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Employer Supported Volunteering

Making your group volunteering project a success



HOW TO MAKE YOUR GROUP VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY A SUCCESS

Congratulations! You have decided to undertake a group volunteering project in your community, and you are ready to plan your activity with your partnership community organisation. As part of your preparation for your employee's volunteering you have already;

- Agreed what you want to achieve with your volunteering activity
- Considered what resources you have (people, budget, time)
- Chosen the type of volunteering activity that matches your current needs
- Sourced an appropriate community partner
- Understand your rights and responsibilities in the partnership.

(For guidance on any of the above steps please read Volunteer Ireland's guide on Corporate Volunteering – Where to Start, available at www.volunteer.ie.)

Careful planning is key to successful group volunteering activity, where happy and motivated employees complete their community tasks in a safe and fun environment. The following checklist will help ensure the successful completion of your group volunteering projects.

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS IN A GROUP VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY



BEFORE THE VOLUNTEERING DAY:

- Appoint one person in your company as Team Leader to take responsibility for the coordination of the project for your company. This person will be responsible for liaising with the rest of the corporate team.
- It is important that the Team Leader has the time available for the project and enjoys being a communicator and organiser.
- Meet with the community organisation's Project Coordinator, and any supervisor assigned to the day's activities to agree the details of the project. Try to meet the Project Coordinator at the project site. If this is not possible, try to gather as much information as possible regarding the location and logistics of the project, financial commitment and the requirements and expectations of the volunteers.
- Think about what your team and the organisation each want from the opportunity – (e.g. team building skills, media profiles, etc.) and share expectations with them.
- Clarify who will provide and pay for any materials required to realise the project.
- Confirm that you are properly insured for corporate volunteering activities under your own company's insurance policy and ask the volunteer organisation to check their position regarding public liability insurance cover.
- Draw up an action plan for the day in collaboration with the community organisation, remembering that a team can get through more work than a group of individuals. It is helpful for each action to be allocated to an individual or to a team, and that each action has a deadline. Allocate who does preparatory work and clean up.
- Clearly document the agreed tasks and give a copy to the community organisation. Include the time commitment, financial commitments and deadlines.
- Ensure all equipment and materials you need are there on the day.
- Determine in advance what volunteer expenses will be reimbursed (travel / lunch etc.). If it is an all-day event determine who will provide lunch, e.g. will volunteers need to supply their own or will the company cover catering.

- The Team Leader should circulate information to the volunteers in advance of the day, in particular highlighting any tools, equipment or clothing they need to bring. Ensure the volunteers have detailed instructions on how to find the project site, and predicted start and end times, details of the project, the organisation and tasks.
- Ensure the safety of all the participants. While health & safety is the responsibility of each individual it is important that no risks are taken and that all appropriate safety guidelines are followed. Undertake a risk assessment on-site. If any members of your group have physical imitations that may affect their participation in the project try to find alternative roles for them.
- Assign a volunteer to photograph or video the day's activities for use in marketing material.

ON THE VOLUNTEERING DAY:

- Volunteers should be on time and dressed appropriately for the day's activities.
- It is a good idea to wear company branded t-shirts so that all volunteers can be easily identifiable on the day (in photos, for security and for health & safety considerations).
- The Team Leader and the Project Coordinator should brief the team on the tasks involved, the deadlines and roles at the site. Ensure each volunteer is comfortable with his or her role.
- Volunteers should be made aware of any areas that they are not allowed access to without prior permission from the Project Coordinator.
- Before taking on any tasks outside the original plan, discuss and agree on them with the community organisation and team members.
- Be prepared for the weather and have a backup plan / alternative date should you need them.
- Lunch break is a good time to learn more information about the community organisation and the impact of the project on the organisation / its service users or community.
- Have fun!

AFTER THE VOLUNTEERING DAY:

- **Remember to thank the community organisation** for their hospitality and the opportunity.
- The Team Leader should ask volunteers to complete a short survey on their experience of the day, (successes and suggestions for improvements), and include in the evaluation.
- Provide reviews and suggestions to the community organisation. Positive reviews are always welcome, and suggestions will enable the volunteer organisation to enhance future volunteer's experience.



Northern Tust Inspiration Day Volunteers in Cheshire Ireland, ©Leah Carroll, 2013

- Share photos or video footage with the volunteer organisation.
- Share photos and experiences with other colleagues in staff break rooms, on the company intranet etc.
- Keep in touch with the volunteer organisation, keeping the door open for future collaboration.

BEING A SUCCESSFUL TEAM LEADER

The role of the Team Leader is very important for a successful group volunteering event, ensuring that everyone has fun and support, and the goals are achieved. Being a Team Leader in a volunteering project allows an opportunity:

- to develop and enhance your people, communication and project management and skills in a new environment.
- to demonstrate your leadership skills.
- to become an agent of change in your community.

It might make more sense to nominate someone other than the manager to be a Volunteer Team Leader, as they are likely to be more accessible to the community organisation than a manager.

Don't forget, the community organisation is on hand to help supervise and ensure the safety of your volunteers.

So work in partnership to lighten the load!



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TEAM LEADER

- Understand the company's objectives for the volunteering project.
- Create and maintain the relationship with the community organisation where the volunteering activity will take place.
- Do an on-site visit in advance of the volunteering day to assess any health and safety risks to volunteers, and develop the volunteers' tasks and schedule.
- Encourage colleagues to participate in the volunteering opportunity.
- Communicate regularly with management on project status.
- Prepare a brief information sheet for colleagues ensuring they have the all the information required for the volunteering activity, details of location, tasks, appropriate clothes, meeting points, and necessary contacts etc.
- Create a list of emergency contacts for volunteers and make it available on the day.
- Lead volunteers on the day of the project, ensuring everyone has enough to do, and are sticking to the project brief.
- Gather feedback from all volunteers to help evaluate the success or lessons learnt from the volunteering activity.

PROJECT DAY TIPS FOR LEADERS

Take charge – It's up to you to get the volunteers organised on the day, take charge, define the project for the volunteers, help them find jobs to do and assist them.

Delegate – If your project involves a lot of tasks, or is spread out over a lot of geographical area (e.g. a conservation project) ask people to serve as leaders of their area, freeing you to oversee the full project.

Be available – No matter how well organised you are in advance, some glitches will occur, and you should make yourself available to troubleshoot, advise solutions, and encourage everyone as much as possible.

Take breaks – Schedule breaks throughout the day, and encourage volunteers to take natural breaks when they need to for hydration and rest, especially when the tasks are physically demanding.

Give progress reports – Keep volunteers aware of the progress and give praise the work already done – this is very motivating and rewarding for volunteers.

Keep it interesting - While some tasks can be very simple, but important, they may be tedious, so think about ways to make it fun.

Plan for groups – There is fun in numbers so structure tasks that volunteers can work together and not individually.

Be flexible – Be ready to adapt to the unexpected! If volunteer numbers on the day are lower than what was anticipated, adjust the tasks accordingly.

Clean up – Allow sufficient time for clean-up, to leave the site in as good a condition, if not better, than when you arrived.



Acknowledge everyone– At the end of the day, thank everyone for all of their hard work, and the community organisation for facilitating the day. Take photos of the volunteers and the work done.



Tip: Check if the community organisation's Personal Accident and Public Liability insurance covers the volunteer activity.

If not, you might consider funding the additional contribution required for the day's event.

HEALTH & SAFETY OF EMPLOYEES DURING VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

All employer-endorsed volunteering activities have health & safety issues that need to be addressed. This is especially true for employees participating in short term or once-off group volunteering opportunities, in a different type of work environment and where employee volunteers won't receive the same amount of advance training as a permanent volunteer.

It is extremely important to be aware of your responsibilities as an employer to ensure a safe and productive environment for all employees that volunteer in approved employer-endorsed volunteering projects.

Employers in Ireland have a duty of care to their employees under both common law and under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. An employer must do whatever is reasonably practicable to ensure the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees, and should not expose employees to an unreasonable level of risk. This duty includes the obligation to provide a safe place of work, safe systems of work, training and instruction in relation to health and safety and reporting accidents and dangerous occurrences. This duty extends to corporate volunteering initiatives, and includes those undertaken away from the normal place of work.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HEALTH & SAFETY OF EMPLOYEE-VOLUNTEERS?

There are four key stakeholders who may be involved in ensuring the health & safety of employee volunteering projects – the voluntary organisation, employee, employer and broker (if used e.g. Volunteer Centre or Volunteer Ireland).

Voluntary organisation	It knows best the tasks and work environment, so it can identify and communicate potential health & safety issues, and the skills and experience required to undertake the work.
Employer	Ensures its employees are aware of the need to take on roles appropriate to their physical abilities and that employees take adequate care doing their volunteer work in a safe way. The employer needs to be fully informed about the legal and insurance issues associated with volunteering.
Employees	Have a responsibility for their own safety including obtaining and following the particular health and safety requirements of the project.
Broker (if used)	Makes each party aware of the need to ensure health & safety issues are well covered when the project is carried out.

BEST PRACTISE FOR ORGANISING AN EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY

Risk Assessment - Assess the possible risk to employee volunteers of every task that an employee may undertake when volunteering off-site.

Training - The outcome of the risk assessment will determine what training or instructions may be necessary for employees in respect of the duties that they will be undertaking to ensure a safe environment.

Insurance - A company should check its insurance cover to determine whether it will cover an employer supported volunteering project and, if it does has cover, what activities are included or excluded.

Agreement - a project agreement should be completed between the employer and the host organisation, including (among other things) training requirements, and health & safety responsibilities.

IDENTIFY HAZARDS	Identify known and potential hazards that pose a risk to some or all of the participants, looking at the environment and equipment.
MANAGE HAZARDS	Manage the hazards appropriately by eliminating, isolating or minimising them.
SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS	Ensure all the tools and machinery are used in accordance with the safety instructions.
EMERGENCIES	Be familiar with emergency procedures to be followed in the case of emergency or accident.
SAFETY POLICY	Have a Health & Safety policy with clear procedures which everyone knows about.
TRAINING	Ensure all volunteers have appropriate training for the tasks they are to do.

HEALTH & SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS



Refer to this checklist when planning your volunteering project to promote employee safety. Not all questions may be relevant to your particular volunteering activity.

- Is there an information brief from the community organisation detailing the tasks, skills, equipment and any protective clothing required for the work and the health and safety procedures to be followed?
- Have you undertaken an on-site risk assessment ?
- Have you contacted your insurer to check if employees are covered under your insurance policy while on volunteering duties?
- Have you signed a project agreement?
- Does the community organisation regularly check and maintain all their equipment?
- Is there a team leader for the group doing the volunteering?
- Can the community organisation ensure adequate training and supervision by staff who can guide volunteers on any relevant safety procedures?
- Do your safety assessments include wet weather and back-up tasks?
- Did you inform your employees about the volunteering tasks and skills/experience required?
- Have you specified or provided personal protective gear required for volunteering such as clothing, gloves, sun hat, safety glasses, shoes, etc?
- Do you have a policy covering absence from work caused by an injury obtained during the volunteering project?
- Do you have emergency contact details for the employees while on their volunteering project.
- Do your employees know what immediate action to take if a volunteer is injured?
- Do you expect your employees to report to you any incidents and injuries while on an employee volunteering project?
- Have you checked with your volunteers that tasks they will do will not affect any health conditions they might have?

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM FOR GROUP VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

A risk assessment involves identifying all hazards, assessing all risks, and putting in place measures to control unacceptable risks for the Volunteer. This assessment should consider both the potential severity of the consequence and the number of volunteers who may be exposed to each hazard.

Place of Volunteering Event:

Date of event:

HAZARD / RISK Please assess the site for risks and identify those risks in this column	LEVEL OF RISK Is it High, Medium, or Low?	CONTROLS Identify the controls that need to be in place to reduce the risk

Signed by: (print name):

Date:

Common hazards that might occur on volunteer work locations:

- Working at height
- Using unfamiliar tools and inappropriate use of tools
- Muscular stress while doing a physical activity
- Transport to and from the volunteering site
- Exposure to cold, heat and sun and noise
- Lack of ventilation



SITE VISIT INFORMATION TEMPLATE

When undertaking your site visit to where the volunteer project will be take place, it is helpful to document as much information about the event as possible. This can form the basis of the Project Agreement between the company and the community organisation.

Name of the Team Leader:	
Name of community organisation:	
Name and contact details of community organisation's project co-ordinator:	
Address where volunteering will take place:	
Briefly describe the volunteering challenge:	

List specific tasks that will be undertaken on the day (to be completed with organisation's project co-ordinator)	No. of volunteers

When is the activity due to start and finish?	
Are there tools needed for the day and who will supply them?	
How many supervisors from the organisation will be available on the day?	
What is the general dress recommendation for the day?	
Where can employees park their cars safely?	
Where is the nearest public transport link for employees making their own way?	

	Yes	No
Can the organisation provide a brief orientation on the day of their work?		
Do volunteers need to sign any waiver for the community organisation?		
Are there tea / coffee facilities available or is a packed lunch required?		
Are their accessible bathrooms at the work site		
Is there a secure facility where volunteers can leave their personal belongings?		
Are there any restrictions on photographs being taken on the day?		

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

The following resources are available on www.volunteer.ie

- **Corporate Volunteering** – How to ensure your group volunteering activity is a success
- **Employee Survey template** - what to ask your employees before you introduce an employee volunteering programme, to understand their interests and preferences.
- **Employee Volunteering Evaluation template** - what to ask your employees after they have participated in a volunteering activity to determine its success and any suggestions for future volunteering events.



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Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development agency and a support body for all local Volunteer Centres in Ireland.

Volunteer Ireland works to promote and celebrate volunteering in Ireland through campaigns such as National Volunteering Week and the Volunteer Ireland Awards. We support national volunteer involving organisations by offering bespoke training, consultancy and an extensive range of online guides and resources on engaging volunteers. Volunteer Ireland also

provides support to for-profit companies interested in volunteering and offers volunteer management services for large-scale events and festivals.

Volunteer Ireland develops and supports best practices in volunteering and Volunteer Centres, including the evaluation of Volunteer Centres according to a quality standard framework, striving to achieve our shared objective of an Ireland where everyone who wants to, can volunteer.