



managing volunteers

a step by step guide



volunteer centre

Ionaid d'Oibrí Deonacha na Contae áth Cliath Theas

SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY

Be Prepared !

Just like another well-known volunteer organisation with that slogan, your organisation needs to be prepared. It needs to know why it wants to involve volunteers in its work, how volunteer positions fit and be ready to receive willing volunteers when contacted.

The benefits of being organised and ready for volunteers are plentiful:

- It sets the stage for an effective volunteer program and positive volunteer experiences.
- Thoughtful screening connects the right volunteer with the right opportunity.
- Happy volunteers tell others about their experiences, as do unhappy volunteers.
- Success builds on success - effective volunteer programs attract volunteers.

Overall volunteer management is comprised of several pieces including:

- Planning and preparation
- Role description/volunteer assignment development
- Recruitment
- Screening
- Orientation
- Training
- Ongoing support and motivation
- Feedback and evaluation
- Appreciation and recognition



The Volunteer Role Description

A "Role Description" is a great tool that helps everyone involved in the volunteer program. A good description will clarify a number of key points that will help both the volunteer co-ordinator and the volunteer understand what is needed from the person filling that position.

Key components of a good "Role Description" will include:

- Title of the position
- Purpose of the position
- Job responsibilities
- List of necessary or desirable skills, attitudes & knowledge
- Note who supervises the position i.e. Reports to?
- Time commitment requirements
- Description of training the volunteer will receive
- Description of both the benefits and challenges of the position
- Description of measures of success i.e. specific outcomes that indicate job tasks are being accomplished.

Be as specific and realistic as possible when developing the role description. An accurate role description will:

- Give a potential volunteer a good idea of what to expect, helping them make an informed commitment to the position.
- Serve as a reference point and ongoing guide for the position.



Recruiting Volunteers

Now that -

You know why your organisation wants volunteers involved in its work

You have developed clear job descriptions or volunteer assignments

You are ready to recruit!

There are two main types of recruitment: targeted and untargeted.

Targeted recruitment...

seeks to recruit people that will be a likely match with the specific skills and requirements of the volunteer assignment.

Untargeted recruitment...

Is typically an appeal to the general public. It aims to get the message out to as broad an audience as possible and let interested potential volunteers come forward.

Both of these types of recruitment can be successful and are used by non-profit groups. An organisation may choose one, both or a combination of both methods at different times, depending on what is appropriate to the volunteer assignment or project at hand.

For example, untargeted recruitment might be the logical choice for a project like preparing Christmas hampers where many people are needed for a short period of time and no significant training is involved. When that same organisation is seeking new board members they may opt for targeted recruiting, seeking to attract volunteers with specific skills such as fundraising abilities or legal expertise.

A possible disadvantage of targeted recruitment is that it may be labour intensive, as you seek to find and match the right volunteer for a specific job.

A possible disadvantage of untargeted recruitment is that your campaign may be very successful (imagine!). But think about it - are you prepared for a large number of potential volunteers - not knowing their inclinations, skills or preferences? Will you be able to sort it all out and juggle to make everyone fit? Or are you prepared to turn some volunteers away?

Based on experience, your organisation may have developed a preference for particular recruitment methods that have a track record of success. If so, that's great. It means you have found the right balance in your ongoing recruitment process and have loyal volunteers to show for it.

Your current volunteers may, in fact, be helping attract new volunteers. Congratulations! Satisfied volunteers are the greatest recruitment tool in existence and are the reward of good volunteer program.



Screening

Screening is an important part of the volunteer selection process, especially so for organisations which provide services to vulnerable people such as children, the disabled or the elderly.

Volunteer screening serves two main purposes:

- To create and maintain a safe environment
- To ensure an appropriate match between volunteer and task

A good screening process will incorporate a variety of steps and not rely on any one method or measure. Screening is part of an entire picture of risk management within an organisation whereby potential risks are identified, assessed and controlled in a manner that is as realistic and reasonable as possible.

Some of the things that can be done as part of the screening process are:

- Write a clear role description or volunteer assignment - it shows applicants that careful thought has gone into developing the position.
- Establish a formal recruitment process - indicate in job postings or other recruitment advertising that screening is part of the application process.
- Use an application form - it gives an applicant clear information about what is required. The form will ask for permission to obtain necessary information relevant to the role (such as driver's license and record, reference checks, garda vetting check, etc.).
- Conduct interviews - the skill and judgment of a good interviewer can be invaluable in the screening process. A face-to-face meeting can help both parties decide if it is an appropriate match.
- Check references - follow through on the process. Applicants often hear from their references if contact was made or not.
- Request Garda vetting - when appropriate to the position, these should be done. The most important thing to remember is that a check, in itself, is never sufficient

screening. It is only one step in the entire screening process.

Remember that screening does not abruptly end once the volunteer has been accepted - orientation and training sessions provide more opportunities for the volunteer to learn more about the policies and procedures of the organisation, as well as the people. Ongoing supervision and evaluation is a much-needed part of giving volunteers the support they need to meet the standards of the program and to ensure clients, especially those in high-risk categories, receive appropriate care and service. Regular contact and follow-up with clients will also help ensure standards are met.

Before You Hire

Ten Essential Questions to Ask a Potential Volunteer

1. How did you find out about this volunteer opportunity?
2. Have you given your time previously as a volunteer?
3. Why do you want to volunteer with this organisation?
4. What would you like to get out of the volunteer experience?
5. What are your interests?
6. What skills, abilities, and qualities do you have to contribute to the organisation?
7. How long do you think you would like to be involved with our program?
8. Do you have any special needs?
9. Are you prepared to attend training and/or a information sessions?
10. Are you prepared to undergo screening an/or a background check for our safety, your safety and our clients' safety?

Policies & Procedures

Your organisation may already have policies and procedures in place about screening volunteers and staff or about risk management, in general.

Formal policies and procedures give clear guidelines for decision-making and instruction on how to carry through or act on decisions made. In the areas of screening and risk management, having such policies and procedures in place offers tangible proof that an organisation is diligent - it demonstrates that thoughtful consideration has been given to these issues and steps taken to minimize risk and harm.

Orientation & Training

How are volunteers welcomed to their new work?

Orientation is part of the welcome for a volunteer. It shows volunteers where they fit in to the organisation and gives them practical information they will need to function effectively.

Some of the things an orientation package may include are:

- A tour of the workspace and introductions to co-workers and/or clients.
- Information about the mission and mandate of the organisation and a description of the programs and services.
- History of the organisation: How did it start? How did it evolve to where it is now. This kind of information fosters a clear connection with the mission and helps volunteers represent the organisation to others.
- An explanation of the organisational structure (for example, is it a hierarchy or a collective?). Who reports to whom (show lines of accountability and authority within the organisation)? What is the size of the entire organisation?
- Introduction to the practical aspects of the work space: where will the volunteer be working, where are supplies

kept, what equipment is used, where are washrooms - do they need a key, is there an alarm system - do they need an access code, how do they answer the telephone, etc. In short, the basic everyday things new volunteers will need to know to do their jobs.

- Information about any record-keeping that may be required such as logging hours or scheduling; timelines for training or upcoming events; probation periods and evaluation methods. Putting together a written orientation document can be a good way to get some of the general information together to present to a new volunteer.

Orientation checklists are one way to ensure all the desired steps are covered in an orientation process. This can be particularly helpful if the orientation duties are shared by several people.

A sound orientation process will pay off in a variety of ways that include:

- Making a volunteer feel welcome.
- Giving volunteers the means to work effectively and minimize unnecessary frustrations.



Training

Training is often one of the most appreciated benefits a volunteer can receive. It can be a great motivator, keeping people interested and challenged, as well as enhancing skills.

Developing training sessions that can be undertaken by a group can also be a good team-building exercise, giving people an opportunity to interact in a context different from the usual work tasks.

Training does not have to be expensive. Look at local resources, including your own volunteers! A working lunch once a month with a guest speaker sharing their expertise on a relevant topic is an informal and effective way to offer training. Watch a video together as a group and discuss it later. Take a field trip to visit local places that are relevant to the work you are doing.

Training sometimes gets put to one side in a non-profit group with limited resources, as people struggle to meet everyday demands and pressures of "getting the job done". It is, however, one of the most critical investments an organisation can make in its people and its quality of service.



Appreciation & Recognition

Appreciation and recognition of your volunteers is a critical piece of any volunteer program.

Volunteers are not free. Even if you do not currently have a budget line for volunteer appreciation, there is an investment made by the organisation that includes all the preparation, planning and ongoing support required to effectively manage the people who are your volunteer resources.

Methods of appreciation and recognition can vary widely. It can be formal or informal, public recognition or personal thanks, costly or absolutely free.

Appreciation needs to be tailored for the individual.

- What is the personality and taste of the volunteer you want to thank? You know one person will really enjoy public recognition at a dinner, for example, whereas someone else might find that embarrassing or downright wasteful.
- Get to know your volunteers, their motivations, likes and dislikes. This can provide you with insight into what they will really appreciate.
- Be willing to be open and creative! Try not to get stuck "inside the box". One person's ideal appreciation might even be an extra work assignment, or a special task that recognizes and utilises their unique skills.

Different types of appreciation and recognition include:

- Saying "Thank you!" - in person and with cards or notes
- Remembering birthdays or other special occasions
- Special occasion surprises or gifts
- Annual events such as National Volunteer Day luncheon, Christmas parties, summer barbeques or awards ceremonies
- Recognition in newsletters or local newspaper profile

- Years of service pins or plaques
- Name tag pins
- Taking the time - to provide orientation and ongoing support
- Providing training opportunities
- Offering job rotation opportunities for variety or advancement
- Asking for volunteer input when developing policies and procedures
- Offering letters of reference





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