

# Volunteer Management Competency

## Descriptions

This document provides full descriptions of the **10 core competencies** required across roles in volunteer management, following the IFRC framework. Each competency includes an introduction, key elements, a closing reflection, and references.

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### 1. Safeguarding & Risk Awareness

#### Intro

Safeguarding and risk awareness are the foundation of responsible volunteer management. They ensure that volunteers, staff, and communities are protected from harm—whether physical, emotional, or reputational. This competency is not just about compliance but about cultivating a culture of safety and care across every aspect of volunteer engagement.

#### Key elements

- Apply safeguarding policies consistently, with clear reporting and confidential response mechanisms.
- Conduct risk assessments before any activity or deployment, and communicate risks clearly to volunteers.
- Train staff and volunteers in identifying, preventing, and escalating safeguarding concerns.

#### Closing

When safeguarding is prioritised, volunteers can serve confidently and communities can trust the National Society. Embedding risk awareness into all volunteer processes ensures that humanitarian action does no harm and reflects the Movement's principles of humanity and impartiality.

#### References / links

- IFRC Standards for the Safety, Security and Well-being of Volunteers (2012)
  - Case: *Philippine Red Cross* volunteer safety frameworks during typhoon response.
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### 2. Communication & Relationship Building

#### Intro

Volunteering is built on trust, and trust is built through communication. This competency ensures that volunteer leaders and coordinators can engage volunteers clearly, transparently, and empathetically, while also creating opportunities for dialogue and feedback. Strong communication fosters belonging and retention.

#### Key elements

- Provide regular, consistent updates on activities, roles, and expectations.
- Listen actively to volunteer feedback and adapt practices where possible.
- Build trust through fairness, empathy, and recognition in all interactions.

#### Closing

Communication is more than sharing information—it is about building human connection. When

volunteers feel heard and supported, they are more motivated, more committed, and more likely to stay engaged in the long term.

#### **References / links**

- IFRC NSD Competency Framework (2025)
  - Case: *Kenya Red Cross* community volunteer WhatsApp groups improving retention.
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### **3. Inclusion & Cultural Awareness**

#### **Intro**

Volunteers reflect the diversity of their societies. Inclusion and cultural awareness competencies ensure that everyone—regardless of gender, age, disability, or background—feels welcome, respected, and able to contribute fully. This is critical both to humanitarian effectiveness and to the Movement's legitimacy.

#### **Key elements**

- Apply inclusive recruitment and selection practices to encourage broad participation.
- Respect cultural norms and identities in training, deployment, and recognition.
- Address bias, discrimination, or exclusion actively and transparently.

#### **Closing**

Inclusive volunteering is stronger volunteering. By making space for diverse voices and experiences, National Societies not only extend their reach but also demonstrate the impartiality and universality at the heart of the Movement.

#### **References / links**

- IFRC Volunteering Policy (2011)
  - Case: *Colombian Red Cross* disability-inclusive volunteering practices.
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### **4. Learning & Adaptation**

#### **Intro**

Humanitarian contexts are always evolving. Learning and adaptation competencies enable National Societies to continuously reflect on their practices, capture feedback, and improve the way they manage volunteers. This ensures relevance, safety, and effectiveness over time.

#### **Key elements**

- Conduct after-action reviews and reflection sessions with volunteers.
- Integrate feedback into training, deployment, and recognition systems.
- Share learning across branches and with peers through Communities of Practice.

#### **Closing**

Learning is how volunteer systems remain alive and responsive. Embedding adaptation into the culture of volunteering not only improves effectiveness but also builds resilience within National Societies and their communities.

### References / links

- IFRC Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks
  - Case: *Peruvian Red Cross* use of branch-level after-action reviews in emergencies.
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## 5. Data Use & Accountability

### Intro

Data is a powerful tool for recognising volunteer contributions, tracking progress, and ensuring accountability. This competency ensures that National Societies collect, manage, and use data ethically and effectively, while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

### Key elements

- Maintain accurate volunteer records in secure systems such as VDMS.
- Use data to monitor retention, training, incident reports, and recognition trends.
- Share data responsibly with governance, donors, and volunteers themselves.

### Closing

When handled ethically, data strengthens trust. Volunteers see that their contributions are valued, and National Societies gain credibility through transparent reporting and evidence-based decision-making.

### References / links

- Volunteer Data Management System (VDMS)
  - IFRC Data Protection Policy
  - Case: *Kenya Red Cross* pilot of VDMS.
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## 6. Volunteer Recognition & Motivation

### Intro

Volunteers give their time and energy freely. Recognition and motivation are the competencies that ensure their contributions are acknowledged, valued, and sustained. Motivation is not only about formal awards but also about creating a culture where volunteers feel appreciated daily.

### Key elements

- Develop both formal (awards, certificates, national events) and informal (thank-yous, peer recognition) systems.
- Link recognition to meaningful opportunities for learning, leadership, and progression.
- Ensure recognition is equitable, transparent, and aligned with the Fundamental Principles.

### Closing

Recognition is central to volunteer retention. When volunteers feel valued and motivated, they are more likely to stay engaged and bring others into the Movement. This strengthens the Red Cross Red Crescent's credibility and sustainability.

### References / links

- IFRC Volunteering Policy (2011)
  - Case: *French Red Cross* recognition practices (Youth Award, diplomas, medals, and responsibilities).
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## 7. Training & Capacity Building

### Intro

Training equips volunteers with the skills and knowledge they need to contribute effectively and safely. Capacity building extends beyond initial induction, offering pathways for growth and leadership. This competency ensures volunteers are always prepared and supported.

### Key elements

- Provide structured induction and role-specific training before deployment.
- Offer ongoing opportunities for upskilling, mentorship, and peer learning.
- Monitor training completion, refresher needs, and the effectiveness of curricula.

### Closing

Training is an investment in both volunteers and the National Society. Well-trained volunteers deliver safer, higher-quality services and are more likely to remain engaged. Capacity building transforms volunteers into future leaders.

### References / links

- IFRC Learning Platform
  - Case: *Kenya Red Cross* blended learning programme for youth volunteers.
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## 8. Ethical & Legal Awareness

### Intro

Ethical and legal awareness ensures volunteer programmes operate with integrity, transparency, and accountability. This competency is about aligning with national laws, international standards, and the Movement's own ethical commitments.

### Key elements

- Ensure compliance with national labour, insurance, and data protection legislation.
- Enforce codes of conduct and clear disciplinary procedures.
- Uphold impartiality, transparency, and fairness in volunteer engagement.

### Closing

Volunteers and communities must trust that National Societies act lawfully and ethically. Embedding this competency protects all stakeholders and upholds the credibility of the Movement.

### References / links

- Volunteerism & Legislation Guidance Note (IFRC/IPU/UNV, 2018)
  - Case: *Nepal Red Cross* legal frameworks for volunteer insurance and protection.
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## 9. Digital Literacy & Technology Use

### Intro

Technology is now essential for volunteer management, from recruitment to data management, training, and recognition. Digital literacy ensures that staff and volunteers can use systems confidently and inclusively.

### **Key elements**

- Use volunteer management systems (e.g., VDMS) for registration, tracking, and reporting.
- Apply digital platforms for communication, e-learning, and mobilisation.
- Ensure tools are accessible to volunteers of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

### **Closing**

Technology makes volunteer management more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. When National Societies build digital competencies, they strengthen resilience and expand the reach of volunteer engagement.

### **References / links**

- Volunteer Data Management System (VDMS)
  - Case: *Spanish Red Cross* use of digital platforms for volunteer mobilisation.
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## **10. Emotional Intelligence & Psychosocial Support (PSS)**

### **Intro**

Volunteering often takes place in emotionally demanding situations. Emotional intelligence and psychosocial support competencies ensure managers and coordinators can support volunteer well-being, prevent burnout, and create safe, caring environments.

### **Key elements**

- Recognise signs of stress, trauma, or conflict among volunteers.
- Provide access to psychosocial support, peer debriefing, and referrals.
- Foster empathetic leadership and a culture of care across teams.

### **Closing**

Caring for volunteers is a core responsibility of every National Society. By embedding emotional intelligence and psychosocial support into volunteer management, organisations build resilient teams and protect those who give their time in service of humanity.

### **References / links**

- IFRC Psychosocial Centre Resources
- Case: *Danish Red Cross* PSS peer-support networks for volunteers.