Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport | UVMIS

European Code of Ethics for Sports Volunteer Managers

ENGLISH

"Upskilling volunteer managers in sport" (UVMIS) project aims to set a new standard, and to lay the foundation for transforming the offering of sports volunteer management qualification in Europe, by creating a full Higher Education level curriculum, detailing what and how professionals need to learn, to tackle contemporary and future critical challenges.

The Project is led by Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University in collaboration with partners including Centre for European Volunteering, Dutch Hockey Association, ENGSO, NR Sports Volunteering Solutions, IGNITX, French Federation Sport and Leisure Profession, CSV Trentino, and Vytautas Magnus University.

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Introduction to UVMIS and this Guide

This guide has been developed as part of the **"Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport"** (UVMIS) Erasmus+ project. It belongs to a series of four complementary guides developed to support sports volunteer managers across Europe:

1 - European Code of Ethics for Sports Volunteer Managers
2 - Guide to Sport Volunteering, Solidarity and European Values
3 - Guide on the Role of Sports Volunteer Managers in Facilitating Inclusive Sports Volunteering to Facilitate Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Sport Engagement
4 - Guide on Volunteering in Sports Events.

At the core of UVMIS lies the idea that addressing the sports volunteer management issues of tomorrow requires a better trained, qualified and recognised volunteer manager. A professional that can think and act strategically and is equipped with the latest skills and scientific concepts to organise effectively. Through the state-of-the-art report, it was found that there is an overall lack of resources throughout Europe for training sport volunteer managers to this level.

UVMIS contributes to closing the gap between European countries and addressing the overall need by creating new training opportunities and resources which raise the capacity of sports organisations and communities to offer competitive and noncompetitive sports. The main results, consisting of higher education curriculum aimed at experienced sports volunteer managers and four practical guides on ethical codes, EU values in volunteering, inclusive volunteering and event volunteering addresses the needs of volunteer managers and sports organisations in acquiring the necessary skills and insights and sets a high standard for future resources and qualifications for sport volunteer managers. Through the state-of-the-art report and policy brief (forthcoming in 2026), it is shown the need in Europe and provides recommendations for decision makers to improve policies around sports volunteer management training and qualifications.

Read more about UVMIS and find project results here.

The guides take into consideration two distinct approaches to volunteer management (Meijs, Hoogstad, 2001):
- **Membership Management (MM)** describes organisations like local sports clubs where volunteers are a cohesive, existing group with a strong, shared culture. Expectations are often implicit, recognition is based on long-term service, and volunteers often dedicate many hours.
- **Programme Management (PM)** is used for specific, time-limited projects, such as large or smaller scale sporting events. This model involves recruiting volunteers for defined roles, tasks and responsibilities.

This **European Code of Ethics for Sports Volunteer Managers Guide** is a practical, user-friendly tool for sports volunteer managers. It can be used as an ethical guide or dilemma-solving tool as it is intended to assist users in making ethical decisions when managing volunteers. To ensure its practical relevance, the guide:

- includes **general yet concrete examples** of definitions and possible actions linked to specific values – identified to be relevant and captivating **-** without being tied to any specific national context.
- is written in **accessible, simple language**, with a clear structure that allows managers to quickly find guidance when needed.
- offers **possible solutions and approaches to common ethical dilemmas**. The guide aims to empower sports volunteer managers to foster environments that are fair, respectful, and inclusive, but be aware that these should be thoughtfully adapted to the specific cultural, organisational, and situational context in which they are applied.

Different scenarios in the guide are shown in different colours. If the scenario has a blue background, it refers to addressing volunteers who are members (**member management)**; if it is in yellow, it refers to volunteers who are engaged for a specific activity or event (**programme management**).

This guide is designed to **provide practical assistance and best practices to sports volunteer managers** with varying levels of experience. It can be used as a tool for ethical guidance or for solving specific dilemmas, helping users make effective decisions when managing volunteers. A useful recommendation is to take a moment at the end of each section to reflect on how the proposed actions or outlined principles are currently addressed within your own context, and how they could be further developed or improved.

It's important to understand that the suggestions and solutions outlined in this guide are not just for individual actions a volunteer manager can take, but also for organisations as a whole. Some of the actions and examples that can be found in this document are processes that should involve the board or other decision-making levels. The guide could serve as a tool for volunteer managers to initiate change within their organisations to better value volunteers and offer volunteering experiences with increased quality.

For this reason, this guide can also serve **as a starting point for organisations wishing to develop their own Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct**[1] **for volunteer management**. Before applying the principles and examples provided, it is essential for each organisation to **reflect on its own values and decision-**

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[1] It is important to distinguish between a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct. A Code of Ethics outlines the core values and guiding principles that shape the culture and decision-making of an organisation. In contrast, a Code of Conduct translates those values into specific behaviours and responses expected in real-life situations. While this guide focuses on ethical values, it can also serve as a foundation for developing or refining a Code of Conduct tailored to your organisation's context.

making processes. *What are the core principles that guide your organisation? How are decisions made when it comes to managing volunteers?* By answering these questions first, organisations can ensure that the ethical framework they adopt is tailored to their specific cultural, structural, and operational context. This reflective step is crucial to building a meaningful and effective ethical foundation. In addition, it is fundamental that the decisions made are **maintained and reviewed periodically** to reflect changes in society and the organisation.

The guide's chosen principles are closely connected to core European values and policy. The European Union promotes values directly relevant to ethical behaviour in sport volunteering, including good governance, human rights, equality, fair competition, solidarity, inclusion, tolerance, and respect. At the same time, EU policy actively seeks to combat unethical practices such as match-fixing, doping, violence, harassment, discrimination, and social exclusion.

To learn more about EU values and how they can be implemented in volunteer management in sports, you can take a look at the UVMIS Guide to Sports Volunteering, Solidarity and European Values.

This guide is organised around five core ethical values — **Respect, Equality, Appreciation, Empowerment, Thriving, and Transparency**. Each value is broken down into key elements, followed by practical actions and real-life scenarios to illustrate how these principles can be applied in sports volunteer management. The examples provided are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. They highlight aspects of each value that are particularly relevant to the sports context, but do not cover every possible situation or interpretation. Users are encouraged to adapt and expand upon these examples based on their own organisational and cultural realities.

Respect

Recognise the inherent value of all volunteers and the contribution they make in the organisation and for the community. This respect is also reflected through *fair play*, by fostering relationships based on fairness, integrity, and collaboration.

Core elements

Integrity: Ensure that all volunteers act with honesty, transparency, and responsibility in their roles, upholding the values of the organisation and the spirit of sport. This includes a **clear commitment to rejecting unethical behaviours** such as doping, corruption, and match fixing. Promote a culture of fair play and accountability, where volunteers understand the importance of ethical conduct and contribute to a safe, trustworthy, and respectful environment for all.

Kindness: It may be obvious, but the relationship with volunteers starts from **being polite** and making them feel part of the activities.

Conflict management: Address disagreements, misunderstandings, or concerns among volunteers or with staff through **fair, open, and constructive dialogue**, with the aim of preserving dignity and collaborative relationships. It is important to promote spaces for constructive dialogue to effectively manage differences in behaviour and vision among generations, genders, roles, etc. The goal is to reduce conflicts, limit volunteer dropout, and increase the organisation's appeal to new volunteers.

Value-based commitment: Cultivate and reinforce **volunteers' dedication** for the benefit of the community and foster a deep sense of belonging and purpose.

Privacy: Keep important and confidential information about volunteers private.

Possible actions

Integrity

- Implement **a mandatory code of conduct for all volunteers** that clearly defines expected ethical behaviours, including principles of fair play and the rejection of unethical practices such as doping or corruption, and **provide regular training** on these principles. If your organisation doesn't already have a code of conduct, propose adopting one to protect volunteers and staff.
- Organise **annual meetings** with a group of volunteers (peer groups) to discuss what they think is appropriate behaviour and revise the code of conduct.
- **Respect the autonomy and authenticity of volunteers** in deciding how and why they want to engage.

Kindness

- Make sure you have **time to dedicate to volunteers** during their first activity and throughout their experience.
- Showing appreciation and acting with honesty towards volunteers strengthens their sense of belonging and deepens their commitment.

Conflict management

- Implement a **training programme** for volunteers on **mediation and conflict resolution techniques**, equipping them with the tools they need to address and manage disputes impartially and constructively. An example is to train using various escalation frameworks that show different ways to handle a situation, clarifying who to contact and what to expect from them. Another example could be to promote the use of **Nonviolent Communication** to create an environment focused on needs and feelings rather than blame or to do training based on role-plays to understand better how situations can be managed.
- Establish **clear communication guidelines and behavioural expectations** for all volunteers, providing specific and accessible channels through which they can express concerns in a constructive and respectful manner.

Value-based commitment

- Promote **training courses** that make volunteers aware of their role and the principles on which it is based (e.g. solidarity, inclusion, etc.).

Privacy

- **Do not share any confidential information** that volunteers share with you with anyone else, unless necessary (e.g. for safeguarding reasons).

Practical Scenario

Value-based commitment - (*Programme Management*)

Lucas is a new volunteer but after several event preparatory meetings he drops out saying that he is learning nothing new and his notion of fun event engagement doesn't meet the expectations. He was assessed during the entrance interview and initial training as a highly capable and motivated person.

Possible solution: Implement a value-based workshop into the initial training and coordinate the visualisation of the values through the volunteer communication channels and in the organisation facilities. Everyone in the management discusses the importance of long-term value-based motivation and awareness towards the nature of volunteering activities, which can sometimes be filled with exhaustive routine.

- *Is this possible solution applicable to your organisational context?*
- *Can you think of any other solutions?*

Equality

Give all volunteers an equal and fair treatment. Make sure that the experience is safe for volunteers from all backgrounds.

Core elements

Anti-discrimination: Ensure that people in the organisation are **not**, intentionally or unintentionally, **treating people from certain backgrounds differently to others**.

Accessibility / Diversity: Ensure that volunteers have **easy and equal access to all opportunities**, regardless of their background, and that they are supported based on their needs. Ensure that the volunteer pool is diverse (e.g. in terms of gender equality).

Preventing misuse: Ensure that volunteers are not exploited (e.g. they are not used to cover staff shortages or to save money)

Possible actions:

Anti-discrimination

- Implement a **clear and accessible system that allows volunteers to safely report incidents** of discrimination, unsafe working conditions, or abuse. It will make volunteers feel more confident that their concerns will be heard and addressed without risk.
- Ensure that your organisation has a **clear anti-discrimination policy** to foster a truly inclusive culture. Even better if it includes structured policies, awareness training, and access to legal tools at all levels.

Accessibility / Diversity

- Try to use **diverse and universally accessible channels** to reach people from different backgrounds.
- Organise activities, training, gatherings and events in a way that can allow all types of volunteers to **actively participate**.

Preventing misuse

- Define in a clear way the **volunteers' tasks** and share them with them and the staff.

Practical Scenario

Diversity - (*Programme Management*)
You are selecting a team of volunteers for an upcoming sport event but realise you have unconsciously favoured individuals with whom you are most familiar.

Possible solution: Take a step back, evaluate your decision-making process, and consider diverse candidates. Another useful action could be to involve other persons in the decision-making process to have different opinions on the matter. In addition, when planning the recruitment, look at the recruitment sources and advertising, ensure they are reaching diverse groups, question any bias in the interviewing questions and selection - for example if limiting acceptance of applications from a local area, are you precluding a specific demographic.

Empowerment

Promote a culture that recognises each volunteer's potential, gives them the tools to succeed, and actively involves them in the life and decision-making of the organisation or event implementation.

Core elements

Acknowledgment: Recognise the volunteers as individuals.

Training: Provide volunteers with the knowledge and skills they need to perform their roles effectively and grow personally and professionally. Be clear on what skills are required and what they can gain from the participation.

Mentorship: Pair new and not new volunteers with experienced mentors to support onboarding, learning, and improvement.

Inclusive leadership: Involve volunteers in decision-making processes and leadership opportunities, ensuring diverse voices are heard and valued.

Possible actions

Acknowledgment

- **Celebrate volunteer achievements**: it can be done through regular feedback, public recognition, or informal appreciation moments (thanking them is always a great start!).

Training

- Offer **accessible and relevant training sessions** that help volunteers expand their skill sets, ensuring the relevance is determined by the volunteer's initial skills and their assigned task through specific meetings.

Mentorship

- **Pair new volunteers with experienced mentors** to support onboarding, learning, and improvement.

Inclusive leadership

- Invite volunteers to participate in planning meetings or working groups and **consider their input in shaping activities and policies**.

Practical Scenario

Mentorship - (*Programme Management*)

A volunteer expresses interest in leading a team during an upcoming sport event, but you're unsure whether they have the necessary capacity to succeed in the role. Or a situation during a one-time event, where a volunteer needs to step up into a leadership role due to an urgent need to fill a gap.

Possible solution: Recognise their motivation, assess the risks, and offer a supported leadership opportunity—such as co-leading with a more experienced volunteer—to foster growth while maintaining team effectiveness. Ensure they have the knowledge of the context of the role, are engaged with the entire team, and have the understanding of the expectations and outcomes of the role.

Inclusive leadership - (*Programme Management*)

Tina, an experienced volunteer coordinator, wants to maintain established event management procedures that have proven successful in the past practice. But now there are several younger volunteers proposing an innovative digital solution and more inclusive practices for participants that require significant process changes.

Possible solutions: Tina will organise the event according to the proven procedures but create a smaller pilot programme to test these new approaches and establish basic evaluation criteria for it. If it proves useful, next time it could be implemented on a bigger scale.

Supportive environment

Promote and protect the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of volunteers by creating a safe, respectful, and supportive environment. Volunteering should contribute positively to a person's life, not become a source of stress or harm.

Core elements

Safeguarding: Protect volunteers from harm, abuse, or unsafe situations by establishing clear policies, procedures, and reporting mechanisms.

Support: Ensure that volunteers have access to **emotional and practical support** throughout their experience.

Nurturing: Create a **caring and supportive environment** where volunteers feel safe, valued, and free to enjoy their experience without pressure or performance expectations.

Workload balance: Ensure that volunteers are **not overburdened** and that their time commitment is compatible with their personal responsibilities and well-being.

Possible actions:

Safeguarding

- Develop and share a **clear safeguarding policy** with all volunteers, including procedures for reporting concerns confidentially and safely.
- Appoint a **trained safeguarding officers** within the organisation who is accessible and trusted by volunteers. Try to appoint at least two officers, a man and a woman, so that volunteers can choose who they feel most comfortable with.
- Regularly **check in** with volunteers who are more exposed to potential misbehavior or aggression — such as linesmen or referees — by scheduling periodic **one-on-one conversations** and assigning observers during activities. This proactive approach helps ensure their safety, well-being, and sense of support within the organisation.

Support

- **Schedule regular one-on-one check-ins** to listen to volunteers' experiences, challenges, and needs. In addition to these individual meetings, implement **group support sessions** or **peer-to-peer meetings**. This provides a valuable space for volunteers to share experiences, build stronger team bonds, and collectively find solutions within the group.

Nurturing

- **Promote a culture of error** by encouraging an environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and growth, rather than failures, ensuring volunteers feel comfortable trying new tasks and seeking assistance.
- **Foster a safe space where volunteers feel protected and don't feel the need to constantly perform** making it clear that their well-being is prioritised.
- **Integrate elements of fun and positive social interaction** into volunteering activities: enjoyment is a fundamental part and can significantly motivate individuals. Create opportunities for socialising and rejuvenation, especially at the end of events, to improve group cohesion.

Workload balance

- **Monitor volunteer hours** by implementing a system to track the hours contributed by volunteers to ensure that their engagement and commitment is reasonable.
- **Encourage regular breaks** to support a healthy and enjoyable volunteering experience.

Practical Scenario

Workload balance - (*Member Management*)

Erik is a dedicated long-term volunteer who experiences a significant family crisis due to which he is able to participate consistently anymore. He feels guilty about reducing his involvement and fears of disappointing the coordinator and other volunteers.

Possible solution: Acknowledges the situation and provides flexible (non)participation options during this period. Besides that, enable Erik to maintain not only his family social connections, but the connections with the volunteer community as well. When ready, there is a clear pathway for Erik for re-engagement.

Transparency

Foster a culture of openness and accountability where volunteers are fully informed about the organisation's or event organiser's mission, values, and activities, and feel empowered to ask questions, raise concerns, and contribute to decision-making.

Core elements

Openness: Be open to volunteers about what the organisation works on, what is its impact, its missions and values, and how volunteers are an active part of the organisation's activities.

Accountability: Ensure that volunteers can hold both you and the organisation accountable.

Possible actions

Openness

- **Be clear from the start**: share all the information since the onboarding process of volunteers.
- **Share regular updates** with volunteers about ongoing projects, decisions, and organisational developments through newsletters, meetings, or digital platforms.

Accountability

- **Establish feedback and reporting anonymous systems** where volunteers can safely express concerns, suggest improvements, or report misconduct without having any repercussions.

Practical Scenario

Openness - (*Member Management*)
Sarah, a volunteer, raises a concern about how decisions are made in the organisation, but you hesitate to share internal discussions, fearing it might create confusion or criticism from other colleagues inside the organisation.

Possible solution: Acknowledge Sarah's right to understand how decisions are made. Share relevant information in a clear and accessible way and invite constructive dialogue to build trust and mutual understanding, engaging other colleagues.

Accountability - (*Member Management*)
Caroline, a volunteer, is during regular meetups constantly criticising administrative issues regardless of the topics and goals of the meetups. She is defending herself with the freedom of expression in the unpaid volunteer environment.

Possible solution: Commence a 1 on 1 talk with Caroline appreciating her open attitude and establish a feedback tool for regular meetups where Caroline and others can share their opinions and frustration. Everyone in the organisation has to be aware of this tool.

Conclusions

By embracing these values, volunteer managers foster environments that are inclusive, respectful, and ethically sound. This not only enhances volunteer satisfaction and retention but also strengthens the credibility and impact of the organisation.

Ethical leadership builds trust, encourages collaboration, and empowers volunteers to contribute meaningfully. Ultimately, working according to these principles helps managers create a culture where volunteering thrives and becomes a source of personal and collective growth.

All of these aspects also benefit the organisations that gain greater transparency, and they create safe, welcoming spaces where volunteers feel heard, valued, and motivated to engage. Moreover, by adhering to these guidelines, organisations contribute to making volunteering more ethical and aligned with the core values of European citizenship and sport, such as fairness, solidarity, and inclusion.

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