



Skills acquired through
Volunteering in Sport

LEARNING RESOURCES

/// PILLAR 3: VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT AND RETENTION

SUB-PILLAR 3.4 Monitoring volunteers' performance and acknowledging their contributions



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



/// Sub-Pillar 3.4

Monitoring volunteers' performance and acknowledging their contributions

a/ DESCRIPTION

In order not only to measure the wider impact of volunteers, but also to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the organisation, volunteer performance must be routinely monitored. This should be a positive activity for all parties, supporting volunteers to do the best possible job in a welcoming culture as well as enabling you to thank them for their contributions. In addition to having more formal implications for career development, this will aid with retention and volunteer performance as they are more likely to feel like a valued part of your sport organisation.

b/ KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS – DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Maintaining the motivation of sport volunteers is very important to retaining their services. The desk research and interviews highlight the importance of compensating volunteers for their efforts and giving small material rewards.

But our Global Survey results show that only a minority do this, for example:

- Only 46% of organisations provide clothes and uniform
- Only 42% of organisations reimburse volunteers' expenses
- Only 11% offer incentives such as reduced membership fees, leisure sport services or discounts for tickets

Research also shows the importance of acknowledging volunteer contributions in non-material ways. Yet, once again, the survey results show only a minority do so, for example:

- Only 37% provide awards, certificates and celebrations for their volunteers
- Only 24% offer access to training
- Only 18% organise social events.

Rewarding your volunteers for their time and effort will be very important to retaining their services. Encourage your organisation to think about how it can show gratitude to your volunteers in ways that they will appreciate.



>> CONTENT AREA 1 : MONITORING PERFORMANCE: WHAT TO MEASURE AND HOW

Monitoring performance helps sport organisations and their volunteers to achieve better results in a more effective way. Monitoring is the process of collecting information on the work that takes place within your organisation, so that your processes and procedures can be reviewed and updated as necessary. Monitoring can provide feedback on the organisation's progress towards specific goals and can also help monitor volunteers' performance. Ideally, monitoring and evaluation should take place on a regular and systematic basis based on clearly defined criteria and methodologies.

Most organisations will keep internal records of numbers of volunteers, volunteer hours, qualifications, and skills. This can be used to support volunteer deployment and management but may also be important for supporting the submission of funding applications. Monitoring and evaluation does not have to be too time consuming, but it is important that any monitoring activities are not just a paper exercise. Once you have collected data from your monitoring activities, you will need to evaluate and analyse what that data tells you about volunteer performance. This process will help you to identify any gaps and improvements you can make to improve the volunteer experience in your sport organisation.

🔗 Why monitor and evaluate a volunteer programme?

- To measure the quality of the volunteers' experience within your organisation
- To identify the impact that volunteers have on your organisation, both in terms of their contribution and their economic value
- To identify areas in your volunteer programme that may need improvement
- Funders may require you to monitor and evaluate your volunteer programme.

🔗 What to measure:

Your monitoring and evaluation activities may produce both outputs and outcomes. Outputs are quantitative measures such as facts, figures and statistics. Outcomes are the changes generated through volunteer management activities. They are typically qualitative impacts such as the new skills volunteers have developed or the difference a volunteer has made within the organisation. The combination of outputs and outcomes will provide you with valuable insight into the effectiveness of your volunteer management activities.

The first step in monitoring and evaluating a volunteer programme is to identify your aims and objectives, so that you can measure the outputs and outcomes of your volunteering programme i.e. what do you need to know more about.

⌚ **Outputs can include information such as:**

- How diverse are our volunteers?
- How successful are our recruitment methods?
- How well do we retain volunteers?
- How did our volunteers find out about our volunteering opportunities?
- What is the economic value of volunteers to the organisation?

⌚ **Outcomes may include:**

- What's the volunteer experience like?
- Do our volunteers feel properly supported?
- Are current volunteer policies and procedures relevant?
- How does the training we provide enhance the volunteer experience?
- Are the volunteers happy?
- How much do volunteers contribute towards the organisation?
- In what ways have volunteers benefited the organisation?
- Is there a suitable way of thanking volunteers?

Undertaking monitoring activities:

A key consideration when undertaking monitoring and evaluation activities is to ensure that your volunteers understand why they are being asked to provide information and understand how this will help the organisation to become more effective and to improve the volunteer experience. As such it is important that:

- Organisation objectives are measurable, achievable and understandable to the volunteers
- The evaluation procedure is motivating for volunteers not onerous
- The evaluation criteria are clear and transparent
- There are fewer rather than more evaluation criteria
- Sufficient time is planned for the assessment.

There are a variety of methods of evaluation available to sport organisations to use. These include:

- Observations
- Group discussions ('focus groups')
- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Satisfaction surveys
- Informal chats

It is important to recognise that some of these methods are better for generating outputs (i.e., numerical data), for example, satisfaction surveys and questionnaires, whilst others will generate qualitative data and information about outcomes, for example, interviews, discussions and observations. You should therefore select the most appropriate method depending on what information you require.

For example, collecting demographic data on your volunteers may help you to assess the diversity of your workforce, supporting the organisation to subsequently target certain areas or groups in your local community that may be underrepresented. Alternatively, a discussion with a group of volunteers may be helpful in generating insight on their experiences within the organisation including recruitment and induction processes, training and development activities and whether they feel that their efforts are adequately recognised and rewarded. Information gathered can then be used to implement any improvements or further develop areas of strength.

In the process of monitoring and evaluating volunteer performance, it is therefore important to:

- Discuss and compare the results achieved with the agreed results
- Set new and agreed objectives
- Discuss options and plan possible changes
- Plan and identify the actions needed to achieve the new objectives and allocate responsibility for actions to specific individuals
- Document and communicate what has been agreed. This involves providing feedback to volunteers to keep them informed of future actions and progress against these.

>> CONTENT AREA 2 : PROVIDING FEEDBACK AND GUIDANCE TO VOLUNTEERS

Feedback provides information and tools to help a volunteer reach a goal while keeping that individual on track. It also helps to maintain or fuel motivation and a team spirit. Feedback should be specific, and within sport organisations involve two elements. Firstly, the organisation may provide generic feedback to all volunteers based around the overall volunteer experience for example the contributions made by all volunteers to the organisation's success, or actions that the organisation is taking to support its volunteers. Secondly, feedback may be provided to individual volunteers on their progression and contribution. This feedback may be connected to their personal development and performance and focus on improving their skills, knowledge, and attributes. Providing support and regular feedback to individual volunteers on their performance and development will directly contribute to the organisation's overall success, so it is important to get it right!

🕒 **Giving feedback is necessary and beneficial for both parties – the volunteer and the sport organisation:**

- Feedback helps volunteers to understand themselves better and guides and motivates their behaviour and may result in improvements in their performance
- Good feedback (even if it is to address an issue) is helpful and motivating
- Feedback will also help the volunteer to assess their learning and personal development
- Feedback should be balanced – it is important to recognise good performance but also to discuss areas for improvement and development.

Providing feedback to volunteers:

If your organisation undertakes regular monitoring and evaluation activities with volunteers (as discussed in the previous section), it is important that the outcomes of these activities are fed back to volunteers. You should share the findings of these activities, and how you will use this information to help improve their volunteer experience. As this information is about the organisation as a whole and not individual volunteers, it can be shared via email or in a large meeting to ensure that it reaches as many volunteers as possible.

When managing or supervising individual volunteers in sport organisations, it is important to let the volunteer know, how he or she is doing on a personal level, and what they can do to improve and how the organisation can help with this process. In addition, if the volunteer is doing well, this should also be acknowledged and recognised. If the volunteer needs to improve, this should be specifically, yet sensitively and constructively addressed. Ideally, feedback provided to individual volunteers should be done in-person as this is more impactful and a better way to have open and honest discussions about the individual's progress and contribution.

Some reminders about feedback:

- Feedback should focus on the volunteer's behaviour and activities. It should focus on the volunteer's recent performance and contributions, not on his/her personality
- Feedback should be given directly to the individual by their supervision or mentor, not via another person
- Feedback is the opinion and impression of the person giving the feedback therefore it is important that it is carefully thought-through and balanced
- Feedback should be development-oriented and focus on providing support to the volunteer.

How to give feedback:

- Ideally, feedback should be provided in-person and face-to-face
- Any problems or issues relating to volunteer performance or contribution should be reported and dealt with as quickly as possible in an open way
- Choose the right time and place to provide feedback and ensure you have allowed sufficient time to discuss it with the volunteer
- Prepare in advance, so that you are organised and know what points you wish to make. Provide opportunities for the volunteer to contribute to the discussion and listen carefully to their perspective. At the end of the discussion, try to agree actions or goals that the volunteer can work towards to either further develop or if necessary to address issues with their performance.
- Avoid making judgements of the volunteer before you have spoken to them.
- Speak for yourself, use 'I' language as feedback comes from your observations
- Avoid generalisations such as "always" or "never". It is better to use terms such as 'sometimes' or 'occasionally'
- Observe if behaviour changes or if the volunteer continues to progress/improve and provide feedback on an ongoing basis.

🕒 Using feedback to help manage volunteer performance:

When providing feedback to individual volunteers, it is important to recognise that volunteers will want to do their best and be good volunteers. If there are issues with volunteer performance that require you to take action to address, it is worth asking yourself whether any of the following situations could be affecting their performance:

The volunteer does not know what is expected of them.

Have you clearly discussed the expectations you have of each other? Do you give feedback to the volunteer on their performance when you are both satisfied with the performance and when there is room for improvement? If volunteer does not know that he or she is doing something wrong, they will not know how to change their behaviour or actions.

The volunteer does not know why they should do certain activities or tasks.

Volunteers often don't realise the importance of tasks and how they are connected to larger activities undertaken by the organisation. It is therefore important that they understand how their work contributes, for example where their specific tasks fit in the overall sequence of activities needed to help the organisation deliver activities or events, and therefore its importance.

The volunteer does not know how to do a task.

Tasks that seem simple to you and that are done in a casual way can be difficult for new volunteers, and therefore cause uncertainty. It is therefore important to ensure that you have adequate an induction and training programme in place and that volunteers have access to ongoing support from a named individual within the organisation. Check that the volunteer is happy with what they are expected to do.

The volunteer thinks his approach is better.

We want to encourage volunteers to demonstrate initiative and independence, but it is important that tasks and responsibilities are completed appropriately. It is possible that a young volunteer, by doing things differently, is not ignoring the instructions, but is taking what he or she thinks is an innovative approach to the task. Be clear about boundaries and where there is flexibility (and where there isn't. You should also consider whether the new approach demonstrated by the volunteer has merit – it may actually help improve practice and enrich the day-to-day activities of the organisation.

There is no direct or indirect positive outcome to the volunteer's activities.

People tend to prefer to do the kind of work for which they are rewarded and recognised. This does not necessarily have to be in the form of a material reward. The provision of positive feedback and recognition based on the volunteer's work are sometimes more motivating than financial reward. Alternatively, if the volunteer if not completely their tasks or responsibilities instead of discussing with them directly, they are given lighter tasks or reduced hours etc. This is not a 'good practice' – it is always better to discuss issues with the volunteer directly and come to an agreed solution. Just reducing their hours or responsibilities without explanation is likely to be de-motivating and confusing.

Depending on the volunteer and their performance, you may also wish to consider using a volunteer mentoring system to help support volunteers. Ideally, the mentor should be somebody within the organisation with the right skills, knowledge and attributes to perform this role, who can act as a role model and support for the volunteer in their specified role. The mentor's role is to support the volunteer to learn on the job – getting used to the tasks, learning new techniques, setting goals, evaluating results, etc. This should therefore someone with whom the volunteer works directly on a day-to-day basis, and who can give direct feedback, guide the volunteer in analysing situations, and clarify connections and background.



>> CONTENT AREA 3: THE VALUE OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND REWARDING VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS

Volunteer recognition is a critical part of volunteer management. Recognition involves acknowledging the efforts and contribution of volunteers and thanking them for their efforts. It can take on many forms from formal events to a simple timely thank-you. It shows appreciation for the work that volunteers do for your sport organisation and provides volunteers with a sense of belonging and contribution. Volunteers give their time willingly and without expectation of a reward; however, appropriately recognising volunteers demonstrates how much your organisation values their contribution.

Taking the time to recognise your volunteers can help organisations to retain high-performing volunteers and recruit new ones. Recognising volunteers is closely linked to motivating them, it reinforces a sense of belonging and helps to show that their contribution is important and valuable. When volunteers feel appreciated and important, they are more likely to continue their involvement. Research suggests that volunteers who are recognised and rewarded for their work will be driven to do even better work in the future. For many sports organisations who depend on volunteers, it is therefore crucial that volunteers feel appreciated and connected to the organisation. Let your volunteers know the impact they have on and within the organisation.

A comprehensive recognition and reward system should be balanced and will acknowledge participation and effort, progress towards goals and excellence.

Rewards enhance productivity, boost engagement, and increase productivity. Perhaps more importantly, having happy and motivated volunteers will contribute towards the development and continuation of a supportive organisation culture.

It is crucial to align recognition and reward systems with the organisations overall strategy so that any rewards provided are directly connected to the organisations goals. For example, if you are trying to increase the skills and knowledge of volunteers, suitable rewards for good practice may include access to additional training or formal recognition of volunteers who have completed specific qualifications. This would help to embed desired behaviours within the organisation culture whilst also recognising the efforts and commitment of volunteers. You may also wish to recognise volunteers who demonstrate the right behaviours to promote them as positive role models.

It is also important to understand the difference between recognition for an achievement, versus appreciation for effort for someone, even if they did not perhaps achieve the desired results. Both are noteworthy and in need of acknowledgement. Effective volunteer recognition is an ongoing process – it is not just a one-off event each year. Consideration should be given to how volunteers can be acknowledged more frequently. This should be considered in any reward and recognition system you are considering developing within your organisation. Any rewards or recognition provided to volunteers should be authentic, timely and aligned to results / behaviours. The next section of this sub-pillar looks at how your sports organisation can implement a volunteer reward and recognition system.

>> CONTENT AREA 4: IMPLEMENTING A SYSTEM OF VOLUNTEER REWARDS

As volunteers are very diverse, there is no one-size-fits-all method or system that will work 'best'. It is likely to depend on your specific sport organisation, its infrastructure and the nature of your volunteers. There are multiple ways to recognise the contributions made by volunteers – you will need to consider what works best in your organisation.

One way to identify this can be to consult with, and talk to, the volunteers themselves. Guidance on how to involve volunteers in the 'Communicating with and consulting your volunteers' section within this pillar. Remember, you may need to develop a system that includes different forms and types of recognition that 'suit' the different volunteer roles within your organisation and the different types of volunteers (e.g., younger volunteers, long-term versus short-term volunteers).

⦿ **Thanking volunteers can involve:**

Providing tangible items and gifts, such as badges, clothing and kit, thank you notes, mementos and the like. Informal approaches that help the volunteer feel satisfaction with their achievements, a sense of pride and higher self-esteem. For example, simply verbally congratulating and thanking volunteers on their work and contribution can make volunteers feel valued.

An organised and formal recognition and reward system incorporating the tangible items and gifts listed above combined with formal events such as a 'thank you event' or 'volunteer awards evening' and the development of a volunteer recognition system with clear criteria.

There are lots of way you can thank and recognise volunteer contributions, and which can be incorporated into a formal volunteer recognition system or policy. These include:

- A simple "thank you!" for a job well done
- Thanking volunteers by name and highlighting them on the organisation's website, publications, and other information materials
- Letters of thanks, tokens of appreciation, decorations, awards
- Remembrance on special occasions (birthday card, small Christmas gift etc.)
- Appreciation events – collective thank you for volunteers (thank you dinner, small party or annual volunteer awards and recognition event)
- Joint outings, hikes, and cultural events
- Giving gifts with the organisation's logo
- Feedback on the work done from the chairperson of the organisation
- Nominating your volunteers for awards at national, local and sectoral recognition events
- Offering a letter of recommendation from the organisation to a volunteer, help through volunteering, describing skills and experience gained on a CV
- Giving volunteers a meaningful title based on their activities (e.g. volunteer project manager), 'promoting' the volunteer to a more challenging position in the organisation
- Articles on volunteers in the media
- Encouraging interaction between volunteers (e.g. volunteer meetings, joint events etc.)
- Facilitating participation in training courses and seminars (both at home and abroad)
- Token gifts (e.g. gift cards)
- Celebrating International Volunteer Day within your organisation on 5th of December each year.

You can also read about how some sports organisations have implemented volunteer reward and recognition activities in the case studies below.



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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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