ENGAGING WITH DIVERSE CULTURES

*For migrants who have arrived in Ireland volunteering can be a great way to learn about the community they live in. Volunteering can help migrants – new or established in the community – to make connections as they settle into their new home.*

**The Benefits of Volunteering**

Volunteering is ideal for helping migrants, from diverse cultures, connect with their community. Not only does volunteering provide a basis for people to make new friendships, share their skills and help people in need, it also provides an opportunity for migrants to:

* Gain experience within the Irish community
* Develop community knowledge and social connections
* Develop language skills
* Source local referees and support networks
* Make contacts for future employment opportunities

**Ways to Volunteer**

It is important that clubs create opportunities to get migrants involved in volunteering. These opportunities can range from administration to mentoring etc. An important element of this volunteering opportunity will be the support provided by people in the existing roles. Migrants may find it easiest to volunteer with groups they already have an association with such as places of worship or sports groups they had an affiliation with. Gaelic games may be a new interest so it is important to make this an easy transition.

**Who can Volunteer?**

Everyone has a unique set of skills to offer. Opportunities are available for everyone whatever their situation – whether they possess limited English/irish skills. It is imperative to find the best fit between the volunteer and the club to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship. These new volunteers can also encourage more people from the diverse cultures to become involved in your club.

**Recruiting Volunteers from Diverse Cultures**

Recruiting people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds can make your club more representative of your community. Tips for recruiting:

* Research your local demographics. Your local council may be able to assist
* Talk to your council and local migrant organisations about local cultural community groups and ask for their assistance to build relationships
* Seek advice from cultural community leaders about how to recruit volunteers
* Customise recruitment strategies to specific cultural groups as one size does not fit all
* Face to face communication is the most effective way of distributing information. Offer to run an information session about your club
* Advertise volunteer opportunities in local ethnic community newspapers, newsletters etc.
* Provide extra support initially for volunteers e.g. a mentor or buddy system
* Promote what your club can offer volunteers e.g. work experience, practice English conversation or make new friends

**Inclusive Club Practices**

All of your club’s policies and procedures should be inclusive of diversity. Be sure to:

* Be welcoming and make the person feel comfortable as volunteering may be a big step for them
* Include lots of face to face communication at induction
* Address problems with language and cultural knowledge that might make it hard for the volunteer to do their job
* Ensure stereotyping and discrimination have no place in your club
* Recognise and reward volunteers in culturally acceptable and meaningful ways

**What are the Challenges?**

Some people have a high level of English reading and writing ability however their conversational English makes it difficult for them to perform some roles. However many of these people may be highly qualified in IT or other roles that may assist in your club. Do not let challenges stop you from encouraging people from diverse cultures to get involved in your club. Try to find a role they are interested in. People enjoy volunteering by doing things they love to do, and the new skills and experiences they gain will only serve to broaden their abilities, network and confidence. Remember these volunteers and their families can be future members of your club!

**Tips for Communicating and Overcoming Language Barriers:**

* Use simple English
* Give instructions in a clear sequence
* Avoid too much indirectness
* Allow time for people to process information, especially concepts
* Avoid figurative language e.g. “take a seat”, “hold on”, “see you later”
* Back up verbal instructions with a demonstration or written information if appropriate
* Remember some people may speak English well but not be able to read and write and vice versa
* Ensure understanding by asking the person to repeat the message
* Understand that some people are hesitant to ask too many questions in case they are seen as being impolite. Try and confirm the volunteer’s understanding by seeking verbal acknowledgement

**Managing Unfamiliar Accents**

Sometimes a speaker’s unfamiliar accent can make them difficult to understand. When communicating:

* Encourage the person to talk for a while so you can pick up on any words, pattern or rhythm
* Explain that you are not familiar with their accent and ask if they could speak more slowly
* Slow your own speech and speak clearly