



WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE VOLUNTEERS?

**A Guide to Volunteer Work for
Festival and Cultural Event Organizers**



This guide is published by Tampere Region Festivals as part of the development project Capable and Inclusive Event, conducted in 2024–2026 with support from the Council of Tampere Region.

The contents have been compiled from project training materials, governmental guidelines and information services concerning volunteer work (references on page 19).

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Foreword

The Capable and Inclusive Event project by Tampere Region Festivals was born out of a need for local festival organizers to find new volunteers for their events. With some events, the challenge was to reach suitable target groups or committed volunteers, whereas others were concerned for the future of volunteering as long-term volunteer veterans were aging.

During the 2024–2026 project, we have been surveying not only the current challenges of volunteer work but also best practices to make the events' participatory activities more appealing and sustainably organized. The purpose of this guide is to support event organizers in planning and developing their volunteer activities.

Whatever the starting point of your event may be, this guide can help you make sure that all the important aspects of the volunteering process are taken care of and that the volunteers are left with a positive experience of your event!

Since volunteer work is at its nature community-based and participatory, accessibility and inclusion of various target groups is an overarching theme in all of the stages of volunteer work described here. With this guide, we wish to inspire events to develop their volunteer activities in a way to make volunteering even more accessible in the future for both current volunteers and newcomers alike – no matter their age, background or capabilities.

Volunteering can be a revolutionary experience for the participant. As event organizers we can help make that experience as meaningful as possible. Thank you for joining us in this important work!

Tampere Region Festivals Project Managers,

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The Role and Significance of Volunteering

Volunteering contributes to many societally important aspects of life. Volunteers help run non-profit organizations and hobby groups, prevent loneliness, give aid to those in need, conserve nature and animals and create joy in our everyday lives. Without volunteers, many village fêtes, sports events and festivals could not be organized.

In the arts and culture sector, discussing volunteer work sometimes raises some dissonance, as fair working conditions and wages can still not be considered a given. It is indeed important to clearly define event volunteering as separate from paid employment, to run it responsibly and to also make volunteering useful to the volunteer – as opposed to exploitation.

Rewards of Volunteering

According to Citizen Forum's 2024 study on volunteering in Finland, more than 75 % of Finns have participated in volunteer work at least once and 43 % within the last year. The reasons for volunteering are manifold, varying according to the respondents' circumstances. In general, event volunteers are motivated by their desire to help, an interest in the event's programme and social reasons, such as nice coworkers or meeting new people.

Volunteering can also support inclusion, wellbeing or skills in various target groups. For some, volunteering can be

a first step in the beginning of their career, a door to social networks, an opportunity to learn new skills or to do something meaningful. Therefore, the event organizer should observe the needs of various target groups as well as the accessibility and welfare-enhancing effects of volunteering.

Opportunities in Volunteering:

- Gaining work experience
- Access to culture events that may be economically out of reach
- Reaching the local community
- Feeling of togetherness
- New friendships and social networks
- Developing language or other skills
- Counterbalance to work and everyday routines
- Meaningful pastime
- Confidence-building experiences



**10 WORKING STAGES
OF PRODUCTION**



1. ORGANISATION

The starting point of volunteering may be the need for help in event organizing or the organizers' desire to include local communities in their activities. Often, it's both.

It is indeed important to recognize already in the early stages of production the role of volunteering in your organisation and the values guiding the volunteer process. The organizer should also calculate the time, money and work required for volunteer coordination.

Who's in Charge of the Volunteers?

In comparison to paid personnel, volunteer tasks should be supplementary and supportive tasks coordinated by a designated team leader. Even if the entire event was to be organized voluntarily, the designation of team leaders is important for the smooth, reliable and safe implementation of volunteer work.

Volunteers are usually assigned to various sectors and teams with tasks ranging from cleaning duties, reception and hosting customers or performers, tech, logistics, catering, communications or other supportive

organizing and customer service duties. Team leaders are needed to steer the respective teams, with someone also in charge of coordinating the whole operation, including the team leaders.

Volunteering Requires Resources

The organisation of volunteering is usually the job of the event producer, but it may be useful to designate a separate volunteer coordinator, especially if the number of required volunteers is high. What is essential is recognizing the tasks and responsibilities related to volunteer coordination and allocating the necessary resources – meaning the time of those in charge of the volunteers.

There are also costs related to volunteering, including insurance, catering, meetings, supplies, and possible transportation or accommodation arrangements, which should be included in the budget.

Producer checklist:

- Define the goals of volunteering
- Calculate the costs and draft a volunteering budget
- Plan the roles and find suitable team leaders:

Who's in charge of volunteer operations as a whole?

Who's in charge of volunteer marketing and communications?

Who will be the leaders for the various teams and sectors?

Producer checklist:

- ✓ Assess any risks in each volunteer task and draft safety instructions.
- ✓ Draft or update safer space guidelines for the event.
- ✓ Make sure that the event's insurances are up to date.
- ✓ Determine how and where the volunteers' personal data is processed and draft a data protection notice.
- ✓ Check the current tax policies from the Finnish Tax Administration.
- ✓ Determine how volunteering agreements are made.

2. ORGANIZER RESPONSIBILITIES

There are responsibilities and obligations concerning volunteer work that should be outlined early in the planning stages.

Occupational Safety

If a contract is drafted between the volunteer and the organizer and the volunteer is performing the same or similar tasks as paid personnel, the volunteer work is subject to Finnish legislation on occupational safety.

Even if the conditions of a legal obligation aren't met, the organizer is always responsible for risk evaluation, training and safe working conditions in accordance with the occupational safety policies.

Volunteer work must never be performed in dangerous or hazardous conditions. Psychological safety must also be observed.

Insurance

Insurance is an important part of event risk management, and it is recommended that the volunteers be covered by accident and liability insurance. Remember to also inform the volunteers of this insurance and instruct them on what to do in the event of an accident.

Data Protection

The organizer is liable for the processing of the volunteers' personal data in accordance with EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Finnish Data Protection Act.

Taxes

Non-profit volunteering is not taxable labour, and it is unpaid. Also, the volunteers can not be compensated for their work with other benefits of monetary value. They are allowed to receive customary volunteer benefits tax-free (see page 10). The reimbursement of expenses arising from volunteer work, such as purchases and travel costs, is also tax-free.

Contracts

It is recommended to outline the terms of volunteer work in writing between the volunteer and the organizer. However, this does not constitute a binding contract, but the volunteer may give up their task if they wish to do so.

3. TASK PLANNING

It is important to plan the tasks offered to volunteers in advance to safeguard and successfully execute the functions critical to the event. The core question here is:

Where are the volunteers needed?

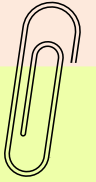
Map out in advance which tasks and production sectors need help, how many people are needed and when. Survey the demands for each task as well as any safety-related risk factors. Tasks requiring special skills and safe working procedures call for adequate training as part of volunteer introduction.

Observing and Adjusting to Various Needs

Anyone can sign up to volunteer, so it is useful to plan different adjustments and adaptations to the tasks. For example, the volunteer's age, physical or mental capacity or lack of adequate language skills may require special attention to accessibility. The wellbeing and basic needs of each volunteer should be the primary consideration.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS:

- Mental or physical stress → Shorter shifts
- Management of pain or illness → More frequent breaks
- Social anxiety → A separate space to decompress
- Physical disability → Performing tasks while seated
- Difficulties performing tasks alone → Participation with an instructor or support person
- Illiteracy or lack of language skills → Working in multilingual pairs or teams



Get creative!

In addition to the event's needs, participatory volunteering may also be devised from a perspective promoting wellbeing.

For example, what kind of activities might bring joy to local seniors or youths? Could volunteering support the integration of immigrants?

Promoting accessibility:

- ✓ Explain the tasks in as clear language as possible. Avoid complicated jargon.
- ✓ Aim for positive and encouraging communications! Many newcomers may be nervous about participating.
- ✓ Do not require skills that aren't crucial to the task.
- ✓ Let them know if the task can be adapted in any way.

Work Packages

Work packages illustrate what types of tasks are available and what volunteering in each role would mean. Outlining these as clearly as possible is especially important when the volunteer is considering joining the event. Task descriptions also help them understand in advance any limitations related to accessibility or skills.

Draft a description of each volunteer task including:

Title of Task, Role or Team

Such as wristband exchange, poster distribution, cleaning crew

Task Description

What does the task actually entail?

Task Schedule

Is the task performed before, during or after the event? At what times of the day is the task needed? How long would the volunteer shifts be?

Task Location

Is it an indoor or outdoor task?
Are there any on-site accessibility considerations?

Required Skills

Does the task require any special skills or is a certain kind of knowhow a plus?
Is previous experience required?

Physical Requirements

Does the task require physical activity such as carrying, standing or walking for longer periods?

Training and Support

What kind of training does the task entail?
Is the task performed alone or in a team?
Are there support and instructions available during the task?

Task Significance

What is the significance of the role or team for the success of the event?

4. WHAT TO OFFER THE VOLUNTEERS

Before starting recruitment, it is important to define what the volunteer will get for their contribution to the event. Many volunteers are motivated by the social activity and joy of working together, but other benefits to participation are also important for motivation, wellbeing and commitment. Remember that you must not agree to any compensation of monetary value comparable to a salary or payment.

Volunteers May Receive:

- Free entrance to the event
- Transportation
- Accommodation
- Free meals
- Other appropriate catering, such as snacks or coffee
- Training related to volunteering duties
- Supplies or clothing used in the volunteer tasks of minor monetary value
- Wrap party a.k.a. staff party
- Staff discounts
- Volunteer work certificate
- Study credits (with agreement from the school)
- Activities or meetings during off-season

The volunteer may also receive a tax-free thank you gift, as long as the following conditions are met:

- The gift is not agreed as compensation for the volunteer work
- The volunteer has not picked the gift out themselves
- The gift is not monetary or comparable transaction
- The monetary value of the gift or gifts does not exceed 100 euros per year (based on the 2026 guidelines)

Promoting sustainability and accessibility:

- ✓ Make a note of any special dietary needs as well as the sustainability chain of the volunteer catering.
- ✓ Organize meals and other gatherings in an accessible location.
- ✓ Avoid disposable materials and pointless freebies.
- ✓ Be mindful of sustainability and different body types when choosing staff clothing. Make sure that there are enough sizes available and offer alternatives (such as vests or other accessories).
- ✓ Make sure that the staff party is a nice experience for everyone – even without alcohol.

5. RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is one of the most important stages of volunteer work coordination and a central element of the event's image, communications and marketing. If the event seems unappealing or unknown, it is not easy to reach prospective volunteers. The event's values are also made visible by recruitment: Who are invited to join us?

Preparing for Recruitment:

Information Release

Compile the volunteering information into the event website or other platform. Introduce the work packages, what is expected from the volunteers and what is offered in return. Also articulate the event's values.

Application Form

Draft an application form. A well-devised form is clear and easy to fill out while paying attention to the diverse needs and wishes of participants and promoting a supportive and safe atmosphere.

Get this information! 

You may also ask for additional information, such as what motivated them to apply.

It is also recommended to survey any wishes on participating with a friend, instructor or support person in the application stage.

Promoting accessibility:

- ✓ Make sure that the website and application form also work on mobile devices and screen readers.
- ✓ Use clear language without complicated jargon.
- ✓ Choose an easy-to-read font of an adequate size. Use clearly distinctive colours.
- ✓ Use images or videos to illustrate the text.
- ✓ Offer an alternative way of signing up, such as by telephone or in person.
- ✓ Also draft English and Easy Finnish versions.

1. **Contact details**
2. **Language skills**
3. **Special skills**
(such as work experience and studies, driver's licence, hygiene passport, security steward licence)
4. **Previous volunteering experience**
5. **Wishes concerning volunteering tasks**
6. **Dates and times of availability**
7. **Possible limitations or special needs affecting participation**

6. COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

The need for communications and marketing usually becomes more pressing when volunteer recruitment is due to start. However, advertising for volunteers doesn't have to be a one-off campaign, but you can make volunteering appealing all year round:

1. Invest in the Volunteering Experience

Happy volunteers often return and can also recommend volunteering for others. Make volunteer satisfaction a priority, invest in their commitment and also keep in contact off-season.

2. Fuel Interest by Communication

Create attractive content about the event, raising volunteering themes regularly. People are fundamentally interested in other people and stories behind the scenes. So, don't be afraid to focus on the volunteers and other event employees!

Drafting a Good Recruitment Announcement

When announcing your volunteer recruitment, draft an inviting advertisement encouraging many types of people to apply. Articulate at least the following basics along with instructions on getting further details:

- What type of an event is it? When and where does it take place?
- Why are volunteers important for this event?
- What types of tasks are available and when?
- How and where to sign up?
- What does the volunteer get for their participation?
- Where can they find more details?

Invest in great vibes
and visuals!

Tips on *communication:*

Keep in touch with the volunteers by communicating things such as:

- Programme releases
- Other event news
- Job openings
- Special offers from partners and affiliates
- Season's greetings, such as thanks for a successful year

Remember to ask the volunteers' permission to also use their contact details during off-season!



Utilize your staff!

Many people take up volunteering with a friend or by a personal invitation. You should activate earlier volunteers and employers into recruiting newcomers.

Where to Find Volunteers

Marketing for volunteers should be based on target groups. Social media platforms are effective ways of reaching users of various ages, but there is also life – namely many people looking for participatory activities – outside of social media.

Examples of Channels and Target Groups:

Event's own communication channels:

Website, social media, newsletters

Target group: Those already interested in the event, earlier volunteers

Schools, student organizations and mailing lists

Target group: Young adults, newcomers, international students

NGOs and associations

Target group: Seniors, immigrants, other special groups

Traditional media (notice boards, local papers, radio, brochures)

Target group: People using fewer digital services, seniors

Also remember these!

- Partner and affiliate channels
- City or municipal channels
- Hobby groups and associations
- Facebook and other social media groups
- Volunteering directory services such as vapaaehtoistyö.fi
- Advertising in events and meeting points
- Influencer marketing

7. EVENT APPROACHING

The work stages from recruitment to the event opening are crucial in the success of the event as well as volunteer satisfaction and commitment.

When selecting the volunteers, it is important to go through all interested applicants, trying to find each of them a task where their wishes, skills and needs meet as well as possible. Planning the teams and shifts demands knowledge of the event's needs, and this highlights the need for co-operation between the various production departments.

If it looks like there are more applicants than are needed for the event, remember that there are almost always last-minute cancellations. It is fairly common to allow for about 10–15 % of volunteers over the actual need – sometimes more. It is useful to make back-up plans and pinpoint the tasks most critical for the success of the event versus the tasks that can be done with less people if necessary.

Address Concerns and Build Trust

The anticipation for the event may be nerve-wracking for especially new volunteers, so it's good to build team spirit and mutual trust from the very start. Things like WhatsApp groups and advance gatherings are great ways for creating team spirit and introducing the volunteers and team leaders. When people get to know each other in advance, the risk of cancellation decreases.

Training should also be organized in good time before the event, for both the volunteers and their team leaders. In addition to the actual tasks, the volunteers may be wondering about such practical details as what to wear or if they can bring their own snacks. Offering information and addressing concerns proactively is an important part of event preparation.

Things to remember in communication:

- ✓ Thank them for applying and give updates on recruitment stages.
- ✓ Inform them of the selections. If all applicants aren't selected, communicate this in an encouraging way.
- ✓ Communicate in good time where and when the training or other gatherings are held.
- ✓ Negotiate the tasks and shifts together with the volunteers.
- ✓ Create team spirit and offer a channel for informal introductions.
- ✓ Encourage questions and offer information proactively.

Promoting accessibility:

- ✓ Don't just talk the talk, but support learning in various ways:
 - Written training guide
 - Visual slideshow or video
 - Practical training before the event
- ✓ Pay attention to special needs related to language, literacy, perception or physical capabilities
 - Plain language materials
 - Translated versions
 - Language support or interpreting
 - Remote participation opportunities
 - Accessible event spaces
 - Mentoring
 - Group exercises

8. TRAINING

Careful training gives the volunteer a clear perception of the event, their task within it and the volunteers' overall role. The first training meeting should be held in good time before the event. This allows for the unhurried rundown of the event's content, values, sustainability and safety.

What should all the volunteers know?

- Basic info on the event's content, background, values and goals
- Key personnel and volunteer team leaders
- The significance of the volunteers to the event
- The meaning of equality, sustainability or safe space principles in the event
- Expected service attitude and manner of encountering others
- Practical things (such as arrival, access badges, meals, contact persons)
- Safety instructions and insurance
- Who to turn to in problem situations
- Designated channels for communication

More elaborate task instructions should be given by the team leader. If the volunteer task calls for special skills or entails any safety risks, adequate training must be offered. For safety reasons, it is also important to introduce the volunteers to the event space and passageways. A walking tour is a good way to get a sense of the operating space and to address any practical issues arising on-site.

To support mental wellbeing, it is recommended to offer the volunteers a low-threshold communications channel for peer support and discussing their concerns or possible problem situations.

9. DURING THE EVENT

In some teams, the volunteers can already join the preparatory stages of the event, but most begin their tasks on the opening day. The moments before launch are exciting for everyone, so encouraging messages and last-minute tips are particularly recommended at this stage.

Volunteer Reception

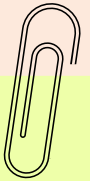
The event should have an information stand or meeting point, where the volunteers can be signed in and pointed towards their team leader. Above all, the volunteer should know in advance when and where to arrive on their starting date and that someone is there to meet them.

At reception, the volunteers are signed as having arrived and are given any access badges and working equipment needed. If the event has the policy of written volunteer agreements, they should be signed no later than this arrival stage.

Support and Guidance

After the volunteers have been given their introductions and their tasks are underway, it is important to offer them continuous support and guidance. Volunteers can perform their tasks independently, but they must not be left alone in problematic situations. Volunteers also need an adequate number of bathroom, food, drink and rest breaks. It is essential for the team leaders and volunteer coordinator to show active interest in the wellbeing of the volunteers and lighten their workloads if needed.

Should the volunteer come across inappropriate behaviour or a dangerous situation in their duties, it is the responsibility of the organizer to provide support and a blueprint to dealing with the situation. In serious situations, the volunteer must be referred to the relevant authorities or healthcare services.



*Ask,
encourage,
give thanks!*

Talk to your volunteers and ask them how they are doing. Observing the event may give you important insights into what is working and what needs more work.

Remember to give credit and thanks, and also instruct your team leaders to act encouragingly.



Starting new paths

Many professional event producers have background in volunteering. Event organizers have a great opportunity to help motivated volunteers advance to new roles.

You can support their development and career paths by offering additional training, team leader positions or invitations to networking events.

10. AFTER THE EVENT

Feeling exhausted after the event? You should prepare for the follow-through in advance, so that important tasks aren't buried under fatigue. Feedback in particular should be requested from the volunteers as soon as possible after completing their tasks, when their memories are still fresh.

Time for Thanks and Improvements

It is often customary to celebrate a successful event with the staff at a wrap party a.k.a. staff party. This party can be organized either right after the end of the event, when most of the staff is still around, or at a later date. It is recommended to designate a person or a team and monetary resources for organizing the party.

Send all the volunteers thank you messages and feedback for their performance. Also give them public credit through event communications. If any problems or shortcomings have arisen during the events, communicate to the volunteers how the event aims to improve in the future.

Learn from Feedback

Volunteer feedback is important for the evaluation and development of the operations. You should make a note of any feedback picked up from any encounters or discussions, but also systematically through a feedback form. A well-drafted form will comprehensively survey volunteer experiences throughout the process and includes metrics for long-term monitoring of the success of the operations.

It is also important to process volunteer feedback with the team leaders and relevant production staff. Volunteers are often the most immediate interface between the event and eventgoers, so you should listen closely to volunteer observations and ideas for improvement when planning the next event.

Metrics for Volunteering

Any event should be aware of the success and impact of their operations. When asking for volunteer feedback, it is useful to include metrics that enable you to get data on the current situation and any changes as well as areas needing improvement. In addition to annual number of participants, it may be useful to keep track on such things as volunteer retention, event appeal and capacity to reach new volunteers:

- How many times have the volunteers been involved?
What is the percentage of newcomers?
- Do the volunteers want to participate again?
- What percentage of the volunteers are locals? And from elsewhere?

With the feedback form, you can also get data on the effectiveness of the recruitment channels, accessibility challenges, safety experience, quality of training and leadership or other areas that the event wishes to develop.

So, draft the feedback form according to your needs; think about what data is actually important for you and how you can utilize it in the future. Make the form as compact and user-friendly as possible, and offer the volunteers a chance to give feedback in many forms, such as online, in person or by a printed form.

You can also apply some well-known customer experience metrics to volunteering assessment:



How likely would you recommend volunteering at this event to your friend?

- **Metric:** eNPS (Employee Net Promoter Score).
Scale of 1-10, where 1 = highly unlikely, 10 = extremely likely.
- **Reasons for using:** Measures the volunteers' sentiment, likelihood of coming back and of recommending volunteering to others.

How smooth or successful were the different aspects of volunteering?

- **Metric:** CES (Customer Effort Score).
Surveys the opinions of the respondent on a variety of topics. Scale of 1-5, where 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.
- **Sample question:** "Applying was easy," "I was trained well for my task," "I felt a sense of belonging"
- **Reasons for using:** Measures the success of the volunteering process and pinpoints areas needing improvement.

How happy were you with your volunteer experience at this event?

- **Metric:** CSAT (Customer Satisfaction Score).
Scale of 1-5, where 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.
- **Reasons for using:** Measures the volunteers' overall experience.

References and Further Reading

Tampere Region Festivals

Materials on the Capable and Inclusive Event project:

- <https://www.pirkanmaanfestivaalit.fi/en/volunteering/>

Event Industry Finland

2024 Guidelines on sustainable event volunteering (in Finnish)

Citizen Forum

Information about volunteering and support for its implementation:

- <https://kansalaisareena.fi/en/>

Ministry of Justice

The ministry in charge of volunteer coordination and development in Finland:

- <https://oikeusministerio.fi/en/civil-society-and-voluntary-activities>

Suomi.fi

Information for both volunteering organizers and participants:

- <https://www.suomi.fi/citizen/rights-and-participation-in-society/civic-engagement-and-volunteering/guide/volunteer-activities>

Occupational Safety and Health Act, Section 55: Voluntary Work

- <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/saadaskaannokset/2002/eng/738>

Työsuojelu.fi (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)

- <https://tyosuojelu.fi/en/safety-and-health-in-workplace/volunteering>

Vero.fi (Tax Information on Voluntary Work, only in Finnish)

- <https://www.vero.fi/syventavat-vero-ohjeet/ohje-hakusivu/48059/yleishyodyllisten-yhteisojen-ja-julkisyhteisojen-vapaaehtoistoiminnan-ennakkoperintakysymykset5/>

Data Protection and GDPR

- <https://tietosuoja.fi/en/data-protection-principles>
- https://europa.eu/youreurope/business/dealing-with-customers/data-protection/data-protection-gdpr/index_en.htm

Accessibility

- <https://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/accessibility>
- <https://www.saavutettavuusvaatimukset.fi/en>



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