

Training and Communication for Volunteers at Home



Once you have volunteers recruited to volunteer from home, be it a long term volunteer in an adapted role, or a new volunteer in an entirely new role, they will need to be trained and supported. Now more than ever, with everyone working and volunteering from home, good communication will be key to the success of your volunteer programme.

Follow Volunteer Ireland's [#VolunteerFromHome](#) campaign for inspiration on how others are getting involved.



TRAINING

No matter what, all of your volunteers will require some training as they adapt to volunteering from home. Providing adequate training and tools for existing volunteers will help ease any fear they may have of technology and/or change. If volunteers need more support than you can offer, can you engage another volunteer to provide technical support to the team? It could be a way of redeploying another volunteer whose role is not needed at present or you could recruit a new volunteer for this role.

Remember that training needs to be thorough even though it is remote. When training from a distance there are several online tools that may be useful, or if the role is simple and straightforward a phone call or video call may be enough. If you are engaging a new volunteer in a role, you'll still want to include the regular induction procedures you would normally do. What policies and procedures does the volunteer need to know about? Are they clear on the boundaries of the role? Make sure to include in the training, how the volunteer can deal with difficulties – how do you want them to get in touch with you? This leads us to the next important aspect of managing volunteers remotely – communication.

COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Regular and structured communication with volunteers will help them feel they belong to your organisation and are valued. This is true of all volunteer programmes, but is especially important when we are all working and volunteering remotely.

Despite the bad press it usually gets, technology can actually help us feel connected. Video calls and regular written communication are two ways to keep volunteers feeling connected.

How you do this will depend on the number of volunteers involved in your organisation and your own workload. You could have a video call once per week with your volunteers, or if there are too many to have one call, organise calls with teams of volunteers. If volunteers are doing shifts, you could have a quick five minute check-in call with them at the start or end of the shift. And if you don't have the time to make those calls, could you assign a long-term volunteer to this role? It could be a great time to enlist experienced volunteers from your organisation in a leadership role within your volunteer programme.

Now is the time for a structured and consistent approach to communication with your volunteers. This may be a big shift for you if you are more used to an informal and day to day



way of checking in with your volunteers. You will need a system in place for how volunteers communicate with you and will need to make sure everyone knows about it. For example you may want to create a specific time and way that volunteers can contact you about non urgent vs urgent queries. This way you will not be fielding calls all day long and volunteers will feel confident that there is a time and a place to contact you should they need to.

Another way to help volunteers feel connected is to create an interactive online workspace (Facebook, Google, Zoom etc.) where volunteers can connect with each other and with you. It can be somewhere to share success stories, photos of volunteers from home and help them feel less isolated. It could also be a way to share with your volunteers any positive feedback about volunteers that you have received from service users and fellow staff.

REPORTING SYSTEM

Another key aspect to managing volunteers from home is to have a clear and structured reporting system in place. Volunteers need to know that they are accountable and their work is valued.

Your system does not need to be complicated, it just needs to be user friendly and accessible to your volunteers. You could have a shared excel spreadsheet where tasks are listed and progress noted, for example. It could also be that you or a volunteer team leader do a check in call with volunteers at the end of their shift to go over what was accomplished during the shift and any issues that came up. Alternatively, if several volunteers are working on a project together you may consider using an online project management tool – many of which are free.

For some microvolunteering roles a reporting system may not be relevant, but for ongoing volunteer roles having some system in place is vital. If you don't check the work volunteers are doing then quality may suffer and issues might be missed and equally importantly volunteers will not feel their work is valued or meaningful if no one is bothering to check it. Again, if you

are unable to do this because of your own workload during COVID-19, enlist experienced volunteers as team leaders who can fulfil this function and report back to you.

REAL VOLUNTEERS REAL RECOGNITION

Finally, even though you won't be seeing your volunteers in person, remember they are real people, making a real effort and they need real recognition.

The communication and reporting systems you put in place will help volunteers feel supported, but don't forget to also thank them. Simple and informal ways of saying thank you will go a long way to keeping your volunteers motivated and feeling valued. Because you can't do this in person, find ways to do so remotely. Whether it is through social media, internal online platforms, email, phone calls, or cards in the post it is important to say thank you to your volunteers for their efforts during this challenging time for all communities across the country.

Read the other guides in this series for further advice and guidance:

- Developing Roles for Volunteers at Home
- Three Ways to Engage Volunteers from Home

