



# Volunteering In Changing Times

Counties: Longford  
Laois, Offaly, Westmeath

## Volunteering in Changing Times

### *Foreword*

The primary purpose behind this publication is to try and reawaken the volunteer spirit that once burned brightly in our communities. The Special Olympics in 2003 saw a national surge in volunteerism, with very many of the volunteers getting involved for the first time simply because they had been directly asked. This publication will also define what is a volunteer, recruitment of volunteers, retention and the recognition of volunteers. Volunteers are vital to the organisation and management of every club or organisation. The time, dedication and energy they devote are of the utmost importance in keeping clubs/organisations running and working well. Without volunteers many would find it difficult to function and may cease to exist. This shows volunteers are extremely valuable and deserve praise, thanks and recognition. Anyone can volunteer, whether they are young, old, male, female, able bodied, disabled, employed, unemployed.

A secondary aim is to inform the people of Laois, Offaly, Westmeath & Longford the role of the Local Sports Partnership which is to promote, support and facilitate participation in sport and physical activity. The Local Sports Partnership is also an information provider, and acts as a conduit and facilitator of information-sharing and networking between agencies and groups.

The Local Sports Partnership would like to thank the Irish Sports Council and all their Partner Agencies, Westmeath Volunteer Centre, Volunteer Centres Ireland, Volunteering Ireland and Mayo Sports Partnership for their assistance with this publication and look forward to supporting the volunteers and promoting volunteering in general.



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## Glossary

### ***Volunteer***

An individual who works on behalf of a sports organisation or club and does not receive payment for carrying out duties. Volunteers may receive expenses (e.g. travel and lunch expenses).

### ***Recruitment***

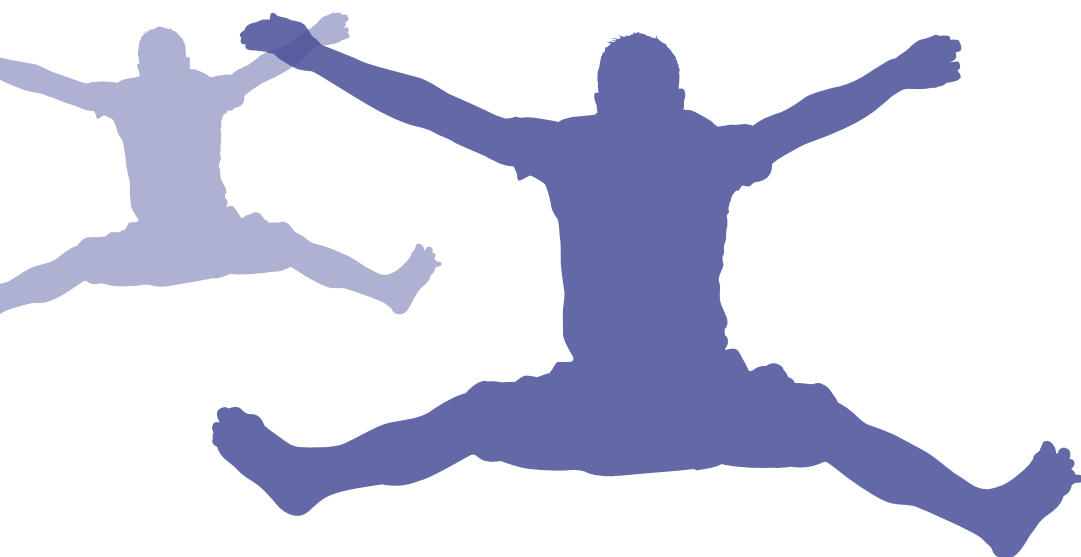
This describes the process in which volunteers are enlisted to join clubs and organisations (i.e. sports clubs, youth groups, etc)

### ***Retention***

This is the process of keeping new volunteers involved in clubs or organisations for a longer more frequent period of time. There are many methods of doing this (e.g. offering training and awards, rotating roles and jobs, etc).

### ***Reward***

This is vital to keeping volunteers involved in clubs; it is the process in which something is given on behalf of the club / organisation to thank and acknowledge the commitment and work of the volunteer. Rewards can include plaques or certificates, etc.




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## What is Volunteering?

Volunteering is defined as the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of the society and the community, the environment or individuals, outside one's immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.



A volunteer is someone from the community who contributes to the development of the community. They are valued as individuals who bring a unique contribution to the group with whom they work. Volunteers work for no reward other than the development of themselves and the community.

Volunteering covers many varied and different activities, from visiting an elderly relative or neighbour; to getting involved in a youth or sports club, scout or guide group; assisting a charity with its finances or administration; to helping someone to read and write; the list is endless.

Anyone can volunteer. It doesn't matter whether they are young, old, male, female, able bodied, disabled, employed, unemployed; there is something they can do.

Some people volunteer a few times a year when they have spare time, others give a regular commitment of several hours per week, and some even volunteer on a full time basis.

## The Importance of Volunteers

Volunteers are vital to the organisation and management of every club or organisation. The time, dedication and energy they devote are of the utmost importance in keeping clubs / organisations running and working well. Without volunteers many of these clubs / organisations would find it difficult to function and may cease to exist. This shows volunteers are extremely valuable and deserve praise, thanks and recognition.

There are many roles a volunteer can fulfil (e.g. administrators, coaches, officials, leaders, etc.) which are all equally important. Many of these individuals are paid however still many act in a voluntary capacity themselves which is vital to the running of club / organisations.

The key to success in clubs / organisations is how volunteers are managed and utilised by the people who are overlooking them.

## How to Recruit, Train and Retain Volunteers?

The following questions are important when looking at the above statement.

- What are your experiences as a volunteer?
- How have you contributed as a volunteer and why?
- Could your experience as a volunteer be improved?
- Can you recruit, train and retain volunteers?
- How do you make sure that your volunteers enjoy working with you?



## Reasons Why People Volunteer?

There are many reasons why individuals volunteer. Volunteers come from a variety of places, religions and races. Volunteers include members, friends, parents, school students, volunteers already involved and volunteers that are linked to volunteering organisations. If you look at your own club / organisation, who are the volunteers? People also volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons include:

- To learn new skills
- To help other individuals
- To be involved with family and friends who are currently members
- To share abilities, knowledge and talent
- To do something other than a day job
- To make new friends
- To build up self-esteem
- To become a member of a team
- To get recognition and prestige
- To give something back to a club / organisation
- For the social aspect associated with working in a club / organisation
- To have fun!

The best way to reward volunteers is in finding out their needs and interests so you can find the appropriate reward or prize. Also recognising what motivates each individual is key in knowing how to reward their efforts. An example of a reward used by many clubs or organisations is to have a volunteer of the year award.



## Recruiting Volunteers

### *How to Find Your Volunteers*

The first thing to consider when recruiting volunteers is to have a clear understanding of what you want them to be doing. If you are organised and have a clear idea and plan (i.e. when, where and why you want help) and seek it in an organised way, people will be more willing to volunteer.

A good idea and one that could be taken on board at some stage is having one of your current volunteers take charge of new volunteers. This role is often referred to as a Volunteer Co-ordinator. To take on this task the individual needs to have excellent inter-personal skills and have experience of this position beforehand. This role will include spending time training, mentoring and managing each volunteer to ensure that they are being used effectively, and that they are having a good time.

A good idea when recruiting volunteers is to consider delivering mentoring training to any club / organisation officials who will be asked to work with the Volunteer Co-ordinator in supporting new volunteers.

In order to get the best performance, and ensure that each volunteer is enjoying themselves, the club / organisation should consider the following:

- Find out where volunteers are needed
- Find out how much time each volunteer can give to the club / organisation
- Write brief role descriptions
- Plan the recruitment strategy
- Include volunteers in club / organisation meetings to ensure they are aware of all activities being carried out
- Supervise volunteers or get other members to help supervise them
- Have regular training for volunteers
- Help volunteers stay motivated and give them the recognition they deserve
- Update volunteers roles and duties regularly

## *Important Questions to ask when Recruiting Volunteers*

- How many volunteers are needed?
- How long will they be needed?
- When will they be needed?
- What will they be doing?
- What will they be asked to do?
- How much responsibility will they have?
- Who will be in charge of the volunteers?
- What training and support will be available to the volunteers?
- What skills do they need to fill the role?
- Where is the right place to find the volunteers?
- Are there partners within my local community that already have volunteers that the club / organisation could use?

## *Role Descriptions*

There are numerous roles that volunteers can fulfil. Sometimes volunteers are recruited into an area where they do not have any experience or relevant skill in the specific area. To avoid this misunderstanding brief role descriptions are required to help avoid confusion about a particular role.

The volunteer role descriptions should include:

- Name of volunteer role
- Brief description of volunteer role
- Location
- Supervised by
- Days and times needed
- Minimum length of volunteer commitment required
- List of tasks or duties
- Qualifications, qualities and/or skills needed
- Training provided

It is vital to review role descriptions after a while to find out how well the description fits the job. It also keeps the volunteer motivated, if it needs to be changed, involve and utilise the volunteer in updating the role description.

It is important that you do not force anyone to take on this role and make sure the individual is comfortable in this role. Provide support for the volunteer, this helps to assist the new volunteer and make them feel welcome.

## *Where to Find Volunteers?*

There is no set place, volunteers are everywhere. It is useful to target certain groups and areas when looking for volunteers. However it should be noted that recruitment campaigns should be distributed widely and contain clear and accurate information.

Some key issues that would be beneficial whilst recruiting are:

- Raising awareness and the importance of volunteering on your website
- Producing information sheets for volunteers
- Use past and present member's lists. Lists of jobs / skills already recorded will give an indication of who has the necessary skills for a position.
- Introduce a volunteer scheme for present volunteers
- Hold social events, encouraging new members to join.
- Use of local press (e.g. newspapers, radio and magazines)
- Organise notices on your website for volunteers
- Produce flyers to be handed out at local events where potential volunteers may be.
- Promotion of your club in local schools and colleges may help involve parents in volunteering.
- Asking supporters of teams or clubs may produce new volunteers
- Develop a partnership with local volunteer agencies (i.e. Volunteer Centres) which helps identify volunteers. Let them know what you need and they will look through their listings for suitable matches.

## *The Process of Recruiting*

This is vital in finding the right volunteer that is needed by the club / organisation. This should not be a formal affair but it is very important in identifying the level of qualification of the volunteer and the skills they have. The recruitment process involves identifying the volunteer wanted and inviting them to the club / organisation for an informal meeting or discussion. The Volunteer Coordinator should also attend to get to know the volunteer as well. It is important to make the volunteer feel comfortable in this situation and make sure they know it is not an interview.

There are many benefits of having an informal discussion with the volunteer:

- It helps to find out what experience / skills they have
- Why they want to be involved in your club / organisation?
- What experience they have working in the particular area (i.e. youth work, sports, etc?)
- What dates and times they are available to volunteer?
- Any additional qualifications
- Have they completed a Garda Vetting Form and is it still in date?  
If your club doesn't have an avenue to vet volunteers, your local volunteer centre can vet them for you.
- Have they completed an Irish Sports Council 'Code of Ethics Awareness Course' or something similar?
- Make sure to give out t-shirts as this will make the volunteer feel part of the team
- Show them the benefits and opportunities they will have whilst volunteering
- Make it appealing to them so they will be interested.
- Make sure to get some sort of references even if they are only verbal references

## Retaining Volunteers

These are ten of the main reasons why it is difficult to retain volunteers or why they leave:

1. Their experience was not what they expected when they signed on
2. Employees treated them as an interruption, not as welcome help.
3. Long term volunteers wouldn't let them into their "insider" group.
4. They did not see the connection between one day's work and another.
5. They did not know how to tell you they wanted to leave.
6. They made a suggestion that was not acted on, or responded to.
7. The atmosphere was impersonal, tense or cold.
8. The physical environment did not support their efforts.
9. No one smiled at them.
10. They were under-utilized.

## *How to prevent this and keep your volunteers involved?*

It can be difficult for some clubs / organisations to attract volunteers; however a lot have success in this area. It may be easy for some clubs / organisations as the activity may be interesting, appealing and glamorous. These benefits however do not always guarantee success in recruiting volunteers. The club / organisation then needs a plan to help retain the current volunteers.

To retain volunteers an induction period is essential. It does not matter about the size of the club / organisation, it is still crucial to have an introduction and an update of activities to keep the volunteers in the 'loop' as well as helping to retain them in the club / organisation.

It is important also to realize that in order to retain volunteers, they have to feel:

- Needed
- Useful
- Part of the team
- Welcome

This is difficult to achieve as many clubs / organisations fail to meet these needs. This is not always intentional so members need to recognise the volunteer and their need as well as their own needs.

## *Motivation*

There is a difference between motivating volunteers and staff members, mainly because:

- Volunteers are not getting paid
- Volunteers do not have a contract
- Volunteers do not depend on you for job security
- Volunteers may be unreliable as their top priority may be different to yours.



There are many reasons why people volunteer:

- Family involvement
- Want to meet new people
- Service to others
- Prestige (i.e. dealing with media etc)
- Want to put something back into the club / organisation (past performers / beneficiaries, etc)

Motivation is pivotal in retaining volunteers in a role. It is also important for people management. Motivation just does not mean to urge people on, it also takes into account what is important to that individual and trying to make sure they reach their goals from their involvement. It is important to match the needs of the individual to that of the club / organisation.

Motivation is basically giving the necessary support to ensure that people's needs are met and that they are kept interested. Paying attention to the tasks undertaken by your volunteers will be important in motivating them.

### *Delegating Tasks*

This is a very difficult process and it needs great consideration. There are many skills associated with it such as being patient, having courage and trust. It is of the utmost importance in any organiser's job. When, to whom and what you choose to delegate is entirely at your own discretion.

For delegation to be successful it is important to match responsibility with authority. For example giving responsibility without authority is not reasonable. Therefore when you delegate it is important to give responsibility with the appropriate authority.

In order to successfully delegate a task you need to:

- Identify the task that needs to be delegated
- Learn the key elements of that task
- Find the volunteer who has the right skills for the task
- Decide upon the appropriate training that is needed by an individual to perform the task
- Have a monitoring system in place to check if the delegation has gone well

## Training

Training is an essential part of any club / organisation, and is also important in the retention of volunteers. It is important because the staff will perform more effectively and efficiently but it also keeps volunteers interested as they also gain knowledge. There is a variety of training opportunities available to volunteers and they should be encouraged and supported to attend this additional training.

In a case where clubs have specific needs then specific training can be organised by the club / organisation. Getting involved with other clubs / organisations can also be useful in getting to know different ideas about how to help involve and train volunteers. Also if different clubs / organisations are involved with one another it also brings a different perspective and new ideas.

Getting involved with local organisations such as National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships to help set up training events would also be very useful.

National Governing Bodies would also be useful in helping to find tutors to deliver training.

## Communication

Communication is key in helping to get your volunteers involved with the club. It keeps them updated and in the 'loop' with what is happening at the club and helps them and the club / organisation progress towards those goals.

Communicating with volunteers will also help the volunteer to take greater responsibility in the organisation. Communicating should also help in encouraging ideas and where practical, allows responsibility to implement them.



## Rewarding Volunteers

### *Job Satisfaction*

This is one of the most important aspects in encouraging volunteers to remain at a club / organisation. This is easy to achieve but sometimes forgotten about:

- Find out what they want and what will motivate them from their involvement
- Use role descriptions to help identify the nature of the role to be undertaken
- Match their motivations with the inherent rewards of the job (this requires careful placement of volunteers)
- Offer training to help them in their role
- Volunteers should be encouraged to give ideas and implement them
- Provide feedback to volunteers and appropriate rewards for them
- Targets should be set for the volunteer so they know the part they will be playing in the club / organisation.

### *Enable your volunteers to enjoy their work with you by:*

- Helping volunteers to experience personal achievement in the role they are doing
- Helping them feel they are making a worthwhile contribution to the objectives of the club / organisation
- Make the role challenging so it demands the best from them, this will also help match the volunteers capabilities with the appropriate responsibility
- Show adequate recognition and praise for the work of the volunteer
- Make sure the volunteer is capable and that they have control of the role they are in
- Make the volunteer feel that they are developing and improving their skills and abilities

### *Recognition*

Some ideas that will be useful in thanking and recognising your volunteers are:

1. Evaluate volunteer involvement on an ongoing basis
2. Create a climate in which volunteers can feel motivated
3. Say thank you often, and mean it
4. Match the volunteer's desires with the organisation's needs
5. Send birthday cards
6. Provide a clear role description for every volunteer
7. Make sure new volunteers are welcomed warmly
8. Highlight the impact that the volunteer contribution is having on the organisation
9. Show an interest in volunteers' personal interests and their outside life
10. Tell volunteers they have done a good job
11. Always have work for your volunteers to do and never waste their time
12. Give volunteers a real voice within the organisation
13. Set up a volunteer support group
14. Provide meaningful and enjoyable work
15. Send 'thank you' notes and letters when appropriate
16. Smile when you see them!
17. Say something positive about their personal qualities
18. Involve volunteers in decision-making processes
19. Give a certificate to commemorate anniversaries of involvement
20. Develop a volunteer policy
21. Allow volunteers the opportunity to debrief, especially if they work in stressful situations
22. Let volunteers put their names to something they have helped to produce or to make happen
23. Differentiate clearly between the roles of paid staff, trainees and volunteers
24. Have a volunteer comments box and consider any suggestions carefully
25. Supervise volunteers' work
26. Remember their names. Seems a bit obvious but forgetting a volunteers name can make them feel very much unappreciated

## Action plan

Develop an action plan to identify volunteers and motivate them to become and remain active in the club / organisation:

- Decide why the club / organisation needs volunteers
- Appoint a Volunteer Coordinator
- Establish links with local volunteer agencies and partnerships who deliver training for volunteers
- Write role descriptions for each job that needs to be done by the volunteer
- Decide the skills needed by the volunteer for certain jobs
- Decide how many volunteers you need
- Decide on the methods you will use to recruit volunteers
- Contact your local volunteer centre with the details of the role and see if they have anyone who meets the criteria, the volunteer centre will also advertise the volunteer role for you if you wish
- Start to recruit volunteers
- Meet the people you are going to recruit and choose the individuals with the appropriate skills
- Show them how to carry out their role and support them
- Involve volunteers whenever possible
- Provide training opportunities
- Evaluate their performance and also evaluate it
- Provide feedback and reward your volunteer
- Make changes when needed and monitor the process
- Always remember to say thank you

## Further Information

For more information about volunteering, organise a seminar for volunteers, coaches, leaders, teachers and anyone else who is interested in volunteering for clubs / organisations giving general information about volunteering, useful tips and guides for volunteering or visit any of the websites detailed below:

### **Irish Sports Council**

[www.irishsportscouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportscouncil.ie)

### **Laois Sports Partnership**

[www.laoissports.ie](http://www.laoissports.ie)

E: [info@laoissports.ie](mailto:info@laoissports.ie)

P: 057-8671253

### **Longford Sports Partnership**

[www.longford.ie](http://www.longford.ie)

E: [smcguinness@longfordcoco.ie](mailto:smcguinness@longfordcoco.ie)

P: 043-43307

### **Offaly Sports Partnership**

[www.offalysports.ie](http://www.offalysports.ie)

E: [sports@offalycoco.ie](mailto:sports@offalycoco.ie)

P: 057-9357462

### **Westmeath Sports Partnership**

[www.westmeathsports.ie](http://www.westmeathsports.ie)

E: [info@westmeathsports.ie](mailto:info@westmeathsports.ie)

P: 044-9390208

### **Longford Volunteer Centre**

P: 043-45555

### **Westmeath Volunteer Centre**

[www.volunteerwestmeath.ie](http://www.volunteerwestmeath.ie)

E: [info@volunteerwestmeath.ie](mailto:info@volunteerwestmeath.ie)

### **Volunteer Centres Ireland**

[www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)

### **Volunteering Ireland**

[www.volunteeringireland.com](http://www.volunteeringireland.com)





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