

GUIDE TO MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS FOR DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS



Practices and Experiences from
Five Danish Diaspora Organizations

With contributions from:
Afghan Cultural Association, Dansomala, IFTIN,
Hela Afghan Youth Association & SSPDO.

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Foreword

This guide is one of three developed by DRC and CISU in close collaboration with five experienced diaspora organizations: SSPDO, DanSomala, Afghan Cultural Association, IFTIN, and Hela Afghan Youth Association. They were created as part of the project Peer-to-Peer Organizational Development.

Together, these experienced diaspora organizations identified the three most important themes they believe have been critical to their long-term existence and sustainability. For each theme, they outlined the major challenges and, for each challenge, formulated key lessons and recommendations.

Although many topics were discussed and analyzed, the three most important are:



The content of the three guides is further illustrated in three matching videos – see: [LINK](#).

In addition to the organizations' own experiences and recommendations, each guide presents links to existing tools and guidelines developed by more formal Danish actors.

The primary target audience for these guides and videos is other diaspora organizations in Denmark – with a clear focus on leaders and board members.

We (DRC, CISU, SSPDO, DanSomala, Afghan Cultural Association, IFTIN, and Hela Afghan Youth Association) hope you find the content useful and inspiring.

Enjoy.

Management of volunteers and members

All Somali and Afghan diaspora organizations in Denmark are based on voluntary work – meaning that leaders, board members, and activists all work on a voluntary basis.

Furthermore, the organizations’ fundamental existence relies on membership fees. Among the organizations that contributed to the development of this guide, membership numbers range from 40 to 250 individuals. Income from membership fees is primarily used to fund activities for members in Denmark. Recruiting new members is a constant priority for the organizations.

Key challenges related to volunteers and members:



Recruiting new volunteer members

Recruiting new volunteer members is a top priority, but it is a time-consuming task, and the appeal to new members depends entirely on whether the organization offers a high level of activity and a dynamic, inspiring environment. Creating such an environment can be challenging within management.



Managing and retaining volunteers

Managing and retaining volunteers is a complex and difficult task – even for volunteer leaders. There is a constant risk that expectations and demands placed on volunteers may jeopardize their membership and engagement.



Internal conflicts

Internal conflicts among volunteers, including within the leadership, can be difficult to manage without risking the loss of members.



Membership fees

Collecting membership fees is generally challenging – even when members are satisfied with the activities offered.



Distrust toward the motives of diaspora organizations

Volunteering is not very common in countries of origin, which often makes it difficult for local partners to understand that diaspora organizations are run by volunteers. This can sometimes lead to distrust regarding the motives of diaspora organizations.



If you don't listen to them, they won't feel like they are part of it. So ask them, tell them what you want, and let them make suggestions – and then act on them. That's how they gain ownership.

- Afghan Cultural Association



1. Recruiting new members and volunteers

Members are the backbone and resource base of the organizations. It is essential to ensure a steady influx of members. A decline in membership will, all else being equal, discourage new individuals from joining. There is also a clear correlation between a high level of activity and visibility in Denmark and the organization's appeal to potential members. The more activities and the greater the visibility – the more new members and volunteers.

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Clear profile

To attract volunteers, the organization's profile must be clear and appealing. For example, the focus could be on a specific geographic area, a particular sector (health, education, justice, etc.), or a specific theme (humanitarian work, human rights, women's rights, etc.).



Activities must appeal to volunteers

Volunteers should be able to see themselves as part of the activities carried out by the organization. These may range from counseling or recreational and cultural activities in Denmark to fundraising, development, and implementation of projects in the country of origin.



Recruitment of new volunteers

Volunteers are often the best at recruiting new volunteers. Therefore, to attract new volunteers, it is important that the organization already has active volunteers with whom newcomers can identify and discuss the work of the organization.



Point of contact

Ensure, if possible, that new volunteers are connected to one or two experienced volunteers who are familiar with the activities, so they have a stable point of contact within the organization.

Visibility

It is also appealing to potential members when the organization and its activities are visible in the local community or to a broader public. Visibility can be achieved through:



Public events

Public debates or cultural events that benefit both members and the local community. These contribute to a clear profile and a dynamic environment.



Social media

Activity on social media is equally important for attracting new members or volunteers. Content may include what it is like to be a volunteer in the organization, information about the organization's work, the situation in the country of origin, or relevant knowledge about Denmark.

2. Managing, motivating, and retaining volunteers

Managing, motivating, and retaining members and volunteers is an art.

As a manager of volunteers, it is challenging to strike the right balance between the volunteers' motivation and the organization's needs. Below is an excerpt of experiences and recommendations regarding direct leadership of volunteers:

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Expectations

It is a good idea to conduct an expectations alignment with new volunteers. Have a conversation about what is expected of the volunteer in terms of activities, time commitment, responsibilities, and influence on the organization's work. Conversely, it should also be clear what the volunteer can expect from their membership in the organization.



Volunteer agreement

Consider creating a written “volunteer agreement” that clearly outlines the organization’s expectations of the volunteer and what the volunteer can expect from the organization.



Feedback

Most volunteers are motivated by knowing that their contribution is important and appreciated. Therefore, it is essential to provide regular follow-up with each volunteer regarding their specific tasks and participation in the organization. Offer constructive feedback so the volunteer feels taken seriously and gains a sense of being vital to the organization’s work.



Individual motivation

Identify what specifically motivates each volunteer. Some are driven by the cause, others by the specific task, the social community, or the opportunity to add experience to their CV. Most are motivated by a combination of these factors. Whenever possible, tailor the volunteer’s tasks to reflect what motivates them.



Broad scope for initiative

While it is important to maintain a clear profile and defined framework for the organization’s offerings to volunteers, it is equally important that management allows ample room for new initiatives and activities. This fosters volunteer engagement and creates a dynamic and inspiring environment within the organization.



Part of something bigger

Ensure that volunteers feel they are part of something significant and indispensable to achieving positive results. It is crucial to value volunteers and their commitment, and to make them part of the narrative about the organization’s achievements – both in Denmark and in the country of origin.



Trust and responsibility

It is important to demonstrate trust in the volunteer by assigning them responsibility. The level of responsibility should be carefully matched to the volunteer's willingness and abilities so that completing the task feels like a success and encourages further engagement.



Sense of security

It is essential to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere in the organization, where the volunteer always feels comfortable asking questions, making suggestions, and being taken seriously—regardless of the topic.



Community

Many individuals who volunteer do so with the desire to be part of a community. Ensure that volunteers have opportunities to participate in positive social interactions, enjoyable experiences, and activities.

3. Membership fees

Although membership fees are crucial for the organization's survival, and even though members generally support the organization's work, it is often challenging to get them to pay their fees.

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Membership fees cover activities in Denmark

It is common practice to use income from membership fees exclusively for activities in Denmark, as members prefer to see their contributions benefit them directly. It is recommended to keep the membership fee as low as possible.



Different types of membership fees

It is recommended to offer different types of membership fees for different categories of members. Examples could include family membership, youth membership, etc.



Transparency and accountability

A high degree of transparency and accountability regarding the organization's use of membership fees is essential to maintain members' trust. This can be achieved by providing insight into financial statements, accounts, or account summaries.



Member-only social events

Organize social events exclusively for members around the time of year when membership fees are due. This can motivate members to pay their fees.



Automatic bank transfer

Consider offering practical assistance to set up automatic bank transfers for membership fees.

4. Internal conflicts

Managing internal conflicts among volunteers, including members of the leadership team, can be challenging, as there is always a risk of losing members and volunteers. This becomes a significant problem if a conflict is allowed to persist over time, as it can easily affect the positive atmosphere and overall satisfaction within the organization.

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The leader is not part of the conflict

If the leader is not personally involved in the conflict, it is their responsibility to attempt to resolve it through dialogue with the parties involved. If this is unsuccessful, the leader should seek assistance from other members. In the worst case, the leader may need to ask one party to leave the organization. Ideally, the conflict is addressed quickly to prevent it from spreading within the organization and to ensure that all members remain active.



The Leader Is Part of the Conflict

If the leader is involved in the conflict, they may not be able to resolve it themselves. It is therefore important that the leader seeks help from a neutral party to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible.

5. Voluntary work is often unfamiliar to countries of origin

Voluntary work is often unfamiliar and not widely recognized in countries of origin. Local partners frequently express distrust toward the motives of diaspora organization for engaging in voluntary work. There may even be suspicion that the diaspora is profiting from these activities.

EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Explain voluntary work to local partners

Explain to local partners what voluntary work entails as early as possible in your partnership—preferably before any funds are introduced into joint projects.



Relationship with the local partner

You can read more in the guide “Projects in the Country of Origin”, where the relationship with local partners is discussed in greater detail.

LINK: [Guide to Projects in the Country of Origin for Diaspora Organizations](#)

Relevant references

Working with Volunteers:

Center for Frivilligt Socialt Arbejde (Center for Voluntary Social Work)

In “Need Volunteers?” you can read the Center for Voluntary Social Work’s recommendations on how to create the best conditions for connecting the right volunteers to your organization.

Link: [Need Volunteers? A Handbook on Volunteer Recruitment \(Danish\)](#)

DRC Community Outreach Toolkit for Diaspora Organizations

The purpose of this toolkit is to outline the basic principles of community outreach, which can hopefully be adapted and applied by various diaspora organizations working in different contexts.

Link: [Community Outreach Toolkit for Diaspora Organizations](#)

Volunteer Motivation and Engagement

How do you ensure satisfied volunteers who stay motivated and committed over time? Here you can learn what steps you can take to develop, motivate, and retain your volunteers.

Link: [Volunteer Motivation and Engagement \(Danish\)](#)

Good Leadership in the Voluntary Social Sector

On this page, you can explore the Volunteer Council’s recommendations for good leadership in the voluntary social sector—and find inspiration and tools to start applying them in your organization.

Link: [Good Leadership in the Voluntary Social Sector](#)

Recruiting New Volunteers

This guide can help you get started with recruitment and can be used for both large campaigns and ongoing recruitment efforts.

Link: [Recruiting New Volunteers](#)

Systematic Use of Psychology to Create Motivation and Engagement Among Volunteers

How do you ensure satisfied volunteers who remain enthusiastic and willing to contribute over time? Here you can learn what you can do to develop, motivate, and retain your volunteers.

Link: [Systematic Use of Psychology to Create Motivation and Engagement Among Volunteers](#)

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