



ETHICAL VOLUNTEER ENDINGS CHECKLIST ✓

Toolkit for Volunteer Leaders

1. At Recruitment & Onboarding (Set the Foundation)

- ✓ Clearly state that volunteers can leave at any time, for any reason
 - ✓ Avoid guilt-based messaging (e.g. “urgent help needed”)
 - ✓ Explain expected duration or natural endpoint (if relevant)
 - ✓ Discuss how endings are handled (normalise it early)
 - ✓ Confirm what volunteers will receive when leaving:
 - Reference
 - Record of training
 - Exit conversation (optional)
 - ✓ Ask: *“What would a positive ending look like for you?”*
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2. During the Volunteer Journey (Prevent “Difficult Endings”)

- ✓ Regularly check in on:
 - Motivation
 - Capacity
 - Changing circumstances
- ✓ Use simple prompts:
 - “Is this still working for you?”
 - “Do you want to continue, change, or pause?”
- ✓ Watch for warning signs:
 - Drop in engagement
 - Missed shifts
 - Change in behaviour or attitude



✓ Reassure regularly:

- Leaving is okay
 - The organisation will organise replacement
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3. When a Volunteer Chooses to Leave

✓ Respond positively and without pressure

✓ Thank them immediately (don't wait until the end date)

✓ Offer (don't require):

- Exit conversation
- Exit survey

✓ Ask:

- "What worked well?"
- "What could we improve?"
- "Would you like to stay involved in another way?"

✓ Agree:

- Final date
- Handover (if needed and appropriate)

✓ Provide:

- Reference (if requested)
 - Record of contribution/ training
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4. Natural or Planned Endings (Projects / Time-Limited Roles)

✓ Remind volunteers of the end date in advance

✓ Share impact and outcomes of their work

✓ Celebrate contribution:

- Thank-you message



- Event or recognition (if appropriate)

✓ Offer next steps:

- Another role
- Future opportunities
- Alumni or ongoing connection

5. If a Role Isn't Working Out (Performance / Fit Issues)

✓ Check underlying causes before acting:

- Skills gap?
- Personal circumstances?
- Role mismatch?

✓ Provide:

- Clear expectations
- Support and feedback
- Opportunity to improve

✓ Explore alternatives:

- Different role
- Adjusted responsibilities

✓ If ending is necessary:

- Be honest, calm, and respectful
- Focus on the role, not the person
- Acknowledge their contribution

✓ Document the process



6. Organisational Change or Closure

✓ Communicate early—don't leave volunteers to be the last to know

✓ Be transparent about:

- What is happening
- Why it's happening
- What it means for them

✓ Involve volunteers where possible:

- Discussions
- Transition support
- Legacy activities

✓ Provide:

- Emotional support (space to talk)
- Practical support (signposting new roles)

✓ Ensure:

- No volunteer is left without communication
 - All are thanked and acknowledged properly
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7. Death of a Volunteer

✓ Follow a planned, sensitive communication approach

✓ Inform:

- Staff
- Volunteers
- Beneficiaries (where appropriate)

✓ Provide:

- Space for reflection or discussion
- Information about funeral/tributes (if appropriate)

✓ Consider:

- How to honour their contribution respectfully
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8. Recognition & Ending Well

✓ Always say thank you—personally and specifically

✓ Highlight impact:

- “Because of you...” statements

✓ Choose appropriate recognition:

- Private thanks
- Public recognition (if agreed)

✓ Avoid:

- Generic or rushed messages
 - No acknowledgement at all
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9. Keeping the Door Open

✓ Ask if they'd like to:

- Return in the future
- Join events
- Stay connected

✓ Add to:

- Alumni lists
- Mailing lists (with consent)

✓ Remember:

Satisfied volunteers often become:

- Advocates
- Donors
- Future volunteers

10. Quick Ethical Check (Use Before Any Ending Decision)

Ask yourself:

- Is this **fair**?
- Is this **respectful**?
- Is this **transparent**?
- Have I **listened** to the volunteer?
- Am I balancing **organisational needs and individual dignity**?

If unsure → pause and seek advice before acting.

11. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- ✗ Making volunteers feel guilty for leaving
- ✗ Ignoring early signs of disengagement
- ✗ Avoiding difficult conversations



- X Treating volunteers as “less important” during closures
 - X Failing to say thank you
 - X Leaving endings unplanned or rushed
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12. Manager’s Quick Reference

- Normalise leaving from day one
- Check in regularly
- Respond positively to exits
- Handle issues early and fairly
- Communicate openly in change/closure
- Always recognise contribution
- Keep relationships, not just roles

For further advice, support, training, workshops etc, please contact me on

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