

APPENDIX A:

Voluntary Service Community Placement Scheme

- enriching lives, tackling need

1. Introduction

This document outlines a combined potential contribution from national infrastructure organisations that are involved in supporting and promoting volunteering and the community and voluntary sector. It is written as an outline proposal with the idea that it can be swiftly worked out in precise detail, once the concept has been judged suitable as one part of the activation-associated measures currently being planned to address the current unemployment crisis.

The organisations that have contributed to this document recognise that these are extraordinary times which require emergency responses and we seek to be part of the solution. We believe that a specialist voluntary placement scheme as described below builds on the competencies of our organisations (and others) and the investments already made in us, while addressing some of the problems people newly unemployed are experiencing who are facing what is likely to be a relatively long period of unemployment.

Because the services many community and voluntary organisations address in assisting people in times of need, the recession has resulted in many of these organisations experiencing an increased demand for services. Therefore this scheme has the potential to help those community and voluntary organisations who are striving to meet increased demand for their services

2. The aim

To link the specialist skills of people who have been made unemployed to specialist needs within community and voluntary organisations, for the mutual benefit of both the individual and the organisation.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the scheme are twofold:

1. To provide people with specialist skills who are unemployed with an opportunity to practice and develop their skills, acquire new ones and maintain confidence during this unprecedented period of unemployment in Ireland.
2. To provide community and voluntary groups working on the ground in communities across Ireland with additional specialist resources and the ability to maximise the opportunity.

4. Scheme Outline

The proposed Voluntary Service Community Placement programme (VSCP) is a unique and innovative model of practice in which volunteers with specific expertise are enabled to contribute their skills in a structured, supervised and supported way to provide a range of quality services. The scheme involves community service placements of a minimum of 3 days per week for up to 12 months with a minimum of 6 months.

The CSVP scheme proposed as part of a wider activation initiative will be available to people claiming jobseeker's benefit or allowance. It will offer skilled individuals the opportunity to make a valuable and valued contribution whilst maintaining their work ethic and discipline and offering opportunities for personal and professional development.

The host organisation commits to facilitating this contribution by utilising the volunteer's skills; offering a meaningful role with a commitment to personal and professional development for the volunteer through a range of interventions that include induction to the organisation and the role, line management, support and supervision, training and development opportunities and on-going appraisal. The volunteering opportunity cannot be designed to replace a paid staff position. Should the volunteer get a job during the placement, it will, of course, end early, but with appropriate recognition for the work achieved.

We recommend structuring the scheme around key 'generic projects/roles' which community and voluntary organisations typically need, and for which specialist-skilled volunteers are available. Examples from which a range of project/role-templates could be developed, e.g.: in the areas of HR management, marketing, strategic planning, finance and governance. The use of these generic templates would allow for a better match between volunteer and organisation as:

It addresses the issue faced in organisations that they do not have the time, energy or resources to draft up a role-description;

It allows for clearer communication to the applicant volunteer so that their expectations can be managed;

It allows for the scheme to cater for larger numbers.

The proposing organisations would play a collective role in ensuring that this pre-development work gets done.

The CSVP scheme will be a high profile initiative with recognition from relevant government departments / bodies (e.g. Active Citizenship/Dept of the Taoiseach) for those who complete the term.

It is useful to note that such schemes have been in use in various parts of the sector with success to date, e.g. the Community Service Volunteer programme which has been running in Focus Ireland for over eleven years with the support of DCRGA with great effect.

The scheme, which initially will be targeted at an agreed number of organisations/participants requires:

1 People willing to volunteer, recruited through social welfare offices and referred on to the volunteering infrastructure organisations.

Organisations that have the capacity to involve those volunteers, offering meaningful and developmental opportunities in a structured setting.

5. Outline of process from the individual's perspective

The picture of how the process will work from the individual volunteer's perspective is outlined here:

Information is provided to prospective volunteers by the Social Welfare Officer.

Referrals are made to the volunteer brokerage system by the welfare officer where there is an expression of interest from the prospective volunteer.

As part of the scheme, the applicant participates in a dedicated workshop in which the specific project opportunities are outlined and the opportunities explained. Their details are taken and a match is found.

After matching up the applicant with an organisation, s/he then undertakes an induction with the organisation in which they will volunteer.

They will sign up for a specific project role from the dedicated templates available. Supervision, support and any training are provided by the host organisation.

At the end of the placement, the participant gets a 'certificate of completion' citing specific achievements, training and skills acquired during the placement. This will be designed as a template so it is available for all in the scheme in the same manner.

6. Outline of process from the host organisation's perspective

The picture of how the process will work from the host organisation's perspective is outlined here:

The scheme will be advertised across the community and voluntary sector and organisations will be invited to apply to participate. The incentives are:

They will get the opportunity to avail of the additional resource that a volunteer with specialist skills can bring to their organisation;

They are given practical support in the development of internal structures to facilitate this scheme through existing infrastructure organisations.

Organisations must comply with key criteria to be eligible to participate in the scheme (e.g. they must commit to developing and implementing a volunteer policy).

If selected for the programme, they must attend a workshop on the requirements of the scheme and in volunteer management.

The placement must not be ones the C&V organisation has previously employed paid staff to do.

7. Assumptions:

This scheme makes the following assumptions:

Fundamental to this scheme is the principle that CSVP volunteers add value that the community and voluntary organisations can't match. It does not enable a cheap/free source of labour to become available, nor does it replace people currently doing paid work in community / voluntary organisations.

This scheme represents a subset of what we would normally understand as 'volunteering', by being a voluntary placement scheme with community/voluntary organisations and having the specific aim of countering the psychological impact of recession on individuals who have been made unemployed. The broader definition of 'volunteering' is that it is the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities and individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment, except for the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.

The requirement from the social welfare system that participants be 'available for work' would need to be either waived or kept under review for the duration of the placement.

There may be a need to incentivise the Community Service Voluntary Placement Scheme, possibly offering a dividend over and above social welfare entitlements.

All other benefits the individual is entitled to would not be affected by their participation in this scheme and this would be clearly stated in the guidelines for front-line staff in the social welfare offices.

The community and voluntary organisation is responsible for reimbursing the out-of-pocket expenses of the CSVP volunteer.

The scheme is promoted appropriately across the social welfare offices as well as across the sector. The promotional aspect prior to launch would be able to detail the programme's objectives (and limitations) and this would be aimed at both people signing on and non-profit organisations.

There is a period of 'pre-development' which allows for the development of the templates and the appropriate workshops and processes.

The Volunteering Infrastructure organisations and other relevant stakeholders will provide a range of supports and services to support this programme.

8. Resources Required

Resources would be needed to develop and promote the scheme and to conduct monitoring and evaluation.

The partners in this proposal all work to a greater or lesser extent directly in volunteer brokerage and organisational development and training. Together as a group we have the experience and skills to collectively oversee and undertake the pre-development and implementation work required.

The following are illustrative resources which the infrastructure organisations and partners would be able to directly contribute were the scheme to go ahead, meaning that this programme would not be starting from scratch, but has been designed to build on investment already made in the infrastructure organisations:

Boardmatch Ireland – brokering applicants, training for roles on boards of charities;

Business in the Community – brokering additional voluntary input from their members to aid in design of and evaluation of the scheme e.g. specialist HR advice and expertise;

PAVMI (Professional Association of Volunteer Managers in Ireland) – training with applicant organisations about best practice in involving volunteers;

Volunteer Centres / Volunteer Centres Ireland - training with applicant organisations involving volunteers, brokering placements through 20 local volunteer centres;

Volunteering Ireland – capacity building for volunteer involvement, consultancy services for the applicant organisation, brokering placements through our local volunteer centre;

The Wheel – promotion of scheme across the sector; training of organisations in best practice in governance and management.

9. The Partners

Boardmatch Ireland – Boardmatch Ireland aims to support the development of the community and voluntary sector (the not-for-profit sector) by strengthening boards and management committees. We do this principally through a free web-based matching service.

Business in the Community– Business in the Community Ireland is a unique movement of companies committed to responsible business practices. Our purpose is to inspire, challenge and support business in continually improving its positive impact on society.

Professional Association of Volunteer Managers in Ireland (PAVMI) – is a peer support network of individuals, both voluntary and paid, who spend the majority of their time directing, managing or coordinating the work of volunteers. PAVMI aims to support, represent and champion people who direct, manage or coordinate volunteers regardless of field, discipline or sector.

Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI) – is a national representative body, support agency and membership organisation for a growing number of local Volunteer Centres in Ireland (currently 20). We have responsibility for developing volunteering nationally and locally.

Volunteering Ireland – is the national volunteer development agency. Our membership comprises a wide range of volunteer-involving organisations and we work as part of an international community of practice, with strong representation within Europe.

The Wheel – The Wheel is a national support and representative organisation for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. Our membership comprises 850 organisations, large and small, across the country.