

Volunteering in County Laois



The primary aim of this publication is to support and encourage volunteering within communities. Many people already contribute in everyday ways – such as coaching, supporting older people, or helping with local initiatives – often without recognising themselves as volunteers.

It also explains key aspects of volunteering, including recruitment, retention, and recognition. Volunteers are essential to organisations, giving their time, energy, and commitment; without them, many clubs and groups would struggle to operate.

A further aim is to highlight the role of Laois Sports Partnership and Laois Volunteer Centre. Laois Sports Partnership promotes participation in sport and physical activity, while Laois Volunteer Centre supports volunteering through recruitment, training, and Garda vetting.

The Local Sports Partnership acknowledges and thanks Sport Ireland, Volunteer Ireland, Laois Volunteer Centre, and all partners who contributed to this publication.

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GLOSSARY

Volunteer

An individual who works for an organisation or club without payment. Volunteers may receive expenses (e.g. travel or lunch).

Recruitment

The process of attracting and enlisting volunteers. Laois Volunteer Centre supports organisations by carrying out needs analysis, advertising roles, referring applicants, and providing training and guidance on induction, management, and retention.

Retention

Keeping volunteers involved over time through strategies such as training opportunities, recognition, and rotating roles to maintain interest.

Reward

Recognising and thanking volunteers for their time and commitment. This can include certificates, awards, or simple gestures. Showing genuine appreciation is essential for motivation, helping volunteers feel valued, and improving retention. For further support, contact Laois Volunteer Centre or Laois Sports Partnership.

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WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is the voluntary commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society, the community, the environment, or individuals outside one's immediate family. It is carried out freely, by choice, and without expectation of payment.

A volunteer is a community member who contributes to its development and is valued for their unique input. Volunteers do not seek financial reward but gain personal growth and help enhance their communities.

Volunteering includes a wide range of activities, such as visiting elderly neighbours, supporting youth or sports clubs, assisting charities with administration or finances, and helping individuals improve skills like literacy. Opportunities are broad and varied.

Anyone can volunteer regardless of age, gender, ability, or employment status. People may volunteer occasionally or regularly, and roles can be in person or remote (e.g. social media support). Volunteering can also include seasonal or full-time commitments, such as helping with community events or charity initiatives.

IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers are essential for the operation and management of clubs and organisations, providing crucial time, dedication, and energy. Their contributions are invaluable, and without them, many clubs could struggle to survive. Volunteers can take on various roles, such as administrators, coaches, and officials, often working alongside paid staff. Effective management and utilisation of volunteers are key to the success of these organisations.

RECRUIT, TRAIN & RETAIN

The following questions are essential to consider in the context of recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers:

- What experiences have you had as a volunteer, and how have you contributed? What motivated your involvement?
- In what ways could your volunteer experience be enhanced?
- Are you equipped to effectively recruit, train, and retain volunteers?
- What measures do you take to ensure that your volunteers find satisfaction in their roles?
- Is your organization or club open to receiving feedback from volunteers?

REASONS WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER



Individuals volunteer for many reasons and come from varied backgrounds, including members, parents, friends, students, and those involved in volunteer organisations. Looking at your own club or organisation, consider who is already giving their time.

Common motivations include:

- Learning new skills
- Helping others,
- Supporting family and friends
- Sharing knowledge
- Meeting people
- Building confidence
- Contributing to the community
- Socialising, and having fun.

Understanding these motivations is key to recognising and rewarding volunteers effectively. Simple gestures of appreciation can have a strong impact — for example, a “Volunteer of the Year” award can help improve retention. Laois Volunteer Centre can support groups in organising recognition initiatives.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

How to Find Your Volunteers

Be clear about what you need volunteers to do. Having an organised plan (when, where, and why help is needed) makes it easier to attract volunteers. Appointing a Volunteer Co-ordinator can also help. This person supports new volunteers, assists with training, and ensures they feel welcome and valued. Strong communication and people skills are important, and clubs may consider mentoring training for those in support roles. When recruiting volunteers, consider the following:

- Identify where volunteers are needed
- Agree how much time each volunteer can give
- Write short, clear role descriptions
- Plan how you will recruit volunteers
- Contact Laois Volunteer Centre for help & advice
- Include volunteers in meetings and updates
- Provide support and supervision
- Offer training where needed
- Keep volunteers motivated and recognised
- Review and update roles regularly
- Check if Garda Vetting is required (not all roles need it)



For support with recruiting volunteers, contact Laois Volunteer Centre at info@volunteerlaois.ie. They can provide advice on recruitment, Garda vetting and volunteer management.

Important Questions to Ask When Recruiting Volunteers

- ▶ How many volunteers are needed, and for how long?
- ▶ When are they needed and what will they do?
- ▶ What responsibilities will they have?
- ▶ Who will support (e.g. mentoring/buddy system) and manage them?
- ▶ What training and support will be provided?
- ▶ What skills are needed for the role?
- ▶ Where is the best place to find volunteers?
- ▶ Are there local partners who could help?

Role Descriptions

Volunteers have various roles, and clear descriptions help avoid confusion and clarify expectations. A role description should include:

- ▶ Role title
- ▶ Short description of the role
- ▶ Location
- ▶ Who the volunteer reports to
- ▶ Days and times required
- ▶ Length of commitment
- ▶ Key tasks or duties
- ▶ Skills or qualities needed
- ▶ Training provided

Regularly review role descriptions to keep them clear and relevant, involving volunteers in updates to boost engagement. Avoid pressuring individuals into roles—ensure they feel comfortable, supported, and welcome. Expanding recruitment approaches can also help attract volunteers with a wider range of skills, experiences, and ideas.

Where to Find Volunteers

Volunteers can be found in many places. It is helpful to target certain groups, but also promote your roles widely with clear and simple information. Some useful ways to find volunteers include:

- ▶ Contact Volunteer applicants as soon as possible
- ▶ Promote volunteering on your website and social media
- ▶ Create simple information sheets or flyers
- ▶ Use current and past member lists to identify skills
- ▶ Encourage existing volunteers to invite others
- ▶ Hold social events to welcome new people
- ▶ Use local media (newspapers, radio, community boards)
- ▶ Promote your club in schools and colleges
- ▶ Ask supporters, parents and community members
- ▶ Contact Laois Volunteer Centre for assistance with volunteer recruitment, advertising of volunteering roles etc.

The Recruitment Process

A clear recruitment process helps you find the right volunteers. It does not need to be formal, but it should be organised.

- ▶ Be clear about the role and skills needed
- ▶ Invite potential volunteers for an informal chat
- ▶ Include the Volunteer Co-ordinator where possible
- ▶ Focus on getting to know the person and their interests
- ▶ Make the volunteer feel welcome and comfortable
- ▶ Reassure them that it is not a formal interview

A friendly and simple approach helps volunteers feel at ease and more likely to get involved.



Informal Discussions with Volunteers

An informal discussion allows you to get to know the volunteer and assess if they are a good fit. It forms part of the screening process to ensure suitability for your club or organisation. It can help you find out:

- ▶ What skills and experience they have
- ▶ Why they want to get involved
- ▶ Their experience in similar roles (e.g. youth work, sport)
- ▶ When they are available to volunteer
- ▶ If Garda Vetting is needed or completed (Volunteer Centres can assist)
- ▶ If they have completed relevant training (e.g. safeguarding)

It is also important to:

- ▶ Make the volunteer feel welcome and comfortable
- ▶ Clearly explain the benefits and opportunities of volunteering
- ▶ Help them feel part of the team (e.g. club gear such as t-shirts)
- ▶ Ask for references where possible (even verbal)
- ▶ Keep a simple record of the discussion (date, time, name)

A positive and welcoming approach will inspire volunteers to participate and sustain their active engagement.

RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

There are many reasons why volunteers may leave or become less involved:

1. The role was not what they expected
2. They did not feel welcome or valued
3. They felt excluded by long-term members
4. They did not see the impact of their work
5. They were unsure how to step away
6. Their ideas were not listened to
7. The atmosphere felt unfriendly or tense
8. The environment made it hard to do their role
9. No one smiled, spoke to, or acknowledged them
10. They were not given enough meaningful tasks

How to prevent this and keep your volunteers involved?

Attracting volunteers can be challenging, so retaining them is essential. While engaging activities help, a clear plan is needed to support and keep volunteers involved.

An induction process is important for all volunteers, regardless of organisation size, as it helps them understand their role and feel part of the team. Regular updates also ensure volunteers stay informed and engaged.

Informal discussions or interviews are part of the screening process. They help make sure the volunteer is the right fit and understands what they are signing up for.

An induction pack can also help volunteers feel valued and supported. Laois Volunteer Centre can assist your club or organisation in developing this. To help retain volunteers, make sure they feel:

- Needed
- Useful
- Part of the team
- Welcome

Laois Volunteer Centre also provides a Garda Vetting service and support with volunteer retention, management & recognition.

MOTIVATION

Motivating volunteers is different from managing staff because:

- Volunteers are not paid
- They do not have contracts
- They are not dependent on the role for income
- They may have other priorities

Because of this, it is important to create a positive and welcoming environment where volunteers feel appreciated.

There are many reasons why people volunteer:

- ▶ Family involvement
- ▶ Want to meet new people
- ▶ Service to others
- ▶ Prestige (i.e. dealing with media etc)
- ▶ Gain experience for CVs or training programs.
- ▶ Want to put something back into the club / organisation (past performers / beneficiaries, etc)

Motivation is key to retaining volunteers and effective people management. It is not just about encouraging people, but understanding what matters to each individual and helping them achieve their goals through volunteering. Matching the volunteer's needs with those of the club or organisation is essential.

Motivation involves providing the right support to meet volunteers' needs and keep them engaged. Paying attention to the tasks volunteers carry out is important in maintaining their interest and commitment.



DELEGATING TASKS

This is a very difficult process and it needs great consideration. There are many skills associated with it such as being patient, having courage and trust. It is of the utmost importance in any organiser's job. When, to whom and what you choose to delegate is entirely at your own discretion.

For delegation to be successful it is important to match responsibility with authority. For example giving responsibility without authority is not reasonable. Therefore when you delegate it is important to give responsibility with the appropriate authority.

In order to successfully delegate a task you need to:

- ▶ Identify the task that needs to be delegated
- ▶ Be clear about the key elements
- ▶ Find the volunteer who has the right skills for the task
- ▶ Decide upon the appropriate training that is needed by an individual to perform the task
- ▶ Have a monitoring system in place to check if the delegation has gone well.



COMMUNICATION

Good communication is key to keeping volunteers involved in a club or organisation. It helps volunteers stay informed about what is happening and supports everyone in working towards shared goals.

Clear communication also helps volunteers take on responsibility and share ideas. Where possible, volunteers should be encouraged to help put ideas into action.

Communication should be a two-way process. Clubs and organisations need to give feedback clearly and respectfully, but also be open to receiving feedback from volunteers and acting on it when appropriate.



TRAINING

Training is important for all clubs and organisations. It helps volunteers feel confident in their role and supports volunteer retention. Training also keeps volunteers interested by helping them learn new skills.

Volunteers should be encouraged and supported to take part in training opportunities. Where specific needs exist, clubs or organisations can arrange tailored training. Working with other clubs and organisations can be useful. Sharing experiences can bring new ideas and different perspectives.

Support is also available from external organisations, including:

- Laois Volunteer Centre, which provides training on volunteer management and retention
- National Governing Bodies
- Laois Sports Partnerships

National Governing Bodies can also help source qualified tutors to deliver training.



REWARDING VOLUNTEERS

Job satisfaction is key to keeping volunteers involved. It is often easy to achieve but can be overlooked.

To support job satisfaction:

- Find out what motivates each volunteer
- Use clear role descriptions so expectations are understood
- Match volunteers to roles that suit their interests and skills
- Offer training to help them feel confident
- Encourage volunteers to share ideas and, where possible, implement them
- Give regular feedback and recognise effort (e.g. thank-you events, awards, celebrations)
- Set clear targets so volunteers understand their role and contribution

Helping Volunteers Enjoy Their Role, you can help volunteers enjoy their work by:

- Helping them feel a sense of achievement
- Showing how their work supports the goals of the club or organisation
- Making roles meaningful and appropriately challenging
- Matching responsibility to the volunteer's ability
- Giving praise and recognition for work done
- Supporting volunteers to develop new skills

RECOGNITION

Some ideas that will be useful in thanking and recognising your volunteers are:

- ▶ Evaluate volunteer involvement on an ongoing basis
- ▶ Create a climate in which volunteers can feel motivated
- ▶ Say thank you often, and mean it
- ▶ Match the volunteer's desires with the organisation's needs
- ▶ Send birthday/thank you cards
- ▶ Provide a clear role description for every volunteer
- ▶ Make sure new volunteers are welcomed warmly
- ▶ Highlight the impact that the volunteer contribution is having on the organisation
- ▶ Show an interest in volunteers' personal interests and their outside life
- ▶ Tell volunteers they have done a good job
- ▶ Always have work for your volunteers to do and never waste their time

- ▶ Give volunteers a real voice within the organisation
- ▶ Set up a volunteer support group
- ▶ Provide meaningful and enjoyable work
- ▶ Send 'thank you' notes and letters when appropriate
- ▶ Smile when you see them!
- ▶ Say something positive about their personal qualities
- ▶ Involve volunteers in decision-making processes
- ▶ Give a certificate to commemorate anniversaries of involvement
- ▶ Develop a volunteer policy, Laois Volunteer Centre can assist
- ▶ Allow volunteers the opportunity to debrief, especially if they work in stressful situations
- ▶ Let volunteers put their names to something they have helped to produce or to make happen
- ▶ Differentiate clearly between the roles of paid staff, trainees and volunteers
- ▶ Have a volunteer comments box and consider any suggestions carefully
- ▶ Supervise volunteers' work
- ▶ Remember their names. Seems a bit obvious but forgetting a volunteers name can make them feel very much unappreciated.

ACTION PLAN

Develop an action plan to help identify, recruit and retain volunteers in your club or organisation.

- ▶ Decide why volunteers are needed
- ▶ Appoint a Volunteer Co-ordinator
- ▶ Establish links with Laois Volunteer Centre and other local partners that deliver volunteer training
- ▶ Laois Volunteer Centre can help with volunteer recruiting, promotion of volunteer roles etc.
- ▶ Write clear role descriptions for each volunteer role
- ▶ Identify the skills needed for each role
- ▶ Decide how many volunteers are required
- ▶ Choose the best ways to recruit volunteers
- ▶ Contact Laois Volunteer Centre with role details (they can also advertise roles for you)
- ▶ Recruit volunteers
- ▶ Meet potential volunteers and select those best suited to the role
- ▶ Show volunteers how to carry out their role and provide support
- ▶ Involve volunteers wherever possible
- ▶ Review and evaluate how things are working
- ▶ Provide training opportunities
- ▶ Give regular feedback, recognise efforts and make changes when needed
- ▶ Always remember to say thank you

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FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about volunteering, you may wish to organise a seminar for volunteers, coaches, leaders, teachers and others interested in volunteering with clubs or organisations. These sessions can provide general information, practical tips and guidance on volunteering. You can also visit the following websites or contact the organisations below:

Laois Volunteer Centre



www.volunteerlaois.ie



info@volunteerlaois.ie



087 2499659

Laois Sports Partnership



www.laoissports.ie



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