



Handbook



# Overcoming challenges in volunteerism



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## Introduction:

This handbook distills insights gathered during a participatory methods-based workshop titled "Volunteering during Crisis" held on June 16, 2023 in Bulgaria within the framework of the ERAS II - Learning from the Covid-19 Crisis project. The workshop aimed to identify key challenges in volunteer services and explore strategies to raise awareness. Over 30 young participants from Bulgaria, along with project partners from Slovenia, Portugal, Latvia and Greece, collaborated to address problems commonly faced in volunteerism and devised innovative solutions.

This handbook serves as a practical guide for addressing challenges in volunteerism and offers concrete suggestions for promoting engagement. By adopting the recommended strategies, organizations can enhance their outreach, inspire participation, and create a more inclusive and vibrant volunteer community.



## Identifying challenges:



Participants were divided into small groups, each tasked with pinpointing a significant challenge in volunteering. The ensuing discussions delved into the root causes, opportunities for change, anticipated hurdles, necessary actions for resolution, required support, and culminated in the formulation of specific solutions.

The issues identified included:

Lack of general information about volunteer opportunities.

Ineffective promotion strategies.

Motivational deficits.

Limited opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate as volunteers.



## Suggested solutions:

A discussion revealed that a common pitfall in attracting new volunteers is the ineffective and insufficient dissemination of information and promotional strategies. This is often attributed to limited funds or insufficient motivation among potential volunteers and organizations. However, participants identified opportunities for change through novel approaches, such as raising awareness across diverse age groups, providing comprehensive information, creating inclusive environments for volunteers with disabilities, and employing more effective promotional tools.

To address the challenge of information dissemination, participants recommended that organizations organize inclusive events to promote their activities and values. Given the significant role of the internet in people's lives, a focus on social media channels emerged as a key solution. Suggestions included hiring a social media expert to craft a strategy for engaging content and community interaction. Additionally, organizations were encouraged to conduct research on successful practices in the field of volunteering for effective implementation or adaptation of proven approaches.



## Strategic approach to involve more volunteers

A strategic approach to involve more volunteers requires a thoughtful and well-planned effort to attract, engage, and retain individuals interested in contributing their time and skills. By integrating these elements into your volunteer management strategy, you can attract a diverse pool of volunteers, enhance their experience, and create a sustainable and impactful volunteer program.

### Key elements of a strategic approach to involve more volunteers

#### **Define clear goals and objectives:**

Clearly articulate the goals and objectives of your organization's volunteer program. Understand what specific tasks and projects require volunteer support and how these contribute to the overall mission.

#### **Develop a compelling mission and message:**

Craft a compelling mission statement that communicates the impact of volunteer contributions. Develop a clear and inspiring message that highlights the difference volunteers can make in your organization and the community.

#### **Create diverse volunteer opportunities:**

Tailor volunteer opportunities to accommodate different skills, interests, and time commitments. Provide a variety of roles, both short-term and long-term, to attract a diverse group of volunteers.

#### **Leverage technology and social media:**

Utilize online platforms and social media to promote volunteer opportunities. Create a user-friendly website with detailed information about your organization, its mission, and how individuals can get involved. Actively engage with potential volunteers through social media channels.

#### **Establish partnerships:**

Collaborate with local businesses, schools, and community organizations to expand your reach. Partnering with other entities can increase awareness of volunteer opportunities and attract individuals with varying backgrounds and skills.

## Strategic approach to involve more volunteers

### **Offer training and skill development:**

Provide training sessions or workshops to enhance the skills of volunteers. This not only benefits your organization but also offers volunteers a chance to develop personally and professionally.

### **Recognize and appreciate volunteers:**

Implement a recognition program to acknowledge the contributions of volunteers. This could include awards, certificates, or public acknowledgment. Feeling appreciated increases the likelihood of volunteers continuing their involvement.

### **Create a positive volunteer experience:**

Ensure that the volunteer experience is positive, fulfilling, and aligns with the expectations of the volunteers. Regularly seek feedback and make adjustments to improve the volunteer experience.

### **Build a volunteer community:**

Foster a sense of community among volunteers by organizing social events, networking opportunities, or regular meet-ups. Creating a supportive environment can enhance the overall satisfaction and retention of volunteers.

### **Evaluate and adjust:**

Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your volunteer program. Collect feedback from volunteers and use this information to make adjustments and improvements. Continuously assess the impact of volunteer efforts on your organization's goals.

### **Promote diversity and inclusion:**

Ensure that volunteer opportunities are accessible and inclusive. Embrace diversity and create an environment where individuals from different backgrounds feel welcome and valued.

## Accessible information about volunteer opportunities

Dealing with the lack of general information about volunteering opportunities requires a proactive and strategic approach to disseminate information effectively.

### Strategies to address this issue

#### **Create a comprehensive online presence:**

Develop a user-friendly and informative website that highlights your organization's mission, values, and available volunteer opportunities. Ensure that the website is easily navigable and provides clear details about how individuals can get involved.

#### **Utilize social media platforms:**

Leverage social media platforms to reach a broader audience. Regularly share updates about volunteer opportunities, success stories, and the impact of volunteering through engaging content. Encourage followers to share posts to increase visibility.

#### **Collaborate with community partners:**

Partner with local community centers, schools, businesses, and other organizations to expand your reach. Share information about volunteer opportunities through their networks and platforms.

#### **Participate in community events:**

Attend local events, fairs, and community gatherings to promote your organization and volunteer opportunities. Set up booths, distribute informational materials, and engage with potential volunteers face-to-face.

#### **Establish partnerships with media outlets:**

Collaborate with local newspapers, radio stations, and television channels to feature stories about your organization and volunteer initiatives. Utilize press releases to share information about upcoming events and opportunities.



## Accessible information about volunteer opportunities

### **Develop engaging content:**

Create compelling and visually appealing content that showcases the impact of volunteering. Utilize multimedia formats such as videos, infographics, and testimonials to capture attention and convey the value of volunteering.

### **Implement an email newsletter:**

Start an email newsletter to regularly update subscribers about volunteer opportunities, organizational updates, and success stories. Encourage individuals to subscribe through your website and share the newsletter with their networks.

### **Host information sessions:**

Organize regular information sessions or webinars to provide in-depth details about your organization, its mission, and the various ways individuals can contribute through volunteering. Answer questions and address concerns during these sessions.

### **Engage with local schools and universities:**

Reach out to educational institutions to connect with students who may be seeking volunteer opportunities for community service or experiential learning. Attend career fairs and collaborate with student organizations.

### **Utilize volunteer recruitment platforms:**

Register your organization on online volunteer recruitment platforms. These platforms connect volunteers with opportunities based on their interests and skills, providing a centralized location for individuals seeking volunteer work.

### **Encourage word-of-mouth marketing:**

Request current volunteers, staff members, and supporters to spread the word about volunteering opportunities. Personal recommendations and testimonials can be powerful in attracting new volunteers.

### **Offer regular informational sessions:**

Organize regular sessions specifically focused on providing information about volunteering opportunities. These sessions can be conducted both online and in-person, offering a chance for potential volunteers to learn more and ask questions.

## Motivating volunteers

Motivating volunteers is essential for maintaining enthusiasm, commitment, and a positive atmosphere within your organization. By implementing these strategies, you can create a motivating and rewarding environment for your volunteers, ensuring their continued dedication to your organization's mission.

### Effective strategies to motivate volunteers

#### **Recognition and appreciation:**

Acknowledge and appreciate volunteers for their contributions regularly. Express gratitude through thank-you notes, certificates, or public recognition during events. Feeling valued enhances motivation.

#### **Highlight impact:**

Clearly communicate the impact of volunteers' efforts. Share success stories, testimonials, and tangible outcomes of their work. Understanding the positive effects of their contributions can be a powerful motivator.

#### **Set clear expectations:**

Establish clear expectations from the beginning. Clearly outline roles, responsibilities, and goals for each volunteer. Knowing their purpose and understanding the impact of their work helps maintain motivation.

#### **Provide training and skill development:**

Offer opportunities for training and skill development. Empower volunteers by enhancing their skills, making them feel more capable and confident in their roles.

#### **Create a positive environment:**

Foster a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Ensure that volunteers feel welcome, supported, and part of a collaborative team. A positive environment encourages motivation and engagement.

## Motivating volunteers

### **Flexible scheduling:**

Recognize and accommodate volunteers' time constraints by offering flexible scheduling options. This flexibility allows individuals to balance their volunteer commitments with other responsibilities.

### **Feedback and evaluation:**

Regularly provide constructive feedback and evaluations of volunteers' performance. Positive feedback reinforces good practices, while constructive criticism helps individuals grow and improve.

### **Social events and networking:**

Organize social events, gatherings, or networking opportunities for volunteers. Building a sense of community and camaraderie can enhance motivation and make the volunteer experience more enjoyable.

### **Personalize recognition:**

Recognize volunteers on a personal level. Understand their preferences and tailor recognition efforts accordingly. Personalized recognition shows that you value volunteers as individuals.

### **Offer leadership opportunities:**

Provide opportunities for volunteers to take on leadership roles or responsibilities. This can give them a sense of ownership, purpose, and a chance to further develop their skills.

### **Celebrate milestones:**

Celebrate milestones, anniversaries, or achievements of volunteers. Whether it's their one-year anniversary or completing a significant project, acknowledging milestones reinforces their commitment.

### **Provide volunteer perks:**

Consider offering perks such as discounts, freebies, or exclusive access to events as a way of expressing gratitude. These perks can be a tangible representation of your appreciation for their dedication.



## Motivating volunteers

### **Encourage team building:**

Facilitate team-building activities to strengthen the bonds among volunteers. A sense of teamwork and camaraderie can significantly boost motivation.

### **Show impact firsthand:**

Arrange opportunities for volunteers to witness the direct impact of their efforts. Visiting project sites or meeting beneficiaries provides a firsthand understanding of the difference they are making.

### **Maintain open communication:**

Foster open communication channels. Encourage volunteers to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Feeling heard and understood contributes to a positive volunteer experience.

## Volunteer activities to include people with disabilities

Including people with disabilities in volunteer activities requires thoughtful planning and a commitment to creating an inclusive environment.

### Steps to ensure that your volunteer program is accessible to individuals with disabilities

#### **Accessibility assessment:**

Conduct an assessment of your organization's facilities, events, and materials to identify potential barriers to accessibility. Consider physical accessibility, communication needs, and any other accommodations that might be required.

#### **Open communication:**

Foster open communication by asking volunteers about their specific needs and preferences. Create a welcoming atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable discussing their requirements. Encourage volunteers to communicate any accommodations they may need.

#### **Flexible volunteer opportunities:**

Provide a range of volunteer opportunities with varying levels of physical demand and time commitments. This ensures that individuals with different abilities can find roles that align with their skills and interests.

#### **Adaptable training and orientation:**

Develop training materials and orientations that are adaptable to different learning styles and accessible formats. Provide information in various formats, such as written, verbal, and visual, to accommodate different communication needs.

#### **Accessible communication:**

Ensure that all communication materials, including newsletters, emails, and event announcements, are accessible. This may involve using plain language, providing materials in multiple formats, and using accessible technology.

## Volunteer activities to include people with disabilities

### **Physical accessibility:**

Make physical spaces accessible by removing barriers such as steps, installing ramps, and ensuring that doorways are wide enough for wheelchair access. Consider the layout of tables and seating arrangements to accommodate individuals with mobility aids.

### **Transportation considerations:**

If possible, provide information about accessible transportation options for volunteers with disabilities. Consider the proximity of public transportation and the availability of accessible parking spaces.

### **Assistive technology:**

Be prepared to accommodate the use of assistive technology by volunteers. Ensure that your website, communication materials, and online platforms are compatible with screen readers and other assistive devices.

### **Support and accommodations:**

Be ready to provide reasonable accommodations to support volunteers with disabilities. This might include flexible scheduling, modified duties, or additional assistance. Collaborate with volunteers to determine the most effective accommodations.

### **Promote inclusivity:**

Develop and promote a culture of inclusivity within your organization. Emphasize the value of diversity and inclusion, and educate staff and volunteers about the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels welcome.

### **Training for staff and volunteers:**

Provide training for staff and volunteers on disability awareness and inclusion. This training can help foster understanding, dispel myths, and create a more inclusive atmosphere.

### **Feedback and continuous improvement:**

Regularly seek feedback from volunteers with disabilities on their experiences. Use this feedback to make continuous improvements to your volunteer program's accessibility and inclusivity.



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