

Harnessing Volunteer Engagement

*FACT Collaborations Conference
June 15, 2010*

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National Trends and Realities in Volunteering Today

- Expectation of challenging, interesting assignments.
- Expectation to be treated professionally.
- The “age of spontaneous order” and self-initiated individual voluntary action.
- Gaining popularity of family and group volunteering
- Many look to volunteering for work experience, training, and/or re-entry into employment.
- The Internet’s power to attract and mobilize volunteers – especially “first timers”.
- The “Leaky Bucket”: Between 2006 and 2007, 1/3 of American volunteers dropped out of volunteering.

Changing Generational Characteristics

Traditionalists



Valued civic duty,
respect for
authority, blending
in, following the
rules,
organizational
loyalty

Boomers



Suspicious of
organizations;
anti-authoritarian;
motivated by self-
fulfillment

Gen-Xers



Self-reliant and
independent;
questions
authority,
respects
competence,
not titles

Millennials

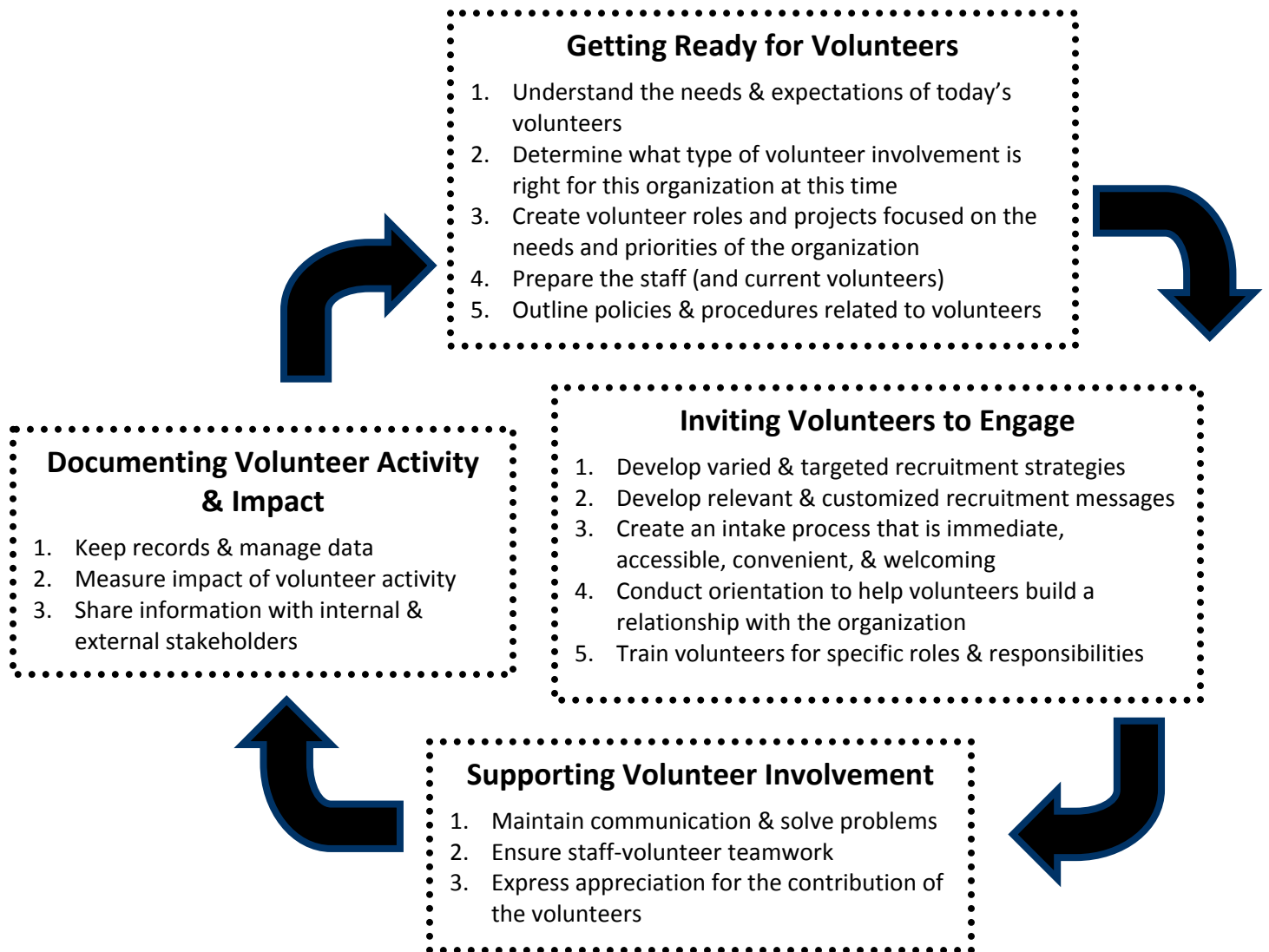


Entrepreneurial;
Self-confidence,
sense of
individuality and
uniqueness

Increasing Individuality



A Human Resource Management Framework



Which pieces are the most challenging for you and your organization? Why?



Which are strongest and/or easiest for you and your organization? Why?

There is a direct connection between how well we support volunteers and the value they add to our organization and our mission.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Clarify Expectations and Connection to Impact

Written Role Descriptions:

- Title (*meaningful, understandable*)
- Goal/Purpose (*why is this position important?; 1 sentence*)
- Responsibilities (*major task areas or activities*)
- Desired Results (*specific outcomes; indicators of success*)
- Expectations (*general “rules” for how the role is performed*)
- Qualifications/Expertise/Skills (*as objective as possible; ideal vs. critical*)
- Time Commitment (*duration; weekly or monthly hours; critical meeting schedule*)
- Location/Site (*where the work must/can be done, if relevant*)
- Supervision and Support (*reporting structure, training provided, other resources*)
- Benefits (*what’s in it for me, the volunteer? Why should I say “yes”? How is this different from other volunteer positions I’m considering?*)

Another Option: Individual Work Plan

- Current competencies
- Goals, benchmarks, desired outcomes
- Available resources
- Additional needs
- Communication, updates
- Next progress review

EXERCISE: *How might you make use of the following volunteers' specialized skills and preferences in YOUR organization, either by customizing an existing position or by creating a new one?*

1. Frank is a retired engineer with an MBA. For the last 30 years he has been the Chief Operating Officer of a plant that manufactured automobile parts. He tells you his area of specialty was setting up organizational systems and operational efficiencies. Frank lives nearby to your organization, and has been impressed with what he's heard about your organization. He says he would really like to help out if you have a need for his skills and can use his help.
2. Karen started out as a carpenter and now owns her own business. She works long hours but feels passionate about your organization's mission and wants to get involved somehow. She is available in the evenings and on Sundays. Her primary business is furniture making and repair and she has a large shop in the basement of her home. Karen also enjoys working outside.
3. David is the young (mid-30's) owner of a local hair salon. He is eager to get involved in the community and recently read about your organization in the paper. He has contacted you to find out about service opportunities.

Offer a Menu of Opportunities to Engage

Type of Role	Current or Potential Opportunities
Continuous, on-going assignments	
Short-term, episodic work projects	
Roles for individuals	
Roles for teams of 2-5	
Work for larger groups	
Roles for families (mixed ages)	
"Generalist" low-skill or multi-skill positions	
"Specialist" high-skill or narrowly-focused positions	
Short-notice, "on call" assignments	
Virtual assignments	
Projects for self-directed teams	

Think Teams

- ❖ **Create Self-Directed Volunteer Teams**
 - Set their own goals
 - Decide the best way to accomplish those goals
 - Assign team members to tasks
 - Monitor their own performance
 - Solve work problems themselves
 - Resolve personnel problems themselves

- ❖ **Form a Management Team of Volunteer Leaders**
 - To share decision-making and power
 - To help solve problems and celebrate success
 - To encourage mutual accountability
 - To foster positive relationships
 - To get more done

- ❖ **Be clear about expectations and roles**
 - Weigh “process” skills vs. “content” expertise
 - Include diverse individuals
 - Clarify the invitation: doing “more” or doing “different”?
 - Delegate power as well as responsibility
 - Offer special training as a benefit
 - Explain their role to everyone else
 - Involve them in succession planning

- ❖ **Ensure regular, effective communication**
 - Involve the team in deciding on a communication plan
 - Include both “lateral” and “vertical” communication
 - Consider a standardized format for reports: “Progress...Pending...Plans”
 - Maximize technology, but retain face-time as well

Update Your Messaging

Revise role descriptions, recruitment materials, manuals, recognition activities, website content, funding proposals, annual reports.

As a potential volunteer, I want to know...

...Why I should care about what your organization does

...What I will get in return, how this might give me something I don't have

...How being a volunteer here is unique, different than other opportunities

Stress professionalism, local impact, flexibility, opportunities to learn, respect for expertise and creativity.

Focus on the “So What”

- solving problems
- alleviating pain
- meeting needs
- influencing policies
- enhancing efficiency
- leveraging resources
- changing behavior or attitudes

PRACTICE: *As a result of volunteer involvement in my organization,*

- our clients/consumers...

- our staff...

- our community...

“Mission is forever – Messaging conveys the urgency and relevance of now.” - Kim Klein

Ask Questions...and More Questions

*The more you ask, the more you know...
...The more you know, the better your management and leadership.*

In the Beginning:

- Why are you interested in this project or role?
- What would you like to learn as you volunteer with us?
- What are your “glad gifts” – things you are good at AND enjoy doing?
- What are your “no-no’s” – things you really dislike doing?
- Here is the problem/challenge we are facing. How do you see yourself helping us find a solution?
- Do you prefer projects and assignments where you work as part of a team, or would you prefer to work more independently?
- What have you enjoyed about other volunteering you have done in the past? What has frustrated you or turned you off when about past experiences as a volunteer?
- What makes you feel appreciated and valued as a person who is volunteering your time?

Later On:

- How can we support you and your role more effectively?
- What is getting in your way?
- How can we more effectively show you we care and appreciate you?
- What would you like to know about your accomplishments? The organization?
- Are you ready for a change in role/assignment/project?
- What has surprised you about volunteering with our organization?
- What would like to see done differently? What ideas do you have for improving the way we work together?

Maximize Technology

- Use your organization’s Web site: home page visibility; special section; multiple links throughout
- Recruit volunteers to prepare and update website content
- Find other sites that do this well, to give you new ideas and models
- Highlight seasonal volunteer activities – and recognize accomplishments
- Respond immediately to inquiries and requests for more information
- Encourage current staff and volunteers to refer others to the web site
- Post volunteer opportunities for free on local and national sites
- Encourage current volunteers to utilize social networking media

Foster a Collegial, Supportive Environment

Be the kind of supervisor you want!

- Coach rather than direct
- Be as accessible as possible
- Listen for the unexpected
- Show an interest in the volunteer's personal life

Maintain frequent communication with ALL volunteers

- Remember: information = power!
- Keep it short and simple, but offer more details for those who want it
- Include good news and bad news
- Solicit input and feedback – and then share the final results
- Encourage the exchange of volunteer “stories”

Offer opportunities to include family members

Allow volunteer “sabbaticals”

Update Strategies for Appreciation and Acknowledgement

Vary the “voices”

- *From an individual, for the volunteer's specific work or action*
- *From an individual, for being part of the team*
- *From the organization, for results achieved*
- *From the organization, for excellence in performance*

Include personal validations

- *You always...*
- *I admire...*
- *I'm impressed by...*
- *We like the way you...*

Vary the activity

Philanthropic: donation in honor of an individual or group

Developmental: opportunity for personal growth/learning

Social: getting together for fun, including family and friends

Personal Acknowledgement: tangible gifts, individualized appreciation

Community Awareness: public attention for individual or group

Formal Special Event: usually annually

Celebrate success and link to results

- *When the project/big task is done*
- *When the initial commitment is completed*
- *When a goal is reached*
- *When a challenge has been overcome*

Match to timing of involvement

Surprise them!

RELATED RESOURCES

Keeping Volunteers: A Guide to Retention, by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch. Available in electronic format (\$10) from www.energizeinc.com

What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers: An Action Guide to Making Your Job Easier, by Jarene Frances Lee with Julia M. Catagnus. Available in print (\$29.95) or electronic (\$15) format from www.energizeinc.com

Volunteer Recruitment (and Membership Development) Book, Third Edition, by Susan J. Ellis. Available in print format (\$18.95) from www.energizeinc.com

Points of Light Institute & HandsOn Network: www.HandsOnNetwork.org

Resources & training in service project management; expertise in building volunteer leadership; innovative civic engagement strategies; local volunteer center network.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS): www.nationalservice.org

Funds and provides technical assistance to national service programs such as AmeriCorps, VISTA, and Senior Corps. Maintains a National Service Resource Center that includes a database for effective practices at www.nationalserviceresources.org

Virginia Office of Volunteerism and Community Service: www.vaservice.org

News, statistics, resources for Virginia. Manages national service programs in the state. Free e-newsletter.

Action Without Borders: www.IdeaList.org

Comprehensive Volunteer Management Resource Center, listing current research, best practices, tools and ideas. Sections include career information, volunteer management tools, professional development opportunities, resources related to specific sub-topics, and support networks.

Energize, Inc: www.Energizeinc.com

Resources, electronic publications, and current “hot topic” discussions, led by consultant and trainer Susan J. Ellis.

Volunteer Match: www.volunteermatch.org

The largest online database of volunteer opportunities, and much more. Free webinars on volunteer management topics, free e-newsletter, research reports. Visit the Nonprofit Learning Center on this site.