



MAYO SPORTS PARTNERSHIP  
COMHPHÁIRTÍOCHT SPÓIRT MHAIGH EO

## Mayo Sports Partnership

C/O Mayo County Council  
Castlebar,  
Co. Mayo

**t:** 094 90 29911

**f:** 094 90 29912

**e:** [mSP@mayococo.ie](mailto:mSP@mayococo.ie)

how can I  
recruit  
retain  
recognise

volunteers in sport



## Useful related contacts/websites

To contact your NGB or LSP click on the following link: [www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie) , then click on the 'Developing Irish Sport' link at top of home page, details of NGBs and LSPs are detailed here.

### **Mayo Sports Partnership:**

[www.mayosports.ie](http://www.mayosports.ie)

email: [mSP@mayococo.ie](mailto:mSP@mayococo.ie)

### **Volunteering Ireland:**

[www.volunteeringireland.com](http://www.volunteeringireland.com)

### **Irish Sports Council:**

[www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie)

## Contents

Welcome	2
The value of volunteers	3
Do you need volunteers?	4
Why do people volunteer?	5
Recruiting volunteers	6
Retaining volunteers	10
Rewarding volunteers	13
An action plan	15
Useful contacts/websites	16

## Glossary of terms

**Volunteer:** Someone who works on behalf of a sports club/organisation or sports club/organisation without receiving payment for carrying out such duties. Volunteers may however receive expenses.

**Recruitment:** The process through which volunteers are enlisted to join the sports club/organisation.

**Retention:** The task of keeping all new volunteers working within your sports club/organisation. Individual sports club/organisation may develop different methods of achieving retention, including offering mentoring and training to volunteers, rotating roles etc.

(Retention: Encouraging all new volunteers to continue their involvement in the sports club/organisation)

**Reward:** Something given on behalf of the sports club/organisation to thank and commemorate the work of the volunteer. This may be gifts, plaques or even naming your new facility in their honour.

**MAD- Make A Difference:** An annual event to celebrate the work of all volunteers. It can be used to raise the profile of volunteering in your club/organisation or to recruit new volunteers.

# Welcome



There are many challenges facing sporting bodies today particularly when organisations depend so much on the commitment and dedication of volunteers. For volunteers too the situation has changed with greater demands in terms of time and the expectations from those they serve. Poor and shoddy services are no longer acceptable and often lack of resources or inadequate training may prevent the volunteer from being effective in their club or organisation. One of the major goals of the Mayo Sports Partnership is to “Increase Participation” and while this can be done in a number of ways the role of the volunteer is fundamental to achieving objectives in this area. Volunteers are required at all levels in an organisation and therefore we have to be innovative in our thinking in terms of how we involve people. I would like to thank the Volunteering in Sport Sub- Committee who pieced together this booklet and to wish everybody well in their volunteering efforts which often go unrecognised.

Yours,  
Pat Stanton  
Chairman  
Mayo Sports Partnership



Volunteerism is at the heart of community life in Ireland and with current society pressures it is becoming more difficult to recruit and retain volunteers. This booklet aims to provide clubs / organisations with an information resource to support them in their efforts with volunteerism. A recent study by the E.S.R.I. and the Irish Sports Council found that 400,000 adults volunteer a total of 900,000 hours weekly in Ireland. A value of € 250 million per year was estimated if this was calculated in monetary terms. The Mayo Sports Partnership recognises

the tremendous work been done by Volunteers across the county in all sports. We seek to provide quality subsidised workshops and training for all with grant assistance available for recognised courses. On behalf of the Partnership I would like to thank the Sports Volunteers of our Volunteering in Sport sub committee for contributing to this useful resource and to Andrea Farrell the Sports Partnership Administrator for her assistance. I would like to wish you well in your Volunteering career and remember you have our support whenever you need it.

Yours in Sport,  
Charlie Lambert  
Sports Co-ordinator  
Mayo Sports Partnership

# An action plan

Develop an action plan to identify volunteers and encourage them to become, and remain active within the club/organisation:

- Decide why the club/organisation needs volunteers
- Appoint a Volunteer Co-ordinator
- Make links and work in partnership with local volunteer agencies and education establishments who are delivering leadership and volunteer training
- Work out specific job requirements for volunteers and write role descriptors for each one
- Decide what skills you need your volunteers to have
- Decide how many volunteers you need
- Decide which methods you will use to recruit volunteers
- Go ahead and recruit
- Meet and choose people with appropriate skills
- Show them how to fulfil their roles and support them through the process
- Involve volunteers in matters that affect them
- Provide opportunities for training
- Supervise and evaluate their performance and provide feedback
- Reward and recognise volunteers appropriately
- Review the process regularly and make the necessary changes
- Say ‘Thank you’

# The value of volunteers

- Giving volunteers complimentary tickets to special events and functions
- Sending volunteers birthday and Christmas cards
- Awarding volunteers life memberships
- Having a party or barbeque for your volunteers
- Having a day of changing roles. Let the participants organise and run the club/organisation and the volunteers just participate
- Acknowledging their efforts during committee meetings
- Paying out-of-pocket expenses and providing meals
- Smiling and calling them by name
- Listening to their ideas
- Make them feel valued and a vital part of the club/organisation
- Having an awards day for them or entering them into a local or national volunteer recognition scheme.

Volunteers are the life-blood of every sporting club/organisation. They dedicate hours of time and energy, working in a variety of ways. Without them, most sports clubs and associations would cease to exist. Volunteers are extremely valuable, and deserve considerable praise and thanks.

Administrators, officials and coaches all fulfill an important role in sport. They may come from different backgrounds, and although some are paid, many act in a voluntary capacity themselves.

The key to success is the way in which they can manage (co-ordinate) the volunteer helpers for whom they are responsible.

So how do you Recruit, Train and Retain your volunteers?

## Consider the following questions:

- What are your experiences as a volunteer?
- How have you contributed as a volunteer and why?
- Could your experiences as a volunteer have been improved?
- Do you know how to recruit, train and retain volunteers?
- How do you ensure your volunteers enjoy working with you?

# Do you need volunteers?

## Case Study

Imagine the following scenario:

You are the president of a local sports club/organisation and are faced with the following situation:

- Membership numbers are down again
- The newsletter is not going out regularly
- The junior members are having difficulty getting home from club night now that the local bus service has been withdrawn
- The nets and posts are in urgent need of replacement and costs are escalating
- The hall the club/organisation has used for the past 30 years is being pulled down and new premises need to be found with the necessary space at an affordable rate

You decide to make an urgent plea to all members to find some volunteers and receive the following response:

- Tommys neighbour, a surveyor wants to volunteer
- Kevin, a recently retired bus driver, offers to help
- 5 others names and phone numbers are given to you (no background is given about them)

Nothing constructive happens with this information, therefore, after a short while, all the new volunteers become dispirited because they do not know what they are supposed to be doing, and can't find anybody to give them any guidance, so they leave. You are back to square one.

## Consider the following before recruiting volunteers:

Make sure you know why you want volunteers before you recruit them, and direct them to appropriate tasks, for example:

- Serving as club/organisation administrator, with clearly defined duties
- Helping with fund-raising events
- Writing a development plan for the club/organisation
- Producing the club/organisation match programme/newsletter or updating the website
- Taking care of equipment
- Maintaining the grounds
- Helping to coach teams or supervise junior night
- Helping to run events
- Washing kit
- Serving teas/coffees/oranges on match-day

# Rewarding volunteers

## Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is vital in encouraging volunteers to remain active within the club/organisation. In order to achieve this it is suggested to;

- Find out what they want from their involvement (what motivates them)
- Clearly identify the nature of the role to be undertaken (using role descriptors to help you)
- Try to match their motivations with the inherent rewards of the role job (this will require careful placement of volunteer at the outset)
- Offer appropriate guidelines or training to help them in their role
- Encourage volunteers to contribute new ideas and to implement them if appropriate
- Build in incentives and provide feedback recognition and tangible rewards
- Set targets so that they understand the part they play in meeting the overall objectives of the club/organisation.

## Enable your volunteers to enjoy their work with you by:

- Helping the volunteer to experience personal achievement in the role they are doing
- Making the volunteer feel they are making a worthwhile contribution to the objectives of the team and of the whole club/organisation
- Making the volunteer feel the role is challenging, demands the best from them, and gives them responsibility to match their capabilities
- Giving adequate recognition for their achievements
- Ensuring the volunteer have control over those aspects of their role that have been delegated to them
- Making the volunteer feel they are developing and improving their experiences, skills and abilities.

## Recognition

Recognition of the roles the volunteer performs is vital to encouraging them to remain active within the club/organisation. Consider the following:

- Offering praise to volunteers while they are doing their job
- Send volunteers a letter or a text message to say thank them for their help
- Give volunteers a thank you certificates
- Giving volunteers a kit or equipment e.g. t-shirts/pin badges
- Giving volunteers a present. It doesn't have to be expensive! Just given with thought
- Acknowledging volunteers in club/organisation newsletters and on the notice board

# Why do people volunteer?

If your club/organisation has specific needs, you could organise your own specific training programme. Perhaps you could also invite representatives from other local sports clubs/organisations to attend. Networking with several other sports can give you different ideas about how to run your club/organisation or some practical coaching ideas. A Sports Partnership course attendee at a recent workshop made the following quote: "The course brought all sporting backgrounds together in a united role. Sharing knowledge and experience is essential."

Better still, perhaps you could persuade your local association, National Governing Body (NGB) or Local Sports Partnership (LSP) to organise a series of training events.

For NGB & LSP contact details use the following link: [www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie), then click on the 'Developing Irish Sport' link at top of home page, details of NGBs and LSPs are detailed here.

Talk to your National Governing Body about finding a tutor to deliver training.

## Communication

Ensure your volunteers are part of the whole club/organisation by:

- Communicating regularly with them. Update them on the objectives of the club/organisation and your progress towards meeting those objectives
- Providing scope for individuals to take greater responsibility
- Encouraging ideas and, where practical, allowing the responsibility to implement them.

A number of people volunteer and they come from a variety of places. Many are members, friends, parents, school students, spectators, existing volunteers and volunteers linked to projects or volunteer agencies. Look at your own club/organisation – who are the volunteers? (most will already have a link with someone at the club/organisation).

People also volunteer for many different reasons.

Some of these may be:

- To learn new skills
- To help others
- To be involved with a relative who is a club/organisation member
- To share talents and abilities
- To do something different to the day job
- To make new friends
- To build self confidence
- To be part of a 'team'
- To gain a new direction in life
- To gain prestige and recognition
- To give something back to sport
- To have FUN!

If you can find out the needs and interests of your volunteers, you can then devise appropriate rewards for them. Know and recognise what motivates each individual volunteer and make sure that his or her efforts are rewarded. Many clubs/organisations nominate and reward a player or coach of the season, why not nominate and reward a 'volunteer of the year' as well.

# Recruiting volunteers

## Finding volunteers

To find your volunteers, you need to have a clear understanding of why you want them. If you identify clearly when, where and why you want help and then seek it in an organised way, people are more likely to step forward and offer their assistance.

Ideally one of your members should take charge of new volunteers; this role is commonly referred to as the 'Volunteer Co-ordinator'. Whoever takes on this task needs to demonstrate excellent inter-personal skills and ideally have some experience of managing people. The Volunteer Co-ordinator is required to spend time training, mentoring and supporting managing each volunteer to ensure they are being deployed effectively and that they are enjoying their role.

Before you recruit volunteers you should consider delivering mentoring training to any club/organisation officials who will be asked to work with the Volunteer Co-ordinator in supporting new volunteers.

In order to help new volunteers support the club/organisation the Volunteer Co-ordinator should think of the following:

- Determine where volunteers are needed
- Decide how much time the volunteers need to be able to give
- Write brief role descriptors
- Plan the recruitment strategy
- Invite volunteers to attend club/organisation meetings to ensure they are aware of all club/organisation activities
- Supervise volunteers or find other members to supervise volunteers. Those members should be briefed on the role of the volunteer and their role as a mentor/supervisor
- Organise training for volunteers
- Keep volunteers motivated and enthusiastic, and make sure they know their contribution is valued
- Revise and update volunteer duties as the need arises.

## You need to answer these questions before trying to recruit new volunteers:

- How many volunteers do you need?
- To do what?
- When?

Motivation is providing the sort of support & leadership that ensures people's needs are being met and their interest sustained. Pay particular attention to the kind of tasks that you expect your volunteers to do.

**NB:** Job satisfaction comes from doing something worthwhile and often challenging.

## Delegating tasks

Delegation is not easy. It requires courage, patience, trust and skill. It is one of the most important aspects of any organiser's job, and one in which there is considerable freedom of choice. What you choose to delegate, to whom, and when, is usually entirely at your own discretion.

Successful delegation is matching responsibility with authority. To give responsibility without authority is unreasonable. Imagine a referee without the power to make decisions. The referee would have to be very persuasive to be able to control the match!

**NB:** When you delegate, you must give authority as well as responsibility. If you are in charge, you are still responsible for what happens, so when you delegate, you do not stop being accountable.

In order to delegate a task, you need to:

- Identify a task that can be delegated
- Decide the key elements of the task
- Identify a volunteer with the necessary skills and attributes
- Decide upon the training and support needed to enable somebody to do the task
- Decide how you will know if the delegation is working well
- Monitor the task that has been delegated, without interfering

**NB:** Delegation is not passing the buck!

## Training

Training is an essential part of the work programme of any company that wants its staff to perform efficiently and effectively. The same principals apply to volunteers in the club/organisation.

There are a variety of training opportunities available to volunteers and your volunteers should be encouraged and supported to attend. (see [www.mayosports.ie](http://www.mayosports.ie) for details on sports partnership run courses)

# Retaining volunteers

## Keeping your volunteers involved

Some clubs/organisations are successful in attracting volunteers. Perhaps the activity is exciting, glamorous or challenging. Even with such benefits, however, sometimes clubs/organisations lose newly recruited volunteers and it is important to try and prevent this from happening.

An induction period is an essential part of any volunteer programme if you want to make sure you retain your volunteers. Even in a small club/organisation, an introduction to the activities and the key members will encourage volunteers to stay involved.

Volunteers want to feel:

- Needed
- Useful
- Part of the team
- Welcome

## Motivation

Motivating volunteers is often different from motivating members of staff, because:

- They are not on the payroll
- They do not have a formal contract
- They may be unreliable (what you want them to do is not necessarily a top priority for them)
- They have their own motives (which may conflict with yours)
- They are not dependant on you for job security.

People volunteer in sport for a variety of reasons. These include:

- Family involvement – son or daughter or other relative
- Want to meet people
- Service to their sport (particularly past performers wishing to 'put something back')
- Service to others
- Prestige (the chance to deal with the media, sponsors etc.)

Motivation is an important part of people management, whether they are volunteers or paid staff. It is not simply about being enthusiastic, (although in the right amount, this helps) or about urging people on. It is about identifying what is important to that person and trying to ensure they gain what they want from their involvement. It is about matching the needs of the individual with the role they are playing within the club.

- For how long?
- What demands will be made of the volunteer?
- What levels of responsibility will the volunteer have?
- To whom is the volunteer responsible?
- What support is there for the new volunteer?
- Will trained volunteers and other personnel, already in place, willingly accept the new volunteer?
- What sort of people do you want in these roles?
- What skills do they need?
- Where can you find the right people?
- Are there partners within my local community that already have volunteers that my sports club/organisation could use?

## Role Descriptors

There are many positions and duties that can be filled by volunteers. Often volunteers are recruited into positions for which they do not have the necessary skill or experience. To avoid problems and misunderstandings as to what is expected of and required of them, you may need to produce brief role descriptors.

The role descriptors should include:

- Role title
- Names of organisers and support network
- Main duties and responsibilities
- Hours, frequency and dates the volunteer is required
- Qualifications or experience needed (if any)
- Special skills or training needed (if any)

Remember to review the role descriptors after a while (e.g. three months) to find out how well the description fits the job. If it is necessary to rewrite the role descriptors, involve the volunteer in the process.

Always provide support for the new volunteer. If you have the people, try to find a member who is given responsibility for providing this assistance. Do not force anyone to take on this role.



NB: Some jobs for volunteers are ongoing but others, such as organising a major event, are limited to a particular time. Offer your volunteers alternatives that will suit them.

### Where to find volunteers?

Volunteers are everywhere. It may be a good idea to target certain groups or areas, but any type of recruitment campaign should be widely distributed and contain clear, accurate and attractive information.

It may be worth considering:

- Raising the profile of volunteering and its benefits on your website
- Producing volunteer information sheets
- Checking past and present membership list. A list of parents' skills/jobs may give you an idea of who has key skills that you could utilise
- Introducing a volunteer scheme for present members
- Holding 'bring a friend' social events
- Organising a recruitment drive using current volunteers to promote the club/organisation and its activities e.g. a volunteer recruitment fair during the volunteers' week (MAD) each year
- Using the local newspaper – classified ads, letters to the editor, feature articles etc.
- Organising community notices on local radio or an article on your website
- Producing pamphlets and flyers which can be distributed in a place your potential volunteer may visit (e.g. the supermarket, the doctors surgery, dentist, the local schools notice boards)
- Promoting your club/organisation and its activities within local schools, colleges and universities.
- Asking for volunteers from the people who spectate at matches or support the team
- Promoting your 'Volunteer of the Year' winner in the local media
- Identifying if your sponsors have any key skills to offer
- Developing a partnership with your local volunteer agency to identify volunteers

### The recruitment process

The recruitment process allows you to search for volunteers who will best meet the club's/organisation's needs. This is a two way process. It does not need to be too formal, but it is an important way of identifying the skills and experiences of a volunteer to decide if he/she wants to support your club/organisation. The recruitment process should involve

identifying and inviting the volunteer to the club/organisation for an informal discussion. Ideally, the Volunteer Coordinator should attend, along with another member from the club/organisation (committee).

**NB:** Don't make the volunteer feel like it is an interview, as you don't want to put them off attending.

The discussion will allow you to identify:

- Why the volunteer wants to be involved
- What skills the volunteer has and if they meet your club's/organisation's needs
- Their experience in working within a sports club and within a 'team' of people
- Their availability to fulfil the role
- Additional skills e.g. coaching, refereeing, that could also be utilised
- Whether the volunteer has completed a Garda Vetting Form, and if so, is that check still in date (Volunteers need to be checked for each organisation), also have they completed the Irish Sports Council 'Code of Ethics Awareness Course' – this is especially important for volunteers working with Children. Contact your National Governing Body of Sport ie GAA, FAI etc for more information also check out [www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie) or [www.mayosports.ie](http://www.mayosports.ie)
- Clothing size of the volunteer – after all every new member feels part of the team if they have a t-shirt!
- An opportunity to see the benefits of becoming a volunteer at 'your club/organisation'. It is vital not to forget that the volunteer is offering their time free of charge and will be expecting something (not necessarily financial) in return e.g. What can your sports club/organisation offer them: - make new friends; learn new skills; create a better club/organisation; go on trips and enjoy the rewards that come from helping people
- References – ensure that you take up references, even verbal ones, before your volunteer begins.