



Skills acquired through
Volunteering in Sport

LEARNING RESOURCES

/// PILLAR 1: VOLUNTEER STRATEGY AND PLANNING

SUB-PILLAR 1.4

**Establishing an inclusive,
equitable, volunteer-friendly
culture**



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Establishing an inclusive, equitable, volunteer-friendly culture

a/ DESCRIPTION

Volunteers that do not stay long with sport organisations often cite that they did not feel properly welcomed. Conversely, volunteers are more likely to stay and thrive if the organisation is configured appropriately around their needs. This includes developing a positive culture for volunteer success. This section therefore offers resources to help you deepen your appreciation of 'culture' and what it means in this context. In addition, equity, diversity and inclusion should be a central consideration when planning your volunteer workforce. This section therefore includes resources to help you ensure that volunteer opportunities and progression are open to all.

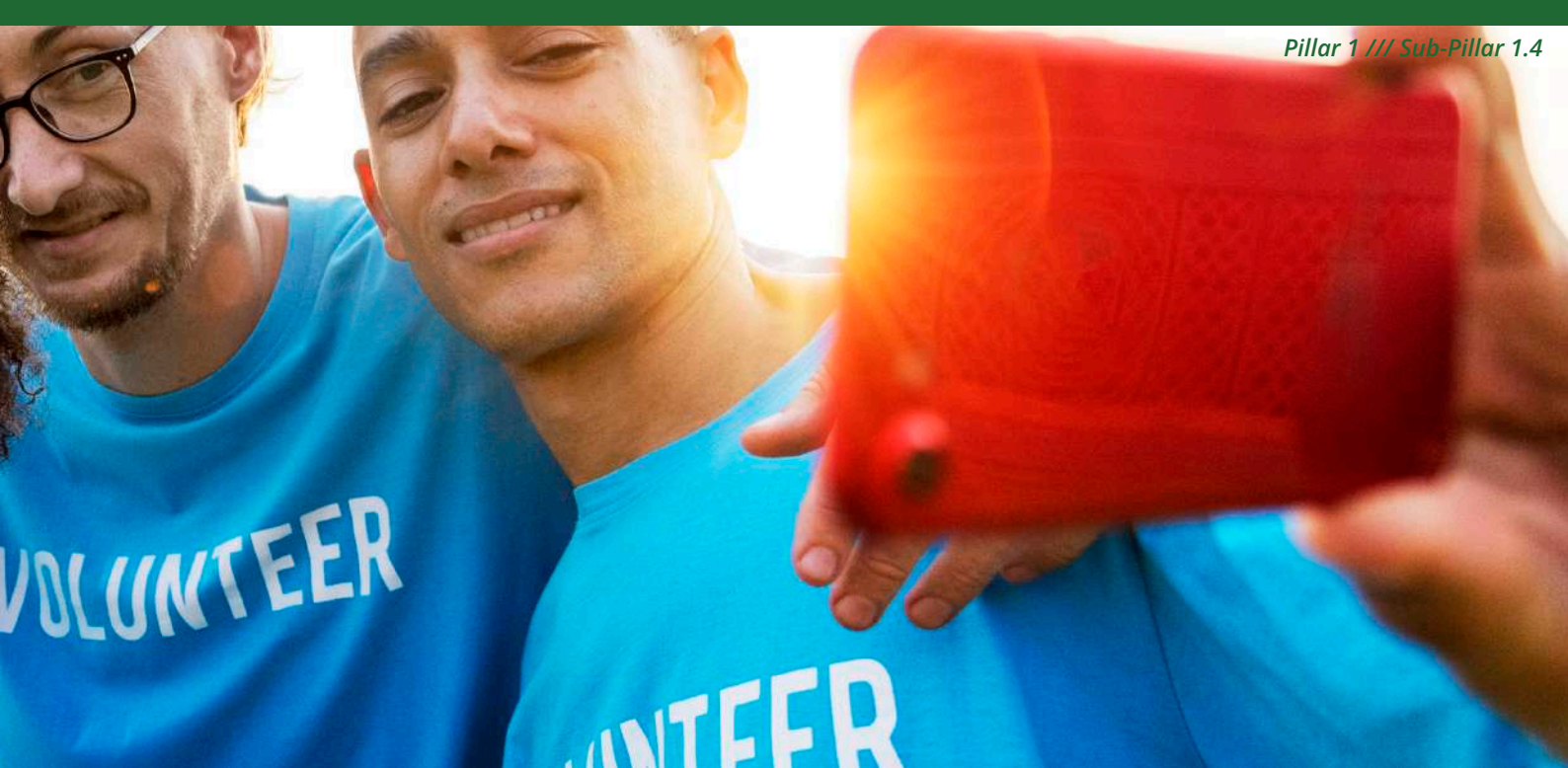
b/ KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS – DID YOU KNOW THAT:

From our Global Survey, sport organisations told us volunteers can bring a wide variety of benefits:

- ② 82% of the respondents feel that volunteering in sport needs to be more inclusive reflecting gender, disability and minorities in society.

However, the same survey suggests that:

- ② 58% of sport volunteers are in the age group 30-55 years old
- ② Only 42% of sport volunteers are women
- ② Only 12% are below 30 years of age
- ② Only 21% are over 55 years of age
- ② Only 19% of sport organisations have volunteers with disabilities
- ② Only 11.4% have volunteers with mental health conditions
- ② Only 24% felt it was easy for people with a disability to find opportunities for sport volunteering.



Our desk research tells us that people with disabilities and mental health conditions can gain a lot from volunteering which can boost their self-esteem and overcome feelings of depression and loneliness.

Our Global Survey also tells us that:

- ⌚ On average, only 11% of sport organisations offer their volunteers benefits and incentives such as reduced membership fees, ticket discounts for events, other types of discounts or vouchers and leisure sport services
- ⌚ Only 18% organise social events for their sport volunteers.

When you are considering what sort of culture you want to have in your organisation, you might benefit from thinking about how you can make the volunteering environment more 'friendly' to women, young people and seniors. Also please remember that, although they may need more support, people with disabilities and mental health conditions have a lot of skills to offer and they will gain a lot from sport volunteering.

Also think about how your organisation can celebrate and reward your volunteers with more social events, incentives and benefits.

>> CONTENT AREA 1: UNDERSTANDING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR SPORT ORGANISATION

There can be a tendency in volunteer-led sport organisations, such as local clubs, for tradition to dominate and “we’ve always done it this way” to be heard from longstanding members. Whilst it is important to embrace lessons learned through extensive experience as these will undoubtedly contribute to the smooth running of the organisation, it is also vital to engage with the changes that are happening all around us to ensure that a modern, welcoming environment is created. In a voluntary sport organisation, the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion are essential for creating a positive and welcoming environment for all participants, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or identities.

Harnessing these principles helps ensure that everyone feels valued, respected, and supported, leading to increased participation, enjoyment, and overall success of the organisation. The terms equity, diversity and inclusion have distinct meanings, so let’s look at each in turn:

⌚ Equity

- **Fairness and equal opportunities**

The essence of equity is fairness; in your sport organisation this means providing equal opportunities for all current and potential volunteers to participate and excel, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or other characteristics. It involves ensuring that resources, facilities and support are distributed in order to address potential barriers and disadvantages faced by some volunteers.

- **Accommodating individual needs**

It is critical to recognise that different volunteers may require different forms of support or accommodation to participate fully. For instance, this could include providing adaptive equipment or modifying activities to be inclusive of disabled people.

- **Removing barriers**

This involves identifying and eliminating any systemic or organisational barriers that may prevent certain individuals or groups from participating fully in volunteering. This might involve reviewing your organisation’s policies, practices, and procedures to ensure they are inclusive and fair.

⌚ Inclusion

- **Active participation**

This means encouraging and facilitating the active participation of all interested volunteers, regardless of their skill levels or backgrounds. This might involve assigning mentors to less experienced volunteers in order to ensure a positive experience.

- **Fostering belonging**

It is vital to build a sense of belonging and camaraderie among all members. This can be achieved through team-building exercises, regular communication, and recognizing and celebrating the contributions of every participant.

- **Open communication**

Encouraging open and respectful communication between members and the club’s leadership. Listening to feedback and addressing concerns helps create an inclusive culture where everyone’s voice is heard.

Overall, embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion in a voluntary sport organisation is not only the right thing to do morally but also contributes to the success and sustainability of the club in so many ways! You may need to be prepared to change well-established ways of working, but the benefits will outweigh the costs.

>> CONTENT AREA 2: UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR SPORT ORGANISATION

Organisational culture is a fascinating and useful concept that will help you understand why things are as they are in your sport organisation. It is also very helpful in determining what kinds of innovations and management styles are likely to work well in a range of situations. Organisational culture is defined in terms of the values and beliefs held by the people who work (or volunteer) in an organisation as well as their ways of working. Every organisation, including voluntary sport organisations, has its own culture that makes it unique. We use the word a lot in everyday conversation, but it is helpful to dig a bit deeper into it in order to be able to improve things for the volunteers in your sport organisation.

Because culture is connected to the deeply-held values and beliefs of members of your sport organisation, it is not always possible for us to observe it directly. Instead, it is often necessary to make conclusions about organisational culture based on factors we can see. There are many ways of thinking about this, but one of the most useful is a model called the Cultural Web pioneered by Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes. This consists of six elements that we combine to tell us more about the culture of any organisation (including yours!).

We have adapted it slightly for the purposes of this Toolkit:

- **Stories**

The way people talk about their workplace is very revealing. In voluntary sport organisations there may be 'myths' and 'legends' handed down about heroic or villainous individuals. There may be repeated complaints about unfair working conditions, favouritism and a host of other gripes. Whether or not these stories are true is beside the point to some extent. The fact that they exist and are passed on between individuals solidifies them and creates an impression of the organisation in the minds of newcomers that can be hard to shift.

- **Symbols**

The way people dress in sport volunteering situations, the state of the physical environment, the logo of a sports club: these and many other things are all symbolic of underlying attitudes and give a fantastic insight into the culture of your sport organisation. For instance, most sports clubs with their own premises proudly display trophies, pictures and other artefacts from their history. Do they convey welcoming images of inclusivity and community, or do the images represent a narrow segment of society (eg all-male, non-disabled)? The choice of symbols presented to the world provides useful insight into the values of the key people in your sport organisation.

- **Rituals and routines**

Organisational habits are very informative in communicating elements of the underlying culture. Do you have certain tasks that are only ever done in one way by the same person, regardless of the potential for others to do it better? Are you a sports club in which the social element of your sporting gatherings has equal or greater importance than the sport itself? Working routines and social rituals differ from organisation to organisation and say a lot about the character of the individuals and their collective mindset. Routines and rituals can very effectively include or exclude newcomers depending on how they are configured.

- **Organisation and power**

The way you choose to structure the roles in your sport organisation has a profound impact on lines of communication, decision-making and autonomy for individual volunteers. It tells us a lot about where the power really resides and is reflective of other aspects of your sport organisation's culture. Some people in positions of responsibility are unwilling to relinquish power, thereby stifling opportunities for enthusiastic and skilled volunteers to make a more meaningful contribution.

We can think of culture as similar to an iceberg in the sense that there are visible signs above the surface but a lot more happening underwater!

The observable aspects of the sport organisation give us clues as to the underlying attitudes that inform them. If a sports club, for example, has unwelcoming symbols, people in powerful positions that do not appear ready to let go of their responsibilities and stories about formidable coaches that are best avoided, we are most likely dealing with a culture that is insular, unfriendly and less likely to attract new volunteers.

Understanding and being able to modify your sport organisation's culture is therefore essential to your ongoing success.



>> CONTENT AREA 3: ANALYSING THE CULTURE OF YOUR SPORT ORGANISATION AND IDENTIFYING FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

(Please read the preceding content area on understanding organisational culture before using this one.)

In the preceding content area, we broke down the concept of organisational culture and showed why is a useful concept for sport organisations working with volunteers. As we explained, there are a number of phenomena that can be observed, and which give us clues as to the deeply held beliefs of organisational members. So, therefore, how do we go about capturing the culture of the sport organisation so that we can make positive changes?

It is particularly important not to over-complicate the process, so here are some achievable actions you can take to enhance your appreciation of the culture of your sport organisation:

- **Observation**
Spend time practices, games, events and meetings. Observe how members interact with each other, coaches and volunteers. Pay attention to rituals, traditions and the general atmosphere during activities.
- **Surveys and questionnaires**
Develop and administer surveys or questionnaires to members, coaches, volunteers, and stakeholders. Ask about their perceptions of the club's culture, inclusivity, communication, and overall satisfaction.
- **Interviews and focus groups**
Conduct one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including leaders, long-time members, newcomers and individuals from diverse backgrounds. This allows for in-depth conversations and a deeper understanding of different perspectives.
- **Review policies and documents**
Examine policies, mission statement, strategy code of conduct, and any other written materials. This can reveal the organisation's stated values and the extent to which they align with its actual practices.
- **Feedback mechanisms**
Assess your organisation's existing feedback mechanisms. Are there opportunities for members to provide input, suggestions, and complaints? Evaluate how feedback is collected, addressed, and utilised for improvement.
- **Leadership styles**
Observe the leadership style and of the organisation's officials. The actions and behaviours of leaders often shape the overall culture of the organisation.
- **Inclusivity and diversity metrics**
Analyse the demographic composition of the members and leadership to gauge its inclusivity and diversity. Assess whether efforts are being made to attract and retain participants from different backgrounds.
- **Assess organisational climate**
The organisational climate refers to the overall perception and feelings of members (including volunteers) regarding their experience there. Analyse factors such as motivation, communication, teamwork and member satisfaction.
- **Comparison with club's values**
Compare the observed culture with the organisation's stated values and mission. Evaluate whether there are any inconsistencies or gaps between what the club claims to uphold and what is practised.

- **Feedback and collaboration**

Share the findings of the analysis with members and stakeholders. Encourage open discussions and collaboration to develop strategies for enhancing the culture and fostering a more inclusive and positive environment.

Note that some of the above actions are better suited to being undertaken by 'insiders' to your sport organisation, whilst others lend themselves to inviting external people to observe without prejudice. You could, for instance, partner with a local university and invite students and academic staff to conduct an analysis of your sport organisation's culture.

Having conducted an honest appraisal of the culture it is possible to identify areas for enhancement and modernisation.

This links clearly to this sub-pillar's other themes of equity, diversity and inclusion, and ensuring that these are in place should be a prime focus of any investigation into the organisation's culture.



>> CONTENT AREA 4: EMBEDDING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION THROUGHOUT THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE

The preceding content areas in this sub-pillar have shared information regarding the nature of equity, diversity and inclusion and shown how these impact, and are impacted by the culture of your sport organisation. Hopefully there is a lot of impetus behind the idea of initiatives to make your organisation's culture more volunteer-friendly and welcoming to volunteers from all backgrounds. What, then, are the practical actions that can be taken to install positive changes that promote equity, diversity and inclusion?

One start point, as well as undertaking an analysis of the organisation's culture, is to conduct a diversity audit of the volunteer workforce (and all other members if you wish). You can compare your findings to local/ national demographics to understand if your sport organisation is at least reflective of the wider picture.

Here are some other activities to enhance equity, diversity and inclusion:

- **Diverse and inclusive leadership**
Ensure that the leadership and decision-making positions in your sport organisation are diverse and inclusive. Having leaders from different backgrounds can help bring unique perspectives and ideas to the table. This may take a long time to establish if your leadership is not currently diverse, but it is always a good investment in individuals to give them more responsibility in the short term.
- **Clear mission and values**
Establish a clear mission statement and core values that explicitly emphasise the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion in the sports volunteering experience. Communicate these values consistently to all volunteers and participants.
- **Training and education**
Provide training and education to volunteers on topics related to diversity, inclusion, unconscious bias and cultural competence. This can raise awareness and equip volunteers with the knowledge and skills to contribute towards inclusive environment.
- **Inclusive recruitment**
Adopt inclusive recruitment practices to attract volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Reach out to underrepresented communities and use language that emphasises the organisation's commitment to equity and inclusion.
- **Accessible opportunities**
Create opportunities for individuals with diverse abilities and backgrounds to participate as volunteers. Make sure that volunteering roles are accessible and accommodating for everyone.
- **Inclusive communication**
Use inclusive language and communication that avoid stereotypes and promote diversity. Ensure that all volunteers feel represented and included in the organisation's communications.
- **Create safe spaces**
Foster a safe and supportive environment where volunteers feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their experiences. Address any instances of discrimination or bias promptly and decisively.
- **Celebrate diversity**
Celebrate and highlight the diversity of volunteers and participants. Acknowledge and appreciate different cultural events, traditions, and milestones.

- **Collaboration with diverse groups**
Collaborate with other organisations or community groups that represent diverse communities. This can help build partnerships and increase the organisation's reach to a broader range of volunteers.
- **Feedback and evaluation**
Regularly seek feedback from volunteers about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to continuously enhance the organisation's approach to equity and inclusion.
- **Set targets and monitor progress**
Set specific targets and goals related to equity, diversity and inclusion, and regularly monitor progress. This can help measure the organisation's efforts and identify areas that need further attention.
- **Recognise and reward inclusive behaviour**
Recognise and reward volunteers who actively promote and embody inclusive behaviour. This can reinforce the importance of equity and inclusion within the organisation.
- **Be open to learning and adaptation**
Be open to learning from mistakes and continuously adapt the organisation's practices based on new insights and understanding.

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REFERENCES AND KEY LINKS

- Diversity and inclusion in sport volunteering – [Click here](#)
- The importance of diversity and inclusivity in sports volunteering – [Click here](#)
- Sport and the Social Inclusion of Migrants & Refugees – [Click here](#)
- Chartered Institute of Personal Development – [Click here](#)
- Volunteers are the public face of community events – [Click here](#)



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