



Finding and Keeping Volunteers

A Guide to Volunteer Management for Sports Clubs



volunteer centre

Ionad d'Obair Deonacha na Gaillimhe

GALWAY

County Galway
Sports Partnership



Chontae na Gaillimhe
Comhpháirtíocht Spóirt



Galway City
Sports Partnership

Comhpháirtíocht Spóirt
Chathair na Gaillimhe

An Irish Sports Council Initiative
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GALWAY



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Introduction

Sports clubs wouldn't exist without volunteers. Volunteers are a club's greatest asset. They can enable clubs to achieve things that just wouldn't happen without them. Volunteers bring great enthusiasm with them.

We know that the team on the pitch can't give of their best without the support of the team off the pitch - the volunteers who coach, referee and wash the kit – but it is not always clear to the general public how much our sports clubs need their help.

This handbook is about helping your club to attract volunteers and working with them to ensure that both the club's and the volunteers' needs are met. It also highlights ways to keep your volunteers motivated and content, ensuring that they stay with your club and make a meaningful contribution to its development.

Challenges for clubs when working with volunteers

Volunteering is a wonderful concept which can achieve marvellous things – but it's not roses all the way! Volunteers – just like paid workers – can sometimes fail to get the job done or even throw a spanner in the works for other volunteers. An organised approach to involving volunteers can work wonders in overcoming difficulties and getting the job done.

The importance of passion

Volunteers are motivated by doing what they believe to be meaningful. Many of your volunteers may share your passion for your game or sport and drawing on their passion will enhance their volunteering experience and their contribution to your club.

Other volunteers will be motivated more by making a contribution to the community or by the role that they carry out for your club and it will be important to draw on their individual motivations.

A shared passion within your club motivates your members and keeps them working together effectively. The most effective way to ensure that all members have a shared passion is to take time out from everyday matters to discuss the vision and values of your club. As your club's vision may change over time, such discussions need to be held regularly. It can also boost motivation if you consider the contribution your club makes to community life.



Why do people volunteer?

- Because they were asked
- Because a friend asked them
- To feel needed
- To make a difference
- To get to know a new neighbourhood
- To help someone
- For fun
- To give something back
- To feel good & increase self esteem
- To gain or improve skills
- To make new friends
- To do something different from their job
- For work experience
- To do something they love
- To donate their professional skills
- To be part of a team
- To get out of the house
- Because they have time on their hands
- To have something to get up for
- To stand and be counted.

Why do people not volunteer?

- Because they were **NOT** asked
- Because they think they don't have the necessary skills
- Because they don't know what opportunities exist
- Because they fear being overloaded with no escape
- Lack of interest
- Because they don't know enough about the club
- Because they have a poor image of the club.

Did you know?

72% of people feel that volunteers offer something that could never be provided by paid professionals

There are lots more reasons to volunteer than not to and good volunteer management can overcome most of the reasons not to volunteer.

Why do volunteers leave?

Volunteers leave for many reasons, some of which are unavoidable. The top ten reasons why volunteers leave unexpectedly are:

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



Galway Volunteer Centre can help

You may already have all the volunteers you need but, if you need more, Galway Volunteer Centre can help you find them. The Centre has over 6000 volunteers on its books, many of whom are looking for a placement. This service is free of charge. Other services provided by the Centre for a small charge include training and support in effective volunteer management and Garda Vetting for clubs who cannot avail of this service at national level through their national governing bodies.

We can be contacted on 091 539930, info@volunteergalway.ie or www.volunteergalway.ie.

Planning for Involving Volunteers

Why is it important to plan?

It has been said that if we fail to plan, we plan to fail. Planning the involvement of volunteers in your work ensures that:

- You have the people you need when you need them.
- You get the right person for the job.
- Your volunteers know exactly what you want them to do and how you want them to do it.
- Small problems can be solved before they become major issues.
- Volunteers' workloads are reasonable and don't take over their lives.



What is involved in planning?

The key starting point to developing effectiveness in working with volunteers is to remind yourself why your club wants to involve volunteers in the first place and to identify what exactly you want to achieve by involving volunteers. A clear vision and understanding as to how volunteers can contribute to the success of your club will help you organise them effectively.

Volunteer Co-ordinator

Appointing a volunteer co-ordinator – who may well be a volunteer themselves – focuses at least one person's attention on the recruitment and retention of volunteers. If the co-ordinator has the support of the committee your club will be well on the way towards effective volunteer management.

Did you know?

Fewer older people volunteer – but those who do tend to deliver more hours of input than anyone else.

The steps involved in planning well include:

- **Involving existing staff and volunteers** - Be sure to engage existing people in the planning process as they are more likely to be receptive to new volunteers when they are involved from the start. They may also have great ideas for involving volunteers.
- **Running costs** - Whilst volunteers give their time for free, you may need a budget for expenses such as travel, telephone calls, training, conferences, equipment and insurance.
- **Space & Equipment** - It is important that volunteers have adequate physical space to work in – they won't all be out on the pitch! Depending on the role, equipment needs may include telephones, a desk, a computer or a lawnmower and other tools as well as sports equipment.
- **Recruitment and Selection** – Attracting volunteers and selecting the right people for your volunteer roles is much easier and more effective when you adopt an organised approach – see next section.

Garda Vetting

Garda Vetting is the process by which the Central Garda Vetting Unit discloses details regarding pending prosecutions and/or convictions in respect of an individual. While Garda Vetting is not necessary for every club or role, it is generally regarded as vital for volunteers who have direct contact with children or vulnerable adults. Most clubs will have access to Garda Vetting through their sport's national governing body. Where this is not available, Galway Volunteer Centre can assist you in the Garda Vetting process. Please contact the Manager of Galway Volunteer Centre for further information.

The image shows a sample Garda Vetting form. At the top left is the Garda Síochána logo. The title is 'Garda Vetting Form' with the subtitle 'Forma Vettinge Gardaí Síochána'. Below the title is a section for 'Personal Details' with fields for Name, Address, and Telephone. There is also a section for 'Employment Details' with fields for Employer, Position, and Start Date. A 'Declaration' section follows, with a line for the applicant's signature and date. At the bottom, there is a section for the 'Garda Vetting Unit' with fields for their findings and the date of the vetting.

Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers

Recruitment means attracting volunteers to your club. Selection means choosing the ones that you think will work well with your club. You don't have to accept every volunteer who comes along! Most volunteers are a great asset to their clubs but some are not. The wrong person in a role could do more damage than good. So it's very important to get your recruitment and selection process correct.

In order to do this you need to be really clear about what you want your volunteers to do. If you write a clear description of the role you want them to undertake, it will be easier to find the right person for that role.

Effective Recruitment

Identify the roles you need carried out by volunteers

Then think about how many volunteers you need for each role.

Challenge your thinking about your 'ideal volunteer'

We may be tempted by the idea of the ideal football coach, for example, being a very fit, six foot man with a couple of All Ireland medals under his belt. Does this man have the people skills required to coach effectively? How are his coaching techniques? An effective coach will have up-to-date knowledge of coaching skills, will understand the participants they will be coaching - whether they are children, teenagers, adults or older people - and will be able to communicate in a manner which motivates the team and makes them believe they can achieve. Such a person may not be 100% fit, may be less competitive, male or female and may be older than the stereotyped image of a coach. Coaching is not about the coach's ability at the skill being taught but enabling the learners to develop *their* skills.

Did you know?

58% of volunteers volunteer because they are asked;
38% offer their services.

Writing a role description

What should be in a role description? It should include:

- The work that the volunteer will be doing
- The kind of person needed to do the job (skills, experience, etc.)
- Specifically when the volunteer is needed and for how long - times and days.

You can download a blank role description form from <http://www.volunteergalway.ie/voluntary-orgs>.

We have found that an effective way to produce a role description that attracts the right people is to consider the following factors:

Creative Role Title

Creating a catchy role title will help 'sell' your volunteer opportunity to potential volunteers. Be honest - make the title sound enticing and encourage people to apply without making them think the role is more than it is.

Club & Role Overview

People are often attracted to volunteering as much for the aims and objectives of the club as for the role itself. Provide a brief overview of your club and its vision. Include a short piece on the volunteer role and how it will contribute to the club's success.

Tasks

Clearly and specifically outline the tasks the volunteer will undertake so that both you and the volunteer know exactly what is expected.

Time Commitment

Outline the hours the volunteer is needed e.g. 2 hours a week on a Monday evening. In addition, outline the length of time the volunteer is required e.g. one weekend, 6 months or 2 years. Stating the time commitment allows potential volunteers to quickly scan through the role description and immediately screen themselves out if they are not available. Short periods can be more attractive than a full season.

Location

State the place where the volunteer will be working i.e. at your office or another location. This informs the potential volunteer of additional travel and time commitments they may need to consider.

Skills, Experience & Qualities

In order to help select the right volunteers, it is necessary to outline the skills, experience and qualities desirable for the role. Be specific e.g. 'good people skills'; 'proficient in Microsoft Word'; 'experience of teaching children'.

Training & Induction

Many clubs provide a significant level of training for their volunteers. Training in subjects such as coaching, refereeing, administration, public relations or first aid is of great benefit to the volunteer as well as to your club. If your club can provide training for volunteers - **don't keep it a secret!!** Many people don't volunteer because they think they don't have the skills required. If they know that your club will give them these skills they may be much more willing to volunteer. It will look good on their CV, too! Emphasise the training you can provide on your role description.

All volunteers should be offered a structured induction to your club on their first day, regardless of the role they are undertaking. Further training may include in-depth information about your club or role-specific training. Clearly describing on the role description the training that you will provide will reassure those potential volunteers who think that they may not have the skills necessary to volunteer for the role - and will hopefully encourage them to apply.



Support & Supervision

As with training, including on the role description the fact that support and supervision will be provided can reassure volunteers.

Benefits

Individuals usually have their own reasons for volunteering – belief in your mission, the desire to give something back to their community, to gain work experience, etc. It is important to identify the specific benefits of each volunteer role to make the role as appealing as possible.

Expectations

It is also helpful to outline basic expectations you have of volunteers such as your code of conduct, ethics and the need for confidentiality, professionalism, respect, etc. These can be further developed in your volunteer agreement and volunteer policy and procedures.



How do you find volunteers for your club?

There are a number of different ways to find volunteers, including:

- Using the services of Galway Volunteer Centre (091 539930, info@volunteergalway.ie or www.volunteergalway.ie). We will advertise your role to over 5000 registered volunteers.
- Personal invitation to:
 - Parents of players – registration night is a good time to ask!
 - Former players – let them have a break but keep them involved!
 - Members of the community

- Local advertising via:
 - Word of mouth
 - Links with other community organisations
 - Parish newsletter or other local press
 - Posters in your club facilities and in your community
 - Flyers – if you're covering a very small area
 - Local radio
- Having a volunteering page on your website
- Approaching NUIG Alive programme -
Email: alive@nuigalway.ie Tel : 091 495346, Ext 5346

What should your ad or poster include?

Ads will give more detail than posters and should include:

- One line on what your club does
- What you need volunteers to do – the specific tasks involved
- Benefits for the volunteer
- The skills and experience your volunteers will need (if any)
- The training you will provide for volunteers
- The time commitment volunteers are asked to make
- The location in which volunteers are needed
- Your contact details.

Posters need to be more eye-catching with less detail – but remember to include at least the title of the volunteer role and your contact details!



Screening and Selection

What's the best way to choose the right person?

There is no one best way to select your volunteers. The most appropriate way will depend on your club and your members and the role for which you want volunteers. Screening and selecting volunteers to work for several hours per day with children or vulnerable adults will involve more thought and care than finding people for a one-off two-hour bag packing session in the local supermarket. If you are looking for a significant level of skill and/or experience and the right attitude, you are likely to want to hold reasonably formal interviews involving a panel of at least two interviewers. You may also wish to check references and use the Garda Vetting process.

On the other hand, if you simply need someone to turn up and do a relatively unskilled job for a short while, a brief informal chat or even a telephone call may suffice. Other roles may merit a less formal interview or a longer chat. It is important to remember that screening does not provide a 100% guarantee that the volunteer will be a perfect fit with your club and with the role you want them to fill.

Role & Club Description

The precise role description that you have already drawn up with detailed information of the tasks involved along with relevant information about your club, will help ensure you match the volunteer and the role.

Application Form

Many clubs develop their own volunteer application form. Application forms, unlike CVs, ensure the same information is collected on everyone so all applicants can be treated the same way. Forms can be off-putting for those with literacy needs or with poor English so always offer to help fill out an application form.

Interview

For volunteer roles which require a significant level of skill and/or experience the interview process can be crucial in enabling you to accurately measure whether the applicant is a good 'fit' for your club and the volunteer role. Interviews should always be regarded as a two-way process in which your club and the volunteer have the opportunity to assess one another.

Preparing for interview

If you decide that you need to hold interviews, you will need to think about the level of formality required for the role you wish to fill. A list of questions, designed to elicit how well the volunteer will carry out the duties of your role, should be developed in advance by the panel. These questions will be asked of each applicant. Then prepare model answers for each question so that the panel are agreed in advance on what you are looking for. Clearly, you are not expecting each interviewee to come up with the same answers as you have, but your answers are a benchmark against which to assess the applicants' answers. Some applicants may give better answers than the panel!

The interview

Ensure that the room is set up in advance with chairs for the panel and the interviewee and a table for taking notes. Introduce yourselves and do your best to put candidates at their ease as relaxed interviewees will give you a better picture of what they can do.

Ensure that you ask all the questions on your list. Ask the applicant whether they have any questions that they would like to ask. Tell them when you will let them know the outcome of the interview.



After the Interview

Reference Checks

Checking references allows you to verify details gathered from the volunteer during the application and interview process. Reference checks are generally conducted once you have interviewed the applicant and have decided you would like to involve them in your club. Generally, clubs request two references. For roles with significant responsibility including roles working with children, three references may be preferred. References should be from separate sources who are not related to the applicant and can be obtained from persons who know the applicant through the areas of sport, education, employment or previous volunteering.



Garda Vetting

If you need Garda Vetting for the role and your national governing body does not have the capacity to offer this service, ask your chosen volunteer(s) to complete the forms you've already requested from Galway Volunteer Centre and return them to us.

Responding to all applicants

It is courteous to respond to everyone who has contacted you about your volunteer roles, even if you decide not to interview them. We often receive complaints from volunteers about clubs not returning calls or answering emails and this disillusions volunteers and creates a bad impression. Courtesy is always the best policy - you never know when you might need applicants to volunteer in the future.

Preparing to welcome your volunteer(s)

Volunteers have high hopes and expectations when they sign up to your club. It is important that their needs and expectations are addressed, starting by making them feel welcome on the first day. Properly preparing for a volunteer's first day will ensure that they feel part of the team from the start.

After the initial discussion or interview, your volunteer will be excited at the prospect of starting out on a new endeavour. The first day's experience with your club will have a lasting impact and can influence their commitment and behaviour in the future. The following ideas will help you make your volunteer feel welcome and start as you mean to go on.

Preparing for a Volunteer's First Day

Induction

Induction is an information-sharing process providing a structured introduction to your club. The amount of training that volunteers need will depend on the role and their experience. Regardless, all volunteers will require an induction which should take place before they take up their role. From your club's perspective, an induction provides an opportunity to learn more about the applicant and ensure that they are willing and able to undertake the role.

When planning an induction process, go back to the role description, reiterate the tasks and outline your expectations. Many clubs choose to create an induction pack to bring volunteers up to speed on all aspects of their club. This also means that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet regarding the

Did you know?

65% of people who don't volunteer at present say they would be willing to use some of their spare time for voluntary work.

club's ethos, etc. Galway Volunteer Centre has an induction checklist on our website which you may find useful. The link is <http://www.volunteer.ie/involving-volunteers/vms/documents>.

Volunteers are ambassadors for your club and they need to understand the club's ethos and be able to communicate what your club is all about. A formal orientation should ideally occur within the first few days as part of the induction process. Orientation usually includes:

- a full tour of the club
- an overview of its history
- a description of all services provided
- how volunteers contribute to the successful delivery of these services
- other issues, where relevant, such as the importance of confidentiality.

Understanding the big picture and feeling part of the club is greatly motivating. This can be done on an individual basis or as a group, if more than one volunteer has been brought on board recently.

Volunteer Agreement

If your volunteers will be working with you for a significant time, it is useful to have a volunteer agreement which clarifies the expectations of both parties in relation to issues such as the time commitment involved, confidentiality, training and adherence to your club's policies and procedures. A sample volunteer agreement can be downloaded from:

www.volunteer.ie/involving-volunteers/uploads/docs/vms/volunteerAgreement.pdf

Trial Period

Agreeing a trial period provides an opportunity for both parties to see if each other's expectations are being met. In addition, it provides an opt-out for either party if things are not working out.

The Volunteer's First Day

The Greeting

Welcome the volunteer warmly. Make sure everyone the volunteer is likely to come into contact with knows they are arriving. It's amazing how motivating it is to feel welcomed by everyone!

Tour of the Premises

This may sound obvious, but volunteers are often left wondering where the toilets are or where they can get a cup of tea!

Don't Assume Knowledge

Gauge the level of support or assistance required to get your volunteer up and running quickly. Spend plenty of time with your volunteer on the first day (or assign another person to do this) and expect lots of questions! This is important in creating a relaxed rapport and building a good working relationship. Pairing the new person with an existing volunteer for a period of time may be beneficial.

Initial Assignments

Nothing says "we need you and value you" more effectively than having prepared work to do right away. This allows volunteers to quickly identify how they can contribute to the work of your club. Conversely, having the volunteer wait while you "pull something together to keep them busy" sends quite the opposite message. Set tasks that allow the volunteer to ease into things, whilst providing enough work to fill their time.

Did you know?

The three main rewards people get from volunteering are the satisfaction of seeing the results, the feeling of doing good and meeting people.

The End of the First Day

Make sure you're there to review the volunteer's work. Give some positive feedback – you can always find something good to say! If there was a hiccup or two, explain constructively how to correct anything that was done incorrectly. Be sure not to belittle the volunteer; rather remind them that they are still in training and practice makes perfect. Confirm the next time they are due in and express appreciation at having a new member on the team. Such courtesies are not just for show; they encourage your volunteer to return again and again.



Keeping Volunteers

How do we ensure that volunteers stay with us?

With good volunteer management!

Volunteers start with great enthusiasm. If this can be effectively harnessed, they will do great things and stay with your club. A few simple steps can make all the difference between effective management of volunteers and complete disorganisation. Clubs where volunteers are well organised and well treated find that their volunteers are happy to stay with them and 'sell' the club to others.

On the other hand, clubs which are poorly organised are unlikely to retain their volunteers for long as volunteers may feel:

- unclear about what they are supposed to do
- that they are wasting their time
- exploited, unrecognised and unappreciated.

Lack of organisation can also lead to solo runs, a disjointed ethos and poor outcomes due to varying ideas and views about their roles of different club members.

Good Time Management

Good time management can make all the difference both to the experience of your current volunteers and the attractiveness of your club to new volunteers. If existing volunteers are working all hours at an endless list of tasks they are likely to burn out and leave. Replacement will be difficult. Stories about the coach mowing the pitch, providing first aid and serving the tea frighten people into thinking that, if they volunteer for your club, they will no longer have any free time for themselves.

If, however, a club develops a culture of good planning with

- well organised timetables and rosters
- an expectation of starting and finishing on time (people do get used to it!)

the volunteer will feel that her/his time is respected and valued and that they can give of their time without the club taking over.



Did you know?

Between 17% and 33% of adults volunteer on a regular basis

Supervision

Supervision is vital if a volunteer is going to do a good job. Its functions are to:

- discuss the volunteering role and its responsibilities
- clarify priorities and set goals
- identify training needs
- share perceptions about how the work is progressing
- monitor work and work performance
- evaluate work and work performance
- improve confidence and competence in doing the work
- recognise and deal with problems
- provide a framework for agreed change
- show support.



Positive Support

Many people have negative experiences and images of ‘supervision’ and ‘management’. Supervision isn’t about being on your volunteer’s back the whole time and watching everything they do. It’s about being supportive rather than looking for points to criticise. Good supervision includes:

- agreeing clear objectives with your volunteers
- ensuring that they know what you want them to do and the most effective way of doing it
- ensuring that they have the skills, knowledge, materials, equipment and information they need to meet their objectives
- providing appropriate training
- giving them space to get on with their work
- giving praise and constructive feedback.

It's important that you or another designated person are available to answer any questions or help solve any problems that your volunteer may experience and that you schedule a feedback meeting with each volunteer at a set period of time such as monthly or quarterly.

Giving constructive feedback is one of the most important elements of supervision. Feedback should be as positive as possible. Express your appreciation whenever you can, in as many different ways as possible - and mean it. Yes, volunteers do need to know when their work needs to improve but the ratio of praise/positive feedback to negative feedback should be 4:1! Feedback meetings should also give the volunteer the opportunity to discuss their level of satisfaction with their role.

Dealing with problems

The problems a volunteer supervisor is most likely to encounter are:

- Performance problems (e.g., timekeeping or the quality/quantity of work)
- Behavioural problems (e.g., offensiveness, laziness or arrogance).

In both cases, early troubleshooting and the prompt resolution of problems will aid morale and enhance volunteer retention. Written policies and procedures for dealing with disciplinary and grievance matters are essential and must be followed correctly. Terminating a volunteer's involvement with the club is an option but should only be used as a last resort when all other avenues of action have been exhausted.

Motivating and Thanking Volunteers

People volunteer for a multitude of reasons: to give something back to their community; to gain or improve skills; to meet new people; because they are interested in an issue or cause; or because they have some free time on their hands.

Motivate people by ensuring that you have the best possible match between their interests and their role. Ensure that no-one is overloaded and provide variety by ensuring that no-one is left in the same role for too long. Make sure that they feel part of your club and that they are included in discussions and decision making. Acknowledging the work that volunteers do ensures they will stay motivated and continue to work on your club's behalf. There are lots of different ways in which clubs can recognise and motivate their volunteers including:

- **Say 'thank you'.** Thank your volunteers regularly. Tell them how important their efforts are to your club.
- **Award service gifts or certificates.** Recognise effort and service by awarding small gifts that commemorate longevity. This can be a formal or informal prize giving.
- **Social events.** Plan events to say 'thank you' and show your appreciation. It can be anything from going out for a drink, a themed event, a film or lunch. Use your imagination!
- **Create volunteer appreciation day(s).** Set aside a day to appreciate your volunteers. Put up posters. Make a speech. Most people like a cake!
- **Establish a volunteer 'Hall of Fame'.** Elect someone as the volunteer of the week, month, or year. Take his or her picture. Build a gallery of honoured volunteers.
- **Additional training or personal development.** Send dedicated volunteers to relevant training to build on their knowledge and develop their skills in relation to the work they do for your club.
- **Local and national volunteer award schemes.** These include:
 - Galway Mayor's Awards – City and County
 - Irish Sports Volunteers Awards

For more ideas see our website – www.volunteergalway.ie

Developing a Volunteer Policy

When you have carried out many of the actions outlined above, it is a good idea to encapsulate all your work in a written document that sets out your policies and procedures in a clear form that others can use and follow. If you would like assistance with this, call us on 091 539930.

Case Studies

Titans Basketball Club

Titans Basketball Club measures its success in a number of ways - the number of games played and events run, including community and inter-cultural programmes; the number of volunteer and coaching hours (not all volunteers are coaches); the number of members and their involvement in club activity.

To attract volunteers Titans use a number of simple methods. Firstly, all parents are required to complete an application form for their child. On this form parents are asked what they can volunteer for e.g. door supervisor, coach, driver, team manager, washing gear or something else. The club committee identify and approach these people informally at games and training and check out their availability to assist their child's team with a task appropriate to their skill set and availability. If someone can only help every third Saturday of each month that is accepted as stated and they are put on a roster accordingly.

The club encourages parents and players to get involved in coaching. Coaching clinics are held in house to coincide with children's training. All volunteers are encouraged to attend certified courses delivered by external providers and supported by the club. Certification and accreditation is highly valued by Titan volunteers and is very effective in encouraging the development and retention of coaches/volunteers who don't have children in the club. Courses include Coach Accreditation 1, 2 and 3, Code of Ethics, Teaching Best Practice, First Aid and Defibrillator training.

Time management and pre-season planning is a major priority on the Titan agenda. During the mid-season Christmas break, Titans meet to review their efforts of the previous season, agree a Strategic Plan and identify priorities for the next three years. The planning for the following season therefore begins well before the end of the existing one, with planning meetings for coaches and managers. Each coach will be aware of their commitment in hours, days and dates for the coming season. This allows volunteers and the club to forward plan and ensures that the club is not otherwise intrusive to the quality of life of these highly valued volunteers. Rosters are created for each session and allow for volunteers to give a specified amount of time for a specific number of weeks. An Academy Coach will know that they are needed for 1-2 hours every third Saturday of the month, while team coaching must be predictable, routine and consistent and these coaches must be able to offer a weekly or twice weekly commitment.

Titans organise a number of big social events throughout the year. These are seen as a very important tool to reward members for their efforts and to gel the club together.

In conclusion, Titans' advice for managing volunteers is to identify your clubs needs; identify people who might have a matching skill-set; ask them if they are interested and available; encourage them; induct them; protect them; mind them; up-skill them, show them that they are valued and provide them with opportunities for growth in their volunteer role through accredited training and development.

Craughwell Athletic Club

Michael Tobin, PRO and volunteer coach with the juvenile section of Craughwell Athletic Club, started volunteering several years ago, having been asked to help out when his own children first became interested in athletics. When he saw how the athletes gained in confidence as well as in athletic ability, he took personal pride in encouraging and enabling young people to develop their talents as far as they could. Whilst the club has had athletes competing at European level and hope to reach the Olympics, they also measure their success by the level of community involvement in the club – demonstrated by the 300 athletes taking part in club activities, many at beginner’s level. Training schedules are well organised with sessions divided by age groups and a head coach for each age group who organises the other coaches. With so many athletes, time has to be well managed with both volunteers and athletes turning up on time and finishing on time – often to let another group use the facilities. Michael says “The work has to be enjoyable for both the athletes and the volunteers, otherwise they will drop away.” To avoid burnout in both athletes and volunteers significant breaks in training are taken throughout the year with the volunteer coaches deciding when the athletes in their age group take breaks from training.

Valerie Fogarty, who coaches adults for the club’s Fit for Life programme, says that getting fit with the club herself gave her such a buzz that she really enjoys passing on the same sense of achievement to others. “We draw a lot of our coaches from people who have come through the programme - they really get what can be achieved through the programme. To keep our volunteers we have to work with all the other things going on in their lives and understand that sometimes people have other priorities.”



For more help and information

This short guide on finding and keeping volunteers gives a quick insight into the issues which have most influence on how effectively clubs involve volunteers. Galway Volunteer Centre can offer a lot more guidance and can provide individual support to your club if this would be helpful. We would be delighted to talk with you about volunteering – so give us a call!



Galway Volunteer Centre

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