VolunTrek

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Module 2: Volunteer Recruitment

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What will you achieve in this module?

This module will help your organisation prepare and communicate volunteering opportunities that are clear, realistic, inclusive and accessible.

By the end of the module, you will be able to:

- distinguish recruitment from selection and matching;
- confirm what must be ready before publishing an opportunity;
- explain the role, conditions, support and expected impact clearly;
- choose suitable online and face-to-face recruitment channels;
- adapt communication to different commitments and audiences;
- remove unnecessary barriers from the application process;
- respond to potential volunteers consistently and respectfully;
- recognise how cultural and linguistic differences can affect communication.

At a glance!	
Estimated reading time	30 – 40 minutes
Main outputs	Volunteer opportunity, channel plan, accessible application process and recruitment tracking system
Essential actions	Define the role, prepare the team, remove unnecessary barriers, publish transparently and respond consistently

Why matching matters

Recruitment is the process of communicating volunteering opportunities and encouraging interested people to come forward. It should be planned around genuine organisational and community needs, not used as a quick response to staff shortages or as a search for unpaid labour.

Recruitment is also a two-way process:

- your organisation explains what it needs, offers and expects;
- potential volunteers decide whether the opportunity fits their motivations, interests, circumstances and availability.

The recruitment experience creates an important first impression. If it is unclear, rushed or inaccessible, it may lead to unrealistic applications, misunderstandings, early withdrawal, pressure on staff and risks for beneficiaries. It may also exclude people who face language, digital, physical, cultural, financial or social barriers.

When recruitment is well prepared:

- candidates understand the opportunity and what is expected;
- the organisation reaches people who are genuinely interested;
- staff are ready to welcome and support new volunteers;
- roles respond to real needs;
- more people can access the opportunity;
- trust and transparency begin with the first contact.

Volunteers may be motivated by solidarity, social connection, learning, personal development, professional experience, community participation or a combination of these

factors. Recognise this diversity, but do not present volunteering as employment or promise outcomes that your organisation cannot guarantee.

Recruitment materials and screening conversations should not assume that everyone shares the same communication norms, sense of hierarchy or way of describing personal motivation. Use clear and inclusive language, remain open to different ways of communicating and avoid interpreting cultural differences as a lack of interest or suitability.

Explain the purpose, not only the task

A strong opportunity helps people understand the difference their contribution can make.

Task-only message	Purpose-led message
“We need a volunteer to drive a van.”	“Help older people experiencing isolation travel safely to healthcare appointments and community activities.”

The second message does not hide the task. It connects the practical responsibility to its social purpose.

Before you begin: recruitment, selection and matching

These processes are connected, but they have different purposes.

Process	Main purpose	What happens
Recruitment	Attract potential volunteers	The organisation communicates opportunities

Process	Main purpose	What happens
		and invites people to express interest.
Selection	Assess suitability	The organisation uses role-related, objective and non-discriminatory criteria to consider suitability, boundaries, safeguarding requirements and alignment with the organisation's values.
Matching	Find the best fit	The organisation connects a selected person with a suitable role by considering motivation, skills, availability and support needs.

Recruitment focuses on visibility, clarity, accessibility and outreach. Detailed interviews, behavioural questions and situational exercises mainly belong to selection or matching, although limited initial screening may be necessary for roles involving specific risks or people in vulnerable situations.

Not every person will be suitable for every role. Explain decisions respectfully and, where possible, explore another role or opportunity. Final decisions must always be based on relevant, transparent and non-discriminatory criteria.

Build your recruitment process

Follow these six steps before and during recruitment.

Step 1 – Confirm the need and your readiness

Recruit only after completing **Module 1: Organisational Needs Assessment.** (link)

Confirm:

- which organisational or community need the role addresses;
- why volunteer involvement is appropriate;
- how volunteers will add value without replacing paid staff;
- whether enough time, people and resources are available;
- who will coordinate and supervise volunteers;
- whether essential legal, insurance, safeguarding and data-protection arrangements are in place.

Stop before publishing if your organisation cannot yet provide safe tasks, clear boundaries, appropriate supervision or essential safeguards.

Step 2 – Define the volunteer opportunity

Prepare a realistic role description containing:

- role title and purpose;
- expected contribution or impact;
- main tasks and clear boundaries;
- location and delivery format;
- start date, duration and time commitment;
- essential and desirable skills;
- training and onboarding provided;
- supervision and named contact person;
- accessibility conditions and available adaptations;
- agreed expenses or other practical support;
- relevant conduct, confidentiality and safeguarding requirements;
- application method and deadline, where applicable;
- expected response timeline and next steps;

- any relevant cultural or community context useful for the volunteer to know in advance.

Separate:

- essential requirements that are necessary to perform the role safely;
- skills that can be learned through preparation and support;
- preferences that may be helpful but are not required.

Unnecessary criteria can exclude motivated people who could perform the role successfully with training or reasonable adaptations.

Use: Volunteer Opportunity Description Template (link)

Step 3 – Prepare your team

Recruitment begins inside the organisation. Before publishing the opportunity, ensure that staff and existing volunteers understand:

- why new volunteers are being recruited;
- what volunteers will and will not do;
- how responsibilities will be divided;
- who will welcome, train and supervise them;
- how concerns will be raised and addressed;
- what support the organisation can realistically provide.

Discuss possible concerns about workload, disruption or the replacement of paid roles. Do not leave recruitment to an isolated coordinator: the people who will work with volunteers must be prepared and involved.

Use: Recruitment Readiness Checklist. (link)

Step 4 – Design a clear and manageable process

Decide in advance:

- where and when the opportunity will be promoted;
- how people can ask questions or express interest;
- what information you genuinely need from candidates;
- who will receive and respond to enquiries;
- what response time your organisation can meet;
- whether an initial conversation or screening is required;
- how personal data will be collected, accessed, stored and deleted;
- when and how candidates will learn the next steps.

The coordinator or adult educator is often the candidate's first direct contact with the organisation. This person should communicate warmly and consistently, answer honestly, explain the role's purpose and limits and avoid creating unrealistic expectations.

Set a realistic response standard. For example:

- acknowledge an enquiry within two or three working days, if your capacity allows;
- provide an estimated date for the next response;
- tell candidates when delays occur;
- always communicate a decision or clear next step.

Choose a timeframe your organisation can actually meet. Silence suggests that volunteers are not valued.

Use: Recruitment Tracking Sheet and Initial Interest Form.(link)

Step 5 – Make recruitment inclusive and accessible

Inclusive recruitment requires more than publishing the same call for everyone. Review who may be excluded by your message, channels, requirements or application process.

Use clear and accessible language

- Write short sentences and organise information under clear headings.
- Avoid bureaucratic language and unnecessary acronyms.

- Explain technical terms and unfamiliar procedures.
- Use respectful, non-discriminatory wording.
- Clearly separate essential requirements from preferences.
- Provide relevant languages where possible.
- Avoid assuming shared cultural references, idioms or examples that may not translate across backgrounds.
- Depending on your audience, consider easy-to-read, large-print, audio or video versions; subtitles; alternative text for images; visual guidance; telephone explanations; or face-to-face information sessions.

Make applications easy to complete

Keep online forms short, mobile-friendly and limited to necessary information. Where possible, offer alternatives such as:

- telephone or email;
- an accessible messaging service;
- an in-person conversation;
- a paper form;
- support from a trusted partner organisation.

A long or complex online form should not be the first barrier to volunteering.

Communicate conditions honestly

Tell candidates:

- whether the location is physically accessible;
- whether travel or physical effort is required;
- which digital tools will be used;
- which language skills are genuinely essential;
- whether interpretation, equipment or other support is available;

- whether remote participation or flexible schedules are possible;
- whom to contact about support or adaptations.

Do not describe an opportunity as fully accessible when significant barriers remain.

Remove unnecessary exclusion

Do not require:

- previous volunteering experience for a basic entry-level role;
- advanced digital skills when training can be provided;
- unrestricted availability when shifts can be shared;
- formal qualifications that the tasks do not require;
- perfect knowledge of the local language when communication support is possible.

Essential safety, legal or safeguarding requirements must remain in place. Inclusion means removing irrelevant barriers, not ignoring genuine responsibilities.

Offer flexibility where possible

Consider:

- shorter shifts or shared roles;
- gradual involvement or an agreed trial period;
- flexible schedules;
- online or hybrid tasks;
- additional orientation;
- mentoring or buddy support;
- adapted communication;
- reimbursement of agreed expenses.

Flexibility should be combined with clear and realistic expectations.

Reflect diversity responsibly

Use images, examples and testimonials that reflect different ages, abilities, cultures and life experiences. Help people recognise that they could belong in the organisation without using stereotypes or presenting individuals only through disadvantage.

Consider culture and communication

Communication styles vary. Language fluency, eye contact, directness, silence or hesitation should not automatically be treated as indicators of motivation or suitability. Explain expectations, allow candidates to ask questions and use more than one way for people to express their interest and experience.

Use: Inclusive Recruitment Checklist and Recruitment Communication Review Form.(link)

Step 6 – Choose channels and publish the opportunity

Do not rely only on the organisation's existing network. Select channels according to the people you want to reach.

Possible partners and locations include:

- schools, universities and adult education centres;
- youth and community centres;
- migrant and intercultural organisations;
- organisations supporting people with disabilities;
- employment and training services;
- neighbourhood and rural community organisations;
- local authorities and libraries;
- local events and informal community spaces;
- social media groups and volunteering platforms.

Trusted local organisations can help reach people who may not respond to a formal institutional call.

Feature	Online recruitment	Face-to-face recruitment
Channels	Social media, websites, newsletters, email, online forms and volunteering platforms	Schools, community centres, local events, partner organisations, presentations and word of mouth
Main advantage	Reaches wide or geographically dispersed audiences quickly	Builds trust through direct contact and local relationships
Communication needs	Short, visual, mobile-friendly and easy-to-share content	Prepared people who can explain the opportunity accurately
Useful materials	Accessible forms, direct links, videos, graphics and several contact options	Flyers, posters, presentations and information sessions
Main risk	Excluding people with limited digital access or attracting poorly informed applications	Reaching only familiar networks or sharing inconsistent verbal information

Combine online and face-to-face methods where possible. Every online call should offer a contact option for people who need help or cannot use the form. Staff and volunteer ambassadors should use agreed information so candidates receive consistent messages.

Use: Recruitment Channels Planner. (link)

Adapt the opportunity to its format

Recruiting for online volunteering

Explain:

- the digital task and expected outputs;
- the software or platforms used;
- estimated hours and deadlines;
- whether the schedule is fixed or flexible;
- meeting frequency and response-time expectations;
- data-protection and confidentiality requirements;
- available technical support;
- whether equipment is provided.

Online volunteering is not automatically accessible. Consider equipment, connectivity, digital confidence, assistive technology, language and time zones.

Recruiting for face-to-face volunteering

Explain:

- the exact location and transport options;
- physical accessibility and physical demands;
- the schedule and expected presence;
- contact with beneficiaries;
- health, safety and safeguarding requirements;
- necessary clothing or equipment;
- expense reimbursement, where available.

Recruiting for hybrid volunteering

Explain which tasks and meetings take place online or in person, how information will be shared and whether remote volunteers will have equal access to supervision, team decisions, learning and recognition.

Adapt the message to the commitment

Type	What the message should emphasise
Short-term or project based	The objective, start and end dates, expected outputs, immediate impact and skills volunteers may develop

Type	What the message should emphasise
Long-term	Regular participation, continuity, relationships, training, ongoing support, progression and reliability
One-off	Date, time, location, simple tasks, registration, practical requirements, instructions and possible future opportunities
Online	Remote tasks, flexibility, availability, communication channels, deadlines and technical requirements
International	Objectives, duration, host organisation, accommodation, food, travel support, insurance, financial conditions, working hours, mentoring, language support, cultural adaptation, safeguarding, visas and administrative responsibilities

For one-off opportunities, keep entry simple while maintaining essential safety and safeguarding measures. For long-term roles, be honest about the sustained commitment. International volunteering must not be presented as tourism, employment or a guaranteed route to migration.

Do’s and Don’ts

Do	Don´t
Confirm the need with staff and existing volunteers.	Publish a call without preparing the people who will support volunteers.
Explain both the tasks and the social purpose.	Use vague messages such as “Volunteers urgently needed”.

Do	Don´t
Be honest about schedules, demands, rules and challenges.	Hide difficult conditions to attract more candidates.
Use diverse online and face-to-face channels.	Rely only on existing contacts or followers.
Separate essential requirements from learnable skills.	Exclude people through irrelevant criteria.
Offer simple and alternative application methods.	Require everyone to complete a long online form.
Respond within a clear and respectful timeframe.	Leave applications unanswered.
Explain the training, support and recognition available.	Focus only on what volunteers must give.
Prepare willing volunteer ambassadors with accurate information.	Ask volunteers to recruit others without guidance.
Redirect candidates where another role may fit better.	Accept everyone because help is urgently needed.
Collect only necessary data and obtain appropriate consent.	Request sensitive information without a clear need and lawful basis.
Keep final decisions under human responsibility.	Use automated tools to accept, reject or rank candidates.

Good practices

- Use a standard template for volunteer opportunities.

- Agree on a realistic response time.
- Review accessibility before publishing every call.
- Ask someone outside the organisation to test whether the message is clear.
- Include a named contact person.
- Record where and when the opportunity was published.
- Monitor which channels attract suitable and diverse candidates.
- Explain what happens after someone expresses interest.
- Link all selection criteria directly to the role.
- Explain the available support and recognition.
- Invite current volunteers to share realistic experiences when they are willing and prepared.
- Review the results after each campaign and improve the next one.

Useful additions

The following can strengthen recruitment but are not essential:

- a dedicated volunteering page;
- short testimonials from current volunteers;
- a volunteer ambassador programme;
- QR codes linking to accessible information;
- easy-to-read or multilingual calls;
- a shared recruitment calendar;
- automatic acknowledgement messages;
- an anonymous accessibility feedback form;

- a volunteer opportunity database;
- a recruitment tracking sheet;
- an information session before applications close;
- a contact option through a familiar messaging platform.

Examples in practice

Example 1 – Recruiting digital volunteers before preparing the team

Situation: A food distribution organisation decided to recruit five volunteers to create a digital inventory system.

Challenge: The opportunity was published without involving warehouse staff. When volunteers arrived, staff did not understand the role and feared that the system would disrupt their work. Volunteers struggled to obtain information, felt unwelcome and soon left.

What changed: Before recruiting again, the coordinator met with the warehouse team. Staff identified problems in the existing system, agreed which tasks volunteers could support and named one team member to work with them. The new call explained how volunteers would help reduce repetitive paperwork and improve the distribution of donated food.

Learning point: Recruitment begins inside the organisation. Staff need a shared understanding of the role before volunteers are invited to participate.

Example 2 – Ethical expectations were not explained

Situation: A volunteer joined a programme providing recreational activities for children receiving long-term hospital care and built positive relationships with children and staff.

Challenge: Recruitment and orientation had not explained the rules for donated toys, food and gifts. The volunteer later took unused donated items home, believing that this was an acceptable informal form of compensation.

What changed: The coordinator discussed the situation directly with the volunteer and recognised that the rules had not been clear. The organisation updated its recruitment and onboarding materials and introduced a mandatory explanation of ethical boundaries, donated goods, confidentiality and acceptable behaviour.

Learning point: Good intentions do not replace clear rules. Boundaries and responsibilities must be explained from the beginning and reinforced during onboarding.

Tools and templates

Tool	Purpose	Who uses it?	When?
Volunteer Opportunity Description Template	Prepare a clear and complete volunteering call	Organisation and coordinator	Before recruitment
Inclusive Recruitment Checklist	Confirm that the organisation can recruit and support volunteers	Organisation and coordinator	Before recruitment
Recruitment Channels Planner	Identify language, digital, physical and procedural barriers	Coordinator and communication team	Before publication
Recruitment Tracking Sheet	Select appropriate online and face-to-face channels	Coordinator and communication team	Before and during recruitment
Initial Interest Form	Record enquiries, response dates,	Coordinator	During recruitment

Tool	Purpose	Who uses it?	When?
	channels and next steps		
Local Volunteer Initial Conversation Guide	Collect basic and relevant information from candidates	Candidate and coordinator	During recruitment
International Volunteer Interview Guide	Support a short two-way exploratory conversation	Coordinator	Initial screening or selection
Situational Question Bank	Discuss motivation, conditions and adaptation needs	Coordinator	Initial screening or selection
Recruitment Communication Review Form	Explore boundaries, teamwork and responses to realistic situations	Trained coordinator	Selection or matching
Recruitment Readiness Checklist	Review clarity, transparency and accessibility	Organisation or external reviewer	Before publication

Using AI in this module

AI may help organise anonymised, role-related information or create a comparison table. It must not rank candidates, calculate suitability scores, infer personality or make the final match.

Before using AI, follow **Module 0: Using AI responsibly** and your organisation's data-protection and AI policies.

Appropriate uses

AI can help you:

- turn a technical role description into a clearer opportunity;
- adapt a call to different channels and audiences;
- simplify complex or bureaucratic language;
- translate basic materials for human review;
- identify potentially exclusionary or biased wording;
- draft social media and acknowledgement messages;
- prepare accessibility checklists;
- organise anonymised recruitment information;
- draft role-related interview or reflection questions;
- summarise anonymous feedback;
- create versions for short-term, long-term or online opportunities.

For example, the same opportunity could be adapted for university students, older adults, professionals, families, local residents or online volunteers. A person who understands the organisation, community and role must review every version before publication.

AI may also flag complex vocabulary, gendered assumptions, discouraging expressions, unclear requirements, long sentences or missing accessibility information. It cannot guarantee that a message is inclusive. Consult people with relevant lived experience and representative organisations where possible.

Important limits

Do not use AI to:

- make final decisions about candidates;
- automatically reject or rank people;

- infer motivation, personality or psychological suitability;
- evaluate sensitive personal situations;
- replace direct conversation;
- process personal data without a lawful basis and transparent information;
- analyse disability, health, ethnicity, religion or other sensitive information;
- create criteria unrelated to the role;
- promise benefits or conditions the organisation cannot provide;
- replace safeguarding procedures or professional risk assessment.

Chatbots may answer basic questions or suggest opportunities, but they must not decide whether someone is accepted. Candidates should know when they are interacting with an automated system and how to contact a person.

Example prompt

- **Adapt a recruitment message**

“Act as a volunteer management communication assistant. Based on the following role, create two recruitment messages: one for university students on Instagram and one for local adults on Facebook. Include the social purpose, main tasks, time commitment, support and accessibility information. Do not exaggerate the benefits.”

- **Simplify the language**

“Rewrite this volunteer opportunity in clear, accessible English at approximately B1 level. Remove unnecessary jargon, explain acronyms and preserve all essential information about tasks, schedule, requirements, support and accessibility.”

- **Review inclusion**

"Review this volunteer recruitment call for unnecessary barriers, unclear requirements, gendered language, cultural assumptions and digital accessibility issues. Suggest practical improvements without changing essential safeguarding requirements."

- **Prepare questions**

"Create four situational questions for an initial conversation with volunteers who may work with older adults. Focus on boundaries, reliability, communication and asking for support. Do not propose medical or psychological assessment questions."

Reflection questions

- Do we know why volunteers are needed and what they will contribute?
- Is the role clear, realistic and understandable to someone outside the organisation?
- Are we transparent about tasks, schedules, boundaries, accessibility and possible challenges?
- Are our message and application methods accessible to people from different backgrounds?
- Do our images and examples reflect diversity without reinforcing stereotypes?
- Are we using suitable online and face-to-face channels?
- Can we respond to candidates promptly and respectfully?
- Are staff and existing volunteers ready to welcome and support newcomers?
- Could cultural or linguistic differences be influencing how we interpret candidates?
- Could communication-style or cultural differences be shaping how we read a candidate's motivation or suitability?

Key takeaways

After completing this module, your organisation should be able to:

- connect recruitment to identified organisational and community needs;
- distinguish recruitment, selection and matching;
- communicate the task, conditions, support and social purpose clearly;
- prepare staff before inviting volunteers to join;
- use accessible communication and several outreach channels;
- remove requirements and processes that create unnecessary barriers;
- respond to every candidate consistently and respectfully;
- use AI for limited communication and administrative support while keeping decisions human;
- recruitment and screening should account for cultural and linguistic differences in communication.

Before moving forward: Check that the opportunity is accurate, the application process is accessible, the team is ready and someone is responsible for responding to every candidate. Candidates who continue will move into selection and **Module 3: Volunteer Selection and Matching**, followed by **Module 4: Volunteer Onboarding.(link)**

References and further reading

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