

VolPris assessment checklist to classify your Prison Volunteering programmes

We would like to start a volunteering programme in prison. Where do we start?

NB: This at-a-glance checklist consolidates the [VOLPRIS Minimum Requirements for Volunteering Programs in Prison Settings](#). Please check these Standards for more detailed information on the standards, tips for implementation and known challenges and barriers.

Step 1: Research a volunteering project idea

- ✔ **Make contact** with local institutions, with prisons, with local citizens and VSOs already active in your local community.
- ✔ **Ask what is needed:** what are the rehabilitation needs of detainees in your local prison or detention centre?
- ✔ Compile a **list of good practices** in local VSOs aligned to these reintegration needs.
- ✔ Do these activities **comply with your national Volunteering Legislation**? Are there provisions for volunteering in your national criminal justice laws?
- ✔ Think holistically: make sure the volunteers and stakeholders you interact with **represent the different agencies already working in justice and reintegration post release**.
- ✔ Plan an **info-day** with the above stakeholders. Where does expertise overlap? How could you work most effectively together? Agree your next steps.

Step 2: Plan your volunteering project and prepare your volunteers

- ✔ **Guarantee a Prison Volunteering Coordinator** for your volunteers, and one contact person for them in each of the organisations collaborating on the project.
- ✔ **Ensure your volunteers are insured** for being active in prison.
- ✔ Ensure each volunteer has a **volunteering agreement and a code of ethics**.
- ✔ **Train all volunteers** on being active in prison, on the criminal justice pathway and on the needs of prisoners.
- ✔ **Select mentors** based on their knowledge and skills: give priority to those individuals that have prior experience in Volunteering in Prison (such as former volunteers, prison staff/VSOs staff in retirement, etc..)
- ✔ Build your project to **allow for different levels of engagement and participation**, according to a volunteer's availability and to be inclusive of volunteers with disabilities.
- ✔ Develop a **Partnership Agreement** between all stakeholders, detailing each organisation's roles, duties and agreeing joint objectives.
- ✔ Allocate a **precise and realistic budget** to each organisation based on this agreement.
- ✔ Dispel the myth that volunteers are a 'free resource'! **Ensure financial support to the volunteer** (transportation costs, meals, tools needed to implement the activities).
- ✔ Recruit volunteers widely. **Try to ensure your volunteers represent the people in prison**.

Step 3: Reward and motivate all stakeholders

- ✔ Note any **practices in place to recognise volunteers** (such as local volunteering awards).
- ✔ At the end of the volunteering experience, present volunteers with a **certificate of participation** detailing skills and knowledge improved or learned during volunteering activities.
- ✔ Make sure **staff** (in the prison, in the volunteering organisation and other stakeholders) are **aware of the value each volunteer brings**.
- ✔ Organise **local events to inform about the prison initiative and recruit volunteers**. Give volunteers, prison staff and inmates the chance to share their experience within the Volunteering Program and the benefits they got out of it.

Step 4: Make it sustainable

- ✔ Is your project easy to contact? Are your resources open to everyone? **Help your project to grow by maintaining your presence**.
- ✔ **Use training as an incentive**: where possible, organise cross sector learning and capacity building with stakeholders from all organisations as professional development during the project.
- ✔ **Use available tools to guarantee volunteers and mentors receive constant training** and updates on techniques, tools available: [Mentor's European Union Resources](#).
- ✔ Embed collaboration between voluntary sector organisations and prisons/ justice authorities by organising a **monthly round table on emerging needs for rehabilitation and reintegration**.
- ✔ **Spread the good news**: increase the positive perception of volunteering in prison so that the project is recognised and opportunities advertised in the official portals of the municipality and of VSOs involved and also in the media.
- ✔ Include your Volunteering in Prison project in the **European Solidarity Corps Portal**.

Step 5: Self Assess, monitor, evaluate and improve

- ✔ **Embed self-assessment**: facilitate volunteer and stakeholder feedback at the midpoint and end of their volunteering experience.
- ✔ **React quickly to issues which arise**: do prison staff feel volunteers are ill-informed? Do volunteers feel they are not accepted by prison staff? Begin dialogue immediately to improve any issues, and make changes to future training delivered.
- ✔ **Monitor the project** against the aims, roles and objectives of the Partnership Agreement - is there something you could change to achieve better results?
- ✔ **Adopt a 'problem-solving' attitude to challenges in the project and in your partnership** - avoid blame and criticism when you hit limitations.
- ✔ **Map challenges, opportunities and issues to provide further support in the Volunteering in Prison program implementation**. Compile a **list of stakeholder contacts** to reach out to easily in any foreseen occasion or emergency.