

The Steps You Cannot Skip!

Organising Volunteers at a time of Emergency



ORGANISING VOLUNTEERS

Many people are asking what they can do to help their communities during the COVID-19 emergency. We developed this factsheet for people who find themselves in charge of groups of volunteers for the first time. Maybe you are an employee who has been asked to take on volunteers to help your organisation respond to COVID-19. Maybe you are an active member of your local community and are trying to mobilise much needed help.

This factsheet covers the essentials that will help you to run a safe and successful volunteer effort.

Right now, many organisations and individuals are responding to an urgent situation – either our work has increased as a result of COVID-19 or perhaps staff and volunteer numbers have decreased as people are ill or self-isolating.

We want help and we want it now! But no matter how urgent the situation feels, we need to take a moment to pause and prepare properly before recruiting volunteers. If we don't prepare properly, we could risk the safety of our clients, volunteers, staff and the public. Let's do this right - it will save time and lives if we do!



PREPARE



RECRUIT



SUPPORT



THANK

PREPARE

Why do you need volunteers?

It may seem like a silly question because in a time of crisis so many people need help. But it's important to first ask yourself, is there a clear need for volunteers? If you are an individual or group of individuals trying to organise something locally to help with the COVID-19 emergency – are you sure that you are not duplicating work that is already being done? Are there established groups already doing similar work that you could contact to offer your support?

If there is a clear need for volunteers and no one else is doing what you propose to do to help, make sure you are following all the HSE guidelines to keep yourself and others safe available at [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie).

A very good first step would be to connect with your local Volunteer Centre as they know organisations and volunteers in your area and are staffed and ready to help. You can find their details on [volunteer.ie](https://www.volunteer.ie).

What do you need volunteers for?

If you don't have a clear idea of what you need volunteers to do, your joint efforts may well be wasted because if you don't know what the volunteer needs to do then how can they know? A simple role description is a basic requirement for all volunteers. It helps you clarify what you need, and it helps the volunteer understand what is being asked of them. Clear expectations will lead to clear action and clear results. Without them, your work will not be as effective, and you will end

up wasting your time trying to fix the problems that inevitably occur when people don't know what they are supposed to be doing. So before you ask for volunteers, make sure you have a role description identifying the following:

WHAT – will they do

WHEN – are they needed

WHERE - will they be volunteering

WHY – should they get involved

HOW – will they contact you

Who Can Volunteer?

If someone's health condition makes them vulnerable or they live with someone who is vulnerable, now is not the time for them to be volunteering if it means being in contact with others. There are many ways volunteers can help virtually of course – talk to your local Volunteer Centre to explore ways to engage volunteers virtually.

If a volunteer or potential volunteer is feeling unwell, has any symptoms or has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, make sure that they can disengage promptly without concern or guilt. Sometimes volunteers feel guilty that they are letting the group down. Make sure that they know their health and well-being and that of your service users is your number one concern.

Have you got the appropriate insurance?

It is imperative to make sure you have the appropriate insurance in place. For information about this and other practical issues about volunteering in response to COVID-19, check out [volunteer.ie](https://www.volunteer.ie).

RECRUIT

Start small

It may seem like we should do the opposite at a time of emergency, but if you recruit too many volunteers at once and don't have enough for them to do, you will find your time being used to come up with an activity rather than getting the work done that is needed. Ask only for the volunteers you need, and for whom you have role descriptions.

Safety First

It can be tempting when we feel under time pressure to act now and think later, but this will create far more problems than it solves. Make sure you check the information you need to know before engaging a volunteer. Does the volunteer need specific skills? Is the volunteer going to be in contact with a vulnerable person or young person? Are there things that would prevent someone from being a suitable volunteer for a particular role?

It is essential that you keep yourself, your volunteers and your community safe by understanding what information you need to ask for before involving a volunteer in your efforts. You can get more information about safeguarding and garda vetting at volunteer.ie

For everyone's safety at this time, you need to make sure that all volunteers are following HSE guidelines, including handwashing, social distancing, using protective equipment where appropriate, and that volunteers stop volunteering immediately if they are experiencing symptoms or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.



SUPPORT

Orientation and Training

While some roles will require very little training, all volunteers will need someone to go over the tasks required for the role and to cover basic, essential information e.g. Health & Safety procedures, who their supervisor is, what the boundaries of their role are and what the communication channels are for the organisation. Taking the time to train volunteers and ensure they understand the tasks involved in the role will save infinitely more time down the road.

Look and Listen!

Volunteers need to be supervised and supported in their roles – no matter what they are doing. Make sure you have a system in place for overseeing volunteers on duty (if you can't do it personally, recruit a volunteer to act as a team leader) and make sure you have a system in place to check in with volunteers. Many people will have moments of stress, concern and worry over the coming weeks. It is vital that volunteers know who they can go to for support and that you check in with them regularly. This can happen in many ways – in person, phone calls, texts or virtual meetings.

Direct Communication

If there is an issue with any volunteer – nip it in the bud! Now is not the time to let things fester. Deal with issues immediately, directly and fairly.



THANK

Recognition is Key

We know that nobody volunteers for the praise, but people need to be acknowledged for the efforts they make. It is an unsettling time for all of us but taking the time to thank a volunteer for their efforts will make everyone feel better. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution your group has made and to highlight something positive – critically important in a time of crisis.

When you Prepare, Recruit, Support and Thank properly you help ensure the success of your efforts and the safety of all involved.

For more information on volunteering in response to COVID-19 please see volunteer.ie.