



GUIDELINES

COVID-19: ENGAGING AND MANAGING VOLUNTEERS IN THE HSE

1 APRIL 2020

1. Overview

- 1.1 As part of the national response to Covid-19 health services must be flexible and innovative in how we deliver our critical services. All resources which can support our services and staff must be explored including the use of volunteers.
- 1.2 These guidelines are for services that engage volunteers locally. They do not guide volunteers who are engaged through the 'Be On Call For Ireland' initiative.
- 1.3 While many health services throughout Ireland already have successful volunteer programmes in place, other services may not have experience of volunteers. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on engaging and managing volunteers, and to highlight important considerations in these arrangements.
- 1.4 Volunteers are individuals who choose to commit their time and energy for the benefit of society to support the work of an organisation or in the community, without receiving any payment beyond reimbursement of out of pocket expenses.
- 1.5 There may be scope for volunteers to fulfil a variety of non-clinical roles and activities which benefit the health service, patients and staff. During the current crisis, potential areas of activity includes contact tracing, reception and administration support and telephone helplines. There may be many other roles and activities however which could be fulfilled by volunteers.
- 1.6 As a first step, the organisation or each Service (e.g. CHO, Hospital Group, Corporate/ National Service) should identify a member of staff to act as Volunteer Coordinator/Manager for the organisation or service. The Volunteer Coordinator(s), with the support of relevant managers throughout the Service, should consider and identify the activities within a service which could be fulfilled by volunteers.
- 1.7 Consideration will need to be given to whether Garda vetting of relevant volunteers is necessary in line with the National Vetting Bureau Act for a particular role and any delays that may arise as a result. Garda Vetting of volunteers is already established process carried out by the HSE Garda Vetting Liaison Office (GVLO). Vetting must be submitted through the existing process. However, applicants assisting the Covid-19 response will be prioritised.
- 1.8 The Volunteer Coordinator will be responsible for overseeing the engagement of volunteers with the support of relevant managers. This may involve issuing relevant documentation (e.g. role and person specifications; Volunteer Agreement) and overseeing/supporting the induction, training and ongoing support/communication needs of volunteers and their supervisors/managers in the organisation.
- 1.9 It is very important that volunteers are assigned a named contact person for supervision and support purposes and that they are given clear guidelines of

their role as a volunteer. Equally the contributions made to the organisation by volunteers must be recognised and appreciation is shown individually to volunteers in the wards/departments/services where they are based.

- 1.10 It should be emphasised that individuals who are self-isolating or restricting their movements under HSE/Public Health advice, have been diagnosed with Covid-19 or are showing symptoms of Covid-19 and are awaiting testing should not be engaged as volunteers.

2. Key considerations in the use of Volunteers

2.1 Health and Safety

2.1.1 The organisations in which volunteers are placed are responsible for ensuring the safety, health and welfare of its volunteers. In the first instance it is important that the employer is satisfied that volunteers who are engaged have the required skills and competencies for their particular role/activities. For some roles, this may require certification or other forms of assurance. Because of the difficulties presented by Covid-19 in relation to staffing, obtaining satisfactory evidence of this competency may be achieved in alternative ways. The HSE should do its best to satisfy itself that all individuals engaged to undertake activities on a voluntary basis are competent to do so and document their decisions accordingly.

2.1.2 Risk assessments should be done to help identify any health and safety issues which relate to particular volunteering roles and control measures which must be taken to address any risks should be identified (e.g. training). These risk control measures for individuals undertaking work activities should be directly related to the individual's level of competence and the activities they shall undertake.

2.1.3 Safety statements and relevant policies and other relevant risk assessments/control programmes and procedures which set out all the safety arrangements in place including fire safety should be brought to the attention of volunteers during the induction process.

2.1.4 The HSE's Corporate Safety Statement which describes the arrangements in place for safeguarding and maintaining a safe and healthy environment for employees, service users and visitors is here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/healthsafetyand%20wellbeing/css.pdf>

2.1.5 Volunteers equally have a duty in relation to safety, health and welfare and must familiarise themselves with and adhere to the relevant health and safety provisions. The HSE and other public health service employers should ensure that volunteers are provided with the necessary information, training and/or equipment and any other control measure identified to carry out their role safely.

2.1.6 It should be made clear to volunteers that they are offering their assistance at time when the HSE is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused

by Covid-19. In accepting engagement as a volunteer they must accept that they are duly aware of the risks associated with working in potential Covid-19 environments.

2.2 At risk volunteers

2.2.1 In seeking and selecting volunteers, it is important to consider the most up to date occupational health advice in relation to at risk groups (for example those that have conditions that place them at high risk of severe disease, are pregnant or are otherwise immunocompromised) and assign volunteers accordingly. It is important to clearly outline the nature and activities of the volunteer role so that volunteers can de-select themselves where appropriate from particular volunteer roles.

2.2.2 Volunteers should also follow all HSE guidelines with regard to self-isolation, restricted movement and the development of symptoms of Covid-19.

2.3 Insurance and Clinical/General Indemnity

2.3.1 To ensure indemnity cover for personal injury and third party property damage under State indemnity, all volunteers in the HSE must be competent to undertake any assigned duties and must be approved by local HSE management. A Volunteer Agreement must be signed by all volunteers engaged (see Appendix A). The names of all volunteers must be submitted to the HSE Insurance Department (see Appendix B). All relevant documentation and records should be retained on file and be available for inspection by the State Claims Agency (SCA) should the need arise.

2.3.2 Volunteers who drive their own private vehicles or HSE vehicles on HSE business as are not covered as part of HSE's indemnity cover.

2.4 Garda vetting

2.4.1 Requests for Garda Vetting should be submitted by the pre-registered contact person with the GVLO for the purposes of submitting requests for Garda Vetting. Vetting for Covid-19 volunteers will be processed using the new Covid-19 digital form.

2.4.2 All volunteers who are engaged in relevant work will need to be vetted. Relevant work involves having access to and/or contact with vulnerable adults and/or children while performing the duties of their volunteer role. Please see 'Guide To The Garda Vetting Process For HSE Employees, Volunteers and Work Experience' which is available from the pre-registered contact person.

2.4.3 Under the legislation it is an offence to engage a person to undertake relevant work until the vetting process has been completed. This means it is an offence to appoint anyone engaged in relevant work to the HSE unless:

- the HSE is in receipt of a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau (NVB) in relation to the applicant.

AND

- the appropriate follow up procedures have been successfully concluded in order that Garda Clearance can be issued.

2.4.4 Any applicant who submits an application form is obligated to undertake an identification verification process which includes confirming both their identity and current address. The pre-registered contact person must carry out the identification verification process.

2.4.5 The GVLO will provide the manager who requested the vetting the original disclosure issued from the NVB. HSE Managers must make their own decisions in relation to suitability or otherwise of prospective volunteers entering their services. The GVLO has no role in the decision making process in the event of positive disclosures (i.e. a disclosure with criminal offence history) and risk assessments for volunteers.

2.5 Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children

2.5.1 Depending on the volunteering placement, Induction of volunteers into the policies and guidelines which safeguard vulnerable adults and children in the HSE may be required.

2.6 Confidentiality and GDPR

2.6.1 During the course of volunteering, volunteers may have access to confidential information regarding the HSE and its service users. In engaging volunteers, consideration must be given to ensuring volunteers are made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality and not to disclose information to third parties during or after volunteering for the organisation. Volunteers should be advised that any breach of confidentiality may result in the discontinuation of the voluntary placement. This information can be conveyed in a Volunteer Agreement.

2.6.2 Volunteers who as part of their role/activities are processing the personal data of other volunteers/employees/service users should be subject to the same requirements as employees in the processing of this data. Volunteers should be given copies of relevant GDPR documentation in this regard.

2.7 Expenses

2.7.1 Financial costs incurred as a result of volunteering may be reimbursed, once approved in advance, verified and authorised by the appropriate manager in accordance with relevant HSE regulations and standard public health service travel rates.

3. Appointing Volunteers

3.1 Identify need

3.1.1 As a first step, each Service (e.g. CHO, Hospital Group, Corporate/National Service) should identify a member of staff to act as Volunteer Coordinator/Manager for this Service. Each Volunteer Coordinator with the support of relevant managers throughout the Service should consider and identify the activities within a service which could be fulfilled by volunteers. Consideration will need to be given to whether Garda vetting of relevant volunteers is necessary for a particular role and any delays that may arise as a result.

3.2 Identify Role/Person Specification

3.2.1 Once specific roles have been identified for volunteers a written role/person specification should be drawn up. This specification should give an overview of the volunteering role, how it fits into the overall work of the organisation, a breakdown of the tasks and the desired time commitment. The person specification should describe the skills, attributes and qualifications if any which the person needs to fulfil the role. To minimise health and safety risks and ensure compliance with the requirements of State Claims Agency indemnity schemes, all volunteers must be competent to undertake assigned roles and duties.

3.3 Communicating the need

3.3.1 Communicating /advertising the volunteer roles may be achieved in a variety of ways. This may include local notices within services which employees may communicate externally, in local health centres, HSE website, social media, newspapers etc?

3.3.2 Communication of vacancies and assistance with the process may also be provided by the organisation Volunteering Ireland <https://www.volunteer.ie/> Volunteering Ireland is the national volunteer development organisation and a support body for all local Volunteer Centres and Volunteering Information Services in Ireland. Organisations that are registered with Volunteering Ireland can register their vacancies on the volunteering database and obtain support with filling their volunteer needs.

3.3.3 The communication/advertisement should identify the method of application.

3.4 Application process

3.4.1 Potential volunteers may respond to advertisements seeking volunteers or may apply speculatively. All enquiries from potential volunteers should be acknowledged promptly. All volunteers will be required to complete an application form (Appendix C).

3.4.2 All applications will be reviewed to determine if the applicant has the eligibility requirements (such as essential qualifications, experience and skills) outlined in the Person Specification.

3.5 Interview

3.5.1 Applicants may be invited to attend an informal interview to outline the duties involved in the volunteer role and to assess the applicant's interest in and suitability for the role. Due to the urgency of the Covid-19 circumstances, such informal interviews may take place over the telephone. Selection will be based on the ability of each applicant to fulfil the role concerned. A written record of the interview will be retained. Candidates for interview will be required to produce a form of recent photographic identification i.e. drivers licence, passport or student ID.

3.5.2 Candidates will be notified of the outcome of their interview at the earliest possible date. If the applicant is considered suitable and they are still interested in taking up a volunteer role, the next stage involves clearance checks such as references, Garda/police clearance, occupational health, validation of qualifications and experience (if relevant).

3.6 Pre-placement health assessment

3.6.1 Volunteers will be subject to pre-placement health assessment. Health screening for volunteers will take into account the volunteering role, whether having a specific condition is relevant to that role, whether that creates any risks and how these should be managed.

3.6.2 Pre-placement health assessment forms are available from Health Business Services National Recruitment Services.

3.7 References

3.7.1 Reference checks and any other necessary pre-placement checks will be carried out in line with the HSE's recruitment and selection procedures. Where relevant for the volunteer role, volunteers are required to provide proof of professional qualifications/ licence/membership/insurance prior to acceptance as a volunteer. Up to date documentation is maintained as part of each volunteer's file.

3.8 Prior to commencement/Volunteering Agreement

3.8.1 A Volunteering Agreement should be drawn up to be signed by the HSE and the volunteer (Appendix A). This should outline the role and related tasks, and the terms and conditions e.g. work hours, duties and supervision; the duration of the volunteer requirement. The agreement should also address other matters such as confidentiality and GDPR requirements; health and safety and safeguarding matters; expenses; and if grievances arise. Consideration should be given to outlining a trial period of three months so that both parties to the Agreement can assess how it is working out.

3.8.2 Once all the necessary checks have been undertaken an offer of volunteer placement will be confirmed in writing or over the telephone once the volunteer accepts the Volunteer Agreement (Appendix A).

4. Managing Volunteers

4.1 Induction, training and support

4.1.1 The HSE should aim to ensure that all volunteers have the appropriate induction, training, supervision and support to carry out their voluntary role within the organisation.

4.1.2 Volunteers should receive induction when they begin their role. This will consist of a general introduction to the unit and a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role as well as all relevant general (e.g. relevant safeguarding policies; GDPR etc.) and health and safety policies and requirements to ensure safe systems of work. Volunteers should be provided with uniforms, identity badges and access mechanisms (e.g. swipe cards) where applicable. Volunteers will receive initial and ongoing training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their particular voluntary role. The training will be appropriate for the requirements of the position and the capabilities of the volunteers. Where training cannot be provided in the current emergency, instruction by managers will be offered to all volunteers at periodic intervals.

4.1.3 It is very important that volunteers are made to feel valued for their contribution to the organisation. This can occur in a variety of ways including giving volunteers access to the subsidised rates in staff canteen. Volunteers should have a clear point of contact for any concerns or issues they wish to raise and this will be addressed by the relevant manager.