VolunTrek

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Module 5: Follow-up, Guidance and Supervision

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What will you achieve in this module?

This module will help your organisation provide regular, proportionate and inclusive support throughout the volunteering experience.

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

- establish a clear and realistic follow-up routine;
- balance guidance with growing volunteer autonomy;
- conduct useful two-way follow-up meetings;
- give, receive and act on feedback;
- recognise contribution and learning regularly;
- identify difficulties before they become more serious;
- respond proportionately and refer concerns through the correct procedures;
- adapt support to different roles, durations and participation formats;
- watch for signs that cultural, linguistic or hierarchical differences may affect how comfortable a volunteer feels raising concerns and do not read silence as agreement;
- support the staff members responsible for volunteers.

At a glance!	
Estimated reading time	20 – 30 minutes
Main outputs	Follow-up routine, feedback and reflection records, agreed level of autonomy and referral pathway
Essential actions	Assign a contact person, check in regularly, adapt support, record decisions and act early on concerns

Why follow-up and guidance matter

Follow-up and guidance are the day-to-day forms of support that help volunteers stay informed, connected and confident after onboarding.

Good supervision is not constant control. It is a relationship based on presence, trust and shared responsibility. The coordinator helps volunteers perform their roles safely and well without doing everything for them or leaving them unsupported.

Without regular support:

- volunteers may become uncertain about their role or boundaries;
- small misunderstandings may develop into conflict;
- signs of stress, overload or demotivation may go unnoticed;
- volunteers may feel that their contribution is not valued;
- beneficiaries, staff or volunteers may face avoidable risks;
- coordinators may only become involved after a serious problem appears.

Effective follow-up helps organisations identify difficulties early, adjust expectations and create a fairer and more inclusive environment. It also prevents volunteers from being

reduced to tasks, attendance figures or outputs. Support should protect dignity, promote learning and enable safe autonomy.

Remember: Supporting volunteers is part of responsible volunteer management, not an optional extra.

Support learning and competence developmentBuild a suitable match

Follow-up is also an educational process. It gives volunteers opportunities to connect action with reflection, learn from experience and take on responsibility gradually.

Every interaction can help strengthen:

- **social competences**: active listening, clear communication, cooperation, asking for help and respectful disagreement;
- **emotional competences**: recognising stress, regulating reactions, setting boundaries and knowing when support is needed;
- **intercultural competences**: questioning assumptions, considering other perspectives and responding respectfully to unfamiliar practices.

These competences develop through repeated practice, feedback and reflection—not through a separate checklist.

Set up the support system

Before regular follow-up begins, agree on:

- who is responsible for supporting each volunteer;
- who provides cover when that person is unavailable;
- how often follow-up will take place;
- which communication channels will be used;

- how decisions and actions will be recorded;
- what level of autonomy is appropriate;
- what happens when a concern arises;
- who handles safeguarding, legal, data-protection, accessibility or specialist wellbeing matters.

In a small organisation, this system may be simple: one named coordinator, a predictable contact routine and a short record of decisions. Where there are several teams, projects or locations, create a small support network and divide responsibilities clearly.

The volunteer should always know:

- whom to contact;
- how to ask for help;
- how to raise a concern;
- when the next check-in will happen;
- what will happen with information they share.

Support the people who support volunteers

Review the workload of coordinators and supervisors. Do not place all responsibility for guidance, safeguarding and conflict management on one unsupported person.

Coordinators need:

- enough time to follow up properly;
- clear limits to their responsibility;
- access to specialist advice;
- opportunities to discuss demanding situations with management or peers;
- a clear referral and escalation structure.

Supporting volunteers also means supporting the staff who guide them.

Use a simple follow-up cycle

Use the following six-step cycle during regular contact:

1. Check: Ask what is going well, what is difficult and what has changed.
2. Clarify: Review tasks, boundaries, expectations and relevant procedures.
3. Reflect: Explore learning, emotional impact, communication, relationships, intercultural issues and support needs.
4. Agree: Define specific actions, responsible people and a review date.
5. Record: Keep only the necessary factual information and store it securely.
6. Follow up: Complete the agreed actions and confirm whether the situation has improved.

Follow-up may take the form of:

- a short conversation after an activity;
- a scheduled individual meeting;
- a telephone or video call;
- a written check-in;
- a practical debrief;
- a structured reflection or feedback form.

Informal conversations are useful, but important concerns and decisions should not remain undocumented.

Use: **Tool 1 – Follow-up Meeting Form** (link) to structure regular two-way conversa

Conduct meaningful follow-up conversations

A useful conversation should consider more than task completion.

Ask about:

- clarity of the role and responsibilities;

- workload and realistic availability;
- training and practical support;
- team relationships and communication;
- inclusion and accessibility;
- motivation and sense of purpose;
- learning and progress;
- emotional demands and wellbeing;
- cultural misunderstandings or unfamiliar expectations;
- changes that may affect the role.

Practise active listening and ask open questions. Pay attention to changes in energy, engagement or communication, but do not diagnose, speculate or draw conclusions from a single behaviour.

Cultural, linguistic or hierarchical differences can affect how comfortable someone feels raising concerns. Do not interpret silence or agreement as proof that everything is fine. Ask directly whether anything about the team's communication, routines or expectations feels unclear or unfamiliar.

Use:

Tool 2 – Volunteer Monitoring and Observation Form to record factual, role-related observations and support needs (link)

Tool 4 – Volunteer Reflection Form to help volunteers reflect on learning, contribution and difficulties. (link)

Give, receive and act on feedback

Feedback should be:

- **two-way:** the volunteer and organisation can both speak and listen;
- **specific**: connected to observable behaviour, agreed tasks or outcomes;
- **timely:** given while it can still support improvement;

- **respectful:** focused on the situation, not the person's worth;
- **actionable:** clear about what should continue or change.

Do not reserve feedback for problems. Recognise progress, effort, learning, consistency and responsible communication throughout the experience.

When volunteers provide feedback about the organisation:

1. acknowledge what they have shared;
2. clarify the issue where necessary;
3. explain what can and cannot change;
4. agree on the action to be taken;
5. return to the volunteer with an update.

Feedback strengthens social competence when people listen and discuss differences respectfully. Emotional competence supports calm conversations without humiliation or blame. Intercultural competence requires checking whether language, hierarchy or different communication styles are affecting how a message is expressed or understood.

Use: Tool 3 – Volunteer Feedback Form (link) when a structured record of feedback about the role, support, inclusion or organisation would be useful.

Recognise contribution and maintain purpose

Recognition should be regular, proportionate and genuine. It is not limited to certificates or formal events.

Recognition may include:

- a specific thank-you after an activity;
- asking about the volunteer's experience;
- showing how their work contributed to the organisation or community;
- including them in relevant discussions;
- recognising learning or growing responsibility;
- celebrating milestones appropriately;
- acting on the feedback they provide.

Volunteers are more likely to feel connected when the organisation shows interest in both their contribution and their experience. A lack of feedback may be interpreted as a lack of interest.

For long-term volunteers, revisit the purpose of the role regularly. If tasks become repetitive or motivation changes, explore learning goals, new responsibilities or an appropriate role adjustment.

Balance support and autonomy

Not every volunteer or role requires the same level of supervision. Adjust support according to:

- the complexity and risk of the task;
- the volunteer's preparation and experience;
- their demonstrated understanding of procedures and boundaries;
- the working environment;
- current support or access needs;
- changes in the role or circumstances.

Length of service alone does not justify greater autonomy. Autonomy should increase when a volunteer can work safely, communicate difficulties, manage workload and emotions, cooperate with others and respond respectfully to difference.

It may need to decrease temporarily when tasks change, risks increase or additional support is needed.

Level	Volunteer responsibility	Coordinator support	Suitable when
1. Direct guidance	Carries out clearly defined tasks under close guidance.	Provides instructions, observes practice and checks understanding.	Induction, unfamiliar tasks or higher-risk situations.
2. Agreed plan	Carries out agreed tasks and consults before making significant changes.	Reviews plans and provides scheduled support.	Building confidence or moderately sensitive roles.
3. Independent delivery with updates	Works in line with agreed objectives and provides progress updates.	Monitors outcomes and remains available.	Experienced volunteers and established, lower-risk tasks.
4. Collaborative initiative	Proposes improvements or activities within the agreed purpose, boundaries and approval mechanisms.	Provides strategic guidance and approves significant changes.	Experienced volunteers in trusted roles with clearly defined boundaries.

The aim is not to move every volunteer to Level 4. Choose the level that is safe and appropriate, discuss it openly and review it over time.

Pace through these levels can be affected by a volunteer's confidence in cross-cultural communication as much as by task skill. Check understanding rather than assuming silence means readiness is lower.

Respond early to difficulties

Follow-up should become more proactive when:

- the role or responsibilities are unclear;
- attendance or engagement changes;
- the volunteer shows signs of fatigue, stress or demotivation;
- team or communication problems arise;
- boundaries are crossed;
- a cultural misunderstanding affects participation;
- tasks or circumstances change;
- the volunteer, staff or beneficiaries raise a concern.

Begin with the least intrusive response that is safe and consistent with organisational policy. Depending on the situation, this may include:

- clarification of the role or expectations;
- additional guidance or training;
- mediation or a facilitated conversation;
- an adaptation to tasks, schedule or communication;
- a temporary increase in supervision;
- referral to an appropriate person or service.

Escalate serious concerns correctly

If there is an immediate safety or safeguarding risk, or the matter falls outside the coordinator's responsibility, follow the organisation's procedure without delay.

- Do not investigate serious safeguarding concerns informally.
- Do not promise confidentiality that cannot be maintained.
- Separate observable facts from assumptions.
- Record necessary information accurately and securely.
- Consult the designated safeguarding or responsible person.
- Protect everyone involved from retaliation or unnecessary disclosure.

During difficult conversations, coordinators should manage their own reactions, listen before reaching conclusions and consider whether language, hierarchy or cultural expectations contributed to the situation.

Use: Tool 5 – Problem-Solving and Referral Flowchart (link) to identify immediate risk, gather factual information, choose proportionate action, refer appropriately and review the outcome.

Make follow-up inclusive and accessible

Adapt the support process to the volunteer rather than expecting every person to use the same method.

Use accessible communication

- Use clear language and explain unfamiliar terms.
- Offer face-to-face, telephone, video, written or supported contact.
- Use accessible forms and digital tools.
- Allow additional time to prepare for or respond during meetings.
- Provide interpretation or communication support where possible.
- Summarise agreed actions in an accessible format.

Ask rather than assume

- Ask how the volunteer prefers to receive feedback.
- Ask what support or adaptation would be helpful.
- Make implicit organisational norms explicit.
- Avoid stereotypes about age, disability, culture, language or confidence.
- Give volunteers space to disagree or explain another perspective without negative consequences.

Accessibility is relational as well as technical. A tool is not truly accessible if volunteers do not feel safe using it or believe that raising a concern will harm their position.

Adapt support to the volunteering format

Format	Possible follow-up methods	Points requiring attention
Face-to-face	Brief conversation after an activity, planned meeting, observation or telephone follow-up.	Privacy for sensitive conversations, transport, staff availability and avoiding informal issues being left undocumented.
Online	Scheduled messages, video or telephone calls, accessible forms and shared task updates.	Isolation, time zones, secure communication and deliberate team connection.
Hybrid	Combination of planned online check-ins and face-to-face review.	Consistency of information, equal visibility and avoiding duplicated or missed communication.

Online follow-up should be especially intentional because informal signs of uncertainty, disconnection or emotional strain may be less visible. Keep digital support personal and ensure that online volunteers can participate in team communication and recognition.

In every format, agree on communication preferences and provide more than one accessible way to request help.

Adapt support to the duration

Type	Recommended approach	Key aspects to consider
Short-term or one-off	Provide concise initial guidance, a contact person during the activity, a brief debrief immediately or at	Prioritise clarity of tasks, safety, quick access to help, inclusion in the team and immediate feedback.

Type	Recommended approach	Key aspects to consider
	the end of the shift, and a short wrap-up/feedback session.	Avoid an unnecessarily burdensome supervision process for a brief, low-risk role.
Long-term	Agree on a regular rhythm of supervision, periodic reviews of the role and learning, ongoing recognition, and additional check-ins when tasks or circumstances change.	Review over time the volunteer's motivation, workload, learning objectives, boundaries, relationships, access needs and level of autonomy.

Avoid an unnecessarily burdensome process for a brief, low-risk role. However, even one-off volunteering needs clear boundaries, immediate support and a way to report concerns.

Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don´t
Set a simple and predictable follow-up routine.	Contact volunteers only when something goes wrong.
Ask about clarity, workload, support, learning and experience.	Focus only on attendance and task completion.
Adapt support and autonomy over time.	Use the same supervision level for every role and person.
Give recognition and constructive feedback regularly.	Assume volunteers do not need feedback.

Do	Don´t
Record necessary decisions and agreed actions.	Rely only on memory or informal conversations.
Check whether communication or team practices feel unfamiliar.	Assume that a quiet or agreeable volunteer has no concerns.
Refer serious matters through the correct human procedure.	Ask AI or an unqualified person to handle a serious case.
Support coordinators and distribute responsibility.	Leave one person solely responsible for every issue.
Ask directly whether anything about how the team communicates or works feels unfamiliar, not only whether tasks are going well.	Don't assume a quiet or agreeable volunteer has no concerns since silence can reflect language, hierarchy or cultural expectations rather than satisfaction.

Good practices

- Keep follow-up short, regular and predictable.
- Agree on preferred communication and feedback methods.
- Schedule an early review after onboarding.
- Add reviews whenever tasks, risks or circumstances change.
- Recognise effort, learning and responsible communication—not only outputs.
- Record decisions factually and securely.
- Confirm whether agreed actions were completed.
- Give volunteers several ways to raise concerns.
- Create internal support and reflection opportunities for coordinators.

- Use supervision to practise listening, self-awareness, boundaries, respectful disagreement and curiosity about difference.

Useful additions

- a buddy system;
- a shared follow-up calendar;
- anonymous mini-surveys;
- peer reflection sessions for volunteers;
- internal support meetings for coordinators;
- brief wellbeing check-ins;
- a simple record of learning goals and progress;
- scheduled recognition moments.

Examples in practice

The following examples are fictional.

Example 1 – A volunteer at a one-day event

Situation: During a community event, a volunteer is unsure how to respond when a participant becomes distressed.

What the coordinator does: The team leader clarifies the boundaries of the volunteer's role, confirms who should take responsibility and checks in after the incident.

Learning point: Even very short-term volunteering requires immediate guidance, a brief debrief and a clear referral pathway.

Competences strengthened: Emotional self-awareness, boundaries, communication and asking for help.

Example 2 – A long-term volunteer loses their sense of purpose

Situation: After several months, a volunteer says that the role has become repetitive.

What the coordinator does: During a scheduled review, they reconnect the tasks to their community impact, identify a learning goal and agree on a new responsibility that will be introduced gradually.

Learning point: Long-term support should review motivation, learning and autonomy—not only attendance or results.

Competences strengthened: Expressing needs, reflective self-awareness and collaborative planning.

Example 3 – An intercultural misunderstanding

Situation: A volunteer interprets indirect feedback from a colleague as avoidance.

What the coordinator does: During a debrief, the coordinator separates observable facts from assumptions, invites both perspectives and clarifies the team's communication expectations.

Learning point: Follow-up can turn an intercultural misunderstanding into a learning opportunity without stereotyping either person.

Competences strengthened: Perspective-taking, emotional regulation, active listening and constructive dialogue.

Tools and templates

Tool	Purpose	Who uses it?	When?
Follow-up Meeting Form	Structure regular two-way check-ins	Coordinator and volunteer	Throughout volunteering

Tool	Purpose	Who uses it?	When?
	and record agreed actions		
Volunteer Monitoring and Observation Form	Record factual observations about participation, progress and support needs	Coordinator or supervisor	During activities and before review meetings
Volunteer Feedback Form	Gather feedback about the role, support, inclusion and organisation	Volunteer and organisation	During the experience and at review points
Volunteer Reflection Form	Help volunteers reflect on their experience, learning, contribution and difficulties	Volunteer	After key activities and at review points
Problem-Solving and Referral Flowchart	Guide proportionate action and appropriate referral when a difficulty or risk arises	Coordinator or designated responsible person	Whenever a concern or risk is identified

Using AI in this module

AI may support drafting, organisation and the analysis of properly anonymised feedback. It must not replace human conversation, infer a volunteer's wellbeing or competences, or decide how a serious concern should be handled.

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

Appropriate uses

AI can help you:

- draft routine follow-up or reminder messages;
- simplify language for different audiences;
- prepare questions or agendas for meetings;
- adapt general forms for online or face-to-face use;
- translate basic content for human review;
- organise properly anonymised feedback into themes;
- draft neutral summaries of anonymised meeting notes.

Important limits

Do not use AI to:

- judge motivation, commitment or wellbeing;
- infer social, emotional or intercultural competences from messages or behaviour;
- make final decisions about conflict, support, discipline or safeguarding;
- replace direct conversation or professional assessment;
- process identifiable personal, health or safeguarding information in publicly available tools;
- analyse emotionally sensitive situations without appropriate human review;
- decide whether a concern should be dismissed or escalated.

A named staff member must review all AI-generated material for accuracy, tone, accessibility, bias, missing context and data exposure.

Example prompt

- **Prepare a meeting agenda**

“Create a short, accessible agenda for a follow-up meeting with a volunteer who has completed their first week. Include role clarity, support, learning, wellbeing, questions and agreed next steps.”

- **Simplify a feedback form**

“Rewrite this general feedback form in plain, inclusive English for volunteers with different levels of experience. Preserve all essential information.”

- **Organise anonymous feedback**

“Organise the following properly anonymised volunteer comments into recurring themes, positive aspects, concerns and possible follow-up actions. Do not infer emotions, motivation or personal characteristics.”

- **Draft a check-in message**

“Draft a respectful message asking a volunteer who has missed two sessions whether they would like to arrange a conversation. Do not assume the reason for their absence or use blaming language.”

Reflection questions

- Are we providing regular and proportionate support?
- Does every volunteer know whom to contact?
- Are our messages clear, respectful and accessible?

- Do follow-up conversations consider both task performance and the volunteer's experience?
- Are we adapting support to the role, risk, duration and format?
- Are we recognising contribution and learning meaningfully?
- Can volunteers raise concerns safely and in more than one way?
- Do our conversations support communication, emotional boundaries and respectful interaction?
- Could cultural, linguistic or hierarchical differences affect how comfortable a volunteer feels speaking openly?
- Are coordinators receiving enough time and support?
- Which tool from this module can we start using now?
- Have I checked whether cultural, linguistic or hierarchical differences might be affecting how comfortable this volunteer feels raising concerns?

Key takeaways

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

- provide follow-up from the beginning of the volunteering experience;
- support safe autonomy without creating dependency or excessive control;
- adapt supervision to risk, complexity, duration, experience and individual needs;
- provide concise support for short-term roles and regular review for long-term roles;
- use accessible communication to identify concerns early;
- integrate recognition and two-way feedback into everyday practice;
- use clear human procedures for serious concerns;
- strengthen social, emotional and intercultural competences through reflection and dialogue;

- use AI only for limited drafting and organisation tasks.

Before moving to Module 6: Confirm that follow-up records are up to date, unresolved concerns have been referred appropriately and the volunteer understands how the experience will be concluded. Then continue to **Module 6: Closure and Next Steps (link)**.

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