



Skills acquired through
Volunteering in Sport

LEARNING RESOURCES

/// PILLAR 1: VOLUNTEER STRATEGY AND PLANNING

SUB-PILLAR 1.3

**Developing, implementing
and evaluating a volunteer
strategy / plan**



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



/// Sub-Pillar 1.3

Developing, implementing and evaluating a volunteer strategy / plan

a/ DESCRIPTION

Once you have undertaken the underpinning research and enhanced your understanding of volunteering, you can use the resources in this section to help you map out your volunteering needs in the form of a broader strategy and a more detailed, operational plan. This will help you take a more informed and structured approach to managing all aspects of volunteering. You will also find a range of monitoring, evaluation and learning tools to help you gain deeper insight into the impact of your volunteers and the support you created for them.

b/ KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS – DID YOU KNOW THAT:

From our Global Survey, sport organisations told us volunteers can bring a wide variety of benefits:

- ① 73% strongly agreed that sport volunteers actively contribute to social, health and economic wellbeing
- ① 60% said that volunteers provide energy and enthusiasm to sport organisations
- ① 59% agreed that volunteers are vital in providing logistical support
- ① 50% agreed that volunteers help to bring in new participants for sport activities
- ① 40% agreed that volunteers help to build relationships with the local community (*which are vital to growing sport participation by ordinary citizens*).

When your organisation is developing its volunteering strategy, you may benefit from thinking carefully about all the potential benefits which volunteers bring and build these into your plans.



TEER

>> CONTENT AREA 1: CREATING A VISION FOR FUTURE STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This sub-pillar deals with something you might (understandably) have never considered: producing a strategy purely for the development of your volunteer workforce. Let us start by clarifying that this does not have to be a major, 'scientific' exercise, but setting out your hopes and expectations for your recruitment, deployment and development of sport volunteers will make so many other parts of your role easier. Any strategy for the development of sport volunteering should sit within the wider vision of your organisation (e.g., there would be no point planning to recruit a cohort of event volunteers if you were not planning to stage any special events).

Creating a vision for your volunteer needs is a great start place for a strategy. Vision statements describe your organisation's "why," while mission statements describe the "who" and "what" of your sport organisation. Vision statements are essential because they reveal a common goal and direction for your volunteers. You can craft a compelling vision statement by infusing it with passion, making it inspiring, and aligning it with your sport organisation's values and goals.

🕒 **An example could be: Our Vision => Building strong communities through volunteering.**

🕒 **Key steps to think about when creating a vision for volunteering in your organisation are the following:**

- Determine who will shape your vision
- Evaluate your sport organisation's published (internal and external facing) documents and materials
- Hold workshops to brainstorm and explore your vision for volunteering
- Get individual input (interviews/ honest feedback)
- Check out other sporting organisations' vision statements for learning and research purposes
- Keep it short but meaningful
- Create a longer version for leadership and senior management eyes only
- Map out your sporting organisation's biggest goals
- Consider your sporting organisation's potential local and global impact
- Dream big, be daring but not generic
- Consider creating a brand vision board (visually shows what you do/ key words).

🕒 **Quick tips/ points to consider:**

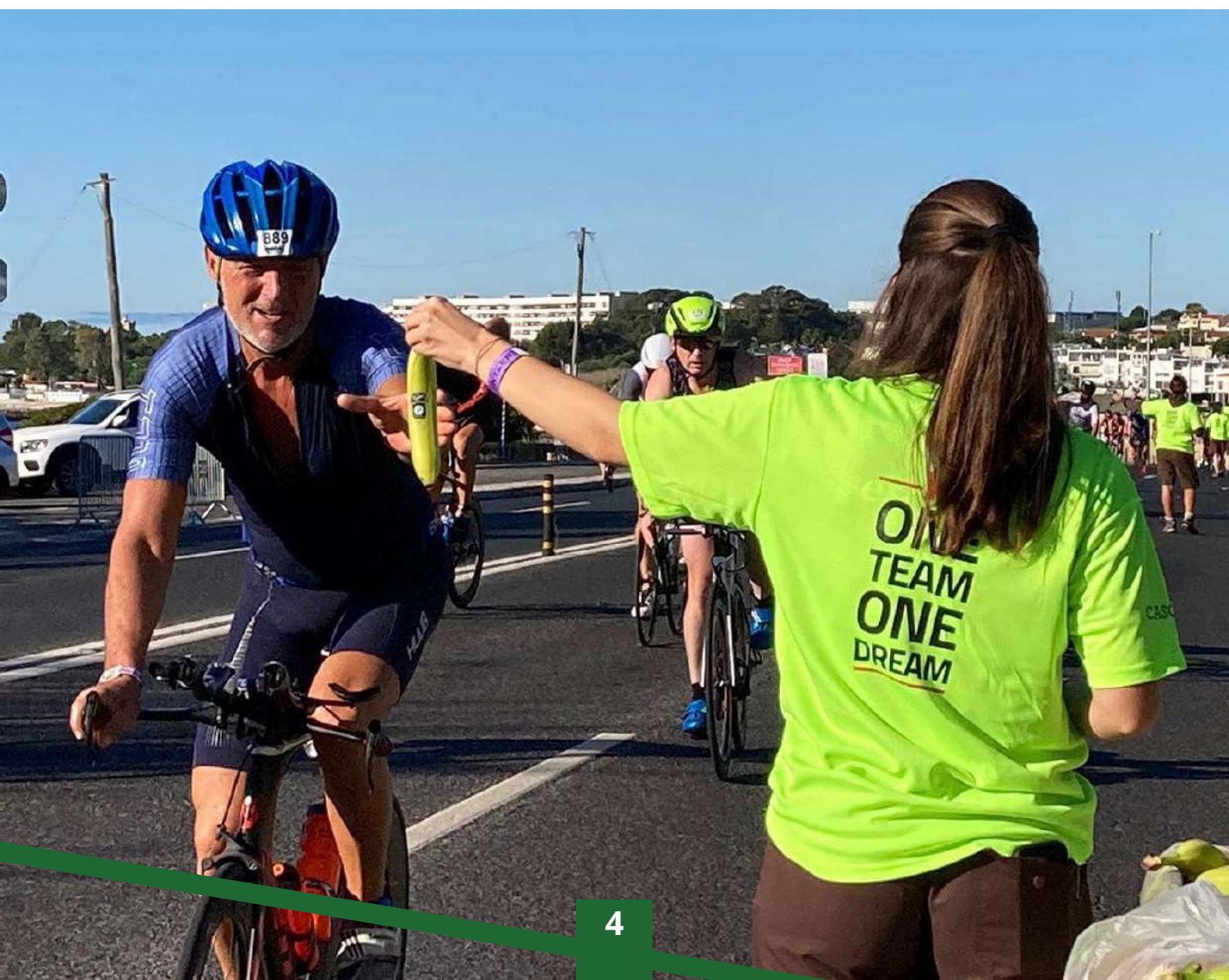
- Project five to ten years into the future
- Dream big, and focus on success
- Use the present tense
- Use clear, concise, jargon-free language
- Infuse it with passion, and make it inspiring
- Align it with your sport organisations' wider values and goals
- Create a plan to communicate your vision statement to your employees
- Prepare to commit time and resources to the vision you establish.

So, vision statements must strike a balance between being broad and ambitious enough for people to unify around, whilst being specific enough to drive the detail of the volunteer strategy.

For example:

"The best handball volunteer workforce in Finland" is a suitable vision statement as it meets these criteria.

"To recruit twenty handball volunteers by the end of October" is not a vision statement as it is too narrow and specific.



>> CONTENT AREA 2: PRODUCING A VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

A volunteer strategy shows your organisation is serious about volunteering. It helps everyone understand your vision for volunteers and why you're involving them. A volunteering strategy sets out what you want to achieve with volunteering and how. It explains how volunteers will contribute to the organisation's aims. It also covers how it will find, recruit and support them. It can be part of your organisational strategy or presented separately; however, it must align fully with your sport organisation's overall strategy.

🕒 To make sure your strategy supports your aims, it should answer these questions:

- What is the sport organisation's overall vision and how will volunteers help to meet it?
- What opportunities and challenges will the organisation face in the next three to five years?
- How will these affect volunteering?
- How will the organisation set tasks and activities for volunteers?
- Who will make sure these tasks are meaningful?
- What skills or attributes will volunteers need?
- How will the organisation share volunteer opportunities?
- How will volunteering activity be inclusive?
- How will the organisation recruit, train and support volunteers?
- How will the organisation value and develop volunteers?
- What processes and policies will the organisation need to support volunteering?
- How will the organisation show the impact of its volunteering?
- How will the organisation seek feedback and use volunteers' experiences to improve things?
- What other resources or systems will the organisation need to make volunteering successful?
- Who will make decisions about volunteering and the policies that affect it?

You cannot write a volunteer strategy on your own, as it is not a one person job. So who do you involve in producing a volunteer strategy? The answer is simple: speak to a range of people to help you write your strategy.

🕒 Below is a starter list of the people you might engage in the strategy development process:

- **Senior staff, volunteers and/ or trustees**
Make sure you get senior support for your strategy and the resources needed to make it happen. Include people who are key decision-makers for relevant processes or funding.
- **Volunteer managers**
Anyone already managing volunteers at your organisation will know lots of useful information. They can bring knowledge and experience from their networks too.
- **The people your organisation helps**
If volunteers will help you provide services, speak to users of that service about their needs.
- **Paid staff**
If paid staff may work alongside volunteers, consult with them about your plans. This can help to address any concerns they have.
- **Existing volunteers**
If your organisation already has volunteers, they'll have useful insights and suggestions.

It's a good idea to give people different ways to contribute to your strategy. For example, you could hold focus groups and or do an online survey. Ask the people you want to reach how they would like to share their views. You can also bring in an external consultant to help develop your strategy (*although this might be a more expensive option unless you can acquire their services on a pro-bono basis!*).

👉 **Key steps to think about when creating a volunteering strategy for your sporting organisation are the following** (*the strategy needs to demonstrate the following points*):

- Informs volunteers about your mission
- Educates them about different volunteer opportunities
- Establishes goals for volunteers
- Safeguards against common mishaps
- Helps you learn more about them
- Excites volunteers to make a difference

👉 **Quick tips/ points to consider:**

- Understand volunteer motivation (*see sub-pillar 2*)
- Use your volunteer engagement strategy to tell a story
- Provide orientation, training, and feedback
- Be flexible
- Encourage a sense of community
- Stay in touch
- Show appreciation
- Engage more volunteers (*throughout this process*).

Whilst the production of a volunteering strategy may involve some short-term inconvenience, the benefits it can generate have the potential to be significant and long-lasting!



>> CONTENT AREA 3: IMPLEMENTING YOUR VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY THROUGH OPERATIONAL PLANNING

To bring your volunteer strategy to life for your sporting organisation, you will need practical and robust action plans. They are also called operational plans. Operational plans support the broader strategy by setting out an action plan for a particular goal or project. They can also map out how individual strategies (i.e. volunteer strategies) or departments will contribute to overall organisational goals. The best operational plans have a clearly articulated objective that everyone in your sporting organisation is focused on achieving. Your operational plan will, therefore, be a useful document for your stakeholders.

🔗 How to create an operational plan

The success of an operational plan typically depends on how realistic expectations are. Without achievable goals, a business may never be able to succeed with its long-term goals.

If you're thinking about creating your operational plan, here are the four key principles that you can follow to ensure that your plan is achievable and realistic:

1. Define goals and objectives:

To begin building an operational plan, you can begin by carefully thinking about the goals that you hope to achieve with this plan. These are the five main questions that you can answer when defining the goals and objectives of the operational plan.

The questions include:

- What is your budget?
- Do you have the right team?
- Where do you want this sporting organisation and team to be in terms of the volunteer workforce?
- How do you get there?
- How are you going to measure your progress?

2. Assign resources and team members *(part of the action plan – see below)*

3. Determine the step-by-step processes that you're going to take to achieve these goals *(part of the action plan – see below)*

4. Monitor progress *(effective operational plans are only effective when you monitor them regularly – see next content area).*

🔗 Creating an action plan

As with all strategic approaches, a sporting volunteer strategy should include an action plan with the following ingredients:

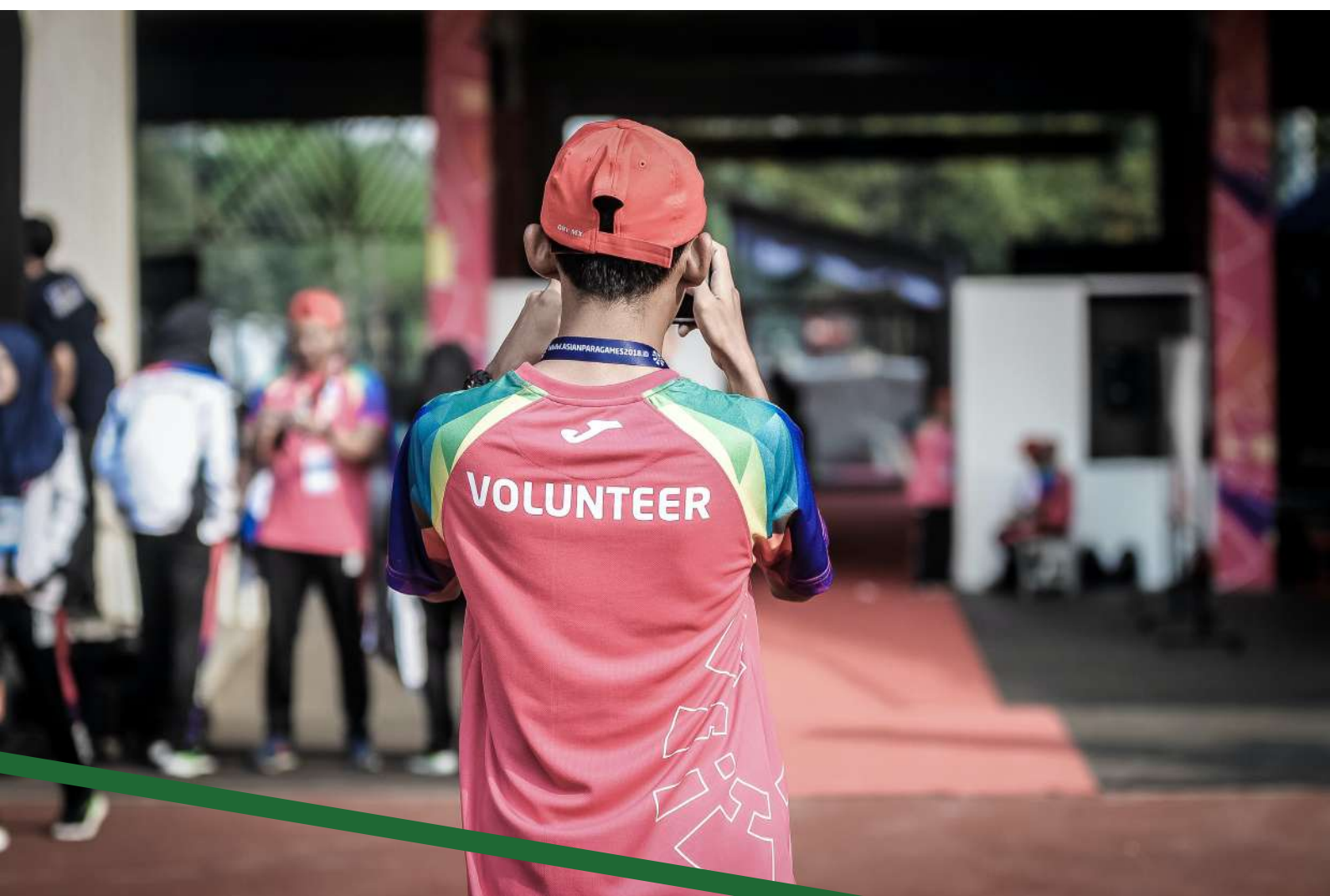
- Organised around the objectives set out in the strategy
- Prioritised actions and task lists
- Targets (including timeframes) and responsibilities
- Resources available

- What staff / volunteer resources or other support must be dedicated to implementing each action identified in the strategy?
- Who is responsible for what? Sometimes it is appropriate to identify a lead individual, department, or organisation, as well as those responsible for providing support.
- What is the timeframe for implementing actions under the strategy?
- Do some actions take priority?
- Are some actions dependent on the outcomes of others?
- What mechanisms will ensure ongoing volunteer community involvement in implementing the strategy?
- How will you ensure ongoing collaborative relationships with other sporting organisations, such as national federations?

An action plan is relatively easy to draw up but much more difficult to implement.

Progress should be regularly reviewed and communication amongst key stakeholders maintained.

The plan needs to be clear enough that everyone is able to identify and deliver on their responsibilities, but it needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the inevitable 'shocks' that will be encountered during its implementation.



>> CONTENT AREA 4: MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR STRATEGY

The importance of monitoring and evaluation in the strategy process cannot be underestimated as it provides a way to assess the crucial link between deliverers and beneficiaries on the ground and decision-makers. (In a smaller, voluntary sport organisation these could be the same people, but hopefully you see what we mean.) In addition, it adds to the retention and development of organisational memory, in other words the more purposeful work that is delivered by volunteers, the more there is a to reflect upon and learn from. An effective monitoring and evaluation will have a positive impact on future fundraising and give you the chance to influence decision that impact your sport organisation, for example those made by your national federation.

Effective monitoring involves keeping on top of all activities and making sure that implementation is on the right path towards achieving your goals. Monitoring might reveal that your strategy is not working, that means you may need to change your strategy during the implementation phase. Monitoring and evaluation plays a key part in ensuring good programme results. While monitoring and evaluation is an accountability mechanism to ensure and report that activities are being delivered as planned, it should also be used for learning and adaptive planning.

Your action plan (discussed in the preceding content area) has already outlined the objectives and accompanying actions for the development of your volunteer workforce. Depending on the level of detail you are able to go into in the monitoring and evaluation process, you can set key performance indicators (KPIs) to help you understand how you are getting on at any given point in the process. KPIs are interim measures of achievement rather than end goals – they are used to monitor progress. They are only useful if they are well designed and relevant to the wider strategy and action plan. A simple example would be a KPI we would use to check if we were on target to increase our volunteer workforce by the people over a two-year period. We might have reason to assume that the majority of new volunteers will be recruited in the second year, thus a total of three new recruits at the end of year 1 might indicate that we are on track. KPIs can be much more complex and can focus on all areas of work, including financial performance, so consider how they can play a part in monitoring your action plan.

🔗 **Make sure that the ongoing monitoring process includes the following:**

- KPIs clearly defined and reviewed.
- Define data collection methods (*e.g., counting numbers, financial information, conversations with key individuals*) and timeline.
- Identify monitoring and evaluation roles and responsibilities: all paid and voluntary personnel can play a part but this needs to be clearly agreed at the outset.
- Create an analysis plan and reporting templates.
- Make sure that key monitoring and evaluation information is disseminated to appropriate stakeholders.

Evaluation of a volunteering strategy is a more reflective process. Whilst ongoing might answer the question “are we doing things right?”, evaluation looks at “are/ were we doing the right things?”.

In other words, evaluation processes will consider whether the strategy is succeeding/ has succeeded and try to identify any variation from expectations.

The same people that produced the original volunteering strategy should ideally be part of the evaluation process. Evaluation during the life of the strategy may identify a need for changes to be made, hence the original strategy should have in-built flexibility. Evaluation will generally consider the strategy's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, added to which your sport organisation might have agreed specific criteria for evaluation at the outset of the process.

>> CONTENT AREA 5: LEARNING TO INFORM FUTURE STRATEGIC DECISIONS

It is vitally important to use the learning from your day-to-day practices to shape future strategic decisions. If you have gone to the trouble of devising, implementing and evaluating a strategy for the development of volunteering in your sport organisation it only seems appropriate that the experience informs the way forwards. One methodology that can help shape positive decisions is evidence-based practice. An evidence-based approach to decision-making is based on a combination of using critical thinking and the best available evidence. You do not need to have a high-level education to engage in critical thinking – your experiences as someone with intimate knowledge of your sport organisation are vital in shaping future approaches and helping you to successfully recruit, manage and develop sport volunteers.

There are several key sources of information to help you find the meaning and significance of your experiences of working with volunteers.

🕒 **Make sure that the ongoing monitoring process includes the following:**

- Literature on management has become more readily available in recent years. Find sources that interest you and are digestible – think about how the management concepts contained in them relate to your experiences and the achievements of your volunteer strategy.
- Monitoring data (see previous content area) must be examined. This data can come externally from participants (satisfaction, repeated attendance at your sport organisation's activities), or internally from volunteers and paid staff (levels of 'job' satisfaction, retention rates). There's also the comparison between 'hard' evidence, such as turnover rate or your volunteers, and 'soft' elements, like perceptions of culture and attitudes towards leadership.
- Stakeholders, both internal (board members, volunteers, etc) and external (your sport's national federation, suppliers, etc), may be affected by your sport organisation's decisions and their consequences. Acquiring knowledge of their concerns will give more context to decisions you make about the future.

One very important element of evidence-based practice is collating evidence from different sources.

🕒 **There are six ways to do this:**

- **Asking:** translating a practical issue or problem into an answerable question.
- **Acquiring:** systematically searching for and retrieving evidence.
- **Appraising:** critically judging the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence.
- **Aggregating:** weighing and pulling together the evidence.
- **Applying:** incorporating the evidence into a decision-making process.
- **Assessing:** evaluating the outcome of the decision taken so as to increase the likelihood.

Through these six steps, decision makers on future volunteering strategies can ensure the quality of evidence is not ignored are able to evaluate the trustworthiness of evidence available.

🕒 **Appraisal varies depending on the source of evidence, but generally involves the same questions:**

- Where and how is evidence gathered?
- Is it the best evidence available?
- Is it sufficient to reach a conclusion?
- Might it be biased in a particular direction? If so, why?

This might seem like a painstaking process, especially in a sport organisation that might be led by volunteers who are already extremely busy, but if we are not committed to continuous learning, we repeat mistakes and find it difficult to progress.

All of the content in this challenging sub-pillar, with its focus on strategy, represents a relatively short-term investment that should yield relatively long-term benefits and enable you to do a better job of recruiting, retaining and developing your sort volunteer workforce.

SUB-PILLAR 1.3

Developing, implementing and evaluating a volunteer strategy / plan

REFERENCES AND KEY LINKS

- Volunteer Ireland – [Click here](#)
- NCVO – [Click here](#)
- Sopact – [Click here](#)
- Chartered Institute of Personal Development – [Click here](#)
- Volunteer Now – [Click here](#)
- IRFU – [Click here](#)
- Sport and Development Org – [Click here](#)



Skills acquired through
Volunteering in Sport

VOLUNTEER

V4V PARTNERSHIP:



Coordinator



www.v4v-sport.eu



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.