



How to develop and organize a volunteer program

Volunteers are a great resource for your organization. Proper management of volunteers will ensure that this valuable asset is used effectively in your programs and services.

What is the role of the manager of volunteers?

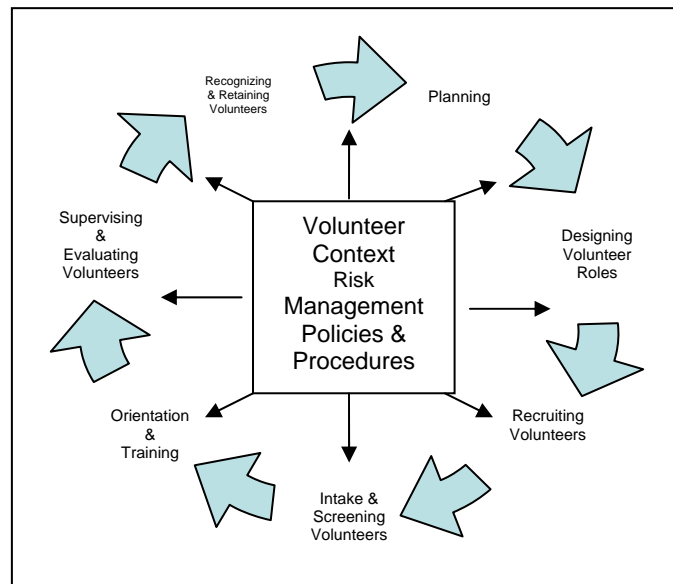
The Manager of Volunteers is the person responsible for involving volunteers in your organization. In large organizations this may be a paid position. In smaller grassroots organizations, this may be a volunteer role. The Manager of Volunteers is responsible for ensuring that volunteers are involved effectively in assisting the organization in meeting its mandate, and that sound volunteer management practices are in place.

What is the volunteer management cycle?

The volunteer management cycle (see diagram1) provides a framework for managing volunteers. The volunteer management cycle is a process that is continually monitored and revised as required. Volunteer Management encompasses the following:

- Planning for your volunteer program
- Designing Volunteer Roles
- Recruiting for Volunteer Roles
- Screening and Intake of Volunteers
- Orientation and Training of Volunteers
- Supervising & Evaluating Volunteers
- Recognizing Volunteers

Diagram 1



Volunteer Management also includes policies & procedures for your program, risk management strategies and an understanding of voluntary sector trends.

How do you plan for a volunteer program?

Having a plan in place for your volunteer program and the involvement of volunteers is important as it sets a clear path for volunteers to help achieve the mandate of your organization.

Planning is an analysis of both the past and the future. It is important to be aware of the history of the volunteer program in your organization and also be able to anticipate its future needs.

Consider the following:

- How do the goals of your volunteer program relate to the mandate of your organization? In what ways is your volunteer program contributing to the mandate? In what ways could it contribute differently or more effectively?
- Do you have a formal volunteer program? What things have been successful? What things have not been successful and need improvement?
- How does your organization currently involve volunteers? What roles do they play? What changes can you make in order to involve volunteers more effectively in your organization?
- What trends are happening in the community or nationally that affect how volunteers are involved in your organization? Have you made adaptations to involve volunteers based on what is happening in the sector? How do people perceive your organization?
- Are volunteers welcomed, and recognized for their efforts and involvement?
- Do you have adequate resources (human and financial) to support the involvement of volunteers? Do you have adequate resources to expand your volunteer program?

How do you design volunteer roles?

Role design is taking various tasks that need to be completed and combining them into roles. Consider the following:

- The mission, vision and goals of your organization and the goals of your volunteer program. Ensure that the roles you are designing contribute to the mandate of your organization.
- Needs of staff and volunteers should be considered when designing roles. Involve staff from your organization when planning and designing roles for volunteers. Also ask: “What could a volunteer bring to our current work team that would benefit the team, the volunteer and the organization?”
- What would motivate someone to fill the role you are designing?
- Consider the climate of your organization. Look at where and how volunteers currently participate in your organization, what types of positions are working well and which ones need revision. Consideration should also be given to how volunteer involvement is accepted and valued in your organization.
- The trends that are happening in the sector should be considered.
- The level of risk associated with the position need to be determined. Decisions regarding whether your organization can find ways to minimize the risk or assume it need to be made.

Once roles are designed, develop a **position description**. A good position description should have the following components:

1. Role title
2. Purpose of the role
3. Duties and responsibilities
4. Time requirements
5. Skills and qualifications
6. Orientation and training
7. Supervision
8. Other details that may be relevant to the position

How do you recruit for volunteer opportunities?

Recruitment is the process of matching an organization’s needs with a volunteer’s interests and skills. You want to promote your volunteer opportunities to potential volunteers and match their skills to the needs of your organization. A recruitment plan is a very important part of your volunteer program. Questions to ask when building a recruitment strategy include:

- What outcomes do I hope to achieve through the recruitment of new volunteers?
- What type of person will be the best match for this position?
- Where could I find this person?
- What factors would influence a person’s choice to fill this position? (time, interests, location, others)

- How could I make this volunteer position attractive?
- What is the best way for me to reach potential volunteers?
- What recruitment message will best grab their attention?

Organizations need also to ensure that they are recruiting from a diverse volunteer base. You may be missing the opportunity to involve people into your organization by limiting who you are targeting. Recruitment materials should be written in plain and inclusive language that is distributed through a diverse media.

How do you handle intake and screening of your volunteers?

Intake and screening is a series of steps that ensures an interested person is the best fit for the volunteer position. Intake involves some or all of the following, depending on the level of risk associated with a position:

Application forms: The application form provides the first piece of documentation for individuals who have expressed an interest in becoming a volunteer in your organization. An application form should include:

- Identification: name, address, phone, email
- Qualifications: skills, education, training, license required etc.
- Availability: day of work, time of day, etc.
- Preferred working conditions or limits
- Reason/motivation for volunteering
- Work/volunteer history
- References

Interviews: The interview offers further insight as to whether a potential volunteer is a good fit for your organization and the volunteer position available. Some tips to consider when interviewing:

- Consider different formats (one to one, panel, group, telephone, etc.)
- Determine in advance what you are looking for and prepare a series of questions that are primarily open and behavior based
- Don't ask anything that is not directly related to the requirements of the position, that is inappropriate, or against human rights legislation (i.e. birthplace, age, religious background, etc.)

Reference checks: Reference checks will provide other people's perspectives as to whether a potential volunteer is a good fit for your organization and the volunteer position. Determine in

advance how many references you would like to check. Prepare questions to ask that will help you decide if the potential volunteer has the skills and qualifications for the position.

Other checks: Depending on the level of risk associated with the position, you may want to perform other types of checks. These should be based on the requirements of the position and could include: police record checks, child welfare checks, and drivers' abstracts. A word of caution, never rely solely on a police record check to screen inappropriate people out of your organization. Police record checks can be useful, but will only tell you if someone has a record.

How do you orient and train volunteers?

Orientation is the process that makes a volunteer feel welcome into the organization. A good orientation should provide the volunteer with:

- A sense of belonging and connection to the organization.
- An overview of what is expected within the role and what their responsibilities are.
- An understanding of how they fit into the “big picture” of the organization and how their involvement and contributions help the organization achieve its mandate.

Training ensures that the volunteers have the skills and knowledge to perform their roles. When developing a training strategy consider the following questions:

- What is it that I want the volunteer to learn? What skills do I need to provide them with in order that they can properly do their role?
- What methods of training should I consider using? (May vary depending on the skills you are training for). Methods could include: workshop sessions of varying lengths, manuals, one-on-one demonstrations, coaching or mentoring, job shadowing, videos or a walk through.
- How much time should I allow for training? Are there additional resources that I may need?
- Who would be the best person to provide the training?

How do you supervise and evaluate volunteers?

Supervision is about managing the performance of your volunteers, and providing them with support and direction. Effective supervision involves:

- Basing the level of supervision on the requirements of the position.
- Ensuring a volunteer has an assigned supervisor.
- Reflecting a caring attitude.
- Being accessible and approachable.
- Being consistent in your supervisory approach.

- Ensuring volunteers have position descriptions, an orientation to the organization, training for the position and regular feedback.
- Being prepared to take corrective action or managing problems associated with volunteer performance.
- Expressing appreciation for the work the volunteer is doing.

Evaluation measures volunteer involvement against the goals and objectives set for the position, and provides performance feedback and verbal recognition. Evaluation is an opportunity to set future goals and objectives; ensuring the involvement of the volunteer continues to fulfill the mandate of the position and the organization. The evaluation process should also provide opportunity for volunteers to express feedback regarding how they feel they are contributing to the organization and any suggestions they may have for improvement or changes.

How do you recognize and retain volunteers?

Recognition is acknowledging the efforts of volunteers. Recognition can take on many forms, from formal galas to a simple timely thank you! One of the best forms of recognition you can provide to your volunteers is a solid volunteer program. This communicates to volunteers that they are an important and integral part of the organization.

Recognition programs that typically work are those which:

- Have rewards that are based on the individual volunteer as a unique person and which address their individual motivation.
- Are based on individual jobs or tasks.
- Are consistent in their delivery.
- Recognize both long term involvement and special contributions.
- Have rewards that can be shared by a team of volunteers or the entire organization.

What is risk management?

Risk Management is an ongoing process that should be built into the entire Volunteer Management Cycle. Risk is any uncertainty that may have negative consequences to an individual, staff person, volunteer or the organization. Risk Management is about identifying what the potential risks may be and working to reduce, modify or assume the risk involved.

What about policies and procedures?

Policies and Procedures should be in place to support your volunteer program. Policies and procedures provide:

- A framework for how your organization involves volunteers.
- Risk management.
- Consistency, eliminating guesswork in decision making.
- Guidance for making difficult decisions and support to justify the decision.

Volunteer trends

It is important to understand how trends in the community and the voluntary sector can impact voluntary organizations. Surveys such as the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (www.givingandvolunteering.ca) and the National Survey of Non-Profit and Voluntary Organizations (www.nonprofitscan.ca) are useful resources to determine trends. These resources give a national perspective on what is happening in the voluntary sector. Local trends happening in the community should also be considered.

Resources

Graff, Linda G. (2005). *Best of All: The Quick Reference Guide to Effective Volunteer Involvement*. Dundas, Ontario: Linda Graff and Associates Inc.

McCurley, Steve & Lynch, Rick (1996). *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community*. Downer's Grove, IL: Heritage Arts Publishing.

Vineyard, Sue & McCurley, Steve (2001). *Best Practices for Volunteer Programs: Best Ideas from Best Programs*. Darien Illinois : Heritage Arts Publishing.

Ellis, Susan J. (2002) *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*. Philadelphia: Energize Inc.

Acknowledgement

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