



**The A.D.Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Centre**

**Volunteerism and Volunteers**  
Methodological manual

## **What is volunteerism and who can be a volunteer?**

Volunteerism is unpaid, conscious and volunteer activity for common good. Volunteerism is an opportunity for everyone, especially for young people to be involved in social life and have an impact on the society.

Often there is an impression that only adult, skilled and responsible people can be volunteers who can spare their time and skills for implementing volunteer works. Everyone, who works for others' benefit, can be called a volunteer. A distinctive feature for a volunteer is his/her willingness to work without or for rather low payment.

It's obvious that not all people can work in any organization of project. It depends on the requirements of a project and volunteer's capacities.

What features does a volunteer need? It's a rather difficult question, which causes heated debates during seminars. Usually the following features are mentioned: strong mind, sensibility, ability to cooperate, experience, good will for unpaid work, patience, strong motives. First of all, a volunteer should have high moral criteria and compassion towards his work. In reality, very often volunteers don't correspond to the mentioned high qualities, but the presence of some of them is compulsory. People who want to contribute to the development of their surrounding environment, pensioners and elderly people, unemployed people with huge life and work experience (who want to feel themselves useful for the society and not lose their experience and skills), as well as young people, who need obtaining work and life experience and who perceive volunteerism as a starting arena, can be involved in volunteer works. Practically, anyone can become a volunteer. Volunteer works can be organized in a way that even people with serious physical disabilities can carry out important activities.

## **What can volunteers do?**

Volunteers' work can be very diverse. Usually the issues, which can be solved by volunteers, can fully coincide with the tasks of paid staff, thus volunteers mainly implement the role of assistants. It's not bad, but in the result the role of volunteers can be limited in the organizations. Organizations should regard the issue of selecting spheres and objectives for volunteers creatively, clearly define their labour spheres and assignments.

Volunteers can be involved in the spheres for which it's impossible to pay, but they are important for reaching project goals. For example, works carried out with children at schools and orphanages, taking food to elderly people who are in elderly houses and to sick people in hospitals, inviting public attention to community issues, etc.

Volunteers' works must be organized effectively and conducted professionally. Many employers refuse to take volunteers as professionals, as their work is not paid and does not require professional approach. But it's a narrow viewpoint for this approach. One should admit that volunteers can do any work, and not only such simple assignments which don't require professional qualification. Volunteers should not be perceived as only assistants or social workers taking care of others. They can be teachers, computer specialists, political scientists, engineers, designers, etc. And they must be professional in their occupation.

While assigning tasks for volunteers organizations should get acquainted with each volunteer's individual capacities.

Volunteers can bring certain diversity in the general process. Consequently it would be better to involve volunteers of different ages, professions and skills.

The organization should suggest such assignments which can be done outside working hours: at weekend, in the evening, once a week, etc.

If an organization wants to recruit an effective team of volunteers, it should assess volunteers' needs. Only then it will be possible to form an effectively functioning team of volunteers.

## Recruiting volunteers

Recruitment of volunteers can be done in different ways depending on the type of the work and terms. The recruitment process should be started with preparation of a plan taking into account the organization's mission. It can comprise the following:

- Aim and expected results of the recruitment
- Events (steps) to be implemented
- Person responsible for each event (step)
- Time and place of the event
- Necessary resources

The control over the recruitment process can be done by a schedule (e.g. Gantt chart). This will allow to analyse the terms of the implemented work, define the most effective sequence of steps and will reflect the opportunities of conducting different events at the same time.

The recruitment of volunteers can be implemented through different means depending on the type of work and terms:

- ✓ Public announcements
- ✓ Informative leaflets
- ✓ Disseminating information through friends
- ✓ Beneficiaries can become the best volunteers as they are aware of the importance of volunteer work on their own example
- ✓ Organizing exhibitions about volunteerism in different institutions
- ✓ Raising awareness of potential volunteers on the objectives and works of the organization

Before recruiting volunteers the organization should think what it can offer its volunteers. It shouldn't promise what is above its opportunities.

The clear definition of volunteers' work is the main part of effective recruitment. The organization should define the work implemented by a volunteer. It shouldn't recruit volunteers, e.g. only for organizing an event for refugee children. The organization should involve its volunteers in the solution of vital issues.

An informative meeting should be organized for all candidates, where they can get acquainted with the project and the volumes of work. Questionnaires will be distributed to the interested candidates in which they will answer to questions about their previous experience, motives to become a volunteer, need of training, etc. If the organization recruits a team of volunteers for short-term work, which doesn't require professional preparedness, then there is no need in conducting long interviews.

The organization should convince each candidate in the importance of being a volunteer.

### Selecting a volunteer

After recruitment the organization should select volunteers through different methods.

Depending on the type of the work the requirements must include:

- ✓ Moral criteria
- ✓ Certain professional qualification
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Place of residence
- ✓ Social status (pensioners, young people)
- ✓ Gender
- ✓ Other criteria

These criteria should be taken into account in the selection process, but, at the same time you should remember that sometimes people underestimate and sometimes overestimate their knowledge and skill, thus volunteers' interest is more important.

During the selection the following tools are used:

- Interview
- observation
- questionnaires
- tests
- data verification

These can be used both separately and together.

### ***Interview***

Interview aims at revealing experience, skills and interest towards the offered work.

This can be conducted by the following model:

1. Study the information about a candidate beforehand, prepare a list of questions that interest you:
  - Why are you interested in this work?
  - What are your expectations concerning this work?
  - What opportunities do you see in this work?
  - Do you have experience in volunteering?
  - How much time can you spare for this work?
  - Would you like to participate in preparatory trainings?
  - Do you have any restriction-health, transport, etc.?
  - Do you have particular interests?
  - Do you prefer working in a team or individually?
2. Conduct the interview in friendly atmosphere.
3. Ask about his/her interests. Why has he/she come to you\
4. Tell him/her about the work, ask his opinion. Give him/her printed job-description.
5. Tell the volunteer about privileges and encouragements which the volunteer can get from the organization and work.
6. Spare time for questions. The volunteers can also ask questions:

- What will I do?
  - With whom will I work?
  - Will I be allowed to expand the scope of my responsibilities?
  - What if I will not be able to implement the work/?
  - Will I be allowed to quit the job if I'm bored?
7. Give a questionnaire to the volunteer and appoint your next meeting.
  8. Make the written description of your interview (your impression, recommendation, etc.).

Despite the results, the interview must be positive for both sides. If a candidate does not correspond to the organization's requirements, then the coordinator must tell the candidate and substantiate the rejection.

### ***Observation***

Through observation you can see whether the volunteer has communication skills, behaviour peculiarities, etc. Observation can be made during a certain part of recruitment. It's desirable that the person won't notice that he/she is being observed.

### ***Questionnaire***

It can be used in the initial phase of recruitment, where there are many applications. You should always remember that behind each questionnaire there is a person full of desire to help your organization. That's why questionnaire shouldn't be the only means of selecting volunteers; it should be combined with direct contact, interview for example.

### ***Tests***

They are used when the work requires special responsibility, for example for working with children, people with disabilities, sick people.

### **Data verification**

Verification of documents should be conducted when a person starts working in your office, but remember that it's not a sign of distrust, but a common procedure.

## **Preparing volunteers to work in the organization**

When the volunteers' selection is over, each volunteer is assigned with certain work.

**Informing** the volunteers on the organization's mission, goals, traditions, procedures (a special procedure for volunteers, if there is any) and rules is one of the main methods of involving them in the organization. Volunteers should be introduced to the office and colleagues. **Making volunteers familiar with the moral norms and rules in the organization is very important.**

### **Job description for volunteers**

After getting acquainted with the organization, volunteers should be informed on their work, scope of activity, in case of need training should be planned. The duration of the training depends on the work: the easier is the work, the shorter will be the training. But there are works which require long-term trainings.

A well-elaborated job description gives volunteers a comprehensive idea about their work.

While working in a team, it would be advisable that each team member should have others' job descriptions. In the initial phase, when the volunteer doesn't feel comfortable and confident, the coordinator should assist him/her. The coordinator should ask: "Is everything ok? What do you

need? Who's the work?".

Remember that both volunteers and the organization share the responsibility of volunteers' work.

### Preparing the contract

The best variant of regulating the relations is concluding a contract between the volunteer and the organization which includes a job description. Then the volunteer's card is filled in. It serves as a document which later can be used by different organizations.

After all these important procedures the volunteer starts his work in the organization. The probation period is very important: it shows whether the volunteer is ready for the work.

The type of the work and the scope of responsibilities prompt the ways of engaging the volunteers in the work as there is a great difference between a volunteer writing and putting stamps on envelopes and a volunteer providing professional consultation.

### **Assisting and supervising volunteers' work**

Often volunteers ask the same question: "Who will help me if I need assistance?".

Usually the coordinator is responsible for this. He/she must assist volunteers. Regular communication is strongly recommended. It can be individual or general meetings. Regular meetings provide exchange of experience, establish friendly connections and atmosphere of mutual confidence. The other role of these meetings is providing mutual assistance.

Corresponding technical assistance-using a copying machine, computer, etc. is important as well.

The coordinator is responsible for the work implemented by the volunteer and has must require proper implementation of work by the volunteer.

There is an opinion that because of the absence of material interest volunteers are not responsible workers, and if they haven't implemented the work, in this case only the volunteer is guilty.

Is it right? Are volunteers responsible for others' mistakes? For answering this question we should refer to one of the elements of management-supervision.

Before answering the question "Who is guilty?" and before punishing one should consider the following questions:

1. Who, how and to what extend has informed the volunteer on the assignment?
2. Was there supervision and who was the supervisor?

After answering these questions one can find out that proper work hasn't been conducted with the volunteer and the whole responsibility lies on the person who hasn't properly chosen the given volunteer, who hasn't given assignments and who hasn't realized feedback in the course of the work.

The factor of supervision is very important during the work. For determining who and to what level has carried out this supervision, we must carefully study **the chart of the controllable indicators of the supervisor's competence and volunteer's work**. In the given chart "Yes" shows that supervision is possible and "No" shows that it's not possible, "In certain conditions" means that in case of sufficient information supervision is possible.

Degree Indicator	Volunteer (self-supervision)	Partner (paid employee or volunteer)	Volunteers' coordinator	Head of the organization	Beneficiaries
Professionalism	Yes	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Efficiency	"In certain conditions	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	No
Personal qualities	No	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Success	"In certain conditions	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Keeping to rules	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Encouragement	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Necessary resources	Yes	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Feedback	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Security	Yes	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Conflict of interests	"In certain conditions	"In certain conditions	Yes	Yes	No
Posing problems	No	No	Yes	Yes	"In certain conditions
Responsibility for results	Yes	No	Yes	"In certain conditions	No

It's worth mentioning that the positions of the coordinator and head of the organization are almost equivalent. The difference is only in the responsibility for the result of the work when the head of the organization bears responsibility for the whole organization. And if we take into consideration that many organizations have few members, then often the head of the organization takes the role of the coordinator as well.