



Finding and Keeping Volunteers

A Guide to Volunteer Management for Volunteer Involving Organisations



volunteer centre

Ionad d'Obair Deonacha na Gaillimhe

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na Gaillimhe
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Introduction



Community groups wouldn't exist without volunteers. Volunteers are a wonderful asset to a community and bring great enthusiasm with them. They enable communities to achieve things that just wouldn't happen without volunteers.

This handbook is about attracting volunteers to your organisation and working with them to ensure that they do what your group needs them to do, that they are motivated and content, that they stay with your group – and about making your life easier!

Challenges for organisations when working with volunteers

Volunteering is a wonderful concept which can achieve marvellous objectives – but it's not all 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 working with 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, so drawing on their enthusiasm for the cause is absolutely essential. A shared passion within the organisation motivates its members and keeps them working together effectively. The most effective way to ensure that all members of your organisation are motivated by a shared passion is to take time out from everyday work to discuss your values and your vision for the future. As your vision may change over time, you need to review it on a regular basis. It can also boost motivation if you consider the loss to your community if your organisation wasn't making its contribution to community life.

Rural areas

One of the challenges facing community groups in rural areas in particular is finding and keeping volunteers. We understand it is often the same small group of people who take on and stay with voluntary tasks in the community. It can be difficult to find new volunteers to take their place or when more volunteers are needed. Hopefully, Galway Volunteer Centre and this booklet will help.

Planning



Why is it important to plan?

It has been said that if we fail to plan, we may as well plan to fail. It makes sense to plan how you involve volunteers in your work in order to ensure 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.
- You can solve small problems before they become major issues.

What is involved in planning?

The key starting point to developing effectiveness in working with volunteers is to remind yourself why your organisation 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 your organisation will help you organise them effectively.

The steps involved in planning well include:

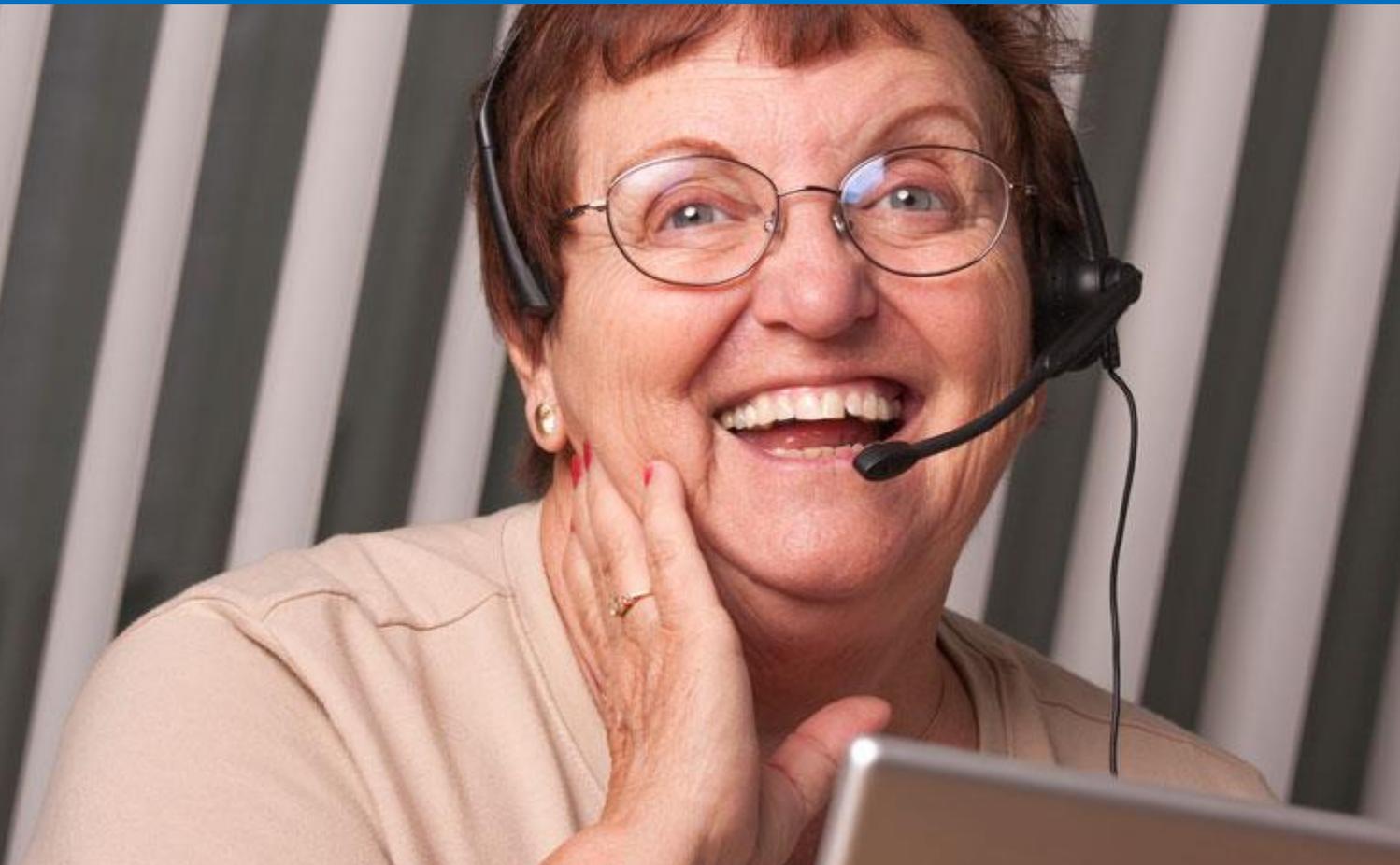
- **Involving existing staff and volunteers** - Be sure to engage existing workers in the planning process as they are more likely to be receptive to new volunteers if they are involved from the start. They may also have great ideas for involving volunteers.
- **Running costs** - Whilst volunteers give their time for free, you may need a budget for expenses such as travel and additional costs such as telephone calls, training, conferences, equipment and insurance.

- **Space & Equipment** - It is important that volunteers have adequate physical space to work in. Depending on the role, equipment needs may include telephones, a desk and a computer or a lawnmower and other gardening tools.
- **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 organisation or role, it is generally regarded as an important step for organisations whose volunteers are involved with children or vulnerable adults. Galway Volunteer Centre can assist you in the Garda Vetting process if your organisation does not have its own arrangements. Please contact the Manager of Galway Volunteer Centre for further information.

Recruitment



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

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.

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.)
- When the volunteer is needed and for how long.

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.

Organisation & Role Overview

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

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.

Number of Volunteers

Deciding on how many volunteers are needed will depend on the type of tasks required, whether you are a newly established organisation, if there are gaps to be filled or if you are replacing a volunteer who has retired or has less time to commit and how many you feel you can support effectively.

Location

State the place where the volunteer will be working i.e. at your office or another location. This information 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'.

Is there a minimum age to become a volunteer?

It depends on the type of role, if the organisation has the supports/insurance available i.e. families could

engage in volunteering activities and support their children. For under 18's to volunteer, they need parental/guardian consent and the organisation must have appropriate insurance for them.

Training & Induction

All volunteers should be offered a structured introduction - to your organisation on their first day, regardless of the role they are undertaking. Further training may include in-depth information about the organisation 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

Including the fact that supervision will be provided on the role description can reassure volunteers.

Health and Safety

All volunteer roles should be assessed to identify any potential health and risks. Risk management is a system to forecast risks in advance and take proactive steps to deal with identified risks. Conducting volunteer role risk assessments will help promote and ensure the safety of volunteers, staff and service users within your organisation. Volunteering during COVID 19 is covered towards the end of this booklet.

Child Protection

It is important to have appropriate policies and procedures in place around child protection, if relevant. Please contact <https://www.tusla.ie> for further information.

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. Volunteering is an excellent way to gain work experience that can lead

towards employment, improving a person's CV. Where relevant, the value of this needs to be recognised and supported if possible

Expectations

It is also helpful to outline basic expectations you have of volunteers such as 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 organisation?

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

- Use the services of Galway Volunteer Centre
- Any social media channels that you may have
- Word of mouth
- Parish newsletter or other local press or local radio.
- Posters in your community
- Flyers – if you're covering a very small area
- Have a volunteering page on your website

What should your ad or poster include?

- One line on what your organisation 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 time commitment volunteers are asked to make
- The location in which volunteers are needed
- 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 organisation and the role for which you want volunteers. 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.

Role & Organisational Description

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

Application Form

Many organisations 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 organisation and the volunteer role. Interviews should always be regarded as a two-way process in which the organisation 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. The interviewer/panel should develop in advance a list of questions designed to elicit how well the volunteer will carry out the duties of your role. 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 Check

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 organisation. Generally, organisations request two references for roles with significant responsibility – or even three for roles working with children. References should be from nonrelatives and from separate sources: education, employment, previous volunteering or from a person of standing within the community.

Garda Vetting

If you need Garda Vetting for the role and don't have your own arrangements, contact Galway Volunteer Centre to avail of Garda Vetting information, services and support. Email vetting@volunteergalway.ie or phone (091) 581 727 or visit <https://volunteergalway.ie/garda-vetting/> .

When you've selected your volunteer(s)

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 organisations not returning calls or answering emails and this disillusiones volunteers.

A Volunteer's First Day



Preparing to welcome your volunteer(s)

Volunteers have high hopes and expectations when they sign up to volunteer. It's important that organisations address their needs and expectations, starting with making them feel welcome on the first day. Properly preparing for a volunteer's first day will ensure they immediately feel part of the team, allay any nerves they may have and help you to retain your volunteers.

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 organisation will have a lasting impact and will influence their commitment and behaviour within the organisation in the future. The following ideas will help you make your volunteer feel welcome and start as you mean to go on.

Induction

Induction is an information-sharing process providing a structured introduction to your organisation. The amount of training that volunteers need will depend on the role and their experience. Regardless, all volunteers will require an induction. When planning an induction process, go back to the role description, reiterate the tasks and outline your expectations. Many organisations choose to create an induction pack to bring volunteers up to speed on all aspects of the organisation. Galway Volunteer Centre can provide you with an induction checklist which you may find useful.

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 the organisation's policies and procedures. A sample volunteer agreement can be accessed by contacting our office directly.

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.

Training

Volunteer training that takes place prior to starting their role gives volunteers an opportunity to come to terms with the role and to decide if it is definitely something they want to pursue. From the organisation's perspective, training provides an opportunity to learn more about the applicant and ensure that they are willing and able to undertake the volunteer role.

The Greeting

Welcome the volunteer warmly. Make sure everyone the volunteer is likely to come into contact with knows they are arriving, including the receptionist. It's amazing how motivating it is to feel expected and 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.

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 organisation. 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 the shift.

Formal Orientation

Volunteers are ambassadors for your organisation and they need to understand and be able to communicate what your organisation is all about. A formal orientation should ideally occur within the first few days. Orientation usually includes a full tour of the organisation, an overview of its history, a description of all services provided, how volunteers contribute to their successful delivery and other issues, where relevant, such as the importance of confidentiality. Understanding the big picture and feeling part of the organisation 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.

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 what was done wrong and how to correct it. 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 a great job and stay with the organisation. A few simple steps can make all the difference between effective management of volunteers and ineffective disorganisation. Organisations where volunteers are well organised and well treated find that their volunteers are happy to stay with them.

On the other hand, organisations which are poorly organised so that volunteers are left unclear about what they are supposed to do and feel that they are wasting their time, or organisations which exploit volunteers without recognising or thanking them are unlikely to retain their volunteers for long.

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

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
- 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, say every few weeks.

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 (for example, timekeeping or the quality or quantity of work)
- Behavioural problems (for example, 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. It is advised that in drafting policies a section is dedicated to 'volunteer code of conduct'. Galway Volunteer Centre can provide you with a template volunteer code of conduct which you may find useful. Ending a volunteer's involvement with the organisation is always an option but should only be used as a last resort if all other avenues of action have been exhausted.

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.

Acknowledging the work that volunteers do with your organisation ensures they will stay motivated and continue to work on your behalf. There are lots of different ways in which organisations can recognise and motivate their volunteers. Some ideas are included below but you can also contact Galway Volunteer Centre for more ideas

- **Say ‘thank you’.** Thank your volunteers regularly. Send them personal notes on special occasions (birthdays, holidays, for a job well done, etc.). Remind them how important their efforts are to your organisation.
- **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 organisation.

Developing a Volunteer Policy



When you have carried out many of the actions outlined above, you may well want to encapsulate all your work in a written policy document that sets out your good work in a clear form that others can use and follow. Galway Volunteer Centre can provide a template volunteer policy you may find useful.

What is a volunteer policy?

It is the main foundation that all the other building blocks for volunteering sit on. Your policy will outline clearly to all staff, volunteers and users of the service, why volunteers are involved.

Why is a volunteer policy important?

- Having a volunteer policy in place shows that you've thought about volunteering and that you care about your volunteers.
- For staff and volunteers it communicates how volunteers are involved in the organisation.
- For volunteers, they can find useful information about how they're engaged. For example, what the procedures are for expenses, what support's available or access to training.
- It helps you be consistent in how you work with volunteers.
- It can help clarify the boundaries between paid staff and volunteers.

Volunteering During COVID-19

YOU ARE
NOT
ALONE



Whether you have an existing volunteer programme or are managing volunteers for the first time due to COVID-19, we are here to help. Please contact us if you have any further questions.

A vital role

Volunteer management is a busy and varied role at the best of times, but it is even more important during times of emergency. The requirements of your role may change a lot during these periods but the health, safety and welfare of you and your volunteers is of the utmost importance above all else. Managing volunteers at this time will continue to be an essential part of your work in our local communities. Depending on the nature of your volunteer programme you may have to curtail activities, or you may need to ramp up the activities you provide. You may even need to provide a whole new programme that you haven't delivered before. Here are some suggestions of things you can do now:

Balance or re-balance your workload

Things will move faster than ever before with phone calls and emails flying in. If you are working from home make sure you plan some downtime and where possible get some physical exercise outdoors while practicing social distancing – it is important to be able to switch off. Update your phone message or email signature to tell people your revised working hours.

Let your volunteers know they are supported and appreciated

Communication is key, even if it's just to say "we don't have much for volunteers to do right now" or "we are changing the way we do things, it'll take us a little time to adjust and we'll get back to you". Let your volunteers know what is happening.

Prioritise health above all else

You may not have collected personal data from your volunteers in the past in relation to them being in one of the “at risk” groups for COVID-19 but you might need to ask that question now. This may seem intrusive but remember the health of us all is everyone’s primary concern.

Review your volunteer programme risk assessment

It’s unlikely that you have a pandemic as a listed risk in your existing risk assessment. Now is the time to include it and to reassess all elements of your work on this basis.

Have a contingency plan in place

We all know that Volunteer Managers can be a “one man/woman” show, so make sure you have a contingency plan in place, in case you need to self-isolate or restrict your movements. Upskill a colleague to run your volunteer programme in your absence, if you have not previously done so. Think about how the programme would operate without you.

Do not work/volunteer if you are ill

If you are sick and showing any of symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19) you should withdraw immediately, following the guidelines from the HSE.

Do not let anyone volunteer if they are ill

If a volunteer is feeling unwell make sure that they can disengage promptly without concern or guilt. Sometimes volunteers feel guilty that they are letting the organisation down. Make sure that they know their health and well-being and that of your service users in your number one concern.

Get your information from reliable sources

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can be stressful and worrying so encourage your volunteers to follow only recognised news channels, there is a lot of misleading information floating around on Social Media.

Encourage Communication

Encourage your volunteers to reach out to you if they have a question or concern about their volunteering, as one volunteer's concern could be the concern of 20 volunteers.

Be honest with your volunteers

As a Volunteer Manager you may be your volunteer's "shining light" and wear many hats but you are not expected to be a scientist or doctor. Don't bluff your way in an answer to a question from a volunteer. There is no shame in saying "I don't have the answer to that question right now, but I will find out and come back to you". Volunteers will respect you for your honesty.

Follow HSE guidelines round social distancing

If volunteering is to continue you need to adopt a social distancing/no handshake policy at your organisation. Volunteers are usually friendly people so encourage waving or verbally greeting people instead.

Implement proper hygiene

Provide facilities for volunteer hand-sanitising and hand-washing and provide clear signage to encourage this.

Volunteer and service user safety should be your primary concern

If continuing interaction between volunteers and vulnerable persons, take all recommended precautions, including but not limited to PPE, gloves, eye and face masks, frequent hand-washing, and use of sanitiser.

You may need to adapt your volunteer policy or procedure

Make sure you include volunteers in the decision-making process. This will ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed.

Explore virtual volunteering

If your facility has closed and volunteers can no longer volunteer there explore if it is possible for them to carry out these tasks remotely. Perhaps you are recruiting new volunteers and your current volunteers could interview, screen and check references, this could be done through virtual volunteering.

Be prepared that some people may not be able to continue volunteering

What if one of your volunteers tested positively for Coronavirus (Covid-19)? What if a number of volunteers had to self-isolate as a precaution, would your volunteer programme continue? Would it have an impact on services?

Think about which of your services is a priority

You may need to move and upskill volunteers from one area to another to maintain capacity to deliver your priority services.

Mind the mental health of your volunteers

Volunteering at a time of a pandemic can be stressful for everyone, ensure that volunteers are taking shorter shifts and longer breaks and encourage them to not push themselves.

Think about training

If you have to train or upskill volunteers, think about how you are going to do this. Can you have social distancing in a training setting or do you need to offer e-learning instead? What might be some of pitfalls of this and do you need to have an enhanced buddy scheme in place for new volunteers?

More information

There are a broad range of resources and tools to help you to support your volunteer programme during an emergency available on the Volunteer Ireland web site <https://www.volunteer.ie/>

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 organisations involve volunteers. Galway Volunteer Centre can offer a lot more guidance and can provide individual support to your organisation if this would be helpful. We would be delighted to talk with you about volunteering – so give us a call!

27 William Street West, Galway

091 581727

info@volunteergalway.ie

www.volunteergalway.ie

