



The European Volunteer Management Ethics Guide



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Introduction

EVI-DEMS Erasmus Plus funded project aims to understand the current training and qualifications available to volunteer managers. With this knowledge, the partners are developing an HE learning programme and resources to enhance opportunities for **proper training and recognised qualifications across Europe**. This should contribute to ensuring **effective and ethical management of volunteers**, avoiding exploitation and job substitution. It also aims to boost community capacity in disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery through well-trained volunteer managers. Additionally, it promotes diversity and inclusivity in the volunteering sector, with managers actively assessing organisations and implementing proactive plans to mitigate risks of exclusion.

The European Volunteer Management Ethics Guide is intended to be a practical, user-friendly tool for volunteer managers. It is based on value orientations and can be used as an ethical guide or dilemma-solving tool as 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.

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

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 altruism,² (defined as a voluntary, selfless act intended to benefit only the other) and the **principles of volunteering defined by the European Union:**

- Includes all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal.
- Undertaken of a person's own free-will, choice and motivation.
- Without seeking financial gain i.e. Financial gain being neither the objective, nor the way to recognise the contribution or the achievement.
- Is a journey of solidarity and provides a way to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns.
- Is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative

○ 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 including a spirit of altruism in their activities in addition to other motivational factors.
- **Provide workshops explaining the value and importance of altruistic and volunteer effort volunteers do** and how it³ positively impacts the community and the people involved.
- **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.

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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.

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.

Dignity - Make sure to treat volunteers with dignity in order not to damage their sense of self-worth.

Privacy - Keep important and confidential information about volunteers private.

○ 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 lead to a sense of satisfaction as volunteers see their impact being acknowledged, fostering greater self-recognition of the positive outcomes and outputs achieved through their efforts and dedication.

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 that all volunteers have equal opportunities to participate** in volunteering events, gatherings, and decisions that affect them and their actions. Empower them to actively engage in the volunteer activities, considering their diverse needs and characteristics.

Combatting Exploitation - Ensure that your volunteers are not exploited as free labour i.e the main reason for their engagement should not be to save on personnel costs above all other factors relating to their added value.

○ Possible Actions:

Anti-discrimination

- Always **be mindful of the way you treat and interact with volunteers**, and reflect on whether the way your behaviour may negatively affect some volunteers. This will ensure that you, and everyone with responsibility for the wellbeing of volunteers, are not disregarding the volunteers by treating them differently based on their background and contexts.
- **Be aware of the diverse needs volunteers** coming from different backgrounds and contexts 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 groups of people that exist in your community are not represented in the volunteer group, there may be accessibility or communication issues and/or communication issues that undermine the equality of opportunity to take part in your organisation initiatives.
- If this is the case, **implement policies and strategies 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, training 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 cliques from forming** by clearly stating in the organisation's volunteer policy that all people are welcome regardless of age, social status, disabilities, gender, ethnicity, religion, and ensure that volunteers experience team activities with people from diverse groups.



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 mission**. Volunteers should also be made aware of which projects and/or activities they will be involved in, make familiar the team they will engage with and the results expected from them.
- Whenever your organisation starts a new project or activity, **explain to all the volunteers involved in detail the objectives**, the actions that they will be doing, contribution they will make and who will be involved.
- **Establish an open communication channel with volunteers** to clarify any questions that they may have and provide an annual report made available to all volunteers.

Accountability

- **Create a mechanism that volunteers can use to report any cases of misconduct by volunteer managers or any other higher ups and staff members 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 implies that volunteers are given the opportunity to propose changes or enhancements, and the organisation's decision makers are responsible for addressing these suggestions in the practices and policies they implement.



Responsibility

○ Ethical Principle:

Ensure that volunteers **embrace the values of volunteering engagement**, as well as accept the organisation's code of conduct and respect the other volunteers, the paid staff and beneficiaries.

○ 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 for volunteers to enable them to report any case of bullying and/or egoistic/selfish behaviour coming from other volunteers or from the paid staff that goes against the spirit of teamwork, equal value, inclusion and respect that should be at the heart of the activities in a safe and secure way.



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