



Skills acquired through  
Volunteering in Sport

# LEARNING RESOURCES

## /// **PILLAR 4: VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

### **SUB-PILLAR 4.3 — Mentoring volunteers**



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## /// Sub-Pillar 4.3

### Mentoring volunteers

#### a/ DESCRIPTION

Mentoring is a specific relationship that involves one individual (for example, a more experienced volunteer) supporting and advising another in a structured way. Effective mentoring can accelerate and consolidate volunteers' integration and development, enhancing their ability to contribute to your sport organisation's work. Acting as a mentor can also be a developmental experience. Here you will find resources that will help you clarify the meaning of mentoring as it applies to your organisation, plus identify and support mentors and mentees.

#### b/ KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS – DID YOU KNOW THAT:

From the Global Survey of sport organisations:

- 23% of respondents thought that training on the job is enough for volunteers,
- 41% said that providing ongoing support to volunteers would be a good way of retaining them.

Learning on the job is often an effective way of training volunteers, but they need supervision and support during the process, and mentors are vital to this process.



## >> CONTENT AREA 1 : UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE AND BENEFITS OF MENTORING

A mentor is a person who gives a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time, especially at work or school. The main aim of a mentor is to guide volunteers in their volunteering journey in your organisation. In a volunteering experience, a mentor has some key roles that should be clear both for the volunteers and your organisation.

### **A mentor is someone who :**

- Supports and encourages the learning process of the volunteer
- Offers knowledge and individual support
- Listens and understands the expectations of the volunteer
- Sets concrete and achievable goals together with the volunteer for their personal and professional improvement
- Assigns and monitors tasks, and provides feedback to the volunteer

### **A mentor is not :**

- A friend or a parent
- At volunteer's disposal at 24/7 unless in an emergency
- Someone who should fulfil all expectations of the volunteer

### 🕒 **Bear in mind these important principles:**

- Mentors should not have a personal connection to the volunteer in order to maintain neutrality while taking decisions, enabling them to listen objectively to the volunteer's situation and suggest ideas.
- The mentoring relationship is built on mutual trust, respect and communication. Both parties meet regularly to exchange ideas, discuss progress and set goals for further development.

Mentoring is more than advising and sharing knowledge. The relationship offers benefits for mentors willing to invest time in mentoring. Aside from the personal satisfaction of sharing skills and experience with someone willing to learn, being involved in mentoring also provides benefits that can reward mentors on a professional level. The mentoring relationship can focus on specific aspects of the volunteers' role and development: it does not need to try and capture the entirety of the volunteer's role.

🕒 **Some of the key benefits for mentors are:**

- Recognition as an expert and leader
- Contact with new perspectives, ideas and approaches
- Increased professional development
- Opportunity to reflect on own practices and goals
- Development of leadership style and training

🕒 **Some of key benefits for your sport organisation:**

**Retention:**

Volunteers who feel supported and valued are more likely to stay involved with your organisation for a longer period of time. Mentoring can help your volunteers feel connected to the organisation and more committed to its mission and goals.

**Skills development:**

Mentoring can help your volunteers to develop new skills and knowledge. Mentors can share their experience and provide guidance on how to approach different tasks and challenges, and this can help your volunteers to develop new skills and improve their performance.

**Succession planning:**

Mentoring can help your organisation to identify potential leaders from your pool of volunteers, and provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to take on greater responsibility within your organisation.

**Increased engagement:**

Volunteers who have a mentor are more likely to feel engaged and invested in their role. Mentoring can provide your volunteers with a sense of purpose and direction that can increase their motivation and satisfaction.

**Increased confidence:**

Mentoring can help your volunteers feel more confident in their roles. Mentors can provide guidance and support that can help volunteers feel more comfortable taking on new tasks and responsibilities.

**Sense of community:**

Mentoring can help build a sense of community among your volunteers. Mentors can help volunteers to feel part of the team and provide opportunities for them to connect with other volunteers and staff members of your organisation.

In brief, mentoring your volunteers is important because it can increase retention, improve skills development, support succession planning, increase engagement, and enhance the sense of community within your organisation. Mentoring can also help your volunteers to better succeed in their roles and feel connected to your organisation, which can benefit both the volunteers and your organisation.



## >> CONTENT AREA 2 : IDENTIFYING AND TRAINING MENTORS

The preceding content area outlines the benefits of employing a mentoring approach with the volunteers in your sport organisation. In order for this to be a success it is necessary to identify potential mentors and support them to undertake the role.

### 🕒 This can be undertaken as follows:

#### **Define mentorship goals:**

clearly outline the goals and objectives of the mentorship programme. What specific skills or knowledge do you want less experienced volunteers to gain from their mentors?

#### **Identify mentorship candidates:**

look for individuals within your sport organisation who have the necessary skills, experience, and willingness to mentor others. Potential mentors should possess good communication and leadership skills.

#### **Ask for recommendations:**

seek recommendations from your existing volunteers and staff about individuals who have been helpful, patient, and knowledgeable. They might also be aware of potential mentors.

Mentors may usually be sourced from your sport organisation's existing volunteers and staff, but we should not rule out the possibility of identifying external individuals to provide mentoring to your volunteers. Potential mentors include seniors with experience and time, retired athletes and former volunteers of your organisation. Differing mentor backgrounds can lead to different kinds of mentee-mentor relationships:

#### **Internal mentor**

A potential mentor may already act as a task or line manager in the area in which your volunteer works. The task manager and the mentor are important figures in the volunteer's life, but they should provide support in different areas, so a different individual should be chosen as the mentor in this instance. This also makes things easier for the mentor. The volunteer may not feel comfortable giving feedback or raising a problem/issue if their task manager and their mentor are the same person. The task or line manager is in charge of supervising the overall volunteering project, ensuring the quality of the activities and the results reached by the volunteer. Together with the mentor, this manager is also in charge of monitoring the development of the skills and knowledge of the volunteer during the project, as well as ensuring the global wellbeing of the volunteer.

#### **External mentor**

In certain situations, external mentors can provide professional support to establish a healthier relationship between your sport organisation and the volunteer. External mentorship can offer levels of neutrality and objectivity that cannot be guaranteed when using internal mentors, who may have preconceptions which could impact the quality of their mentee-mentor relationship.

⊙ **Regardless of whether they are internal or external or external to your sport organisation, the ideal mentor for your organisation is someone who:**

- has good communication skills
- is empathetic and non-judgemental
- is knowledgeable
- is able to give constructive feedback
- is willing and able to devote time to developing others
- is eager to learn (including from volunteers)

⊙ **Following the identification of potential mentors, a selection process can be undertaken which utilises some of the principles outlined in Pillar 2. It may additionally be necessary to provide training for the new mentors:**

- Training is useful in ensuring mentors have the key knowledge and skills when supporting volunteers. It also provides mentors with strategies for handling difficult situations.
- It is crucial for mentors to avoid experiencing burn-out and to take care of their own mental health and wellbeing. Being a mentor can be a wonderful experience, but it can also be challenging related to different aspects of volunteering management. Training can provide support to help mentors manage the impact of the relationship on themselves.

Some of the possible themes your mentor training could include:

- Defining the role of a mentor.
- Setting clear expectations for both mentors and volunteers regarding communication, availability, and the duration of the mentoring relationship
- Making sure mentors understand their responsibilities and the resources available to support them.
- Providing advice from experienced mentors.

## >> CONTENT AREA 3: IMPLEMENTING AND REVIEWING A VOLUNTEER MENTORING SCHEME

As with all other aspects of this Toolkit, good practice is only an abstract idea until it is operationalised into meaningful actions. Thus, having decided that your sport organisation can benefit from a mentoring arrangement and having begun to identify and train mentors, it is necessary to define how the programme will be implemented and managed. It is crucial that every attempt is made to match mentors and volunteers based on skills, interests, and personalities. A highly experienced mentor might be very effective in general but might not be well matched to a specific volunteer with divergent interests.

⊙ **Volunteers and staff of your sport organisation who will be undertaking mentoring duties need to be properly supported, and this includes their time input being formally recognised as part of their wider role:**

- If the mentor is from within your sport organisation, it will be beneficial for all parties to determine the mentor's tasks and responsibilities with them in advance and to record these in writing.
- Verbal agreements, or assigning someone as a mentor without their approval and/ or interest, can cause the mentor to be unable to fulfil their function in the long run. That might lead a loss of motivation in the mentor that could radiate to other aspects of their role.
- An agreed, written mentoring agreement increases the visibility of the mentor's work and also increases their sense of responsibility and ownership.

👉 Here is a suggested implementation process for your sport organisation's mentoring programme:

**Commencement of the mentoring relationship:**

- The mentor makes the necessary arrangements for the initial meeting.
- The discussion should focus upon the expectations and needs of the volunteer, your role as a mentor, your relationship as mentor and mentee, regularity of the meetings, and perhaps the joint preparation of an activity plan/ personal development plan.
- The mentor should avoid overloading the mentee with information.
- Within reason, the mentor should be available for questions in connection to the focus of the mentoring arrangement.

**Follow-up meetings:**

- It is important to ensure regular communication takes place, and this is best facilitated through a series of follow-up meetings.
- Agree the frequency of follow-up meetings with the volunteer, depending on the objectives of the mentoring arrangement. It should be scheduled in advance, so both parties can prepare appropriately.
- During these meetings, the mentor's focus should be upon the volunteer. The mentor should listen carefully to the volunteer, not interrupt them, give feedback when required, ask questions, and to share their knowledge and experience.

**Mid-term meeting:**

a defined mid-term meeting provides an opportunity to appreciate the achievements of the volunteer and to learn from both parties' experience of the process to that point. After reviewing the goals and expectations set at the initial meeting, mentors will be able to identify whether any amendments are required going forward.

**Final evaluation meeting:**

The final evaluation is very important for both the mentor and volunteer to evaluate the impact of the mentoring relationship. Use this meeting:

- To discuss if the learning gaps identified at the beginning of the process have been plugged by the experience of being a mentee.
- To help the mentee engage in self-reflection about their development.
- To inform and plan future use of mentoring by your sport organisation.

**The mentor and mentee should set expectations from the beginning in terms of:**

- Regularity of meetings.
- When the volunteer can contact the mentor and for what reasons.
- Any other dos and don'ts for the mentee to observe.
- As your mentors periodically meet with their mentees, your sport organisation's support for the mentors is also important. Therefore, remember to arrange periodical feedback meetings with your mentors.



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## V4V PARTNERSHIP:



Coordinator



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