VolunTrek

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Module 6: Closure, Continuity and Next Steps

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What will you achieve in this module?

This module will help your organisation review and close a volunteering cycle responsibly, recognise contributions, exchange feedback and agree on realistic next steps.

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

- distinguish the end of a volunteering cycle from a volunteer's departure;
- plan appropriate review and closure points;
- conduct a two-way end-of-cycle review;
- recognise contribution and learning meaningfully;
- discuss continuity without assuming it;
- manage role changes, temporary pauses and departures respectfully;
- respond appropriately when a volunteer disengages unexpectedly;
- use feedback and anonymised information to improve the next volunteering cycle.

At a glance!	
Estimated reading time	20 – 30 minutes
Main outputs	End-of-cycle review, recognition, agreed next step, practical handover and organisational learning
Essential actions	Review the experience, exchange feedback, recognise contribution, agree on what happens next and close responsibilities safely

Begin with an important distinction

In volunteer management, **closure** means completing and reviewing a defined period or stage. This may be the end of:

- a calendar or school year;
- a project or activity;
- a short-term placement;
- an agreed volunteering period;
- a particular role or phase of involvement.

Closure does not automatically mean that the volunteer is leaving. After reviewing the experience, they may:

- continue in the same role;
- continue with adjustments;
- move to another role;
- take a temporary pause;
- leave the organisation;
- take time to decide.

A **departure** is a separate situation in which the volunteering relationship ends or is interrupted. It requires additional attention to listening, recognition, handover, organisational access and future contact.

Situation	Main Purpose
End-of-cycle-review	Reflect on a completed period and decide what happens next; the relationship may continue
Volunteer Departure	End or interrupt the relationship respectfully and complete the necessary practical steps

Keep the distinction clear: If volunteers think every review is an exit process, they may approach it with unnecessary anxiety or avoid giving honest feedback.

Why closure matters

Closure is a strategic review point, not an administrative formality. It gives both the volunteer and the organisation an opportunity to pause before continuing by habit.

A good closure process helps:

- volunteers recognise what they contributed and learned;
- organisations understand what worked and what needs to improve;
- both parties exchange honest and respectful feedback;
- contributions receive recognition even when volunteers continue;
- motivation, availability, workload and support needs are reviewed;
- continuity, change, a pause or departure is discussed rather than assumed;
- practical responsibilities, access and data are managed safely;
- reasons for departure inform future improvements.

When closure is ignored, volunteers may feel taken for granted, remain in unsuitable roles or leave without explaining what affected their experience. Organisations may lose important knowledge and repeat the same problems (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2018, 2021, 2023c; Volunteer Ireland, n.d.-a).

Strengthen competences through reflection

Closure should help volunteers recognise and develop the three competence areas present throughout the Toolkit.

Competence area	How closure supports it	How to integrate it
Social Competences	Two-way feedback, communication of needs, recognition and discussion of future roles	Use active listening, structured questions and clear agreements
Emotional Competences	Reflection on challenges, emotional impact, motivation, endings and transitions	Allow time, acknowledge emotions, avoid pressure and offer appropriate support or referral
Intercultural Competences	Respect for different communication styles, expectations and meanings of recognition or farewell	Ask about individual preferences, avoid cultural assumptions and adapt the process appropriately

These competences do not emerge automatically from experience. Create time for volunteers to identify concrete examples of communication, collaboration, self-regulation, perspective-taking and learning (Council of Europe, 2018; Sala et al., 2020).

If an area needs further development, agree on a practical next step such as guided reflection, mentoring, additional support or a learning opportunity in the next cycle.

Plan closure from the beginning

Do not wait until the final day to think about closure. Define review points when the volunteering relationship begins and include them in the volunteer agreement or activity plan where appropriate (Volunteer Ireland, n.d.-b).

Before each closure or review:

- communicate the date and purpose in advance;
- explain that a review does not automatically mean departure;
- choose a format suited to the duration and intensity of the experience;
- offer an accessible conversation, reflection activity or alternative;
- collect feedback in more than one way where possible;
- prepare an appropriate recognition option;
- gather the information needed to discuss next steps;
- decide how actions and learning will be recorded.

Adapt closure to the duration

Type	Recommended approach
Short-term or one-off	Hold a brief review immediately after the activity. Focus on the experience, contribution, learning, concerns, recognition and whether future contact is welcome. Keep it proportionate, but do not omit it.
Long-term or recurring	Combine periodic reviews with a more complete end-of-cycle conversation. Explore changes in motivation, responsibilities, wellbeing, relationships, competences, support needs and future plans.

Conduct an end-of-cycle review

An end-of-cycle review should provide a structured opportunity for the volunteer and the organisation to reflect on the experience, exchange feedback, recognise contributions and agree on what happens next.

The review should be proportionate to the duration and intensity of the volunteering experience and conducted in an accessible format. Whenever possible, it should involve a two-way conversation. Written or anonymous options may also be offered, particularly when they help the volunteer express feedback more comfortably.

Use Template Module 6.1 – End-of-Cycle Review and Continuity Form (link) to guide and document the review. The template covers:

- reflection on the volunteering experience;
- two-way feedback;
- recognition of contribution and learning;
- continuity, changes, a pause or departure;
- practical actions and responsibilities;
- organisational improvements and follow-up.

Record only necessary factual information and store it securely. If the review raises a safeguarding concern, serious complaint or other sensitive matter, follow the relevant organisational procedure instead of documenting the case in this form.

Agree on the next step

Continuity should be informed, voluntary and realistic. A volunteer who wants to remain may still need adjustments to their role or support.

Possible next step	What to clarify
Continue in the same role	Confirm motivation, availability, expectations, support and next review date

Possible next step	What to clarify
Continue with adjustments	Agree on changes to tasks, schedule, workload, accessibility or supervision
Move to another role	Review interests, strengths, suitability, support and any additional onboarding
Take a temporary pause	Agree on whether contact will continue and when the situation may be reviewed
Leave	Complete the respectful departure and handover process
Not sure yet	Allow time for reflection and agree on a realistic follow-up date

Continuity should not depend on visibility, confidence or the number of hours someone can contribute. Review whether the arrangement remains meaningful and accessible for both sides (International Labour Organization, 2011; National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

When a volunteer decides to leave

A decision to leave is not automatically a failure or an act of disloyalty. The volunteer may have personal, practical or organisational reasons and is not required to disclose sensitive information.

Follow these steps:

Thank the volunteer for communicating the decision.

Offer an optional departure conversation.

Ask whether they are comfortable discussing what influenced the decision.

Check for unresolved issues involving support, inclusion, conflict, accessibility or safeguarding.

Decide whether any immediate organisational action is required.

Agree on the handover of tasks, information, equipment and access.

Recognise the volunteer's contribution and explain available certificate or reference options.

Ask whether future contact is welcome and obtain consent for mailing lists or networks.

Record only necessary information and extract anonymised organisational learning.

Important: A departure conversation is for listening and learning, not persuading the volunteer to stay. Respect their decision and their choice not to explain personal reasons.

If a safeguarding concern or serious complaint is raised, follow the relevant procedure. Do not treat the departure conversation as an informal investigation.

When participation stops unexpectedly

Unexpected disengagement should be approached with care rather than accusation.

- Make a reasonable attempt to contact the volunteer.
- Use the agreed communication channel.
- Keep the message neutral and supportive.
- Ask whether they want support or wish to end their participation.
- Avoid repeated or intrusive contact.
- Explain practical matters that still need to be resolved.
- If there is no response, follow the organisation's procedure.
- Close accounts, permissions or access safely where necessary.
- Do not share assumptions about the person's reasons with the wider team.

Any wellbeing check should be appropriate to the relationship and the organisation's responsibilities. Refer immediate safety or safeguarding concerns through the correct procedure.

Complete the practical handover

Whether the volunteer continues in a new role, pauses or leaves, clarify what must be transferred, returned, updated or closed.

Area	Questions to resolve
Tasks and responsibilities	What is complete, unfinished or being transferred, and to whom?
Information and files	Where should records be stored, and who needs access?
Equipment and materials	What must be returned, collected or reassigned?
Accounts and permissions	Which physical and digital access should be changed or closed, and when?
Data protection	Which records should be retained or deleted under organisational policy?
Communication	Who needs to be informed, while respecting privacy?
Future contact	Has the volunteer consented to remain on mailing lists or networks?

Do not leave access active simply because a volunteer may return in the future.

Make closure inclusive and accessible

Review, continuity and departure processes should be flexible.

Aspect	Questions to consider	Possible adaptations
Physical accessibility	Can the volunteer attend safely and independently?	Use an accessible venue, online or telephone participation, or travel support
Digital accessibility	Can the volunteer use the platform or form?	Provide screen-reader-friendly documents,

Aspect	Questions to consider	Possible adaptations
		captions, simple links and non-digital alternatives
Language and literacy	Is the language clear and suitable?	Use plain language, translation, visual scales, oral responses or agreed support
Emotional support	Could closure or departure create anxiety or a sense of loss?	Give advance notice, avoid rushing and allow a trusted support person with consent
Availability	Can the volunteer attend at the proposed time?	Offer flexible slots, voice notes, telephone calls or asynchronous reflection
Confidence and reflection	Can the volunteer identify and describe their learning?	Use guided questions, concrete examples, visual or skills cards and additional time

Respect different preferences

Cultural background and personal experience may influence how someone gives feedback, expresses emotion, understands closure or prefers to be recognised.

- Ask rather than assume.
- Do not require public recognition.
- Adapt farewell activities appropriately.
- Allow volunteers to give feedback privately.
- Use culturally respectful communication.

- Do not interpret indirect communication or reluctance to speak publicly as a lack of interest.

Adapt the match to the volunteering format

What to consider when matching across different volunteering formats:

Element	Face-to-face volunteering	Online volunteering	Hybrid volunteering
Review	Individual or group meeting in an accessible venue	Video or telephone call, accessible form, email or asynchronous reflection followed by human contact	Combine online preparation with a planned conversation in the most suitable format
Handover	Return keys, equipment and paper materials; transfer local responsibilities	Transfer files and tasks; close permissions, accounts and shared access	Check both physical and digital responsibilities and access
Recognition	Certificate, private thank-you, event, reference or team acknowledgement	Digital certificate, personalised message, online event, portfolio evidence or recommendation	Offer equivalent recognition regardless of participation format
Data protection	Secure paper records and remove unnecessary local copies	Review cloud permissions, mailing lists, recordings, chats and stored data	Check physical and digital records together

Online volunteers should receive the same quality of human contact, feedback and recognition as volunteers who participate in person. An automated form and certificate are rarely sufficient after a long or demanding experience.

Use: Template module 6.2 Volunteer Certificate Template(link)

Use closure to improve organisation

End-of-cycle reviews and departures can reveal recurring strengths, barriers and gaps. Use aggregated or properly anonymised information to:

- improve role descriptions and expectations;
- adapt training, supervision and communication;
- strengthen inclusion and accessibility;
- understand organisational factors affecting continuity;
- improve workload and continuity planning;
- prepare the next needs assessment and volunteering cycle.

Create a short action plan containing:

- the issue or learning identified;
- the proposed improvement;
- the person responsible;
- a deadline;
- the evidence that will show completion.

Where useful, share a brief **"You said – we did"** summary so volunteers can see how their feedback informed change.

Follow-up within Voluntrek

Where relevant to the agreed project process, organisations may share aggregated or anonymised findings through VolunTrek channels.

- Record how many volunteers continued, changed role, paused or left.
- Identify recurring organisational reasons affecting continuity or departure.
- Document improvements introduced after feedback.
- Share transferable lessons through agreed project channels.

- Review whether practices support meaningful continuity and respectful departure.

Data-protection reminder: Share information only when there is a clear purpose and appropriate legal basis. Use aggregated or anonymised findings whenever identifying individuals is unnecessary.

Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don´t
Explain that closure may mean the end of a cycle, not the end of volunteering.	Present every review as an exit process.
Exchange feedback at regular review points.	Wait until someone leaves before asking about their experience.
Discuss continuity, adjustments, pauses and departure openly.	Assume everyone will continue in the same role.
Recognise contribution at the end of every cycle.	Recognise volunteers only when they leave permanently.
Ask respectfully why a volunteer wishes to leave.	Create guilt, apply pressure or demand personal details.
Act on concerns involving support, inclusion or safety.	Become defensive or dismiss the reasons shared.
Agree on handover, access, data and future contact.	Leave practical responsibilities unclear.
Offer accessible and flexible feedback options.	Require everyone to complete the same written form.

Do	Don´t
Ask how each person prefers to be recognised.	Assume public recognition is welcome.
Use anonymised learning to improve the next cycle.	Share identifiable feedback unnecessarily.

Good practices

- Include review points in volunteer agreements or annual plans.
- Combine a short evaluation form with a conversation where possible.
- Ask explicitly whether the volunteer wants to continue, adjust, pause or leave.
- Agree on adaptations before the next cycle begins.
- Create procedures for planned and unexpected departures.
- Recognise contribution and learning specifically.
- Close physical and digital access promptly and safely.
- Assign responsibility and deadlines for organisational improvements.
- Report back on changes made following feedback.

Useful additions

- an annual volunteer review and planning meeting;
- a visual pathway showing the available next steps;
- a consent-based network for former volunteers;
- a clear return pathway;
- an agreed follow-up after departure;

- a digital record of improvements introduced after each cycle;
- an accessible reflection or competence card activity;
- a simple handover checklist.

Examples in practice

Example 1 - Closing the year without ending the relationship

Situation: At the end of the school year, an organisation invited volunteers to a review meeting. Several initially thought their participation was being ended.

Challenge: The organisation had not explained that closure referred to the annual cycle.

What changed: The coordinator clarified the purpose, collected two-way feedback and discussed four options: continue, adapt the role, pause or leave. Most volunteers continued with updated schedules and responsibilities.

Learning point: Closing a cycle renews the agreement and prevents continuity based on outdated expectations.

Example 2 - Understanding a decision to leave

Situation: A volunteer informed the coordinator that they wanted to leave after four months. No concerns had previously been raised.

Challenge: The organisation needed to understand the decision without creating blame or pressure.

What changed: The coordinator thanked the volunteer, offered an optional conversation and listened. The volunteer explained that unclear tasks and last-minute requests had become difficult. They agreed on a short handover, the volunteer received a certificate and the organisation revised its task-planning process.

Learning point: A departure conversation can help the organisation listen, improve and end the relationship respectfully.

Tools and templates

Tool	Purpose	Who uses it?	When?
End of Cycle Assessment and Continuity Form	Gather feedback and identify the preferred next step. It supports a balanced conversation and agrees actions.	Volunteer and coordinator	At the end of each cycle At a checkpoint or when a volunteer leaves
Volunteer Certificate Template	Recognize participation, contribution and learning.	Authorized organization or coordinator	At the end of a cycle or at the start
Acknowledgment Message Template	Give a personalized and specific thank you.	Coordinator or organization	At the end of a cycle or start

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:

- draft a thank-you message or certificate using non-sensitive information;
- simplify or adapt evaluation questions;
- translate general closure information for human review;
- group properly anonymised feedback into themes;
- create reflection prompts for different formats;
- prepare a handover and access-closing checklist;
- draft an anonymised summary of organisational learning.

Important limits

Do not use AI to:

- process identifiable feedback, health information or safeguarding concerns in publicly available tools;
- decide whether a volunteer deserves recognition, a reference or future opportunities;
- replace the final human conversation with an automated message;
- minimise, reinterpret or dismiss critical feedback;
- infer emotions, motivations or competences;
- decide how to respond to a complaint or serious concern.
- Pseudonymised information may still be personal data if it can be linked back to an individual. Use properly anonymised or aggregated information whenever possible (European Data Protection Board, n.d.; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016, 2024).

Example prompts

- **Draft recognition**

"Draft a warm, professional thank-you message for a volunteer who supported weekly activities for older adults. Mention teamwork and reliability. Do not invent achievements."

- **Make questions accessible**

"Rewrite these evaluation questions in plain English for adults with different literacy levels. Preserve their original meaning."

- **Prepare a remote-role checklist**

"Create a checklist for closing a remote volunteer role, including file transfer, account access, data protection, handover, feedback and recognition."

- **Organise anonymous feedback**

"Group this properly anonymised feedback into the following themes: role clarity, communication, support, accessibility and suggestions. Do not infer personal characteristics or dismiss minority views."

Use: Template module 6.3 Acknowledgment Message Template(link)

Reflection questions

- Have we explained the difference between reviewing a cycle and ending the relationship?
- Have both the volunteer and organisation had an opportunity to give feedback?
- Does the volunteer understand the available next-step options?
- Is continuity voluntary, realistic and adapted to current circumstances?
- Have we recognised contribution and learning in a way the volunteer values?
- Are the review and recognition processes accessible?
- Have tasks, equipment, information and access been handed over safely?

- Do we understand what should improve in the next cycle?
- Are we recording and sharing only necessary information?
- Have responsibilities and deadlines been assigned for agreed changes?

Key takeaways

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

- distinguish closure from departure;
- end every cycle with reflection, two-way feedback, recognition and a next-step conversation;
- agree on continuity rather than assume it;
- manage adjustments, role changes and pauses clearly;
- listen without pressure when a volunteer leaves;
- respond carefully to unexpected disengagement;
- complete handover, access and data-protection actions;
- adapt closure to different needs, formats and durations;
- use learning from each cycle to improve the next one;
- use AI only for limited drafting and organisation tasks.

Complete the cycle: Use the learning from this module to update your organisational practices and return to **Module 1: Organisational Needs Assessment(link)** before beginning a new volunteering cycle.

References and further reading

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