The European Volunteer Management Ethics Guide

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Introduction

The **European Volunteer Management Ethics Guide** is intended to be a practical, user-friendly tool for volunteer managers. It is intended to effectively **assist users in making ethical decisions when managing volunteers.**

The guide puts forward key ethical principles that users should follow and their core components. On the basis of them, possible actions that volunteer managers can take, are put forward. In following this practical guide, users can ensure that the volunteers in their respective organisations are managed and treated in the ethical way they deserve.

Volunteering's philosophical essence

○ **Ethical Principle:**

Foster a philosophy of volunteering in your organisation - a philosophy **where volunteering represents an opportunity for people to actively engage** in helping their communities, to share skills and abilities, to make new experiences and develop new relationships on the basis of inclusion[1] and altruism[2], defined as a voluntary, selfless act intended to benefit only the other.

○ **Core Elements:**

Culture of Altruism – Foster a culture of altruism at your organisation.
Information Support - Provide volunteers clear information about the opportunities they have to help their respective communities and on how to get involved in them.

○ **Possible Actions:**

Culture of Altruism

- **Encourage volunteers** to actively engage in helping their respective communities in the spirit of altruism.
- **Provide workshops explaining the value and importance of altruistic and volunteer effort volunteers do** and how it positively impacts the community and the people involved.[3]
- **Provide workshops on the history of volunteering and altruism in the community.** This will make volunteers feel connected to their communities' history and part of an altruistic culture.

Information Support

- **Set up a mechanism**, e.g. a database or an information service, that volunteers can use to find out about the opportunities available. This information service tool should have an easy to read setting and should be accessible for everyone.

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1. For more information on inclusion, refer to the Guide on the role of volunteer managers in facilitating inclusive volunteering in Europe
2. Definition by Psychologist Abigail Marsh
3. For more information on volunteering values , refer to the Guide to Volunteering, Solidarity and European Values

Respect

⭕ **Ethical Principle:**
Recognise the inherent **value of all volunteers and the work that they do** in the organisation and for the community. Expressing this recognition when interacting with volunteers enhances their commitment for the activities they are involved in.

⭕ **Core Elements:**
Acknowledgement - Acknowledge the volunteers as **individuals,** recognising the important work that they do and their respective skills and abilities.
Courtesy - Interaction with volunteers should be **polite** and volunteers need to **feel welcome** to and part of the organisation.
Privacy - Keep important and confidential information about volunteers private.
Dignity - Make sure to **treat volunteers with dignity** in order not to damage their sense of self-worth.

⭕ **Possible Actions:**
Acknowledgement

- **Take time to talk to and get to know the volunteers of your organisations.** Learning their names and letting them talk about their background, then bringing these up in future interactions will make them feel recognised as individuals and more included in the organisation.
- **Thank volunteers** for the work that they do and keep them updated on the outcomes that they achieved. This will make them feel pleased that their impact has been appreciated, and help them build more self-recognition of the positive results their efforts and commitment achieved.

Courtesy

- Always **be polite** when talking to volunteers.
- On volunteers' first day, **take time** to show them around the organisation and introduce them to the other volunteers and the paid staff. This will make them feel welcome and part of the organisation.

Privacy

- Keep any written confidential information about volunteers in a **safe and secure place**.
- **Do not share any confidential information** that volunteers

verbally share with you with anyone else, unless absolutely necessary e.g. for safeguarding reasons.

- **Clarify in advance** with volunteers that their personal information will remain confidential and agree with them that, in case of emergency or of absolute necessity, they can be shared with professionals.

Dignity

- Always **allow open communication** with volunteers in case of doubts and concerns regarding their tasks.
- **Be understanding and do not belittle volunteers when they make mistakes.** Acknowledge that they may lack experience for certain tasks and need additional following to achieve the attended result. Bear in mind also that the instructions given for the tasks may not be clear for the volunteers, as every person interprets information differently.
- **In case of repeated errors, showcase this understanding** either by taking more time to explain to volunteers how to do it or by politely giving someone else the task.
  In the latter case, do not blame volunteers for their mistakes, and always thank them for their contribution. This will make volunteers not feel upset or less valuable when they make a mistake. The **"volunteer buddy" approach** should also be taken into consideration. Making more experienced volunteers carry out their tasks together with new volunteers not only allows learning opportunities but also increases the sense of belonging of the newcomers towards the organisation. If this approach is adopted, experienced volunteers should be trained in terms of welcoming and understanding behaviour.

"Volunteer buddy": Making more experienced volunteers carry out their tasks together with new volunteers.

Equality

○ **Ethical Principle:**
Give all volunteers an **equal and fair treatment**. Make sure that the workplace is an open and safe space for volunteers from all backgrounds.

○ **Core Elements:**
Anti-discrimination – Ensure that you or other people in the organisation are not, intentionally or unintentionally, treating people from certain backgrounds differently to others. **Ensure that volunteers are provided with the same high standards of safety** in the workplace as the paid staff.
Opportunity/Diversity - **Ensure that volunteering opportunities in your organisation are open and easily accessible** to people from all backgrounds, and that you have representation of a variety of groups in the organisation.
Inclusion – **Ensure the active participation of everyone** in wide events and social gatherings of the organisation, as well as in daily activities, always considering the diverse needs of volunteers and consequently arrange the tasks.
Combatting Exploitation – **Ensure that your volunteers are not exploited for free labour.**

○ **Possible Actions:**
Anti-discrimination

- Always **be mindful of the way you treat and interact with volunteers**, and reflect on whether the way you behave may negatively affect some volunteers. This will ensure that you, someone who is responsible for the wellbeing of volunteers, are not disregarding the volunteers by treating them differently based on their background.
- **Be aware of the diverse needs volunteers** coming from different backgrounds may demand and involve them in suitable tasks and activities to enhance their skills and capacities.
- **Establish a mechanism that volunteers can easily and safely use to report cases of discrimination, poor and unsafe working conditions and abuse.** If volunteers have a mechanism that they feel they can easily use to report these cases, discrimination is easier to stamp out and volunteers can feel more safe and comfortable in the organisation.

- **Create a culture in the organisation of anti-discrimination.** People simply being against discrimination is not always enough to minimise it, people actively have to be committed to calling it out and taking action against it. This culture can be established via **organisational policies or education and awareness workshops on discrimination** so people better understand: what discrimination looks like, the forms it can take and how to act against it. Opportunities for training and learning on the legislative anti-discrimination tools available at the local, national and European level, should also be envisaged and be made accessible to paid staff and volunteers in the organisation. This will result in volunteers feeling more comfortable in the organisation, since they know that everyone there is actively against discrimination and are committed to minimising it.

Opportunity/Diversity

- **Make sure that people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to volunteer at your organisation**. The diversity of backgrounds in the organisation reflects the degree of openness and accessibility to the organisation activities. If certain backgrounds of people are not represented in your organisation, or you mostly only have representation from one or two groups, there may be accessibility issues that undermine the equal opportunity to take part in your organisation initiatives.
- If this is the case, **implement policies that will make it easier for certain groups to volunteer at your organisation** e.g. if there is a lack of people with low incomes volunteering, implement policies such as grants and travel cost reimbursements for them. This will ensure that they will have a more equal opportunity to volunteer at your organisation.

Inclusion

- **Organise activities and events or social gathering in a way that all volunteers can be actively participating in them**. This means providing the right opportunities, means, spaces and support for a wide diversity of people to be engaged in volunteering.
- **Determine which are the main barriers in the organisation** for a more inclusive environment and carry out an action plan to progressively overcome them, involving various stakeholders inside and outside the organisation (i.e. policy makers, the local community).
- **Combat cliquishness** by clearly stating in the organisation's volunteer policy that all people are welcome regardless of age, social status, disabilities, gender, ethnicity, religion, and as well tackling multiple and intersecting discrimination etc.

Combatting Exploitation

- **Ensure that volunteers are carrying out work that can be defined as 'volunteering'** e.g. is conducted out of free will, non-professional and that benefits the community,
- **Ensure that the work that volunteers are doing are not tasks that should be done by paid staff.**
- **Create a mechanism that volunteers can use to report concerns** about the sort of work that they are doing and ensure openness for tasks changes.

Transparency

⊙ Ethical Principle:
Be open to volunteers about the work that the organisation is doing, as well as about its missions and values. **Ensure that you and your organisation can be held accountable.**

⊙ Core Elements:
Information Openness - **Be open to volunteers about what the organisation works on**, its missions and values and how volunteers are an active part of the organisation's activities.
Accountability - Ensure that volunteers can hold both you and the organisation accountable.

⊙ Possible Actions:
Information Openness
- When volunteers first engage in the organisation, they should be **informed about the background of the organisation, its values and its missions**. Volunteers should also be made aware of which projects they will be involved in, presenting the team they will work with and the results expected from them.
- Whenever your organisation starts a new project, **explain to all the volunteers involved in detail the work** that they will be doing, who will be involved and the project's purpose.
- **Establish an open communication channel** with volunteers to ask any questions that they may have.

Accountability
- **Create a mechanism that volunteers can use to report any cases of misconduct by volunteer managers or any other higher ups in the organisation.** This will ensure that higher ranked staff in the organisation cannot abuse their power against volunteers, and that volunteers are protected and can work in a safe place.
- **Create a mechanism where volunteers can voice ideas for better practices and policies in the organisation.** This means higher-ups in the organisation are held accountable for the practices and policies they implement, and volunteers have the chance to suggest changes if they are presently flawed.

Responsibility

○ **Ethical Principle:**
Ensure that volunteers e**mbrace the values of volunteering engagement**, as well as accept the organisation's code of conduct and respect the other volunteers and the paid staff.

○ **Core Elements:**
Value-based engagement - Ensure that **volunteers act for the benefit of the community,** on a voluntary basis, without expecting financial compensation.
Respectful commitment - **Encourage team working** to create a pleasant working environment for both volunteers and paid staff, making sure that volunteers carry out their tasks in a responsible and respectful manner towards the organisation and the community. Promote companionship among the volunteers, to avoid competitiveness, tensions and rivalries.

○ **Possible Actions:**
Value-based engagement
- **Provide to volunteers proper training on volunteering engagement**, underlying its core values and principles, i.e. solidarity, inclusion, altruism and acting for the good of others.
- **Supervise volunteers' tasks** to ensure that they carry out their action following the above-mentioned principles of volunteering. Take appropriate actions when this does not happen.

Respectful commitment
- **Promote team-building activities** with both volunteers and paid staff of the organisation to create an enjoyable working environment for everyone.
- **Ensure that volunteers respect the organisation and its staff**, that they keep a cooperative and open attitude towards both the organisation and the community and that they do not exploit the organisation for their own benefit.
- **Assign group tasks to enhance volunteers' team working**, promoting a spirit of respect and cooperation rather than competitiveness. Establish a safe and confidential communication channel with volunteers to make them feel comfortable in reporting any case of bullying or egoistic behaviour coming from other volunteers or from the paid staff.

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