

Description: Effective volunteer management can make or break the sustainability of your nonprofit or social impact organization. Learn five volunteer coordination best practices that will amplify your engagement and help you organize a volunteer team that's committed and prepared to carry forth your mission.

Volunteers Are More Than Numbers

In our socially-driven climate, volunteers are always searching for new projects and ways to give back to their community. Learning to coordinate, organize, and manage volunteers is a worthwhile investment that will serve your nonprofit for years.

The Corporation for National and Community Service estimates the economic value of volunteerism at \$167 billion¹, which translates to an average of \$25.43² an hour saved in labor and an increase in donations, as volunteers are more than twice as likely to donate than non-volunteers.

Your volunteers provide enduring value and opportunities. Keep reading to learn five best practices to help your nonprofit maximize its impact!

1. Create a Volunteer Management Plan with Set Goals

A volunteer management plan benefits your nonprofit in recruitment, retention, and engagement. For instance, you likely cannot guide and oversee each volunteer, particularly if you're a volunteer-based nonprofit. Having a plan in place will allow you to strategically leverage resources and relationships without increasing the burden placed on staff.

Establish expectations and project goals to support and direct volunteers. Identify the "who, what, when, where, and why" when assigning tasks, developing a workflow, and determining proper supervision.

Your volunteers will arrive eager and ready to help in any way. When they leave, you want them to feel welcomed, wanted, and needed, to be empowered to find solutions and make on-the-spot decisions. Share the plan with volunteers to ensure everyone understands how their assignment supports the larger project or organization.

When possible, include 1 or 2 volunteers in the planning process to give insight from the field perspective on project operations and the community's response to your mission.

¹ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/serve/via>

² <https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2018/>

To read more on volunteer feedback, skip below to step 5.

2. Provide a Volunteer Orientation, Training, and Meet and Greet

Volunteers need to learn as much about your organization as possible in a short amount of time. Coordinate a volunteer orientation to educate volunteers on your mission, policies and procedures, and your organization's culture.

Once volunteers understand how their actions impact the greater mission, provide training. Use demonstrations and role-play to equip volunteers with tools and skills to succeed in every scenario. Volunteer training is also an opportunity to provide technical support. For example, volunteers may need help logging hours or using other technologies.

Host a meet and greet to excite and motivate volunteers if time permits. At this stage, you want volunteers to feel that they're a part of a community. Dedicate a portion of the meeting to introductions and networking or organize volunteers into small groups to encourage team building.

3. Engage Volunteers Before and After Events

Nothing is worse than only hearing from someone when they want something from you. You are committing the same cardinal sin when you only contact your volunteers to ask for help with an event or donations.

Begin building a relationship with volunteers before your event or project. Make introductions, invite volunteers to social outings, and share valuable information. At the end of a project, maintain contact, and continue to share opportunities and knowledge that your volunteers will find helpful.

Use the Ladder of Engagement tool to help organize engagement activities with volunteers. On the first rung on the ladder, your volunteers are observers. They then move throughout the five stages of following, endorsing, contributing, owning, and eventually becoming a leader in the cause.

The Ladder of Engagement will help you coordinate your volunteer engagement activities and follow-ups beyond a needs-based relationship. According to the political scientist Hahrie Han³, the Ladder of Engagement is “the difference between organizing events and organizing organizers” (2015).

³ https://scholars.org/sites/scholars/files/mobilizingideasseries.ssncewg_1.pdf



4. Track Volunteer Information in a Central Location

The more information you can gather about each volunteer, the easier it will be to consider unique talents and place volunteers in appropriate assignments. A critical step in organizing your volunteers is tracking volunteer information and engagement.

You will likely collect volunteer contact information and preferences, log hours served, and communicate with volunteers. A comprehensive tracking system will allow you to streamline communications and build a profile of your volunteer base.

There are many volunteer management software options available. Some systems only track a volunteer's standard information. In contrast, others allow you to include personal details (i.e., talents, hobbies, skills, family demographics, and passions), schedule volunteers for events and send regular updates. The more features a system offers, the more time it will save you. Be sure the software/system is user-friendly for staff and volunteers.

Leading a smaller organization may be tempted to track volunteer information manually to reduce costs. Remember that you need a system that will sustain your organization through its growth phases; manual tracking can only go so far. Consider a free option such as YourVolunteers to get started.

5. Show Appreciation and Gather Feedback

⁴ <http://groundwire.org/blog/groundwire-engagement-pyramid/>

Volunteers do what they do because they want to help people or merely from the kindness of their hearts. Still, everyone likes to feel appreciated. Host a volunteer appreciation dinner to highlight the great work that they've done and to say thank you.

Your volunteers will welcome the opportunity to be the guests of honor, and your act of gratitude will assure volunteers that they are investing their time in a worthy cause.

Volunteers are more than unpaid staff and project support; they're also stakeholders in your mission. They have a unique vantage point and are probably spilling over with ideas and suggestions.

Provide a process to gather feedback via phone, survey, or mobile device.

An alternate approach is coordinating individual exit meetings, which may take quite some time. A better option for large volunteer teams is group meetings.

While your volunteer's input is valuable, you should evaluate each suggestion thoroughly with your team to ensure that it aligns with your mission.

CTA: Learn more about organizing volunteers at [Brightest.com](https://brightest.com).