Volunteering with MapAction: Information for Prospective Volunteers

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with MapAction. We receive a large number of volunteering enquiries every month, so we have put together the notes below to explain what volunteering opportunities exist, and how to apply if you feel you are suitable. Of course, feel free to contact us for more information if anything isn’t clear.

MapAction’s mission is to provide in-field information management and information products to humanitarian decision-makers. The use of volunteers has always been crucial in delivering much of the charity’s work.

MapAction is not a ‘network’ or a broad community of volunteers, but rather we recruit volunteers to fit specific roles and requirements for the organisation’s operational model. Because our experienced volunteers remain with us for several years, only a handful of new opportunities arise each year.

The two main volunteer groups are: the Deployable Team, about 35 experienced volunteers who are selected for emergency field missions to disaster zones and need to be able to deploy at short notice; and the Operational Support Team (OST) which comprises a further 20 volunteers who provide GIS and other technical support and development services without travelling to the disaster zones but who do deploy on non-emergency missions. To join the Deployable Team, you will need to gain experience first via the OST.

What does volunteering involve? What are the opportunities and expectations?

Being a member of the MapAction team has many rewards, it has been a life-changing experience for many of our volunteers. You could find yourself a key player in the UN field coordination centre for a disaster that affects millions of people such as Haiti or the recent Philippines typhoon. You could be part of a training that builds local capacity anywhere in the world. You could attend international training exercises or a support mission to UN or other humanitarian organisations. Volunteers also lead much of MapAction development, both technical and organisational, and there are many opportunities to get involved or lead on aspects of this. As a member of the team you will also receive continuous training from MapAction and other organisations such as the UN and ESRI. Underpinning all this are our monthly training sessions where the team train and much of the development work happens. It is also where we socialise and catch up what has been happening.

You can see that being a MapAction volunteer requires a large time commitment and volunteers generally find this needs to be the main focus of their non-work lives. Our volunteers tend to stay involved for long periods. So when we select volunteers we are looking for a high level of commitment and for people who deliver what they say they will. It’s not for everyone so please think carefully if this is something for you.

The normal route for a volunteer is that they will join MapAction as an OST volunteer, on a six month probationary period, where they will be expected to participate in remote support of emergency missions, MapAction technical development and MapAction training. There will also be some opportunities to attend overseas training missions. Following the probationary period,
volunteers who are interested in joining the deployable team will be eligible to apply for selection for the five-day conversion course.

Operational Support Team (OST) volunteers are expected to regularly attend the monthly face-to-face training weekends in the UK. In between these events, OST members are active progressing development projects, and providing technical support to emergency missions and have the opportunity to deploy on non-emergency missions. You should expect to commit a least two days per month, plus any deployments or training missions of around ten days at a time that you choose to volunteer.

Deployable Team members are expected to make themselves available at short notice for emergency and other field missions, normally up to two weeks long. We expect team members to deploy for at least one mission per year and make themselves available at short notice for emergency deployment on a regular bases. Team members are also expected to participate in the majority of the ten weekends training session we hold each year.

The table below outlines the opportunities available and expectations to/from deployable and OST volunteers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Deployable</th>
<th>OST</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disaster response</td>
<td>In country</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster preparedness</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building</td>
<td>Partner training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>MapAction training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- Disaster response (emergency missions – sudden-onset and conflict).
- Disaster preparedness (data preparedness and skills transfer).
- Capacity building (simulation exercises, training UNDAC etc).

MapAction Volunteer Profiles

Location of volunteers
Although MapAction has a small number of team members based abroad, it conducts almost all its operations from its headquarters in the UK. For that reason, both Deployable Team and OST volunteers must live in, or near, the UK so that they can attend to regular training sessions that are a requirement of membership. MapAction cover all the cost related to being a volunteer of MapAction including travel cost.

General expectations
Our team members can meet challenging conditions on deployment including living and working in basic tented accommodation. Weekend trainings involves camping throughout the year. Typically our team members are happy to camp, are widely travelled and are good team players. Although we don’t have any age limit are looking for team member who have broad experience of life both professionally and personally so we rarely recruit people younger than their late twenties.
Apart from a small number of specialist roles in IT support and software development (descriptions of which are below), volunteers generally need to be expert with Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and/or database. In practice, nearly all volunteers have studied GIS or related subject to masters degree level, although a proven record of relevant work experience is also fine, professional experience essential.

As well as general team members we are also looking for volunteer recruits for our Technical Circle and Software Development Group. Descriptions of these three roles are below.

Profile for general support and deployment volunteer

Required:

- Availability and commitment
- MSC degree in GIS or related subject or equivalent professional experience
- Relevant work experience (essential)
- Proficient in ArcGIS and extensions for data editing, analysis and processing
- Proficient in the use of spreadsheets and database for data analysis
- Self-motivated and organised
- Good team player
- Good communication skills; listening, speaking and writing

Desirable:

- Languages (particularly French and Spanish)
- QGIS
- Google Earth
- GPS use
- Project management experience
- Information management skills
- IT skills
- Leadership experience
- Humanitarian knowledge/experience
- Adventure or professional travel experience
- Graphic design/cartography
- Teaching, training or capacity building experience
- Relevant international work experience
- Web mapping – particularly with relevant ESRI products

Other useful

- Systems administration
- Website design
- Website management
- Radios and satellite communications
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Medical training/advanced first aid
About the Technical Circle

MapAction is looking for volunteers to join MapAction’s ‘Technical Circle’. The Technical Circle a group of both volunteers and staff whose role is ensure that MapAction has the technical capability (equipment and knowledge) to both maintain and enhance its humanitarian activities and can provide this in a technically innovative and competitive institutional environment.

The Technical Circle makes recommendations on policy for all aspects of technology which are not directly related to GIS/GPS and mapping, or data management (which are the responsibility of the GIS and Data Circles respectively). The Technical Circle is responsible for ensuring that the technological facilities and skills are available as required to support the work of the other parts of the organisation.

IT administration is an important function in MapAction. The prime focus for the volunteers is the aspects which are directly used in the field or during operations. This includes the maintenance of our fleet of laptops and other field deployable kit including printers, networking equipment and both voice and data satellite communications.

We outsource a number of generic IT functions to a local company (email servers, file server, network infrastructure etc). The Technical Circle manages these relationships with the suppliers, notably designing and selecting appropriate solutions, capturing user and function requirements, specification and testing and signing off on delivery.

We use a mixture of proprietary and open source solutions, favouring conservative solutions for generic functions and are more willing to take risks with new technology where it is focused on our core operations.

Person Specification for the Technical Circle

Required:

- Pragmatic, practically minded and tenacious problem solver.
- Typically five or more years professional experience in a technical support, system administration or similar role.
- Education to degree level or higher in computer science, GIS or a related subject.
- Professional experience of at least two of the following; administering Microsoft Windows 7, administering Microsoft Windows Server, servicing hardware. Administration of software applications (desktop, server or cloud applications).
- Proven ability in configuration and scripting (Python, Powershell, Batch or similar).
- Good communication skills - listening, speaking and writing.

Desirable:

- A vendor qualification like MCSA, MCITP or MCSE.
- ITIL foundation qualification.
- Knowledge of Windows software deployment.
- Knowledge of Linux.
- Experience writing documentation for both technical and end user audiences.
- Experience of working with a volunteer organisation.
• Knowledge of GIS technology (in particular ESRI software), GPS and satellite communications equipment.

Like all new recruits, volunteers joining the Technical Circle will not automatically be eligible to join the Deployable Team (i.e. those who travel to emergencies are short notice). Eligibility to join the Deployable Team is based on different criteria to those above. A higher standard of GIS knowledge would be required for the Deployable Team than would be required for the Technical Circle, though this is not the only difference.

**About Software Development in MapAction**

MapAction is looking for volunteers to join MapAction’s Software Development Group (SDG). The SDG includes volunteers and staff, whose role it is to support and enhance MapAction’s workflow by supplementing core GIS applications with scripts, customisations and plugins as appropriate. Within the SDG there is space for volunteers with knowledge about specific GIS customisation suites including specialists in both desktop and web development. MapAction is looking for those with experience in working in collaborative software development projects with software development skills such as OO design, software architecture, design patterns, source code management and testing regimes.

**Person Specification for the SDG**

**Typical:**

- Three or more years professional experience working in a software development team, as a developer, tester or other role ideally in a collaborative multi-developer environment.
- Education to degree level or higher in Computer Science, GIS or a related subject.
- For desktop development: proven ability in .C# and/or Python development ideally with a deep knowledge of at least one of these languages.
- For web development: proven ability in HTML, CSS, JavaScript and at least one server side language (PHP, Python etc).
- Experience of or demonstrated willingness to learn testing regimes include unit and regression testing and continuous integration.
- Good communication skills; listening, speaking and writing.

**Desirable:**

- Experience of developing with ESRI’s GIS product suite and other geospatial technology.
- Experience of participating in a volunteer organisation.
- For web development: Experience the in the planning, design and implementation of web sites with a geographical focus, including both client and server components.
Selection and induction process

We usually recruit new OST volunteers annually. This year this will take place in June. The process consists of:

1. CV screening from 3 June 2015.
2. Shortlisted candidates invited to interview, and an open day on what is involved in volunteering with MapAction on either 30 June or 1 July.
3. A practical skills test for your volunteer role will be carried out.
4. Confirmation of volunteer position subject to references and a six-month probation period.
5. The next stage for successful candidate is a two-day induction course on the 18/19 July and then ongoing training.

Every year we receive many times more expressions of interest in volunteering than we have available volunteer vacancies. So, unfortunately, even people with excellent skills and experience are not always selected. However, we do still greatly appreciate all volunteering applications and if you do not succeed please try again. We have several volunteer who were recruited on their second or third try.

How do I apply?

Please send us a CV no later than Wednesday 3 June 2015 for this year’s recruitment

This should include:
- current work
- GIS/geospatial skills and experience
- relevant IT/technical skill and experience
- educational details
- where you live
- languages spoken
- contact details
- references

Please email this to recruiting@mapaction.org by Wednesday 3 June 2015.

Other frequently asked questions

Do you have positions for non-operational volunteers, for administrative roles? These arise very rarely and we would generally advertise them on our website but please send in your CV if you wish.

Are you able to offer internships? So far we have not been able to offer internships, but we are looking at this and may be able to offer some in the future. If you have a particular idea in mind let us know.

I really want to help! Are there no opportunities to do so right now? We’re always sorry to have to turn down the many people who want to help in our work, we just don’t have the resources to accommodate all of them. However, we always greatly appreciate help with fundraising. If you think you could assist with that, do contact us on info@mapaction.org.