



Solas Project Volunteer Policy

Why we involve volunteers

1.1 Why we involve volunteers

The work of Solas Project could not happen without the support of volunteers. More than one of our programmes are reliant on volunteers to operate effectively. We regard volunteers as a valuable resource and encourage them to get involved at all levels of the organisation and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise.

Solas Project recognises that volunteers bring additional skills and diversity to our programmes that adds value and depth to all we do. It is the policy of Solas Project to involve volunteers not only in order to assist us in all we do but also to assist volunteers in developing their skills and experience.

Solas Project encourages a culture of volunteerism and aims to highlight that the nature of volunteering adds an extra layer to the work that we do with young people that is irreplaceable by an employee.

1.2 Purpose of this Volunteer Policy

The purpose of this volunteer policy is to outline our practice of involving volunteers and to ensure consistency and good practice in the recruitment, selection and ongoing management of volunteers.

It is not a binding contract but rather exists to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering at Solas Project. This policy supplements other Solas Project policies and procedures. It is the responsibility of all staff members to ensure that this policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively.

1.3 Definition of volunteering

“Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice” - The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland, May 2011.

1.4 Who is eligible to volunteer?

Solas Project will consider involving anyone over 18 who is committed to the ethos of Solas Project as a volunteer. Volunteers under 18 will be considered under special circumstance e.g. work experience. Potential volunteers must be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the organisation and may only be placed if their needs as volunteers match the needs of the organisation. No person who has a conflict of interest with any aspect of the organisation will be accepted as a volunteer. All volunteers must complete our recruitment and selection process as outlined in Section 2.

1.5 Role descriptions and person specifications

Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description will be developed for each voluntary opportunity. This must include a title of the volunteering role, length of commitment required, hours and place of work and outline of tasks to be undertaken. If appropriate, a brief person specification may also be drawn up. The role description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and Solas Project.

2. Recruitment and Selection

2.1 Recruitment Process

Below is an outline of Solas Project's recruitment process. Once an expression of interest has been made by a potential volunteer they will begin this recruitment process through completion of a standard volunteer application form.

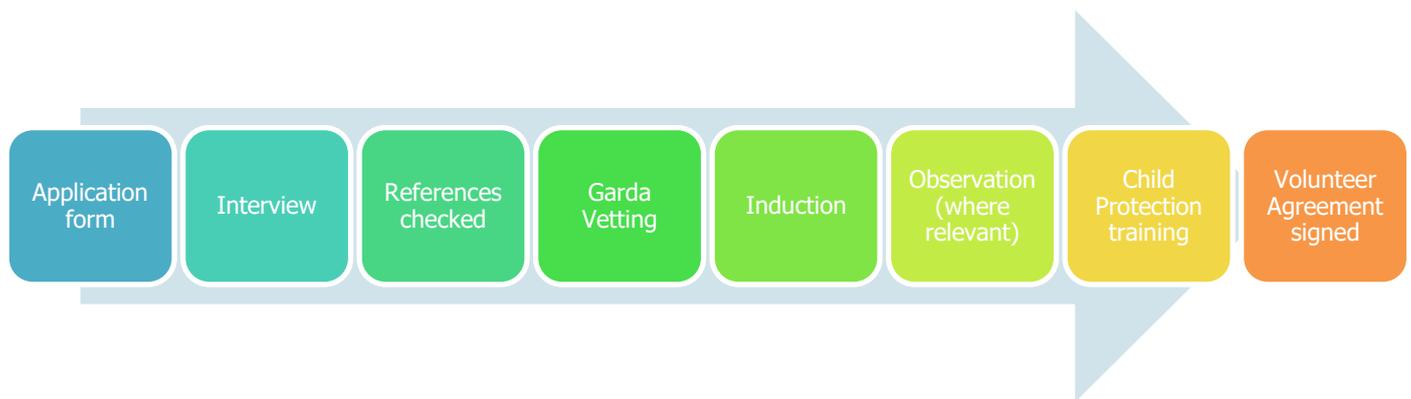


Fig. 1 Volunteer Application Process

At any point of this process if the applicant is deemed unsuitable to volunteer with Solas Project they will be informed. If they reach the end of this process with no issues arising, they will be accepted as a volunteer providing a suitable role is available. Volunteers will be required to provide proof of ID that matches the name on their volunteer application form and Garda Vetting form.

Please note that for the purposes of engaging volunteers in some of our community programmes where volunteers are only required for a short period, the recruitment process can vary. For example for our corporate volunteers in a 5 week Solas Business programme we require only Garda Vetting including two forms of ID.

As instructed in Part I, section 3, c (i), of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, anyone volunteering only for a once off, under the 'occasional basis' arrangement stated, will not be Garda vetted, unless they should choose to volunteer with us in another capacity.

2.2 Interviewing Volunteers

Once a volunteer application has been received all suitable candidates will be invited to attend an interview, to ascertain their interest in and suitability for the role. All unsuccessful candidates are thanked for applying and encouraged to reapply for other more suitable volunteering opportunities. Interviews will consist of standardised questions for all potential volunteers. They can be online or in person. Where suitable, group interviews may take place

2.3 References

Potential volunteers are required to provide contact details (phone number and email address) of two referees (cannot include family members). On checking these IDs if the candidate is deemed unsuitable for the position they are applying for they will be informed and the process will come to an end.

2.1 Observation

For volunteers applying to be involved with one of our long-term programmes (e.g. After School Programme or Step Up mentoring) they will be required to come and observe the programme in action before being accepted as a volunteer. This process allows both Solas Project and the volunteer to discern their suitability for taking part in the programme.

2.5 Garda Vetting (For more information see Solas Project's Garda Vetting Policy)

All volunteers working directly with young people (under 18 years) or vulnerable adults will be required to complete Garda vetting.

If, having made such checks, information comes to light which reveals applicants are unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults their application to volunteer will be refused. This decision will be the responsibility of the Vetting Committee. Any individual with past offences in relation to child abuse will not be allowed access to children or vulnerable adults by Solas Project. Long term volunteers and students on placement should provide proof if they have been vetted through their college or sending organisation. Overseas volunteers should provide police checks from their home country where applicable.

2.6 Selection

Once a volunteer has successfully completed the recruitment process they will be considered for selection. Where there are more candidates than needed the most suitable candidate will be selected.

Applicants will not be treated less favourably on the grounds of sex, gender, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, anti-body status, age, membership of the Traveller community, political or religious beliefs, family status or responsibility for dependants, or put at a disadvantage by unjustifiable conditions or requirements.

2.7 Acceptance

2.7.1 Volunteer Agreement

On being accepted as a volunteer the applicant signs a volunteering agreement (where relevant) which means they have read and agree with Solas Project's ethos, policies and codes of behaviour. This will also include an outline of the time commitment the volunteer is making and will state the designated supervisor assigned to the volunteer.

2.7.2 Trial period

All placements are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the volunteers designated supervisor will meet with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's suitability for their role. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to a more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

1. Volunteer Induction, Training and Supervision



3.1 Induction

All volunteers receive an induction when they begin voluntary work with Solas Project. This consists of a general introduction to the organisation, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role.

3.2 Training

Volunteers receive initial and ongoing training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks well. The training must be appropriate for the demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer. All volunteers working with children and young people will be required to complete mandatory child protection training.

Volunteers are actively encouraged to identify training courses, seminars, conferences, and so on, which would help them to perform their roles better and which would aid their personal development. Approval to undertake such training must be given by Solas Project and this will only be done if sufficient funds are available. Priority is given to long standing volunteers and those who have received little or no training in the past.

3.3 Supervision

3.3.1 Lines of communication

Lines of communication should operate in both directions and should exist formally and informally. Volunteers must have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their assignments. Volunteers must be consulted on all decisions that would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

3.3.2 Supervisors

Each volunteer must have a designated supervisor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of that volunteer. This supervisor will generally be the co-ordinator of the programme the volunteer is involved with. Volunteers can request to meet with their supervisor if any issues arise.

Designated supervisors are responsible to implement corrective action that may be required following meeting with the volunteer. Examples include the organisation of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, or the conversation with a volunteer to explain that the role is not a good fit for them.

3.3.3 Aborted ending to volunteering

Volunteers who do not adhere to the organisation's approach and procedures or who fail to carry out their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be subject to reassignment or discharge from the organisation. No volunteer will be asked to leave without being given the opportunity to discuss the reasons with their supervisor. Reasons we may ask a volunteer to leave include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct, being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol), theft, misuse of equipment and materials, abuse of clients and co-workers, breaches of confidentiality, failure to abide by Solas Project's policies and procedures and failure to complete duties to the required, pre-agreed standard.

Where a volunteer from our European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programme is leaving before their allotted time, Solas Project will adhere to following the procedure above keeping Leargas and other relevant partners fully informed throughout the process.

3.3.4 Concerns and grievances

If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately, they are entitled to have their concerns reviewed. Please refer to Solas Project's Complaints policy.

3.3.5 Issues raised by or about a volunteer

Should a volunteer raise an issue, the volunteer should understand the steps required to elevate this issue. Volunteers will be made aware of our Complaints policy and complaints form (as found on our website) and bring this to the programme manager of the programme they are involved. The necessary steps outlined in our Complaints Policy will be followed. The volunteer will be assured that we are taking the matter seriously. The volunteer will be included in this process unless they choose not to be.

Should an issue about a volunteer be raised by a young person, another volunteer, or a staff member, we will follow our procedure as outlined in the complaints policy. If the issue cannot be solved in an informal setting such as a meeting with the volunteer in question and programmes manager or volunteer coordinator to discuss the matter raised, we will fill out a complaints form along with the young person or adult who has raised the issue and we will escalate the matter in line with our complaints policy.

3.3.6 Exit interviews

Informal exit interviews are held for volunteers leaving the organisation for any reason. Interviews are usually conducted with the Volunteer Manager and written records are kept. The session should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteering experience and what suggestions they offer to improve the way the organisation operates. Volunteers may be asked to complete the Exit Interview remotely.

4. Volunteer Management

4.1 Relationship with paid staff

Volunteers are appointed to enhance the capacity of paid staff, not as a substitute for them. Clear roles are established to differentiate between paid staff and volunteers to foster mutually beneficial and complementary relationships.

4.2 Working conditions and times

Volunteers are provided with appropriate work sites and have access to the space, equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively and comfortably.

Working times are negotiated between the volunteer's designated supervisor and the volunteer and are as flexible as the tasks allow. Voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff, but unscheduled absences can create organisational problems. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their supervisor or the volunteer coordinator as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

4.3 Appropriate behaviour

Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of Solas Project and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of Solas Project to the outside world. Volunteers must seek prior approval from Solas Project before undertaking anything that might affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

4.4 Confidentiality

Solas Project respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with Solas Project.

4.5 Support and recognition

4.5.1 Support

Solas Project endeavours to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution and gain significant benefits from their voluntary work. The volunteer's designated supervisor will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in other areas that are affecting their performance.

4.5.2 Recognition

Volunteers provide a unique service to Solas Project, the benefits of which are difficult to quantify. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. Solas Project staff are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The Solas Project Volunteer Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

4.5.3 Expenses

It is recognised that volunteers give their time and skills free of charge. Where possible Solas Project will offer to reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses volunteers may incur in the course of undertaking voluntary work for the organisation. The costs of volunteering should never be allowed to discourage those on low incomes.

4.5.4 Insurance

Insurance is provided by Solas Project to cover all volunteers working on behalf and at the direction of the organisation.

4.5.5 Personal and vocational development

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while involved with the organisation and are assisted into assuming additional and greater responsibilities over time, if they desire this.

4.6 Monitoring and evaluation

4.6.1 Volunteer Involvement

Solas Project monitors and evaluates volunteer involvement in the organisation on a regular basis and seeks to make ongoing improvements.

4.6.2 Feedback

Constructive feedback on this document is always welcome. It must be given to the Volunteer Co-ordinator who will ensure that it is considered fully.