

South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District



Volunteer Engagement Success Pack

A resource for sport, culture and recreation groups



This **Volunteer Engagement Success Pack** has been developed by the South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District to support local community groups in enhancing volunteer engagement in sport, culture, and recreation. Volunteers are essential to the success of these community opportunities—without their involvement, such activities would simply not happen.

Most organizations don't have paid staff; they rely on volunteers to keep things running. This means that current volunteer leaders must dedicate time to volunteer engagement to ensure continued success and growth.

The good news: Volunteers are motivated, passionate and give their time generously.

The bad news: Volunteer numbers are declining. How people want to give their time is changing and the pandemic may have accelerated these changes.

This means there is a need for change across our sector to make volunteering fit for the future and to take an honest look at the volunteer experience!

Why use this resource?

- This resource is a *starting place* for volunteer groups looking to **refresh** how they currently work with and engage their volunteers.
- It provides innovative ideas and templates to help address volunteer shortages and strengthen volunteer engagement efforts.

Understanding Motivations & Barriers

Has your group thoroughly explored the reasons why you're unable to engage or keep volunteers? It's important to reflect on and understand *motivations and barriers* for all ages.

Examining reasons for volunteering within age groups, there are some differences:

- Those 18-34 are far more likely to volunteer to improve their job prospects through **skill building and gaining experience**, as well as meeting people that may lead to employment opportunities.
- Volunteering that **supports their children's activities** is most common among those 35-54.
- Older individuals are seeking volunteer opportunities where they can contribute their **talents, knowledge, and experience**.

{Source: The Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership (SNP), *Volunteerism in Saskatchewan and the Impacts of COVID-19*, December 2022}

There are several *barriers* to volunteering that groups should be mindful of:

- Barriers to volunteer engagement include a **lack of awareness** about volunteer opportunities, as many people don't know where help is required. Recruitment efforts are often limited to word of mouth or shoulder tapping, and there is a growing need to broaden outreach into the community. A lack of detail in what the volunteer role includes is also a barrier.
- Potential volunteers often **shy away from long-term commitments**. A lack of time (53%) and an inability to commit to long-term obligations (42%) represent the two greatest barriers to volunteering, particularly for those age 54 and under. (Source: The Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership (SNP), *Volunteerism in Saskatchewan and the Impacts of COVID-19*, December 2022)
- The **volunteer experience can be discouraging** if volunteers join a dysfunctional or unproductive board, or if they don't feel their contributions are valued, leading them to disengage or refrain from participating.



ACTIONS TO TAKE to increase volunteer engagement in community:



**Find and Engage
New Volunteers**

**Improve
Volunteer
Experiences**

**Focus on
Task-based
Volunteering**

ACTIONS DEFINED:

FIND AND ENGAGE NEW VOLUNTEERS

Groups should focus on encouraging new volunteers, promoting a more diverse volunteer base—particularly among younger people. This means creating a positive and strong volunteering culture in your community and group. Ensure your group is welcoming and inclusive to encourage a diversity of participation.

IMPROVE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

To engage volunteers, it's essential to align opportunities with people's interests and motivations. Design volunteer roles that have tangible benefits for the group and volunteer. Volunteering should be enjoyable and impactful.

Get your house in order! What does that mean exactly? Boards and committees must evaluate their own efficiency, structure, and productivity to ensure they are a "winning team". After all, volunteers want to be part of successful and effective groups!

FOCUS ON TASK-BASED AND SHORT-TERM VOLUNTEERING

The smaller the ask, the less daunting the task! Breaking down traditional volunteer roles into individual tasks can enable your group to identify where responsibilities that might traditionally fall to one person could be performed by many. Offering task-based volunteering opportunities can help attract a wider range of participants, as it can ease their workload and avoid burn out. Identify one-time and short-term opportunities.

Check out the following tip sheets (how to) that suggest specific tasks you can take for each of these actions.





TIP SHEET #1: FIND AND ENGAGE NEW VOLUNTEERS

"People don't volunteer because they enjoy working for free. They volunteer because they want to change the world." - Unknown

Find and engage new volunteers. Sounds difficult, right? There are many ways to attract potential new volunteers. Try a mixture of ideas!

Create role descriptions

People don't know what opportunities or help is needed. Nor do they want to just simply volunteer their time when they have no idea what commitment, tasks or expectations there are. Having role descriptions advertised will catch people's attention. They will see that the role is something they have skills to contribute to or involves an area they are passionate about.

See Appendix A: Example Volunteer Role Descriptions

Make the ask

"No one asked me to". According to a 2010 Statistics Canada report, 45% of Canadians who didn't volunteer said it was because they weren't asked - so let's ask! Research shows the organizations that are most successful at recruiting and retaining volunteers have a volunteer recruiter or ambassador. This is the person who invites them to be a volunteer and who mentors them.

Bring a friend

Encourage existing members or volunteers to introduce a friend to the group and identify possible areas they would be keen to help out with.

Parental engagement

For sports and recreation programs, remind parents when they sign up their children that the group relies on volunteers to function. Asking parents at the point of registration how many times they will help out a season and what they would be interested in doing can be an effective way of engaging new volunteers.

Flexibility

You may be surprised by the talents and experiences people can offer that don't fit into a traditional role but could be valuable to your group. Don't limit yourself by preconceived notions of what a volunteer in sport, culture, and recreation should do. From plumbers and electricians to caterers and website developers, the range of skills that can benefit your group is vast and diverse!

Shift Communications for Recruitment

Groups may want to explore modern communication methods for recruitment purposes. While traditional approaches, such as word-of-mouth or flyers, can still be effective, incorporating digital tools and social media can expand reach and engage a broader audience.

Using online platforms, social media channels, and digital campaigns can help connect with younger volunteers, promote flexibility, and streamline the recruitment process. It's not about replacing traditional methods but complementing them with innovative strategies that align with the needs and preferences of today's potential volunteers. Embracing a mix of both can enhance recruitment efforts and attract a diverse group of volunteers.

Craft communications that appeal to specific audiences versus one generic message. The table below displays new ways of recruitment versus common tactics.

Traditional Recruitment	Modern Recruitment
Posters and Flyers to the General Public	Targeted Recruitment Campaigns (i.e. youth, moms, older adults, businesses)
Focus on Filling Volunteer Shifts (we need people to work kitchen, sign up)	Focus on the Volunteer Journey (share the benefits to the volunteer)
Hanging up Posters around Town	Social Media Sharing (Facebook, Instagram)
Word of Mouth/Shoulder Tapping	Volunteer Ambassadors in Organizations and on Boards/Committees (designate a volunteer to be an ambassador for recruitment, so it does not get put on the backburner)

See Appendix B: Social Media Post Examples for inspiration!
See Appendix C: #GiveaLittleGainalot Recruitment Tool

TIP SHEET #2: IMPROVE THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

"In order for a volunteer to spend their time, the experience must be worth their time"
- Unknown

The *volunteer experience* is closely linked to turnover rates. When volunteers feel valued, appreciated, and involved, they are more likely to stay. On the other hand, a negative or unfulfilling experience can lead volunteers to leave, which can affect your group's ability to achieve its purpose.

THE GOOD EXPERIENCE VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST

Eight things that make up a good experience for volunteers:

- Inclusive of everyone
- Flexible around people's lives
- Impactful and makes a difference
- Connected to others, the cause and the organization
- Balanced, doesn't overburden the volunteer
- Enjoyable and makes people feel good
- Voluntary, not an obligation
- Meaningful to volunteers' lives, interests and priorities

Create a Strong Volunteering Culture

Building a strong volunteering culture begins with integrating it into your organization's core values and implementing an inclusive recruitment process. Keep volunteering at the heart of your group's growth by ensuring that individuals feel their contributions as volunteers are meaningful. Recognize and celebrate your volunteers to cultivate a sense of community and teamwork.

Know What Skills You Need and How People Can Help

Volunteer availability and preferences vary, so it's essential to clarify the roles and tasks you need assistance with before recruiting new volunteers. Make it clear that volunteers are welcome regardless of their skills, experience, or background. Break roles down into smaller, manageable, and flexible tasks that allow for bite-sized volunteer opportunities. The more flexible and approachable the task, the easier it will be to engage volunteers.



Focus on Volunteer Onboarding

Onboarding is a crucial step to welcome new volunteers and equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their roles. The time and effort you invest in onboarding pays off through more engaged, prepared volunteers. Consider designating current volunteer board members, like a volunteer ambassador, to oversee the onboarding process. It's essential for onboarding to be prioritized by your board/committee.

A volunteer handbook (digital is best) is a key resource that outlines your group's purpose and how volunteers contribute to its success. It provides important information about volunteer guidelines, expectations, and specific tasks. The handbook should be integrated into the recruitment and onboarding processes to ensure that all volunteers start with a clear, consistent understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The secretary of the board can be assigned to update the handbook regularly.

See Appendix D: Onboarding Tool/Checklist
See Appendix E: Volunteer Handbook Template

Create a Welcoming Board/Committee/Environment

It is imperative for your group to explore how welcoming you are. What is experienced by volunteers when they visit the organization – in-person, online, or on social media? What do new volunteers see, hear, smell, experience, and feel when they arrive in your real and virtual spaces? Are there obvious signs, images, and messages to let underrepresented volunteers know that they are welcomed and wanted, or are there barriers to engagement at first contact? Good accessibility and tangible signs of welcome are important elements to help volunteers feel recognized, comfortable, and safe in new surroundings.

Top Tip: Be intentional about connecting with people to learn how they feel welcomed and accepted. Listen to people who experience exclusion from volunteering, so your group can remove barriers and provide support, so that everyone who wants to can volunteer.

Volunteers Supporting Volunteers

Volunteers should support each other, whether they're new or experienced. Long-time volunteers bring valuable history and knowledge, while new volunteers offer fresh ideas, perspectives, and energy. When everyone works together, it's a win-win for your group's purpose! Stay open, kind, and be a good listener!

TIP SHEET #3: FOCUS ON TASK-BASED AND SHORT-TERM VOLUNTEERING

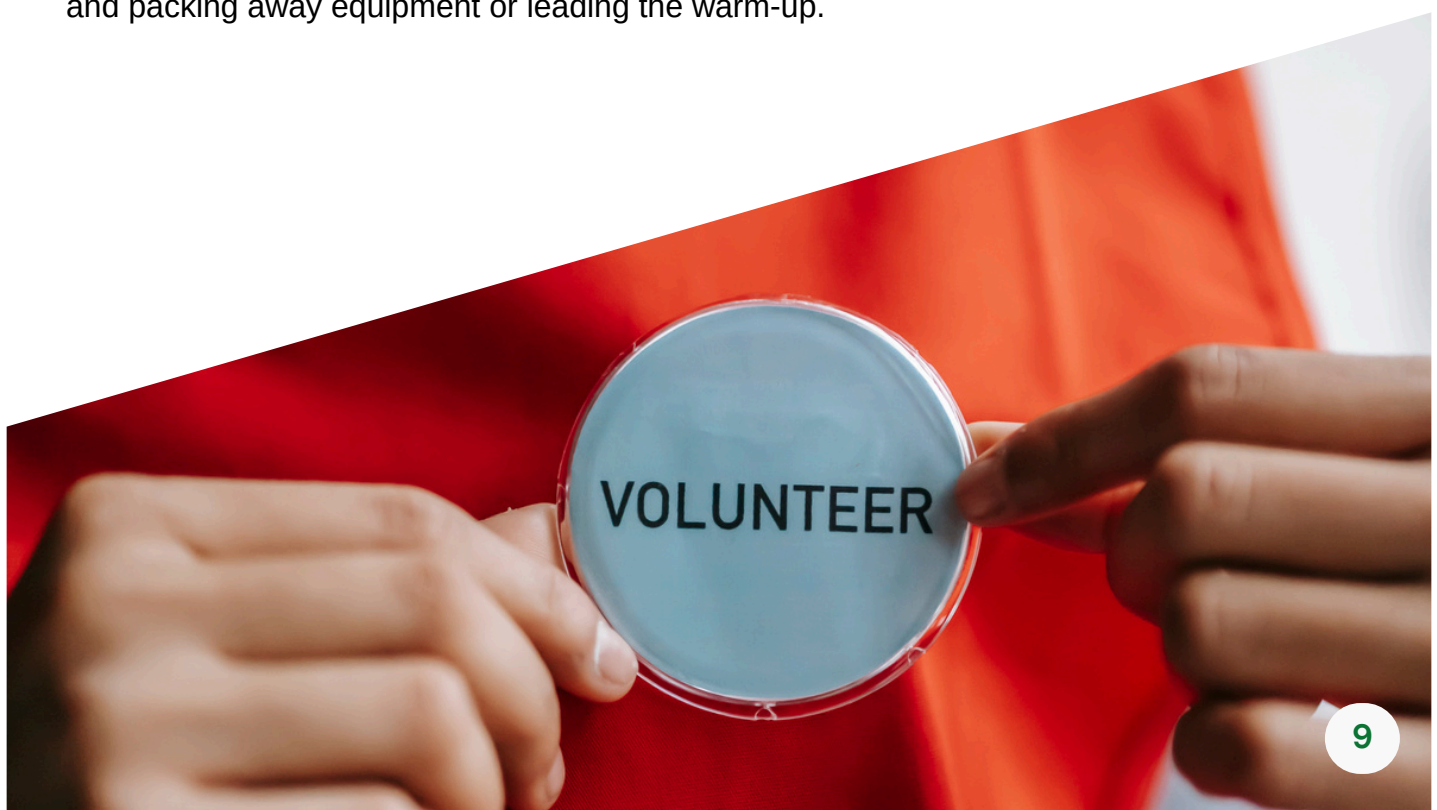
Participation in “informal volunteer activities” is increasing. Groups must consider this trend and look at shifting from traditional long-term commitments to shorter opportunities.

Why Focus on Task-Based Volunteering?

- **Appealing to those with limited time:** People with busy schedules may be more likely to get involved if they can commit to specific tasks instead of ongoing roles.
- **Increased value for existing volunteers:** Volunteers may feel more appreciated when their involvement requires less of a time commitment.
- **Broader appeal:** Traditional volunteering roles may not suit everyone. By recruiting for specific tasks, you can attract a more diverse range of people in terms of age, background, and skills.
- **Easier recruitment and training:** It's often simpler to find and train volunteers for well-defined tasks, which can help ensure continuity when people move on.

Sample Coach Role Transformed into Task-based Volunteer Roles

Breaking down volunteer roles into smaller tasks can help your group find ways to share responsibilities that would normally fall to one person. For example, if a parent wants to coach but doesn't have time for the full qualifications, maybe they could help by setting up and packing away equipment or leading the warm-up.



COACH TAMMY: ONE VOLUNTEER	TASK-BASED MODEL: SEVERAL VOLUNTEERS
<i>Tasks:</i>	
<i>Leads practices</i>	Coach (Tammy)
<i>Game Scheduling/Gamesheets</i>	Assistant Coach (John)
<i>Book Venues for all games and practices Tournament Scheduling</i>	Assistant Coach (John)
<i>Oversees Budget and Finances Collects fees/Pays bills</i>	Team Treasurer (Ben)
<i>Coach competitions</i>	Coach (Tammy) assisted by John
<i>Referee Bookings & Music</i>	Referee Coordinator (Ally)
<i>Oversees uniforms and equipment</i>	Equipment Coordinator (Cheryl)
<i>Jackets & Sponsorship</i>	Sponsorship Coordinator (Tina)

Breaking roles into smaller tasks helps get more people involved in different ways, while also supporting your current volunteers by lightening their workload and preventing burnout.

Family Volunteering

Family volunteering is becoming more prominent as a unique form of volunteering. Groups are increasingly recognizing the significant benefits of engaging intergenerational groups. Families contribute not only by increasing the volume of support but also by bringing diverse perspectives, experiences, and skills through the involvement of children, youth, parents, and grandparents. Family volunteering creates valuable opportunities for shorter, task-based volunteering.

WHAT COMMUNITY SAYS...

Our 2025 Community Survey Respondents were happy to share some of their successes in attracting and retaining volunteers:

“Word-of-mouth and community connections have been our strongest assets in retaining Volunteers. Having programs that the community can get behind, fostering a sense of belonging, acknowledging past members and their contributions and welcoming newcomers has made an impact on our volunteer base.”

“Personal ask.”

“We attract and retain volunteers through community outreach, flexible opportunities, and personal invitations. Successful strategies include recognizing volunteers through social media and appreciation events, providing training and support, and fostering a sense of purpose by showing the impact of their contributions.”

“One organization is working on developing a volunteer group to coordinate volunteers.”

“Our council asks individual members what they want to help with so they can be a part of meaningful projects and volunteering.”

“We always ask for specific task support so that we don't over-extend our volunteers. This means breaking down every task and having a time-frame so our volunteers know what they are committing to.”

“We're really encouraging volunteering outside of being a board member. We're hoping this will help people who don't want to commit to meetings but still want to assist us make their decision.”

“We are trying to add more people to our boards so that the expectations of everyone is not so large and daunting.”

“One of the strategies we've implemented this year is reaching out to all parents with kids enrolled in skating and curling lessons, asking them to volunteer in our rink kitchen. This has been a huge help in running our facility more efficiently.”

“We are also improving training and support for current and new volunteers, better onboarding practices, training videos, in person orientations, etc.”

“We have been reaching out to individuals to help with different activities and have had success with this action. We try not to burn out the individual with too many different types of activities and this seems to work as well.”

“We developed a Volunteer Strategy the last year with quick wins, short, medium and long term actions.”

“We are having a hard time to attract new volunteers as our current ones are tiring out. We are trying to focus more on project based not long commitments.”

“We are attempting to retain members by involving them in discussions and providing assistance in areas that pertain to them. We rely on their intrinsic motivation to stay involved.”

Sources:

{Sport England, www.sportenglandclubmatters.com, Retrieved December 2024}

{The Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership (SNP), *Volunteerism in Saskatchewan and the Impacts of COVID-19*, December 2022}

{Expanding Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Volunteer Programs Tip Sheet, Volunteer Victoria, Retrieved December 2024, <https://volunteervictoria.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Tip-Sheet-Volunteer-Victoria-2022.pdf>}

{NCVO, *Eight Things that make up a good experience*, Retrieved December 2024, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/planning-for-volunteers/writing-volunteer-role-descriptions/>}

{Buddle, Retrieved December 2024, https://buddle.co/learning-and-support-resources/getting-help-people/working-out-tasks-and-roles/needs-and-skills-1?section=breaking_roles_into_tasks}

{Stanford Centre on longevity, Retrieved December 2024, <https://longevity.stanford.edu/three-reasons-why-people-dont-volunteer-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/>}

{Volunteer Retention 101: Creating a Culture They Can't Resist; Retrieved December 2024, <https://www.rosterfy.com/blog/volunteer-retention-101-creating-a-culture-they-cant-resist>}

{Volunteer Canada: Family Volunteering, Retrieved January 2025, <https://members.volunteer.ca/index.php?MenuItemID=343&lang=en>}

{Building Blocks for Family Volunteering, Retrieved January 2025, https://members.volunteer.ca/vdemo/EngagingVolunteers_DOCS/Building_Blocks_for_Family_Volunteering.pdf}

{Buddle, Retrieved January 2025, <https://buddle.co/learning-and-support-resources/getting-help-people/working-out-tasks-and-roles/needs-and-skills-1>}

{Source: <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/volunteer-onboarding>, retrieved Feb. 11, 2025}

DISCLAIMER:

This resource is provided for general information only. South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District does not advise and any reliance you may place on this resource is at your own risk. South East District shall not be responsible for any loss or damage of any kind, which may arise from your use of this resource. We recommend that you obtain professional advice before taking, or refraining from, any action on the basis of information contained in this resource.

Appendix A: Example Volunteer Role Descriptions

Volunteer role descriptions explain what a volunteer's job involves and are important for helping volunteers understand what is expected of them. Clear descriptions also make it easier to share the role with your community when promoting the opportunity. One reason people may hesitate to volunteer is uncertainty about the tasks and the level of commitment required. People want to know if the role fits their interests, meets their needs, and whether they have enough time to take it on.

What to Include in a Role Description

A role description should include:

- **Role Title:** The name of the position.
- **Aims and Expectations:** What the role is meant to do and what is expected from the volunteer.
- **Tasks and Responsibilities:** A list of things the volunteer will be doing.
- **Role Boundaries:** Things the volunteer should not do.
- **Policies and Rules:** Any important rules the volunteer must follow, like health and safety or fairness rules.
- **Contact for Changes:** Who to talk to if changes are needed, like making the job easier to do at home.
- **Expenses:** Whether the volunteer will be paid back for any costs, like travel.
- **Why the Role is Interesting:** Why someone might want to take on this volunteer job.
- **Location and Hours:** Where and when the volunteer will work.
- **How the Role Helps the Organization:** How the job fits into the work the group is doing.
- **Behavior and Dress Expectations:** Any rules about how volunteers should behave or dress (if needed).
- **Skills and Qualifications:** What skills or experience the volunteer should have or should try to learn. This way, everyone will know exactly what to expect and how to do a good job.

Volunteer Role Description Template {sample}

These templates can be revised into very detailed descriptions to suit any type of role.

Role Title	<i>Flood Heroes</i>
Expectations	Outdoor rink cannot operate without the efforts of our amazing volunteers who keep them operating throughout the winter months.
Tasks and Responsibilities	Rink flooding Rink set-up and take-down Snow removal
People Served	
Policies	Town/Rec Board Outdoor facilities policies
Reimbursement of Expenses	

Location/Setting/Hours/Time Commitment	Outdoor rink 5 hours initial rink flooding with other volunteers 8 hours set-up and take-down 1 hour per week snow removal
Supervision/Orientation	
Skills and Qualifications	Ability to work in the cold and outdoors Ability to shovel and push snow
Other Details/Promotional Messaging	Please consider being a Flood Hero to give back to your community to support valuable outdoor recreation opportunities in the winter season. The Recreation Board is looking for "Flood Hero" volunteers to provide support with shoveling, flooding ice, and maintaining local outdoor ice rink. Outdoor ice rink provides the community with free access to outdoor recreation during the winter months. If you are interested in becoming a Flood Hero. please fill out the following application form.

Volunteer Role Description Template {sample}

Role Title	<i>Head Coach for Sports Club</i>
Expectations/Purpose of role	Teach fundamental skills of the sport to children. Adhere to standards as outlined by club.
Tasks and Responsibilities	Teach fundamental skills Schedule practices and book venues Registration of athletes Develop plans Assist officials Support parents and players as needed
People Served	Youth under 18
Policies	Screening and Recruitment Vulnerable Sector Check Privacy legislation
Reimbursement of Expenses	
Location/Setting/Hours/Time Commitment	1 season Average 5 hours per week Practice times – Games -
Supervision/Orientation	Coach operates under minimal supervision and will need to recruit an assistance coach.
Skills and Qualifications	Respect in Sport NCCP certification as outlined by sport
Other Details/Promotional Messaging	

Sources:

{Volunteer Alberta, Retrieved December 2024, Volunteer Position Description Template, <https://volunteeralberta.ab.ca/app/uploads/20180920-Position-Description-Risk-Full-1.pdf>}

{NCVO, Retrieved December 2024, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/planning-for-volunteers/writing-volunteer-role-descriptions/>}

Appendix B: Volunteer Recruitment Social Post Examples

Examples 1 and 2 resonate friendly, enthusiastic, positive messaging to get people's attention. Take a photo of your volunteer group as a selfie, as it portrays a welcoming call to action to join your approachable team!

Example 1:



Example 2:

Be part of something extraordinary!

Join our team of volunteers and experience the joy of giving back while making lifelong memories

Don't wait, let's make magic happen together!

WWW.RECREATIONBOARD.COM



Example 3 below speaks to community and being a part of “Volunteer (insert Community Name)”. It generates a positive message that people would want to be a part of.

Example 3:

#VolunteerMilestone

Be Amazing. Be a Volunteer.



Example 4 displays a warm, friendly invite to individuals. It is not just a “hey, we need volunteers to sit on the board”, but a “hey, does this sound like you, then you belong with us!”.

Example 4:



DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU?



- You want to contribute to a cause you're passionate about
- You're willing to roll up your sleeves and actively support the mission
- You can commit at least 3 hours per month on a consistent basis
- You're excited to collaborate with like-minded individuals who share your passion
- You're ready to be part of an incredible committee of volunteers

Appendix C: Example Poster: #GiveALittleGainAlot Recruitment Tool

#GiveALittleGainAlot

Want to learn some new skills?

Give something back and make a difference in your spare time?

Make new friends?

Then why not join our amazing team of volunteers, where you can give a little and gain a lot.

Your Logo Here

No matter how much time you can spare, there are opportunities to lend a hand doing something you're interested in and helping to make <club/group name> the best it can be.

To find out more, contact us using the details below:

COACHING
SPORT TEAM MANAGER
FUNDRAISING
POLICY WRITING
TEACHING ART
BOARD MEETINGS
SOCIAL MEDIA
PHOTOGRAPHY

Name:
Phone:
Email:

*Be Amazing.
Be a Volunteer.*

Appendix D: Onboarding Tools (Preparing New Volunteers for Success)

South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District On-Demand Modules

Board Orientation Module and Secretary Module: <https://southeastdistrict.ca/programs/on-demand-training>

Sample Volunteer Checklist

https://southeastdistrict.ca/userdata/files/410/Volunteer%20Resources/Volunteer_Orientation_Checklist-fillable.pdf

Sample Volunteer Onboarding Checklist

(Source: <https://www.actiontogether.org.uk/sites/actiontogether.org.uk/files/2024-08/Volunteer%20Checklist.pdf>, Retrieved Feb. 11, 2025)

Having a **volunteer checklist** is an effective way to engage with your new volunteers, help them develop an understanding of your group, and their volunteer role, and help them feel welcome and part of your team from the start.

Below is a list of some of the different areas your group should consider incorporating when welcoming a new volunteer to your team. All the areas suggested on this checklist might not apply to your group or the volunteering roles you offer, but the list is a good starting point if your group wants to develop a **volunteer checklist**.

1. Orientation

- Does your volunteer know the background of the organisation/group, and your purpose?
- Has your volunteer been introduced to other staff and volunteers?
- Have your team and other relevant people been briefed about the volunteer, their role and how they fit with the board/group?
- Does your volunteer know what days and times they are expected?
- Does your volunteer know policies and procedures?

2. General Information

- Does your volunteer know who their main contact is?
- Does your volunteer know who to go to if they have any questions or problems?
- Does your volunteer understand how to claim expenses?

3. Introduction to Role

- Have you given your volunteer an overview of their role and a breakdown of tasks involved? (volunteer position description)
- Has your volunteer been shown their work area? Do they know where they can find equipment they need and how to use them?
- Have you checked if your volunteer has any specific questions about the role?

4. Support

- Have you told your volunteer how they will be supported in their role?
- Do they know what training is available for their role (if appropriate)? (if a board member, have they been given copies of the bylaws, meeting rules, etc.)

- Has your volunteer been assigned an experienced volunteer to shadow?
- Does your volunteer know how to access the organisation/group's policies and procedures?
- Have you explained your policies to the volunteer? Policies can be on:
 - Safeguarding and how to spot and raise a safeguarding concern?
 - Health & Safety and the importance of being aware of those risks?
 - Privacy and Data Protection e.g., using social media, the internet, telephone/mobile,
 - Code of conduct/confidentiality policies

Appendix E: *Volunteer Handbook Templates*

Sample Volunteer Handbook

<https://southeastdistrict.ca/resources/volunteer-resources>

Volunteer Management Handbook: https://volunteer.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/VMH_Eng_2016_Print.pdf

Volunteer Canada: Engaging Volunteers: <https://volunteer.ca/engaging-volunteers/>