteer has sight. How can you adapt your volunteer opportunity postings and organizational information for people with visual impairment.

- If your Volunteer Position description and Volunteer Application forms are available online, make sure you have a text-only option available. Text-only documents are easier for text-to-speech software to read. Many text-to-speech software programs cannot read PDF documents.
- Make sure your Volunteer Position description lists all the tasks your volunteer will be asked to do. If part of the volunteer position requires reading (e.g. to refer people to resources) or writing (e.g. filing incident reports or notes on how the shift went), a person with a visual impairment will often have solutions

## Adapting a Volunteer Position for Someone With a Visual Impairment

The person who knows their abilities and supports needs the best will be your potential volunteer. Two great questions can go a long way to creating the solutions you need:

- What would be the challenges for you in fulfilling the tasks in this volunteer position?
- What solutions would you recommend to overcome these challenges?

Some possible challenges and solutions are listed below:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Volunteers must read printed materials re: policies, resources, etc.	Scan printed materials so they can be read by a text-to-speech program.
Volunteers must be able to write reports on their shifts.	Touch typing does not require sight, and text-to-speech programs are used to read back the typing as it is keyed in, to catch typing errors on the go.
Volunteers must refer people to phone numbers / websites	Make a Braille “cheat sheet” of most common phone numbers or websites
Our computers don’t have text-to-speech programs	Many people with visual impairment have their own text-to-speech programs that they can install on your system.
Text-to-speech programs sound loud. What about disturbing other volunteers or staff?	Headphones are inexpensive and easy to plug into a computer.
How do I help other volunteers and staff support a volunteer with a visual impairment?	Disability etiquette training is available (see resources below) that will orient your sighted volunteers and staff to the basics of showing someone to a chair, giving directions that aren’t vision specific, etc.
People in our offices have allergies to dogs. How do we accommodate guide dogs?	Guide dogs are meant to travel with their companion, and not to be left at home. When at the volunteer site, guide dogs can be crated or settled into their own mats or beds in a room separate from the volunteer activity to try to control allergens.
Volunteers need to be able to find things in the office.	Braille labels can save a lot of time on guessing.

### Helpful Resources/Organizations

- Neil Squire Society:** Provides employability support for persons with physical disabilities and the organizations who are hiring them as volunteers or staff.  
[www.neilsquire.ca](http://www.neilsquire.ca)
- Access for Sight-Impaired Consumers:** [www.asic.bc.ca](http://www.asic.bc.ca)
- Accessworks** – Information on “Employment Accommodations for People with Vision Loss or Blindness” -  
[www.accessworks.ca/visualAccommodations.php](http://www.accessworks.ca/visualAccommodations.php)
- Blind Beginnings** – Strives to guarantee quality of life for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired – [www.blindbeginnings.ca](http://www.blindbeginnings.ca)
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB):** Provides resource and information about living an independent and active life with a visual impairment. Coordinators of Volunteers can find many suggestions for accomplishing tasks without sight. Information on Guide Dog Etiquette, Braille, helpful technologies, etc – [www.cnib.ca](http://www.cnib.ca)
- JAWS** – A popular text-to-speech program for persons with visual impairment. Try it out by downloading a 40-minute demo version.  
<http://www.freedomscientific.com/jaws-hq.asp>