

Working with Volunteers on private land

A Guide



ENPLC

European Networks for
Private Land Conservation





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Summary

Voluntary work is a great opportunity for a nature conservation organisation and private landowners and nature estates to effectively enhance its capacities, knowledge and resources to implement a wide range of activities. Volunteers can support practical nature conservation measures, citizen science projects, fundraising activities or public relations, but they can also support an organisation with their professional knowledge, for example as consultants. Their engagement can lead to better public understanding and appreciation of conservation investments in a private area. Volunteering can make an important contribution to engage people, create discussions about nature conservation and the environment, create critical thinking and addresses misunderstandings with respect to nature conservation. However, including volunteers into an organisation's work also requires financial, human and other resources. The lack of a platform for contacts and matchmaking between organizations and volunteers is often identified as one of the main shortcomings in current national and international conservation volunteering programs. The LIFE ENPLC project aims to bridge this gap. In order to maximize the benefits of working with volunteers for an organisation, a sound management of volunteers and voluntary work is highly recommendable. For private landowners, cooperation with NGOs and colleagues can help to professionalize their cooperation with volunteers.

The following provides some good practices related to the management of volunteers for nature conservation work. Besides, defining processes related to volunteers, it can also be helpful to think about sustainability aspects and to take different forms of volunteering into account.

It should be noted that in most organisations volunteers act to support the work of the organisation (top-down), however, there are some organisations where staff is employed to facilitate the work of volunteers (bottom-up). As is for instance the case with Natuurpunt.

This guide is addressed at nature conservation NGOs and private landowners.



Final version: August 2023

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The ENPLC project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under grant agreement LIFE19 PRE/NL/000003

www.enplc.eu

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Volunteering on private land. What are we talking about?

Environmental volunteering is one of the many fields of volunteer work, alongside society, health, education, culture, sports, and global justice. It involves selflessly contributing to the conservation of nature and enhancing environmental quality through organised and unpaid efforts. These efforts encompass a range of activities and programs, aiming to directly impact the environment and raise awareness about its intrinsic value. Environmental volunteers provide guidance to the public and encourage their active participation in endeavours that enhance the environment.

This form of volunteering provides a valuable opportunity to engage with local challenges and find collective, proactive solutions. Its impact spans three dimensions: environmental protection, personal growth, and societal progress.

In essence, an activity can be classified as environmental volunteering when it:

- Involves no monetary compensation for volunteers.
- Occurs within a defined time frame.
- Arises from a voluntary commitment and a desire to contribute to the community.
- Operates within an organisational framework.
- Aims to improve the preservation status of a targeted area.

When these efforts are directed towards privately owned lands, we refer to it as volunteering on private land. This category involves three key participants: NGOs, landowners, and volunteers. The rights, responsibilities, and expectations of each party must be carefully considered when planning and executing these activities.

Legal framework of volunteering

Prior to arranging environmental volunteering activities, it's crucial to familiarize yourself with the legal framework in your country. For instance, in the Catalan region, there exists a specific law that delineates the definition of volunteering, the types of organizations eligible to engage volunteers, as well as the rights and responsibilities for both volunteers and NGOs. In this context, associations, foundations, and non-profit cooperatives have the capacity to host long-term volunteers or coordinate volunteering efforts. This means that private landowners are unable to directly engage their own volunteers, but they can collaborate with NGOs to initiate such projects

Project or time-bound forms of volunteering

For certain tasks, it might be worth considering implementing a workcamp or to work with long-term volunteers. For both forms of volunteering, there are certain organisations that are specialised on bringing together volunteers and those organisations that have some non-profit work to offer.

Workcamps

Especially for nature conservation projects with short periods of intense workload, it might be worth considering running a workcamp. There are many organisations specialised on bringing together volunteers and organisations that have some voluntary work to offer. Most workcamps attract people from different backgrounds, who generally do not know each other but wish to meet new people, living together and working for a non-profit project. Workcamps generally last from one to several weeks and intend to implement projects with tangible results within social, educational, cultural, artistic, or environmental frameworks.

Time period: 1 to 3 weeks.

Volunteer profile: national or international volunteers.

Extra needs: accommodation and food.

Regular working days

It might also be interesting for an organisation or estate to offer regular working days to volunteers, for instance once in a month, twice a year, or during high season. By engaging a local community, local people can engage for one day, to learn about the area, how it is managed, and which investments have been made, but also to get to know people from the area and to make them feel part of a community.

Time period: regularly, once or twice in a month or year.

Volunteer profile: local volunteers.

Extra needs: none.

Regular Volunteering with fixed tasks

Another option to include volunteers is to let them take on one or several roles or tasks at regular intervals over a shorter or longer period of time.

- First/second chairperson
- Cashier
- Volunteer coordinator
- Welcome mentor
- Receptionist
- Responsible for a protected area
- Volunteer for practical nature conservation measures
- Workcamp participant
- Information stand constructor
- Info stand supervisor
- Info booth manager
- Press spokesperson
- Secretary
- Event coordinator
- Webmaster
- Advertising material producer



- Tour guides

The list of potential roles varies quite drastically. Not only by the skill level to execute a specific task but also the connected responsibility and liability that a person would take on. Some roles, such as a chairman, which arguably requires at least some level of expertise and comes with certain responsibilities, may also require an election to identify the most suitable candidate for that role.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that volunteers may not always be available to fill these roles. It should thus be carefully evaluated who would take on these tasks if no volunteer is available.

Time period: long-term commitment (more than one year), on a regular basis.

Volunteer profile: local volunteers.

Extra needs: none.

Corporate volunteering

Offering volunteering days, commonly 1 or half a day, for companies might also be attractive both for enterprises looking for interesting and useful teambuilding activities and for nature conservation organisations with tasks that can be done by volunteers.

Additionally, this kind of volunteering activity might lead to additional funding for the organisation as the enterprise might be more willing to support the organisation financially when the staff already knows the work of the organisation.

In addition, these one-off activities can end up in long-term collaborations between companies and organizations, for example, through the participation of some of the company's workers in the long-term projects, or the sponsorship of the company of a natural area, regularly contributing with volunteers or funding actions and materials to facilitate its conservation. This will also lead us to community engagement and contribute to their awareness regarding nature conservation issues.

Time period: one day.

Volunteer profile: company's workers.

Extra needs: none.

Short-term voluntary work

It might also be the case that for a certain purpose, it makes sense to engage volunteers only for a very limited amount of time, for instance for a citizen science project. Some organisations also report a trend towards a preference of volunteers towards such short term and project-based volunteering opportunities. This type of volunteering may gain in relevance over time.

Time period: one day.

Volunteer profile: local or national volunteers.

Extra needs: none.

Long-term voluntary services

If your organisation is in permanent need of voluntary work and if you have the capacity to provide adequate supervision, it might also be worth considering offering a long-term voluntary service, meaning that a volunteer would support the organisation over several months to more than a year, in most cases for a small amount of pocket money and/or covering living expenses. There are both national and international programs placing volunteers with non-profit organisations. It should however be considered not to create precarious working conditions. Such long-term volunteering options can also provide social benefits by, for instance, creating communities for people interested in nature or providing an active pastime. An example of that is the NABU programme 'Fit durch Naturschutz' that was created to keep elderly people fit.

Time period: 3 to 12 months, part- or full-time dedication.

Volunteer profile: national or international volunteers.

Extra needs: accommodation, food and pocket money for volunteers.

Self-proposed and “Competence-based” volunteering

Sometimes it can also happen that people approach an organisation, offering them their work for free. It might be recommendable to be prepared for these kinds of cases as well to make use of this resource. It might also be the case that a member or supporter of an NGO volunteers to work within their areas of knowledge to serve the organisation's goals, for instance, to design to produce a logo, producing videos and other media, translations, providing free legal support.

Time period: some days for specific tasks

Volunteer profile: local volunteers.

Extra needs: none.

Citizen Science

Citizen science initiatives, offer the possibility to obtain large scale monitoring data through collaboration between research centres, civil society organisations, public administrations, and private owners. At the same time, these initiatives involve the public in the conservation of nature and raise awareness on the topic. Citizen Science is a specific type of volunteering and requires a somewhat different approach to regular volunteering. Citizen Science projects usually serve the purpose of gathering scientific knowledge and such activities thus should be aligned with requirements of that category.

Processes related to the management of volunteers

In order to successfully manage voluntary work within an organisation, it is recommendable to define and document the processes related to the management of volunteers. The following list provides exemplary processes within an organisation to support volunteer

management. Of course, the processes that are adequate to be implemented depend on the type of volunteering activities that are being offered. All processes are described more in detail below:

- Definition of Role Profiles
- Inventory
- Volunteers' Satisfaction
- Recruitment
- Welcoming culture and social safety
- Access to private land and privacy
- Insurance
- Education and training
- Appreciation and honouring of voluntary work
- Honouring volunteers
- Farewell rituals

Definition of role profiles

Defining role profiles can help to clarify responsibilities, rights and duties of volunteers within an organisation. A role profile could consist of the following elements:

- Name of the role/task
- Rights and duties related to the task/role
- Where, when and how often should the activity be performed?
- Why is this task important?
- What is offered to the volunteer in return for their service?
- Explain what skills are required for the job
- How important is this role profile?

Think about all tasks and activities your organisation has to offer, how small and mundane they may be. Small roles/tasks make it easier for prospective volunteers to get started in volunteering. Maybe you need someone to write minutes, drive a car, or distribute advertising materials?

It might be helpful to keep track and document the tasks that belong to a certain role that is taken by volunteers within your organisation, to be prepared when volunteers end their engagement and others take over.

Some possible roles that can be taken by volunteers for longer and shorter periods of time have been described above. Of course, one person could also take several roles within your organisation.

It can be very beneficial to compile information on each of the roles and to make them available to the volunteers. Some examples could be: the context and of the project or activity, the concrete tasks, what kinds of skills are needed; for longer projects and/or projects abroad in particular: conditions of the project location, risks, safety conditions, travel planning, etc.

When defining roles, there should also always be a connection to an existing staff or volunteer that can act as mentor to that role and who can act as a contact person for them.

Inventory

For the successful management of volunteers, it is recommendable to know your volunteers, their roles and the tasks they take over very well. When managing volunteers, one should make sure to stick to data protection regulations.

Some questions you could ask to get an overview on the current situation:

- How many permanent and/or temporary volunteers are/have been working for your organisation?
- Are all important roles covered?
- Do you have different kinds of volunteering groups within your organisation (e.g. subject/project/local/regional/youth/children's groups) and if so,
- Do you have an overview of these groups?
- Who are the group leaders of these groups?
- Do you have an effective data management in place in order to get an overview on your volunteers, their contact details, their roles within your organisation, their capacities, qualifications and other characteristics that might be relevant to you?
- What kinds of benefits and services do you offer your volunteers?
- Are there any events addressing volunteers, such as annual parties, excursions or trips with and for your volunteers?
- Are the volunteers satisfied with their volunteering experience and what can be improved?
- How is the connection between group leaders and other volunteers?
- Does your group offer events to external people such as guided tours and field trips? If so, how many? And are these offerings targeted to specific groups (seniors, families, professionals ...)?
- How is your organisation being perceived from the outside?

Volunteers' Satisfaction

In order to maintain long-lasting relationships to your volunteers and to make sure that your volunteers continue to be motivated, it is useful to evaluate the volunteers' satisfaction with regard to their volunteering experience on a regular basis.

Tip: Also be aware about what strengths and weaknesses your volunteers or groups of volunteers have. It is recommendable to do this analysis with all the active people and record it in a written form.

Recruitment of Volunteers

If your organization is open to new volunteers, the first step would be to let people know about it. First of all, create and keep updated a specific area about volunteering on your website and share it through your social networks. Creating a form would help to better organize the volunteers' selection. The second step would be to search for national or

international portals (depending on the volunteer profile you are open to host) and share there the volunteering opportunities within your organization.

If there are roles you need additional volunteers for, it can be useful to figure out where to find them. The following considerations will help:

Step 1: What target group does the person you are looking for belong to?

Children, youth, young adults, families, seniors ...

Step 2: Where is the target group located?

Some examples: friends and family of volunteers who are already engaged, membership lists, guided tours, at information booths, at the university, at events, ...

Step 3: How can you reach the target group?

Advertise in all possible places with flyers, posters, ads, on your website and in press releases that you are looking for new volunteers. Invite them to a monthly meeting!

Step 4: Some things take time.

Be patient and don't give up. It may take time to see success.

#Attention: Volunteer Coordination is a hard and tedious job. Do not be disappointed or discouraged if crowds do not flock to your actions. Every single new volunteer is a success, and you can congratulate yourself for that.

Welcoming culture and social safety

You have already done a lot for recruiting new volunteers in all kinds of places. Now it comes to the first personal contacts, whether at the information booth, on the phone, at the monthly meeting, in your office or at an event.

All volunteers should be instructed in the "welcoming procedure". Such a procedure are meant to help new volunteers to familiarise themselves with the work, but also to help integrating any new volunteers into existing groups. It might also be useful to establish the role of a welcoming mentor who explicitly focuses on welcoming new volunteers or prospects.

#Caution: first impressions are crucial! If you don't have a volunteer coordinator or welcome mentor, always make sure beforehand who will take on this role, for example at a regular meeting, and take care of the newcomer from start to finish.

Access to private land and privacy

When volunteers are invited to work on land not in the ownership of the organizer of the volunteering campaign it is advised to make a clear agreement with the proprietary or the land users/managers in advance. The agreement can encompass a list of behavioural rules for volunteers – citizen scientists on the terrains, and the access control. The agreement can contain agreements made on:

- which activities will be conducted by the volunteers - citizen scientists in the field
- management and control
 - E.g.: “the land owner or hunting rights holder owns the right to manage and supervise all aspects of the monitoring action which do not belong to the effective action itself but which are linked to it. Also, the land owner and hunting rights holder are entitled to carry out a marginal supervision of the effective monitoring activities (e.g., check if all requirements and conditions are met with)”
- professional behaviour and respect
 - E.g.: “the volunteer - citizen scientist acts according to the management and supervision as agreed on with [the coordinating organization] and honours the mutual agreements made (related to entry, behaviour, ...). At the spot, the landowner can inquire about the identity of the volunteer– citizen scientist on the land.” The volunteer – citizen scientist responds to all questions asked.
 - E.g.: “The volunteer – citizen scientist honours the mutual agreements made with the landowner and hunting rights holder concerning the entry and access to the private terrain and takes specific requirements into account.”
- expertise of the volunteers (if needed)
 - E.g.: “[Coordinating organization] guarantees that the volunteers – citizen scientists involved have the necessary (taxonomic and methodological) expertise to conduct the monitoring actions according to the expected quality standards.
- restrictions in time and place
 - E.g.: “The visit to the private terrain is entirely restricted to the necessary monitoring actions according to respective monitoring protocols, to the specific locations where the monitoring takes place and is according to the time necessary for the monitoring action. The landowner or hunting rights holder and [coordinating organization] can make additional agreements which do not make part of the signed agreement if needed.
- pictures and video
 - E.g.: “Photographing of private property, digital or analog, as well as all kinds of registrations of elements present on the property (video, sound recording, ...) are only allowed if they concern the monitored species and the monitoring object sensu stricto in the frame of the European Natura 2000 reporting process. All other actions in this respect are forbidden.
- the use of collected data in general
 - E.g.: “the right of use of data collected during the (monitoring) action is unlimited. During public disclosure of these data, however, location blurring rules agreed between parties is strictly applied.”



- process in case of irregularities
 - E.g.: “In case the agreements are not respected access to the private terrain can be denied on the spot by the landowner or [coordinating organization]. If no representative of [coordinating organization] is present the landowner should inform [coordinating organization] about the irregularity within the first 48 hours after the incident. If the facts are ultimately confirmed and harmful to the area or the agreement, access or participation of the volunteer – citizen scientist to the area and other campaigns can be restricted.

Insurance

In many cases, it might make sense to offer an insurance to volunteers during their volunteering time. Depending on the place where the volunteering takes place, it could even be mandatory, for example, in the case of Catalonia, where the volunteering law obliges NGOs to take out insurance for volunteers. It is also important to inform volunteers which steps they have to follow in case of accident before they start the volunteering period.

Education and training

In order to improve the quality of voluntary work, but also to increase a volunteer's bond with your organisation, it can be very useful to offer education on various topics to volunteers, either within the organisation or in collaboration with other organisations. Education and trainings are an effective tool to improve your volunteers' skills and to achieve better outcomes for your organisation and to increase your volunteers' satisfaction.

Some useful topics for education and training programmes (on-site attendance or online) might be:

- Work safety: handling chainsaws, hand saws, brush cutters, scythes, head tree care, fruit tree care, handling ladders, use of excavators, wheel loaders, aerial work platforms, etc.
- First aid: specific action and help in case of accidents in nature conservation
- Volunteer coordination: recruiting, accompanying and also saying goodbye to volunteers
- Youth leader training: how to lead a children's or youth group
- crash course on your organisation: decision-making processes, legal basics, data protection, insurances
- Public relations: production of publicity materials and creation of websites
- General information on the organisation
- Specific courses or talks about the nature of the area or nature conservation. Species, habitats, biodiversity loss, causes of decline, threats, how can we help... This is essential to make volunteers understand the relevance of their work

Appreciation of voluntary work

Besides the motivation to do something useful and meaningful, an important aspect of why people want to volunteer is socializing. Human beings like to be together because we can

only experience appreciation in community. People want to be appreciated not only as "workers" but also as individuals.

Aspects of a culture of appreciation:

- The board of directors is interested in the skills of volunteers and full-time staff
- All volunteers feel that they are important
- All volunteers are involved in developing a culture of appreciation based on reciprocity

Increasing volunteers' self-esteem through honouring measures might be possible through:

- Small gifts to volunteers, such as t-shirts with the logo of the organisation (when volunteers wear them, this is also a good advertisement for the organisation)
- Offering further education
- Loyalty/honorary pins and certificates
- Praise by the 1st chair(wo)man
- Mentioning volunteers and their achievements at annual meetings
- Articles in the annual report
- Offering them a leadership function

Appreciation through publication:

- Article in the local newspaper
- Article on the website
- Profile of volunteers on the website

Valuing volunteers and their contributions through joint events:

- Organization of a group trip
- excursions to regional nature centres
- Invite volunteers together with other experts to guided tours (nature, culture, history,...) or networking events
- joint Christmas party/barbecue/summer party/volunteers' day

Showing appreciation for volunteers through cooperation on equal terms:

- Involvement of volunteers in formal and informal decision-making processes
- joint preparation of the open day joint birthday calendar
- Maintaining common rituals (birthdays, Christmas, Easter, anniversaries, etc.)
- mutual praise, compliments and recognition

Honouring volunteers

Honouring members and volunteers raises the spirits in a group and binds people to an organisation. Don't forget the loyalty of your members. They deserve thanks for allowing you to exist as a group. Emotional involvement in a group usually correlates to long-term commitment. Especially, when people get involved in projects and can communicate their needs, they get an emotional binding.

You could honour membership, donations or volunteering by giving out small little gifts to show your appreciation and to honour people for their contribution to your organisation's goal or for their loyalty. A gift that has a special relation to your organisation could be some

kind of loyalty pins, which you could award for 10-, 20-, 30-, 40-, 50-, 60- and 70-year membership, together with a certificate.

You might also think about honorary presents, such as pins or anything else, honouring special engagement of certain volunteers or members. Maybe you might want to honour different stages of engagement with different kinds of presents or gifts. The advantage of pins is that they are not very costly, but they are strongly related to your organisation and have a strong symbolic character. Be creative! It might be of advantage to establish a standardized and transparent honouring procedure, making clear, maybe even in a written form, who can be honoured for what kinds of achievements or who can suggest people for certain honours, making sure that volunteers do not have the impression that honours might be distributed arbitrarily.

Farewell of volunteers

There can be many reasons for leaving an honorary position: professional reorientation, relocation, changes in the private environment or a new life situation. If a volunteer decides to give up their office/role/task, the association's board of directors should ensure a dignified farewell. After all, the departing volunteer has invested many hours of their scarce free time in the honorary office. Farewells are also an opportunity. They can clarify a situation and make a new beginning possible for all involved.

Causes for quitting volunteer positions:

- The volunteer no longer feels comfortable in the commitment.
- The honorary office no longer corresponds to the life situation.
- The framework conditions are not sufficiently designed and the volunteer no longer feels motivated.
- An age limit has been reached.
- The project has ended.
- The volunteer cannot agree with the agreements and principles of the cooperation.
- The volunteer does not want to integrate into the group.
- The group and the volunteer do not harmonize.
- Unresolved conflicts complicate the cooperation.

Farewell procedure

It might be recommendable to establish a standard procedure to send someone off, depending on how long they were part of the organisation. You could offer them a certificate for their voluntary work, have a final talk or, especially for people with a longer or quite intense history of engagement within your organisation, you could also organize a farewell event.

It might be recommendable to stay in loose contact with former volunteers:

- Keep in touch, even if loosely.
- Invite people to just drop in.
- Organize an alumni party.
- Remember birthday and holiday greetings.



- Continue to invite people to internal events such as barbecues, Christmas parties, group outings and group trips.
- Send condolence cards in the event of a death.

Attention:

Inherent in every goodbye is a new beginning – and should always be seen as an opportunity for the group. We always want to ensure an appreciative farewell. This is just as important for the person leaving as it is for the remaining volunteers. The volunteer work performed always deserves respect when saying goodbye.

Sustainability

As a nature conservation and/or environmental association, it should be self-evident that you pay attention to environmental standards and sustainability in your various volunteer activities.

- When it comes to food, consider offering a high share of regional, organic and plant based/vegetarian food, as food production has a high impact on nature
- Avoid disposable packaging - whether plastic or paper. Use your own drinking bottles or buy regional drinks in reusable bottles.
- When it comes to clothing, also think about fair trade and organic labels.
- If you need new equipment for outdoor use, research whether it can be rented locally. There are also many offers from professional rental companies.
- Your own equipment can be loaned to other groups.
- It's also nice and sustainable to set up a "pool" of tools.