

Volunteer Management in European Parks

EU-GRUNDTVIG Multilateral Project

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**Guidelines for Quality Volunteer Management in
European Protected Areas**



Preamble

These guidelines are the result of the identified need to find and support a common understanding of quality volunteer management in European Protected Areas (PAs). The partners of the Lifelong Learning Project “Volunteer Management in European Parks” have developed these guidelines in consultation with PA-managers and volunteer managers/coordinators within the EUROPARC network.

In accordance with the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers, “volunteering needs an empowering and enabling environment”. In this regard, the project partners are convinced that shared values and principles for volunteer management across protected areas in Europe can generate positive results for the benefit of volunteers, their learning processes and for nature conservation.

Good quality volunteer management in PAs is important as:

- volunteering makes a significant contribution to PAs' work in a number of fields including sustainable tourism management, biodiversity conservation, environmental education, and adaptation to climate change.
- it is a good way of promoting active stewardship of the environment and European citizenship;
- it is an effective means of generating commitment or (re-)connecting people to nature;
- the provision of informal learning experiences offers significant opportunities for volunteers' personal development;
- Volunteering can generate social and economic benefits for residents and local communities.

Protected Areas interested to subscribe those guidelines should consider the following.

Throughout the guide, links are provided to appropriate examples developed by project partners and protected area management authorities.

1. Expressed commitment

There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers and recognition that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the PA:

- The PA has a [written policy on involvement of volunteers](#) based on the principle of equality and diversity. [All staff and partners share and understand the values](#) and impact of volunteering in PAs.
- All staff and partners in contact with volunteers should be aware of volunteers' needs and should be put in a position to respond to them.
- The PA implements procedures for regularly reviewing volunteer involvement.
- The PA offers the opportunity to volunteers to have a strategic input into the organisation of volunteering.
- Volunteers add value and extend the services of the organisation. Volunteers do not replace paid staff efforts.

2. Appropriate resources

The PA commits appropriate resources for working with volunteers:

- The PA designates responsibility for recruiting, [selecting, supporting and protecting volunteers](#) to a key person or a key-group of persons.
- The PA ensures that the supervisors/volunteer coordinators have the relevant knowledge and experience of involving wider society.
- PAs allocate appropriate time during staff meetings to discuss volunteer issues.
- PA Staff and partners working with volunteers are provided with appropriate insurance.
- The PA has an annual/multiannual plan with objectives and programme for volunteer involvement.
- The PA allocates sufficient staff, material and financial resources for volunteer roles.

3. Recruiting volunteers

The PA is open and [actively seeking to involve volunteers](#) who reflect the diversity of the local community and wider society.

- The PA is committed to use fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.
- The PA welcomes and proactively involves volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities.
- information about the PA, volunteering opportunities, recruitment and selection procedures, deadlines and time schedule are made clear and distributed as widely available as possible.
- The PA monitors the diversity of the volunteer team and intends to increase diversity.
- Recruitment procedures are appropriate to the volunteer role.
- Volunteers are informed about the selection results.
- The PA takes a considered approach to taking up references which is consistent and equitable for all volunteers.
- Where appropriate, the PA has considered which types of convictions/disciplinary actions may or may not be relevant to the volunteering being undertaken .

4. Role of volunteers

The PA develops [appropriate roles for volunteers](#) that are of value to them especially in regard to informally gained competencies:

- The PA sets a list of roles that can be managed by volunteers, and for each role a precise description of tasks, activities and learning opportunities is drawn up.
- The PA sets out the necessary [skills, attitude, experience and availability](#) required to carry out each role.
- Where possible, tasks are adapted to suit the needs, abilities and interests of individual volunteers.

5. Safety

The PA undertakes that volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering:

- An assessment of [potential risk to volunteers](#) is conducted when designing the volunteer roles.
- Volunteers are covered by appropriate insurance.
- There is a [policy for reimbursement](#) of volunteers' out of pocket expenses.
- Volunteers' [personal details are protected](#).

6. Training for volunteers

Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the PA, its work and policies.

- Volunteers are made aware of the [hopes and expectations](#) the PA has about them, and also what they can expect from the PA to fulfil their role.
- All new volunteers are [introduced to the relevant paid staff and other volunteers](#) with whom they will come into contact.
- Volunteers are provided with the necessary information and/or training to carry out their role.
- Volunteers are advised how the PA will address situations of inappropriate behaviour and [how they can make a complaint](#) concerning their treatment by paid staff, visitors, committee members or other volunteers.
- There is [clarity between the volunteer and the PA](#) about the boundaries of the volunteers' roles.

7. Support and supervision

The PA [takes account of the varying needs of volunteers](#) regarding support and supervision:

- Either one-to-one and / or group support sessions are offered, as appropriate regarding the level of responsibility and emotional demand of the volunteer role.
- Volunteers are aware that they can refuse demands, e.g. as they consider it unrealistic, beyond the scope of the role or that they do not have the skills to carry out.
- The volunteer and the volunteer coordinator [develop and agree together](#) the specific tasks of the volunteer.
- Volunteers are asked for feedback about their role and their involvement with the PA.
- Volunteers are informed of relevant changes in the PA which might affect their role.

8. Recognition

The whole PA is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition:

- The PA recognizes the value of volunteers' contributions and communicates effectively their appreciation to volunteers, both formally and [informally](#).
- The PA provides volunteers the opportunity to continue developing their skills and talents within the roles on offer if appropriate.
- The PA offers to volunteers who have made a regular commitment to the PA, reference and/or other statement of their achievements.
- The PA has an evaluation and monitoring programme in place, and endeavours to obtain feedback from volunteers.

9. Additional resources

A range of further udeful resources can be found at the [Volunteering in Parks Moodle site](#).

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