



## HOW TO MANAGE VOLUNTEERS

The only thing necessary for evil to triumph in the world is for good people to do nothing

## WHY IS VOLUNTEERING EVEN NECESSARY?

Volunteering, which costs nothing and is available to everyone, is one of the most effective actions a person can take to improve the world or their own neighborhood.

### Volunteers are critical to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 4 ways:

1. Provide governance – most NGO's are governed by a volunteer Board of Directors
2. Provide the staff that NGO's can't afford to pay for.  
Without volunteers, the work would not get done. With volunteers, not only does the work get done, but the NGO can use the money they saved for other needs. This increase in resources allows the NGO to achieve their mission more quickly.
3. Bring the "groundtruth" or a daily dose of reality that paid staff sometimes get distanced from
4. Offer the best kind of publicity and exposure: word-of-mouth/peer to peer

## STEPS TO WELCOME A POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER

You last spoke to Maria outside her home when you were recruiting volunteers in her neighborhood. You shared the mission of the organization and invited her to visit and hear more about volunteer opportunities. She's decided to accept your offer and has come by to learn more. Here are the next steps:

### STEP 1:

It should go without saying: Be very cheerful and gracious.

### STEP 2:

Don't assume she is interested in volunteering. She's here to learn more. And you want to learn about her, too.

### STEP 3:

Briefly re-explain in simple terms what your organization does and why volunteers are critical to the mission.

## EMPLOYABILITY SPOTLIGHT:

### Learning to manage volunteers will make you more employable

Why would an employer be more likely to hire you if you know how to manage volunteers? Managing volunteers is a lot like managing paid employees – only 100times harder! It's harder because a volunteer can leave ANY TIME they want, whereas a paid employee is more likely to tolerate an unpleasant boss or work assignment because they're getting PAID.

How specifically does the skill of managing volunteers make you more employable? One of a business owner's biggest costs is finding qualified, dependable, productive employees.

- When an employee quits, the company's productivity decreases, costing them money.
- Then the business needs to search for someone new which also costs money.
- Finally, the business needs to train the new employee, which, you guessed it, costs money.

So, you can see why businesses much prefer to keep good people in the first place!

When you learn how to manage volunteers, you learn how to ensure workers are happy and content so they will not quit. This is a skill every employer wants to see in their managers.



## STEP 4:

Then ask her, “What is motivating you to be a volunteer?” Does she want to meet new people, learn a new skill, become more employable, or advance the mission of the organization? Her motivations are important to know for 3 reasons:

- It shows you care about her as a person and don't just see her as free labor.
- Maria is more likely to become a volunteer if you can explain to her how her needs will be met. You can only paint this picture if you know what her needs are.
- Assuming she does become a volunteer, as a Volunteer Manager you will want to “check in” with her every so often to see if her needs are being met. If they're not, you need to know this so you can fix the problem. Remember, just like businesses, NGO's much prefer to keep existing volunteers than have to find and train new ones.

## STEP 5:

Next ask Maria to fill out a Volunteer Information Form that includes:

- Name and contact information
- Participation preferences: One-time, Periodic/Irregular, Monthly Committee, All of the above
- Location preferences: At home, At the organization, All of the above
- Skills the volunteer has
- Skills the volunteer wants to learn
- Summary of their motivations

## STEP 6:

Finally, based on everything Maria told you, offer her a volunteer opportunity that meets her needs and preferences.

### HOW TO MANAGE DIFFICULT VOLUNTEERS: The dreamer and the know-it-all

- **The dreamer** is someone who comes up with unrealistic or inappropriate solutions to problems. This could mean their idea is too expensive, or that it might jeopardize the NGO's reputation.
- **The know-it-all** is someone who wants to do the right thing but is very stubborn and sees only one solution to a problem: theirs. The truth is that sometimes NGO's do things that don't make sense to everyone. Sometimes the NGO is wrong, and the Volunteer Manager knows it, but can't change the system. Other times the Know-It-All thinks they're right, but they're not.

### Recommended tactics

- **Hold onto your no's:** Try to say “no” as little as you can so that when you must it will be more powerful
- **Guardrails:** When you seek ideas, define exactly what qualities you are looking for. All acceptable ideas need to include all of these qualities.
- **Genuinely respect all ideas:** Even those that are flawed. When a volunteer suggests an idea, say it right back to them but with different words to let them know you heard them clearly.
- **Ask questions:** Sometimes volunteers blurt out ideas without thinking them through. Help them think it through by seeking more information. Ideally, they will realize if an idea is flawed.
- **Ask the group:** If you're in a meeting with others, ask the group for their thoughts. Only do this when you know you will be ok with an answer you might not agree with.
- **Compromise:** Try to find a way to add a piece of every suggestion to the final solution that is chosen
- **Ask the Board:** Some proposals are not within the Volunteer Manager's authority to decide and must be raised with the manager's supervisor or the Board of Directors

# VOLUNTEER INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

So far we've learned about Maria's needs, preferences, and abilities. But let's say your goal is to recruit 50 volunteers - that's 50 times the needs, preferences, and abilities to keep track of. That's a lot of information! A spreadsheet will help you keep track of it all. This is important to do for 4 reasons:

- To remember the motivations of each volunteer
- To match volunteer skills with tasks
- To demonstrate your success in recruiting volunteers to funders, politicians, sponsors.
- To record attendance at Committee Meetings. This is important for accountability

## ONBOARDING A NEW VOLUNTEER

### Training

- **Job description:** Any major volunteer roles/positions - the ones that you are recruiting several people to fill - should have a job description
- **Demonstration:** Demonstrate how to do the work and then allow the volunteer to do it while you are present until they are comfortable performing it on their own.

### Accountability

- **Explain the importance of accountability:** Those volunteers who accomplish what they agreed to do are asked to come back and/or are promoted to positions of greater responsibility. Unlike in the business world where the boss can tell the employee if they've done a bad job, in the NGO setting we promote volunteers who accomplish things, trusting them with greater roles.

## MOTIVATING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers do incredible and selfless work and are a critical asset to any NGO. Here are a few ideas about how to thank volunteers and show that you value them:

### Check-ins

The #1 thing to do is ... Each month, meet with each volunteer to ask them if their goals are being met. If they're not, ask what you can do to fix the situation.

### Thank them

Routinely and repeatedly thank them for their time, sacrifice, expertise, dedication, ideas, and other contributions. You can thank and let them know you value them in many ways.

### Make volunteering easy

Communicate often, post schedules online, provide free child care, coordinate transportation, allow them use of the organization's kitchen to reheat meals.

