



Toolkit: Inclusion in volunteer programmes

Contents

Introduction	3
How to use the toolkit.....	4
Definitions.....	4
Understanding Volunteer Motivation.....	5
Implementing Inclusive Practices.....	6
Providing Support for Volunteers.....	7
Recognising volunteer contributions.....	7
Monitoring Volunteer Engagement.....	8
Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Inclusion.....	8
Useful Tools.....	9
Tool 1: Sample Inclusion Policy.....	9
Tool 2: Sample Performance Measures.....	10
Tool 3: Sample Inclusivity Assessment & Action Plan.....	11



Introduction

This toolkit has been designed to support Volunteer Involving Organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to make their volunteer programmes more inclusive.

The toolkit was designed based on data collected from individual interviews and a focus group carried out with Volunteering Organisations North and South. This was part of an all-island research project called “Inclusion in Volunteer Programmes” carried out by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Now in collaboration with Dublin City University and Queens University Belfast.

The project was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, through the Shared Island Civic Society Fund, which is an initiative designed to promote practical North South cooperation. The fund aims to encourage and support civic society and community organisations to further strengthen existing partnerships and/or to develop new cross-border links, to build connectivity, and to work together to ensure an inclusive and diverse island.

Volunteering and all its associated health and social benefits is something that should be accessible and available for EVERYONE!

This toolkit is supported by an interactive workshop and a full research report. Details of both can be found on the Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Now websites.

How to use the toolkit

The toolkit provides actionable steps, tips, and practical tools to support you in fostering diversity and inclusion within your volunteer programme.

1. Familiarise yourself with the toolkit
 - Review the contents
 - Understand the resources guidelines, and tools
2. Identify how you plan to use the toolkit
 - Understand your specific needs and challenges
3. Evaluate current practices
 - Identify good practice and areas for improvement
 - Consider one or a combination of the following: surveys, interviews, a review of existing policies and procedures
4. Set SMART objectives based on your evaluation
 - **S**pecific
 - **M**easurable
 - **A**chievable
 - **R**ealistic
 - **T**imebound
5. Select specific tools and resources based on your evaluation
 - New/updated policies and procedures
 - Education and training
 - Community collaborations and partnerships

Definitions

When we talk about diversity and inclusion, what do we really mean? The Collins dictionary describes them, as follows:

- **Diversity** refers to the fact that society contains many different variables/elements, e.g. race, class, gender, disability and more.
- **Inclusion** is the practice of making sure everyone in society has access to resources and opportunities.



Question:

How do you currently promote a culture of inclusion in your organisation?

Understanding Volunteer Motivation

a) Altruism (making a meaningful change):

- Emphasise the value of volunteer contributions to the community.
- Highlight how volunteering aligns with personal values and beliefs.



Question:

How do you currently highlight and showcase the value of volunteer contributions to the community?

Top Tip:

Tell stories – Gather information from individuals and groups about their volunteering experience. Where possible, you could organise an event that highlights the contributions of volunteers to the community

b) Social Factors (making friends and connections):

- Foster a sense of belonging by facilitating social interactions among volunteers.
- Encourage volunteers to build connections with like-minded individuals.



Question:

Does your organisation provide opportunities for volunteers make friends and connections?

Top Tip:

Consider a communal volunteer area for tea/coffee and snacks. Where possible, you could organise a volunteer get-together at little expense, e.g. a group walk/picnic.

c) Personal Development (enhancing and utilising skills):

- Showcase how volunteering can enhance volunteers' CVs, provide valuable references, and contribute to personal growth.



Question:

How does your organisation facilitate volunteers to enhance and utilise their skills?

Top Tip:

Create roles that cater to different skills and interests

Implementing Inclusive Practices

It's crucial that inclusion is pitched at all levels of your organisation, from leadership through to the volunteers.

By taking steps to become more inclusive at all levels, the organisation will become more accessible to potential volunteers.



Questions:

Is your leadership diverse?
Does inclusion feel like it is everybody's responsibility?

The Culture:

Cultivate an inclusive organisational culture that values diversity and promotes diverse perspectives.

- Develop and implement an inclusion policy to guide organisational practices.
- Establish support systems and communication strategies to address the needs of all volunteers.

The Volunteer Programme:

- Provide flexible roles and tasks to accommodate diverse skillsets and abilities.
- Ensure that volunteer roles are accessible to individuals with varying levels of English proficiency.



Does your programme cater for families to volunteer?
Are there Turn up and Try opportunities?
Are there options for people who are working fulltime?
Could people volunteer from home?

Recruitment:

- Actively reach out to underrepresented groups through diverse recruitment strategies.
- Foster partnerships with local organisations and communities to attract a diverse pool of volunteers. By partnering, you can share resources and open your doors to people you couldn't otherwise reach.

Top Tip:

Try using a range of methods to promote opportunities, e.g. social media, local library noticeboards, open days, and encourage people to apply in whatever way suits them. They can 'Pop in for a chat', email, phone, etc.

Providing Support for Volunteers

Providing support is one of the main ways to ensure volunteers stay, and to build a reputation as an organisation who truly values and recognises its volunteers.

While volunteering:

- Offer comprehensive training programs to equip volunteers with the necessary skills and knowledge.
- Provide ongoing support and supervision to ensure volunteers feel valued and supported.
- Develop robust induction processes to ensure volunteers are well-informed from the start.

Outside of volunteering:

- Extend support beyond volunteer duties by assisting volunteers with existing tasks or challenges.
- Foster a sense of community by facilitating opportunities for volunteers to connect outside of volunteer activities.

Recognising volunteer contributions

- Organise formal recognition events, internal awards ceremonies, and social media posts to celebrate volunteer achievements.
- Express gratitude and appreciation for volunteers at all levels of the organisation.

Top Tip:

Profile an existing volunteer on social media and on the volunteer noticeboard. Ask them to explain why they are involved, the associated benefits and whether they had any barriers to getting started.

- Pursue external accreditation and awards to showcase the organisations commitment to volunteerism and inclusion.
- Prioritise communication and transparency to maintain strong relationships with volunteers.
- Offer internal progression opportunities to encourage long-term commitment and engagement.

Monitoring Volunteer Engagement

- Conduct regular volunteer surveys and reviews to gather feedback and assess volunteer satisfaction.
- Carry out Diversity Monitoring and have a DEI policy in place.
- Foster a culture of inclusivity by promoting awareness of group dynamics and leadership opportunities.

Top Tip:

If a volunteer does leave, conduct an 'exit interview' and ask them how they found the organisation, induction processes and general volunteering programme. Use this feedback to improve!

Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Inclusion

As an organisation, consider what barriers there are for potential volunteers. As a group, brainstorm, prioritise and plan to minimise or completely remove existing barriers.

- Implement targeted recruitment strategies to attract volunteer demographics who are under-represented.
- Ensure that volunteer roles are attractive and accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Top Tip:

Offer flexibility in everything you do. Can you translate recruitment material into 'easy read' versions or into different languages?
There may also be ways to simplify your expenses policy to ensure immediate reimbursement.
Ensure volunteers can sit down and have a rest whilst volunteering.

- Address scheduling challenges to accommodate volunteer availability and preferences.
- Allocate resources to support diversity and inclusion initiatives within the organisation, e.g. use free resources such as Google Translate to put up an 'Everybody Welcome' sign in multiple different languages.
- Streamline recruitment processes to remove barriers and improve accessibility for all potential volunteers.

Useful Tools

Tool 1: Sample Inclusion Policy

How can we use this tool?

- To help people to understand the range of activities used to improve inclusion in the organisation.
- To provide a checklist to map against current inclusion activities and identify gaps.

Inclusion Policy

At [INSERT NAME], we are committed to fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported. We believe that diversity is our strength, and we welcome individuals from all backgrounds, abilities, ages, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and socioeconomic statuses to participate in our volunteering programmes. Our commitment to inclusion is integral to achieving our mission and creating positive change in our community. To meeting our commitment, we will:

- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of everyone. Discrimination, harassment, and bullying of any kind will not be tolerated
- Provide equal opportunities for all volunteers regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics. Selection, recruitment, training, and advancement are based solely on merit, skills, and qualifications.
- Strive to ensure that our programmes, facilities, and communications are accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations will be provided upon request to ensure meaningful participation.
- Actively seek to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds and communities, recognising that diversity enriches our organisation and enhances our ability to address complex challenges.
- Provide training and educational opportunities to our volunteers on topics related to diversity, inclusion, unconscious bias, and cultural competence.
- Encourage feedback from volunteers regarding their experiences with inclusion within our organisation. Address any concerns or issues that may arise, to improve our practices.
- Collaborate with community organisations and stakeholders to promote diversity and inclusion initiatives and to better understand the needs and perspectives of all members of our community.

Implementation

- All volunteers, staff members, and Board members are expected to adhere to this inclusion policy and to uphold the principles outlined
- The inclusion policy will be communicated to all volunteers during the induction process and will be accessible on our website and in our volunteer handbook.
- Regular reviews of the policy will be conducted to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in promoting inclusion within our organisation.

Tool 2: Sample Performance Measures

How can we use this tool?

- To measure the impact of diversity and inclusion activities on the organisation
- To support efficient for effective management and continual improvement

Performance Measures

1. Volunteer Demographics:

- Percentage of volunteers from underrepresented ethnic or racial groups.
- Percentage of volunteers from different age groups
- Gender distribution among volunteers (male, female, non-binary)
- Percentage of volunteers with disabilities.

2. Retention and Engagement:

- Volunteer retention rate among underrepresented groups compared to overall retention rate.
- Engagement levels among diverse volunteers (e.g., participation in training, events, feedback provision).

3. Leadership and Decision-Making Representation:

- Percentage of diverse volunteers in leadership positions (e.g., board members).
- Representation of underrepresented groups in decision-making processes.

4. Training and Development:

- Participation rate in diversity and inclusion training programmes among volunteers.
- Feedback on the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion training sessions.

5. Community Impact:

- Evaluation of the organisation's impact on diverse communities served.
- Feedback from diverse community members on the organisation's inclusivity and relevance to their needs.

6. Partnerships and Collaborations:

- Number of partnerships or collaborations with diverse organisations or community groups.
- Diversity of partners and collaborators (e.g., businesses owned by minorities, LGBTQ+ organisations).

7. Incident Reporting and Response:

- Number of reported incidents related to discrimination, harassment, or bias.
- Response time and effectiveness in addressing reported incidents.

8. Organisational Culture:

- Results from culture assessment focusing on inclusivity and belonging

Tool 3: Sample Inclusivity Assessment & Action Plan

How can we use this tool?

- To measure the impact of diversity and inclusion activities on the organisation
- To support efficient for effective management and continual improvement

Inclusivity Assessment & Action Plan			
Organisational Policies and Practices:	Y	N	Action
1. Do existing policies and procedures related to volunteer recruitment and retention reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion?			
2. Does the language and imagery used in organisational communications, both internal and external reflect inclusivity?			
3. Are the physical spaces and digital platforms accessible for volunteers with diverse abilities?			
4. Does the mission statement and values reflect the organisations commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?			
Volunteer Experience			
5. Does the organisation gather feedback on volunteers' experiences with inclusivity?			
6. Does the organisation analyse demographic data of volunteers to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds?			
7. Does the organisation assess the level of cultural competency among staff and volunteers in interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?			
8. Does the organisation have support systems for volunteers facing discrimination, bullying or harassment? If yes how effective are they?			
Other areas to consider evaluating, include Leadership & Decision-making, Education & Training and Community Engagement & Partnerships			

Conclusion

By implementing the strategies outlined in this toolkit, organisations can create inclusive volunteer programmes that attract, retain, and engage volunteers from diverse backgrounds.

Flexibility should remain at the heart of any volunteer programme. In fact, flexibility is the main factor which would encourage non-volunteers to begin volunteering (NCVO, Time Well Spent, 2023).

It is worth considering implementing a spectrum of roles, allowing for a range of different levels of commitment, at different times of the day/week, as well as taster sessions and opportunities suitable for groups/families. Collectively, this will offer a 'step' into volunteering, ensuring people are not put off or completely ruled out due to personal circumstances.

If you lack diversity, this can lead to huge gaps in knowledge and experience, which is a weakness for any organisation trying to make a meaningful difference within their community. Embracing diversity and inclusion not only enriches volunteer experiences, but also strengthens organisational capacity.