

27 · Community work

Volunteer Initiative Planning Template

A workbook from need to plan: target group, objectives, activities, resources, volunteers, risks, timeline and indicators, with a completed example initiative.

For: For a youth team, a new association or a volunteer group that wants to plan a community initiative before gathering people and donations.

Level: Beginner Version 1.0 · 2026-09-21

Why plan before you start?

Enthusiasm launches volunteer initiatives, but it does not finish them. Many start with a good idea and a group photo, then stall in week three: fewer volunteers, supplies gone, the target group did not show up as expected, and nobody can say whether it worked. Planning does not kill spontaneity. It protects volunteers' time and the trust of the people you serve.

This workbook asks nine questions in order, each building on the one before: need, target group, objectives, activities, resources, volunteers, risks, timeline and indicators. If you cannot answer a question, stop there before moving on.

A good initiative starts from a need expressed by the people who have it, not from an activity we would like to run.

The nine steps

1. **Need.** What exactly is the problem? How do we know? Did we ask the people concerned, or assume? Write down your sources: conversations with parents, direct observation, a request from a school or municipality, a short survey. And check: is another group already addressing this need in the same place? Coordinating beats duplicating.
2. **Target group.** Who exactly? Age, location, and the number you can realistically serve, not the number you wish for. What stops them from reaching a solution today: distance, cost, time, shame?
3. **Objectives.** One overall aim and two or three specific, measurable, time-bound objectives. "Help children" is an aim; "30 children attend at least eight homework-support sessions within two months" is an objective.
4. **Activities.** What exactly will we do to reach each objective? Link every activity to an objective. An activity that serves no objective gets cut or postponed.
5. **Resources.** Venue, materials, transport, printing, refreshments, insurance if needed. For each: is it available, donated, or bought? Who is responsible for securing it?

6. **Volunteers.** Which roles? How many people per role? How many hours a week? What skill or training? Who supervises? Plan for a few more than you need, because absences will happen.
7. **Risks.** What could go wrong? For each risk: likelihood, impact, how to reduce it, and what to do if it happens. In initiatives involving children or people in vulnerable situations, safeguarding and safety are the first item, not the last.
8. **Timeline.** Three phases: preparation, delivery, closing and evaluation. Each with dates and an owner. Closing includes thanking volunteers and partners and telling people what happened.
9. **Indicators.** How will we know we succeeded? Separate outputs (what we delivered: sessions, attendance) from outcomes (what changed for people: improvement, satisfaction, skills). For each indicator, set how, when and who collects it.

How to write a measurable objective

Weak objective	Why it is weak	Better objective
Raise environmental awareness	Among whom? How would we measure awareness?	60 pupils from two schools take part in a waste-sorting workshop, and both schools start sorting within a month
Help older people	Help is undefined and the number is open	Visit 20 older people who live alone twice a week for three months, delivering medicine on request
Clean the neighbourhood	A one-off event with no follow-through	Clean three named streets, and agree extra bins with the municipality before the month ends

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Volunteer initiative plan
Initiative plan — [initiative name] Organisation: [...] Lead coordinator: [name] Plan date: [...] Version: [...] 1) Need The problem: [...] How we know (sources): [...] Others working on the same need, and how we coordinate: [...] 2) Target group Who: [age / place / situation] Realistic number: [...] What stops them today: [...] How we will reach them: [...] 3) Objectives Overall aim: [...] Objective 1: [what + how many + by when] Objective 2: [what + how many + by when]

4) Activities

[activity] — serves objective: [..] — number/frequency: [..] — owner: [..]

5) Resources

[resource] — available / donated / bought — source: [..] — owner: [..]

6) Volunteers

[role] — number: [..] — hours per week: [..] — training needed: [..] — supervisor: [..]

7) Risks

[risk] — likelihood: [low/medium/high] — impact: [..]

Prevention: [...] If it happens: [...] Owner: [..]

8) Timeline

Preparation: [..] to [..] — must be done: [...]

Delivery: [..] to [..]

Closing and evaluation: [..] to [..]

9) Indicators

Output: [indicator] — target: [..] — tool: [..] — collected by: [..]

Outcome: [indicator] — target: [..] — tool: [..] — when: [..]

Approved by: [name and role] Next review date: [..]

Worksheet

What need do you want to address? Who told you about it, or how did you notice it?

Who exactly is the target group, and how many people can you really serve with what you have?

Write one overall aim and two specific objectives (what + how many + by when).

What are the activities, and which objective does each one serve?

Which resources do you not have yet, and who will secure them?

Which volunteer roles are needed, how many for each, and who supervises?

What are the three biggest risks, and how will you reduce each one?

What are your output and outcome indicators, and when will you collect them?

Completed example: the "Notebook and Pencil" initiative

Illustrative example

Organisation: Aghsan Youth Association (جمعية أغصان الشبابية), a new youth association in Tripoli. **Lead coordinator:** Dana. **Length:** ten weeks in the first school term.

1) Need

During earlier visits to a nearby low-income neighbourhood, several parents said their primary-school children were behind in reading and maths and that long working hours kept them from helping with homework. The team met the principal of the neighbourhood's public school, who confirmed that no after-school support was available. The team checked that no similar programme ran in the neighbourhood and found a social centre offering similar support in another area, so they contacted it to share materials and experience.

2) Target group

Pupils in grades three to five at the neighbourhood public school. Realistic number: 30 pupils (three groups of ten), because the hall holds that many and the expected volunteers allow one volunteer per three or four children. What stops them today: no quiet place to study and nobody to help. Reach: through the school, which nominates pupils with their parents' agreement.

3) Objectives

- **Overall aim:** support the neighbourhood's pupils in reading and maths after school.
- **Objective 1:** at least 25 pupils attend 14 or more of the 20 sessions over ten weeks.
- **Objective 2:** two-thirds of participants show improvement on a simple reading and maths check run in week one and week ten, designed with a teacher from the school.

4) Activities

- Two sessions a week (Tuesday and Thursday, two hours) of homework help — serves both objectives — owner: Karim.
- Fifteen minutes of group reading at the start of each session — serves objective 2 — owner: Sara.
- A simple check in weeks one and ten — serves objective 2 — owner: the partner teacher with Dana.
- A parents' meeting at the start and the end — serves objective 1 (steady attendance) — owner: Dana.

5) Resources

- A hall at a social centre in the neighbourhood — donated use — owner: Dana (written agreement with the centre).
- Notebooks, pencils and age-appropriate stories — partly donated by a local bookshop, partly bought — owner: Omar.
- Simple refreshments (water and fruit) — bought from the association's fund — owner: Omar.
- Printing consent forms and checks — bought — owner: Omar.

6) Volunteers

- Study companions — 10 (8 needed, the rest cover absences) — 4 hours a week — one training session on working with children and safeguarding rules — supervisor: Karim.
- Reading lead — 1 — 4 hours — supervisor: Dana.
- Materials and logistics — 1 — 2 hours — supervisor: Dana.
- Reception and attendance — 1 — 4 hours — records attendance and hands children back to their families — supervisor: Dana.

7) Risks

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Prevention	If it happens
Child safety and safeguarding	Low	Very high	Written parental consent; no volunteer alone with a child; a code of conduct signed by every volunteer; children handed only to a known adult	Tell Dana at once, inform the family, follow the procedure agreed with the centre
Volunteer attendance drops	Medium	High	Extra volunteers, a rota, a reminder before each session	Merge two groups temporarily
Children's attendance drops	Medium	Medium	Parents' meeting; a call after two missed sessions in a row	Review timing with parents
Hall becomes unavailable	Low	High	Written agreement; a backup contact for the school hall	Move or postpone the session and inform families

8) Timeline

- **Preparation (3 weeks):** hall agreement, pupil nomination with the school, consent forms, volunteer intake and training.
- **Delivery (10 weeks):** 20 sessions, first check in week one and final check in week ten.
- **Closing (2 weeks):** closing meeting with parents, thanks to volunteers, the centre and the bookshop, and an impact report.

9) Indicators

- **Outputs:** sessions delivered (target 20), average attendance per session, volunteer hours — from the attendance log — collected by the reception volunteer.
- **Outcomes:** share of pupils whose result improved between the two checks (target: two-thirds), and parents' views in a three-question survey at the closing meeting.

Common mistakes

- **Mistake:** starting the activity before confirming the need. **Fix:** ask the people concerned, or those who work directly with them, before any planning.

- **Mistake:** a target number far beyond the team's capacity. **Fix:** calculate the number from the venue, volunteers and materials, not from ambition.
- **Mistake:** objectives that cannot be measured. **Fix:** every objective states what, how many and by when.
- **Mistake:** treating safeguarding as paperwork. **Fix:** in any initiative with children or vulnerable groups, safeguarding comes first in the plan, with consent and a code of conduct.
- **Mistake:** relying on the exact number of volunteers. **Fix:** plan a reasonable surplus, since absence is a normal part of volunteering.
- **Mistake:** measuring outputs only. **Fix:** add at least one outcome indicator that measures what changed for people.
- **Mistake:** forgetting to close. **Fix:** set aside a phase for thanks, evaluation and telling everyone what was and was not achieved.

Completion checklist

- ☐ The need is backed by sources, not assumptions.
- ☐ We checked for other groups working on the same need.
- ☐ The target number is realistic and based on resources.
- ☐ Every objective states what, how many and by when.
- ☐ Every activity is linked to an objective.
- ☐ Every missing resource has someone responsible for securing it.
- ☐ Volunteer roles have numbers, hours and a supervisor.
- ☐ Safeguarding and safety are covered, with consent ready where needed.
- ☐ Every major risk has prevention and a response plan.
- ☐ The timeline covers preparation, delivery and closing.
- ☐ There are output and outcome indicators, each with a tool and an owner.
- ☐ Someone outside the delivery team has reviewed the plan.

About the author — Mohamad Charafeddine is an entrepreneur from Tripoli, Lebanon: founder of the Passion digital marketing agency, president of Takaful Youth Association, and founder of digital platforms. He trains individuals and teams in applied AI and marketing.

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