

Evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Management and Training of Disability Sport Event Volunteers





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface2

Quick Guide to the Recommendations3

Brief Summary of the Recommendations5

 Recommendation 16

 Recommendation 27

 Recommendation 38

 Recommendation 49

 Recommendation 510

 Recommendation 611

 Recommendation 712

 Recommendation 813

 Recommendation 914

 Recommendation 1015

 Recommendation 1117

 Recommendation 1219

Recommendation Checklist20

Endnotes21



PREFACE

OVERVIEW

These recommendations provide event managers with guidance on how to develop and implement an effective and inclusive volunteer program. The research evidence and process used to develop the recommendations will be presented in two upcoming scientific papers.

Grimes AC, Shepperdson S, Kalbfleisch M, Mattiello S, Misener L & Latimer-Cheung AE. (2023). *Exploring best practices for training disability sport event volunteers*.

Grimes AC, Shepperdson S, Palmeter J, Hampson R, Binsfeld G, Combdon C, Gilbert L, Kranenburg K, Rothenberg H, Tomasone R, Misener L, & Latimer-Cheung AE. (2023). *Development of evidence-informed recommendations for training and managing disability sport event volunteers: An application of the AGREE II instrument*.

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QUICK GUIDE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

This document outlines 12 best practice recommendations tailored towards enhancing volunteer training and the overall volunteer experience at sport events for persons with disabilities. The purpose of this document is to provide event organizers with key recommendations to support the development and implementation of an effective and inclusive volunteer program to better facilitate the retention of well-trained volunteers for future programs and events.

What do the recommendations entail?

The recommendations move through three operational phases within the pre-event planning stage of an event:

1. **Initial planning**: budget, workforce requirements, training needs, volunteer recruitment
2. **Operational planning**: volunteer training, modes of communication, volunteer engagement
3. **Legacy planning and follow-up**: legacy transfer and management, event/training evaluation



Figure 1. Three Phases of Planning a Volunteer Program.

The **initial planning phase** (recommendations #1-2) takes place at the very beginning of event planning and concerns developing a strategic plan for your volunteer program. This often includes determining strategies for volunteer recruitment, as well as outlining your budget, key deliverables, volunteer requirements, training needs, and a timeline.

After this phase is complete, event organizers can move onto the **operational planning phase** (recommendations #3-10), which provides greater detail about how to implement a successful volunteer program for a sport event. During this phase, the plans developed during the initial planning phase are transferred to those who will be working during the event and who are responsible for delivering the training to volunteers (e.g., team leaders, venue staff, former competitors, etc.). Additionally, this phase breaks down the specific components that should be included in volunteer training and how to appropriately manage and engage volunteers during training and throughout the event.

Lastly, the **legacy and follow-up phase** (recommendations #11-12) relates to volunteer transfer plans and post-games evaluation of volunteer experiences. While both these tasks are typically actioned during the event or after the event has occurred, it is critical that a mechanism for actioning them is developed during the pre-event planning stage to ensure their follow-through. Once completed, a final report should be drafted with recommendations for future organizing committees.

Format of the Recommendations:

Each recommendation is supported with the following information:

- **Who** should put the recommendation into action
- **Where** to put the recommendation into action
- **When** and/or **how** to put the recommendation into action
- **Information** to include when delivering the recommendation
- **Example strategies** and content to include



BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Initial Planning Phase

- #1 During event planning, conduct a needs analysis of the volunteer workforce and training requirements
- #2 Prior to training, ask volunteers their preferred roles and why they would enjoy and succeed in these roles

Operational Planning Phase

- #3 Clearly communicate the event schedule, assigned roles, and expectations to volunteers
- #4 Educate volunteers about disability and how to respectfully interact and communicate with persons with a disability, including but not limited to diverse athletes, spectators, coaches, and other volunteers
- #5 Provide accessible role-specific training to ensure volunteers are confident in their roles
- #6 Provide accessible on-site venue training to ensure volunteers have adequate knowledge about the venue and its accessibility
- #7 Create and deliver training through various modes to support diverse learners
- #8 Include accessible interactive activities throughout training to encourage collaboration and shared learning among volunteers
- #9 Inform volunteers of who to contact for questions or concerns during the event
- #10 Frequently show volunteers they are appreciated and valued

Legacy and Follow-Up Phase

- #11 Seize the moment - cultivate a volunteer legacy by offering networking opportunities throughout the event
- #12 Follow-up with volunteers post-event to assess their satisfaction with training and their overall experience with the event

*The recommendations are expanded on the following pages.

RECOMMENDATION #1

During event planning, conduct a needs analysis of the volunteer workforce and training requirements

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee including persons with disabilities
- Persons with disabilities should be consulted to co-develop individual workforce and training accommodations when assessing accommodation needs

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Before volunteer recruitment begins during the initial event planning phase

Example content to include:

- Volunteer information
 - Number of volunteers needed for the event
 - Hours of commitment
 - Certifications or parameters (e.g., vulnerable sector check, driver's license)
- Role-specific information
 - Roles that need to be filled
 - Job descriptions/expectations
 - Potential accommodations for each role
 - Volunteers who could potentially serve as team leaders (e.g., past sport event volunteers with experience)
 - Contingency plans to prepare for scenarios such as event delays, volunteer illness, absence and/or injury
- Training information
 - Mode of delivering accessible training (e.g., in-person/classroom, online, or a blended approach)
 - Training requirements for each volunteer role
 - Athletes or former competitors who can assist with training

RECOMMENDATION #2

Prior to training, ask volunteers their preferred roles and why they would enjoy and succeed in these roles

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee including persons with disabilities

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- Electronically via an online application portal
- Alternate response formats (e.g., in-person, telephone, Zoom/MS Teams contact)

When to put the recommendation into action:

- During volunteer recruitment

Information to include:

- Volunteer skills
- Specific certifications required
- Potential areas volunteers would be interested in (e.g., customer service, transportation, etc.)
- Intentions to volunteer
- Accessibility/accommodation needs

Example questions:

- What motivated you to volunteer for this event?
- If you could do any role, where do you see yourself?
- Do you require any accommodations (e.g., wheelchair accessibility, onsite access to screen reading software, personal support worker, etc.) to support you in fulfilling your preferred roles?

Note: It is important to consider volunteers with diverse needs and experiences (i.e., disability status, accommodations). Be mindful of the types of questions you ask. Multiple choice and yes or no questions are quick to analyze, whereas open comment questions will take longer to answer and to sort through.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Clearly communicate the event schedule, assigned roles, and expectations to volunteers

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- Online using plain language
- Alternate accessible mediums (e.g., email, texts, chats, print, telephone, American Sign Language [ASL])

When to put the recommendation into action:

- As early as possible

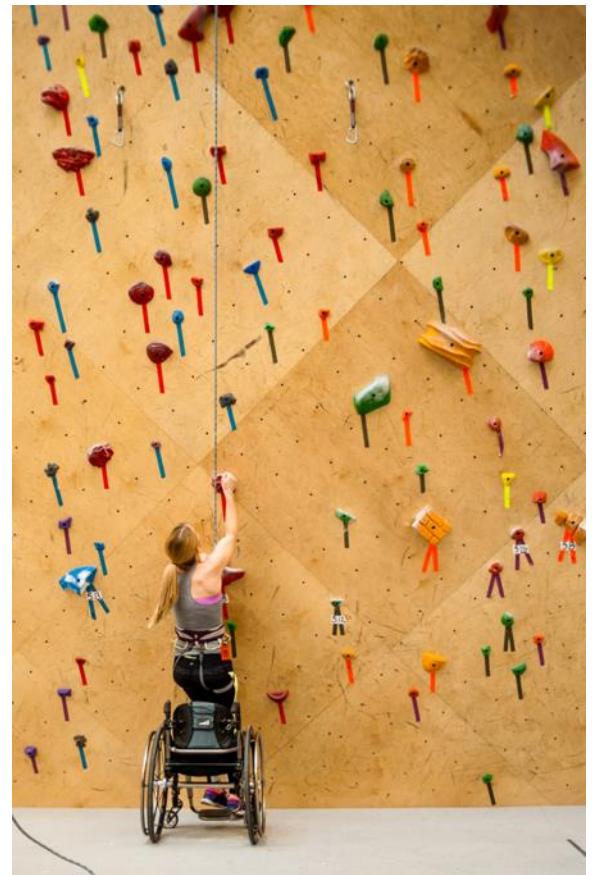
Information to include:

- Role and responsibilities
- When/where volunteers are needed
- Work timetable

Example strategies:

- Provide an information sheet with role descriptions and event schedule
- Supply volunteers with their work timetable via an online portal
- Post daily competition schedule in volunteer work-break area
- Additional information regarding transportation services (e.g., parking, public transport), meals and more should also be communicated

Note: If multiple mediums are used for communication, ensure consistency in messaging across all platforms (e.g., scheduling updates need to be broadcasted across all mediums).



RECOMMENDATION #4

Educate volunteers about disability and how to respectfully interact and communicate with persons with a disability, including but not limited to diverse athletes, spectators, coaches, and other volunteers

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Persons with lived experience of disability (e.g., athletes, former competitors, volunteers, spectators)

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- In-person
- Online module
- Provide a summary handout for volunteers to review on their own time

When to put the recommendation into action:

- During general orientation training
- More in-depth training may be provided during role-specific training for volunteers that primarily interact with athletes and spectators

Information to include:

- General knowledge about disability
 - Models of disability (e.g., social model, biopsychosocial model, medical model)
 - Different types of disabilities
 - Sources of stigma and stereotypes
- How to respectfully communicate with athletes, spectators, volunteers, staff, and coaches with diverse needs
 - Use person-first language
 - Challenge assumptions
 - Ask the individual their preferences for assistance and support
- Tailored sport-specific/event-specific information
- Overview of the classification process
- How to assist athletes with diverse needs
- How to be respectful of service animals and equipment
- How to be accommodating of support persons

Note: It is important to tailor the content to represent the athlete demographic participating at your event.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Provide accessible role-specific training to ensure volunteers are confident in their roles

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Team leaders including persons with disabilities

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- On-site

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Pre-event during role-specific training
- Facilitated small group discussion (see recommendation 8)

Information to include:

- General information about their role
- Specific role duties
- Role expectations
- Code of conduct
- Emergency procedures



RECOMMENDATION #6

Provide accessible on-site venue training to ensure volunteers have adequate knowledge about the venue and its accessibility

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities
- Knowledgeable venue staff member(s)

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- On-site
- Provide an additional hard copy of the venue map for volunteers to utilize during the event

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Pre-event

Information to include:

- Components of the venue that are accessible and which are not (e.g., ramps vs. stairs, accessible and gender-neutral washrooms, elevators, braille signage)
- Registration
- Washrooms
- Medical stations
- Parking
- Service animal relief areas
- Athlete areas
- Volunteer break areas
- Concession areas
- Evacuation procedures/emergency protocols
- Venue specific hazards

Note: An accessibility audit of the venue may be needed to ascertain this information.

RECOMMENDATION #7

Create and deliver training through various modes to support diverse learners

How to put the recommendation into action:

- Consult existing resources and individuals with expertise in creating accessible documents and learning activities
- Offer a variety of formats for:
 - Training delivery (e.g., availability of American Sign Language [ASL] translator)
 - Resources and documents (e.g., paper handouts, documents in braille, described audio)
- Offer opportunities for both asynchronous and synchronous learning

Note: The expert panel suggested including only "how" information in this recommendation because the other aspects of who, where, when and example information are covered in other recommendations.



RECOMMENDATION #8

Include accessible interactive activities throughout training to encourage collaboration and shared learning among volunteers

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities
- See recommendation #7 for activity design considerations

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- In-person
- Live online session

When to put the recommendation into action:

- During role-specific training

Information to include:

- Problem-solving activities
- Potential scenarios that may occur during the event
- Group activities
- Activity variations to ensure accessibility

Example strategies:

- Icebreaker activities
- Team building activities
- Have athletes or experienced volunteers present at the training session(s), leaving time for questions and discussion
- Group experienced volunteers with new volunteers and provide role-specific or event-specific scenarios for them to solve together
- Check volunteers' understanding of training material after a learned task (e.g., trivia)

RECOMMENDATION #9

Inform volunteers of who to contact for questions or concerns during the event

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities
- Accessibility committee

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- In-person
- Online

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Prior to event
- During training

How to put the recommendation into action:

- Online via event portal or email
- Text (e.g., WhatsApp)
- Post in the volunteer work-break area
- Hard copy contact list
- Volunteer handbook
- Accessibility considerations
 - Ensure contact information is shared using accessible formats
 - Ensure all contacts can be reached through accessible communication channels (e.g., phone, text, in-person)

Information to include:

- Organization pyramid of who to contact for different situations
- Names and contact information for venue team members/team leaders
- Who to contact in cases of illness, absence, emergencies, accessibility-related concerns, and/or role-specific or venue-specific questions

RECOMMENDATION #10

Frequently show volunteers they are appreciated and valued

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Event CEO
- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities
- Staff
- Athletes
- Sponsors
- Mascots
- Coaches

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- Any mode possible, including in-person and through electronic communications

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Throughout all components of the event, including pre-event, during, and post-event
- ALWAYS

Information to include/how to disseminate the information:

- Ask general interest questions about the volunteers' experience/day
- Provide information about future volunteer opportunities
- Recognize the volunteers' dedication and hard work
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to network with one another

Example strategies:

- Include appreciating volunteers as an expectation in the code of conduct for athletes and coaches
- Make public statements during the event about the critical role volunteers play to encourage fans and spectators to thank volunteers
- Prioritize time in event leaders' schedules (e.g., CEO, organizing committee) to informally interact with volunteers
- Provide volunteers with an accredited name tag, event swag and/or pins for exchange between volunteers and staff (e.g., use pins to make a special note of accomplishments)
- Provide other functional rewards (e.g., uniforms, food, coffee, opportunity to attend events on their off time)
- Give high fives at the end of a volunteer's shift
- Have a "volunteer only" space where volunteers can take meals and breaks
- Hold a social event for team leaders to show appreciation and recognition for their hard work and dedication to the event

Example statements:

- Thank you for all your hard work and dedication
- You are doing an excellent job
- We could not do this without you

Example questions to ask:

- Tell me about your day.
- What do you think about the event?
- How can I make your event experience better?
- Tell me about any new connections you have made with other volunteers.
- How do you feel about volunteering at future events?



RECOMMENDATION #11

Seize the moment – cultivate a volunteer legacy by offering networking opportunities throughout the event

(A) Engage organizations who may benefit from a volunteer legacy in advance of the event

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- The organizing committee should communicate with local organizations with the expectation that these organizations will be responsive and engaged in the event

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- Contact local organizations via email or telephone

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Coordinate with other organizations prior to the event to see who would benefit from a trained volunteer pool

Information to include:

- Offer the opportunity for local sport organizations to recruit volunteers through the event

Example strategies:

- Event organizers can coordinate network opportunities for organizations to meet volunteers and invite them to engage (e.g., meet and greet)
- Event organizers can invite organizations to be present at the event to meet volunteers
- Organizers and local organizations can develop a communal calendar of future events and refer volunteers as needed



(B) Work collaboratively to create opportunities for local organizations to interact with volunteers during the event

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- A local representative or knowledgeable member of the event organizing committee should communicate with volunteers about future opportunities

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- Interact with volunteers in person at the event and follow up with potential opportunities electronically (e.g., email)

When to put the recommendation into action:

- Provide opportunities to volunteers during the event
- Follow-up with interested volunteers post-event

Information to include:

- Information about local opportunities and how to get involved (i.e., organization contact form)

Example strategies:

- Organizers and team leads can facilitate discussion about future opportunities and encourage volunteers during volunteer interaction
- Designate a knowledgeable workforce member who knows the local landscape to refer to throughout the event
- Include local organizations in the final volunteer recognition event

Note: Master databases are not recommended as the primary means for a volunteer legacy because:

1. Need a provincial database to house information – it can be difficult to effectively transfer knowledge from event to event
2. A designated organization is required to oversee the database
3. Must be mindful of collecting such data as it must be used appropriately

Instead, you can leverage social media networks; however, they likely need to be volunteer-led and supervised by the organizing committee to ensure accurate information is being conveyed.

RECOMMENDATION #12

Follow-up with volunteers post-event to assess their satisfaction with training and their overall experience with the event

Who should put the recommendation into action:

- Organizing committee and team leaders including persons with disabilities

Where to put the recommendation into action:

- In-person (e.g., on-site)
- Online

When to put the recommendation into action:

- At the end of a volunteer's last shift
- Within 5-7 days after the completion of the event

Questions to include:

- Volunteers' reaction or satisfaction with training
- Volunteers' skills and/or knowledge acquired
- Volunteers' integration with others/social aspects associated with volunteering (e.g., building relationships with other volunteers or staff, sense of community at the event)
- Volunteers' sense of support
- Volunteers' intent to volunteer at future events

Example questions:

- *Sample multiple-choice questions* (rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)
 - Volunteer training was enjoyable.
 - Training prepared me for my volunteer role.
 - Volunteer training was relevant to the event and/or your role.
 - Volunteer training made me feel excited about the event.
 - Volunteer training enhanced my knowledge about disability and sport.
 - I made positive connections with others at the event.
 - I felt supported in my volunteer role.
 - Overall, I was satisfied with my volunteer experience.
- *Sample open-comment questions*
 - How was your volunteer experience different from what you expected?
 - How could the event team have made your experience better?

Note: Ensure survey results/feedback are included in a post-event report so future organizers know how to improve the volunteer experience.

RECOMMENDATION CHECKLIST

Initial Planning Phase

- During event planning, conduct a needs analysis of the volunteer workforce and training requirements
- Prior to training, ask volunteers their preferred roles and why they would enjoy and succeed in these roles

Operational Planning Phase

- Clearly communicate the event schedule, assigned roles, and expectations to volunteers
- Educate volunteers about disability and how to respectfully interact and communicate with persons with a disability, including but not limited to diverse athletes, spectators, coaches, and other volunteers
- Provide accessible role-specific training to ensure volunteers are confident in their roles
- Provide accessible on-site venue training to ensure volunteers have adequate knowledge about the venue and its accessibility
- Create and deliver training through various modes to support diverse learners
- Include accessible interactive activities throughout training to encourage collaboration and shared learning among volunteers
- Inform volunteers of who to contact for questions or concerns during the event.
- Frequently show volunteers they are appreciated and valued

Legacy and Follow-Up Phase

- Seize the moment - cultivate a volunteer legacy by offering networking
- Follow-up with volunteers post-event to assess their satisfaction with training and their overall experience with the event

ENDNOTES

FIND OUT MORE!

To learn more about volunteer training for disability sport events, check out:

The CDPP Inclusion Module: Volunteering in Disability Sport at:

<https://cdpp.ca/resources-and-publications/inclusion-module-volunteering-disability-sport>

Additional resources and pre-event planning templates are available at:

<https://cdpp.ca/resources-and-publications/volunteer-training-and-management>

