



Special Olympics
Ireland



Club Onboarding Guidelines



Onboarding Guidelines

Purpose of this document:

The purpose of this document is to *offer* clubs suggestions to evaluate how they integrate new volunteers into their clubs.

Many clubs have great success integrating their newly recruited volunteers and retaining them. Over the coming year there will be opportunities to gather great practices from clubs themselves and share those positive actions with all clubs.

What is Onboarding:

A process for welcoming and orienting new volunteers.

The onboarding *period* is that settling in time when a new volunteer joins until they are not seen as “new” anymore.

Your onboarding *process* is how you support new volunteers to settle in to your club and have a positive experience.

How can onboarding benefit your club?

You put effort into recruiting volunteers and they put time and thought into considering volunteering at your club and registering to volunteer. Even when recruited, volunteers will still continue to observe. You want to let them know they have made the right decision to volunteer with your club and avoid losing them to another volunteer opportunity with another organisation.

Why is onboarding important?

When a new volunteer joins your club, the experience they have at that critical time could determine whether or not they stay with your club. For those who join your club on a short term commitment, e.g., Transition Year Students, their experience in those first few weeks could be the difference between them returning to volunteer with a Special Olympics club when they are older or not.

The point is, you could leave it up to chance or you could take purposeful actions to make a new volunteer’s onboarding experience a really positive one.



So where do you start?

Put yourself in the shoes of a new volunteer joining a club. What might their expectations be, remembering we all different and those expectations may vary from volunteer to volunteer? As they start volunteering, they may make the following evaluations:

- *Do I belong here – do I feel included?*
- *How well-run is this club?*
- *Can I make a difference by giving my time here?*
- *Will my experience and skills be used here?*

You don't want any new volunteers leaving in their first few weeks with the following thoughts:

- *I didn't know why I had been asked to do what I was doing?*
- *I didn't feel welcome*
- *I didn't expect the tasks to be like this*
- *I never got a thank you*
- *I didn't understand what I was supposed to do*

How is onboarding “done”?

By talking to the new volunteer; offering feedback and asking for feedback; supporting the volunteer to get to know other volunteers; listening and gauging the level of support needed for each individual; communicating and managing expectations, facilitating the new volunteer to learn the ropes without overwhelming them.

Putting your onboarding process in place:

- Evaluate what you are already doing and highlight any gaps you think you may have based on the following 2 questions:
- How can you best anticipate what a new volunteer's needs are?
- How can you provide the best possible experience for someone new joining your club?

It's important to use your own style so that the process flows naturally, with sincerity and doesn't come across as scripted.



Suggested Onboarding Guidelines:

You may like to use the following as a checklist when supporting new volunteers in your club:

Creating a good first impression and welcome

- If a potential volunteer contacts you about volunteering at your club, have you thought about what that conversation should look like, e.g. what initial questions should you ask the volunteer, what information you should give before they come to your club
- Is someone assigned to greet the new volunteer on their first day/night and has the new volunteer been advised of who this is?

Orientation

- Do you have a formal volunteer induction?
- Do you assign a volunteer mentor or buddy to any new volunteer(s) for their first few weeks?
- Do you provide new volunteers with welcome packs?
- Do you advise of any club protocols the volunteer needs to be aware of?
- Do you advise of Health and Safety requirements and the requirement to display their volunteer membership card?
- Do you make the club handbook available to the new volunteer when you feel the time is right?
- Are you mindful not to overwhelm new volunteers on their first day/evening in your club?

Getting off to a good start *

- Do you create an opportunity to find out what the new volunteer is expecting from their volunteering experience?
- How do you gauge what level of support is required for each volunteer (see sample questions at the end of this document you might find useful)

Task Familiarisation

- Do you have a process to assess what tasks each new volunteer could do and how they are shown such tasks?
- Do you check understanding?
- Do you explain why you need to ask a volunteer to carry out such tasks (the reason for the task)?
- How does a new volunteer in your club know what they have to do each time they come to the club?
- Do you let the volunteer know how they are getting on with the task?



Forming relationships

- What do you do to support new volunteers to get to know other volunteers in the club (not just know their names)?

Opportunities for progression

- Advise of any training that is made available through your Special Olympics region or your Local Sports Partnership
- Do you have a progression pathway within your club so that volunteers can progress to other roles, especially if key roles may become vacant in the future?

Check-ins and Feedback **

- Do you have a process to periodically check – in with the new volunteer to gauge their comfort level (see sample questions at the end of this document you might find useful)

Recognition

- How has your club agreed to recognise newer volunteers – formal or informal including a sincere thank you

Duration of onboarding

- How have you defined how long onboarding should be in your club?
- Do you formally acknowledge the end of an onboarding period

*Getting off to a good start *

It can be difficult to find out what a new volunteer's expectations are. Asking the question directly might not give you a clear answer. You could try some of these questions to get that conversation started:

- *What drew you to our club?*
- *What's your own background (for those over school or college going age)?*
- *What experience do you have (volunteering, work etc.)*
- *(for school or college going ages) What are you studying? What would you like to study?*
- *What are you most looking forward to as you start volunteering?*
- *What concerns do you have, if any?*
- *How can we best work together?*



****Check-ins and Feedback ****

You want to see how the new volunteer is getting on but you need to have balance in your interactions to avoid overwhelming the volunteer with too much attention.

Informal check-ins are very useful to gauge where the new volunteer is at and to see if their expectations are being met or if there is a need to manage them. It should be two-way communication giving the new volunteer to give you feedback on their experience. The best way to do this is to ask open ended questions instead of yes/no questions.

You could try asking what's going well for the new volunteer. What could be done differently? What they need from you or other members of the club? Finding out if they have any concerns?

To make this a worthwhile and sincere interaction, you need to use your own style.

Thank **you** for everything you do to make new volunteers feel good about their Special Olympics experience