

Developing Roles for Volunteers at Home

MANAGING AT HOME



You are likely reading this document from your own home as you think about how to engage volunteers from *their* homes. Here are some ways which you can adapt your volunteer programme to run successfully while being managed and delivered remotely.

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



RECRUIT OR REDEPLOY?

As always when it comes to volunteer management, the most important first step is to prepare and plan. Look closely at your current volunteer team and the roles you have. If your organisation's needs have changed as a result of COVID-19, is it possible to redeploy your current volunteers to do new roles that are now required? Or do you need to recruit new volunteers?

Remember if you are recruiting new volunteers you still need to follow best practice around selecting, screening, inducting and training these new volunteers.

As a first step, look at your existing volunteers and see what can be done to adapt roles and redeploy these volunteers. This will save you time and allow you to continue engaging loyal volunteers instead of losing them because they no longer feel needed or valued.

ADAPT CURRENT ROLES

If some or all of your volunteer roles are no longer 'do-able' given the current restrictions (such as befrienders who visit older/vulnerable people) can you adapt the roles to be done remotely? In some cases, volunteers may have to take a break from volunteering during COVID-19, but with some creative thinking and some strong systems put in place, many volunteer roles can be adapted to be done from home. A face-to-face befriending role can become a weekly (or daily) phone call. A volunteer who used to help in an administrative role, may be able to complete tasks from home, with a little help from technology.

DEVELOP NEW ROLES

Some roles just won't work from home – such as shop volunteers or volunteer drivers for elderly/vulnerable people who are now cocooning. Look closely at your organisation, its mission and its capacity. Can you create new roles that are meaningful and in line with your mission? Can some of your existing volunteers fill these roles?

Not all roles need to be in response to COVID-19. One positive thing we can take from the situation we find ourselves in, is that some of us now have more time. Possibly many of our day to days tasks are not as relevant or pressing right now. Perhaps now is a time to get to all those jobs done that we were always putting to the side for more pressing needs. Is it time to re-draft a volunteer handbook or various policies and procedures? Is it time to finally update the website or develop that project you



keep meaning to get to? Are there skills your volunteers have that can be used right now? This could be a very productive and creative time for your organisation.

Doing this will help you meet your organisation's mission as well as maintain a relationship with your volunteers - volunteers whom you will most certainly need when life goes back to 'normal'.

Volunteer Ireland will be creating a bank of '[Volunteer From Home](#)' [example role descriptions](#) to give you some ideas to start with, you can view these [here](#).

Read our guide 'Three Ways to Engage Volunteers from Home' on volunteer.ie for an introduction to:



**Virtual
Volunteering**



Microvolunteering



**Physical
Volunteering**

ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

Clear role descriptions that cover tasks and skills required will help everyone understand what needs to be done and how it can be done from home. As always, be specific about tasks, the technical requirements and the time needed to do the role.

When managing volunteers remotely it can be useful to break a role into more bite sized activities. People will be more willing to take on a task that has a clear start and end point and it will be easier for you to manage.

Take the example of re-drafting your volunteer handbook. Break this project down into the various steps involved and the different skills that will be needed. You will want to get feedback from your previous volunteers, research best practices for volunteer handbooks, draft the copy of the text and get the handbook designed. Here are some of the tasks that you could identify to create volunteer roles:

- A volunteer could research good examples of volunteer hand books
- A volunteer could create a survey for you to gather feedback
- A volunteer proof reader could review the draft of the handbook
- A volunteer illustrator could create images to bring the document to life
- A volunteer graphic designer could complete the document for printing

Some of these roles may be suitable for existing volunteers and others will require you to recruit new volunteers with specific skills.



SKILLED SUPPORT

Many organisations find themselves facing a steep learning curve as they figure out how to do their work remotely, upskill their staff in the use of technology and revise their operational plans to deal with the effects of COVID-19.

Identifying areas where your organisation could use support from a volunteer with a specific skill set can be a great way to involve volunteers remotely.

This could be anything from a one hour phone call to give you advice on where to start or a series of support calls and virtual assistance to help you set up a new process or system. There are many skilled people who want to support the community and voluntary sector and this is a great way to involve them.

As well, many companies have skills within their workforce that could help with this transition and who are looking for ways to support. Are there partners you could identify who might be able to help with a specific task?

SHIFTS

Another thing you could consider when engaging volunteers at home is to make roles shift based. Instead of asking for 2 hours per week, assign a specific shift per role. This means you and your volunteers know exactly when they are volunteering and will help volunteers with time management. With shifts there is less chance of volunteers a) doing way more than they are supposed to do and becoming burnt out or b) losing momentum or being disorganised with their volunteering because it is getting mixed up with home and work life.

SAFETY FIRST!

It is tempting to think there are reduced risks if we are all just working and volunteering from our own homes, but in fact risk management is a vital aspect of managing volunteers remotely. When engaging volunteers at home, some or all of these issues are still relevant: confidentiality, liability, IT security, reference checks and vetting.

If you haven't done so in the past, now would be a very good time to include a volunteer agreement in your recruitment process. It can be a simple document that the volunteer signs stating they understand and adhere to your policies, procedures and code of conduct. This shows volunteers that you make the safety of your volunteers, staff and service users a priority, which is particularly important right now.



For more information on next steps, see the other guides in this series:

- Training and Communication for Volunteers at Home
- Three Ways to Engage Volunteers from Home