

Steps for Setting up a Volunteer Programme

The key starting point to setting up a new volunteer programme 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 determine how you support, involve and manage your volunteers on an ongoing basis.

Involve Staff

Be sure to engage staff in the planning process as they are more likely to be receptive to volunteers if they are involved from the start. Also, staff often have great ideas for involving volunteers, whether it is helping with an existing project or planning a new programme they would like to see implemented.

Running Costs

Whilst volunteers give their time for free, ideally they should not be left out of pocket. If possible, it is good practice to have a budget in place to reimburse everyday receipted expenses such as travel and lunch. Depending on the role, additional costs may include: telephone calls, training, conferences, equipment and insurance.

Volunteer Role Description

A volunteer role description defines what the volunteer's purpose is and how they will fit into the organisation. It clarifies expectations and makes the process of recruitment and selection much easier because the role description can be used to determine a person's suitability for the activity.

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.

Advertising

Think about how to reach the type of person you need to fill your volunteer vacancy. For example, if you need a tradesman such as a plumber or an electrician, a trade association may help you to publicise your vacancy. Other examples of advertising routes include posters in public places, newspaper ads or features, local radio and parish or church notes.

Selection

Plan how you will select future volunteers. Options range from: informal or formal interviews, application forms and reference checks. And remember, depending on the role or the work of your organisation, Garda Vetting may also be required.

Induction & Training

All new volunteers should be provided with an induction on their first day. Volunteers may also need role-specific training in a one-to-one or group setting. Consider the time this will take and who will deliver the training when planning your volunteer programme.

Support & Supervision

Just like paid employees, volunteers need regular support and supervision. Each volunteer should have a named supervisor. One-to-one meetings provide an opportunity to monitor and evaluate your volunteer programme, discuss how the volunteer feels about their role, provide feedback, identify goals, and pre-empt difficult situations before they arise. Buddy systems, volunteer support groups and social events can also play a pivotal role in supporting volunteers.

Recognition

Consider how you will recognise the contributions that volunteers make to your organisation. A simple 'thank you' is often enough but small tokens such as cards or chocolate can be just as effective as bigger gestures like volunteer awards or recognition events.