



# Hints and tips for new volunteers

Volunteers have always played a vital part in the sports and physical activity sector. Without them, most community sport and physical activity simply wouldn't happen. Our hints and tips are designed to help new volunteers get the best out of their volunteer experience.

Volunteers who support sport and physical activity in their community can enjoy many benefits including:

- making new friends
- being part of a team and having a sense of belonging
- feeling good about yourself
- giving back to the community
- making new connections and building new relationships
- helping others
- boosting your CV
- gaining new skills and experience
- being involved with social events and opportunities.

Despite these benefits, new volunteers sometimes have concerns about getting involved. Our research showed that people can often:

- be worried about doing something new and meeting new people
- feel like they lack experience in a particular sport, in a sports club or group environment
- feel shy, lack confidence, or consider themselves less of a 'people person' and more suited to behind the scenes roles
- be worried about how much time they will be able to give
- not want to be tied into making a commitment, in case they don't enjoy it.

These concerns are very normal, but they don't need to mean the end of your volunteering journey before it's begun! Sports clubs, groups and their volunteers are a friendly bunch and will want to welcome you and work with you to understand and overcome any concerns you may have.

They will also want to support you to make the most of your volunteer experience and the benefits it can offer.



## 1 Don't talk yourself out of giving it a go

Volunteering can seem like a big ask. Sometimes it feels easier to talk yourself out of doing something new rather than giving it a go. However, clubs and groups with positive volunteering cultures will be keen to ensure your experience is enjoyable. Don't be afraid to take the first step and just have a conversation about your options. Whether it's big or small, every bit of help will be welcome and you'll get a lot from it, so give it a go.

## 2 Understand why you want to get involved

Think about why you want to volunteer, what's motivating you, and what you would like to get out of the experience. There are many benefits to volunteering ranging from specific reasons like moving to a new area and wanting to make friends, to wanting to learn new skills and develop your CV. Use your motivations to shape what you look for and how you get involved.



## 3 Work with your club or group to find your best fit

Be upfront about what motivates you, what kind of tasks or roles you'd be interested in, what your skills are, how much time you can commit and when, plus any concerns you have. That way, you can work with your club or group to identify the best arrangements for you and them. If you can't give time on specific evenings but can contribute from home, or would prefer to do something more 'behind the scenes' than people-facing, tell them! Similarly, if you'd feel more comfortable getting started by shadowing someone else, for example, just ask. Don't be afraid to say no if the volunteering opportunities on offer aren't right for you – just make sure you are open and honest about why. There's likely to be a way forward for everyone if you work together to find it.



# 4

## Bring your enthusiasm!

Some tasks or roles might require specific technical skills, but most don't. Clubs and groups aren't just looking for people with specific skills or qualifications, they want people with enthusiasm and passion, who are friendly and positive and, most of all, have a desire to help. If you fit this description, they will be excited to have you involved and you will be able to pick up new skills and knowledge 'on the job'.



# 5

## Make sure you feel comfortable about getting started

Ideally, your club or group will touch base with you before you start and work with you to make sure you feel informed, ready and excited. This might be through an informal one-to-one or online meeting, a phone call, or a more comprehensive induction process. However, if this hasn't been arranged or you don't feel informed enough, don't worry, just ask for an induction and any extra information that you need to feel ready to get started.



# 6

## Be a team player

Being proactive, patient, flexible and adaptable, having good timekeeping, following through when you agree to do something, being ready to lend a hand and willing to take responsibility will quickly help you become an essential part of your volunteering team. In turn, you can expect to feel recognised and appreciated for your efforts, valued and motivated to continue.



# 7

## Set goals for yourself

As you start volunteering, it can be really useful to set some goals to work towards. These should be driven by what motivates you and what you want to get out of volunteering, such as gaining specific experience, and how you can best support your club or group. Having some goals will help you make the most of your experience and take on opportunities to help you develop and improve your skills.



# 8

## Work with your club/group to prioritise your experience

It's in your club or group's best interest to offer you a great experience, so make sure you ask for support as and when you need it. This might include training to help you progress. Also, be prepared to give and receive constructive feedback, so you and they can work towards any improvements. Two-way communication is important, so always be honest and encourage your club or group to be transparent in your interactions with them. Also, don't be afraid to say no to things that don't feel right for you.



# 9



## Get involved with decision making

To really get the most out of your volunteering experience, you might want to get involved with your club or group's decision making. By doing this you can share your views and not only help to shape your club or group's future, but have the opportunity to become part of that journey too.

# 10

## Enjoy yourself!

The most important thing is that you enjoy your volunteering experience. Take advantage of all the opportunities and benefits on offer and work with your club or group to find new ways they can help you and others to have fun and achieve your goals. Volunteering should be rewarding and fulfilling, so just remember to stay open about what you need from your club or group in order to enjoy your experience.

