

Why Volunteers?

There are many reasons to include volunteers in your organization. Your staff may be overloaded and need some extra hands or you may want to expand the base of support in your community. You may also be interested in training members of your community to address their own issues and in empowering them to speak out.

In the first chapter, you and the members of your organization wrote a vision statement together, describing what your ideal society will look like in twenty years. Realizing these vision statements, and creating the social change behind them, is not something one person can accomplish alone; it will require building the capacity and skills of your staff. In order to do this, you need to think about developing the next generation of leaders of your organization.

A good place to start leadership development is getting more people involved in your work. But once they are mobilized and involved, the question becomes: how do you manage them, build their skills, and develop their leadership capacity? That is where volunteer management comes in. It is important to have a good system for recruiting and managing volunteers so that the organization's needs are met and to ensure that the volunteers feel that they have a good learning experience. A well-managed volunteer program enables volunteers to feel successful, advances your organization's goals and enhances your organization's reputation. That is why it is important to discuss how to create equitable, effective volunteer management systems.

Many of you have significant experience managing volunteers or doing community organizing. For some of you, volunteers are a way to help you to run the organization when you don't have enough money to hire staff. For others, volunteering is a way to empower the community you serve and to enable them to be leaders in the work you do. Some groups do not use volunteers at all.

In this chapter, we present the approach that we have found works best for developing a system to manage volunteers and develop leadership. Before we discuss that system, please consider your experiences with volunteers and think about:

1. What are some things that have worked well?
2. What are some challenges you have experienced?

Mutual Needs

When you design a volunteer management system, you are building a foundation for new relationships. You do not know where those relationships will lead when you begin this process. Some volunteers will drop out after a month, while others may become involved for years and could eventually become leaders in the organization. One of the first things to think about before recruiting volunteers is what everyone involved needs from the relationship. Let us take a look at what your organization might need, compared to what a potential volunteer might need.

As shown in the table below, you and your organization are hoping to fulfil some or all of the needs listed. Similarly, your volunteers also have certain expectations when they come to work at your organization. It is important to note that your needs and their needs might be different:

Your Organization's Needs	The Volunteers' Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More hands to get work done;• A larger network of supporters/members to develop the work;• To empower members of the community to address their own problems;• A core team to grow the organization;• A pool from which you can develop new leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A supportive community and a group of new friends;• A chance to contribute to something constructive;• Empowerment and self-expression;• Discover ways to solve common problems;• To have a good time/discover and develop multiple sides of themselves;• Work experience that can lead to other professional opportunities;• Gain new skills/knowledge;• Receive a reference for future employers.

Creating a volunteer system, with regular practices and tools, is an important way to ensure that your organization runs smoothly even if there are people coming and going every few months. The structure provided by an established system will enable volunteers to be and feel successful and make all volunteer activities predictable and reliable. Creating such a system requires you to consider and position the needs of your organization and your volunteers.

First, when designing a volunteer system, you need to keep in mind that **volunteers will only contribute their time if their needs are satisfied** – this is also the core of volunteer management. If they do not feel satisfied, then volunteers will choose to leave. Telling them things like “you should be interested, because this is for the whole community and you have to support our work” is not effective. People will not sacrifice their time simply because they think they are obligated. In fact, the best volunteers are those who do not feel obliged to work for your organization. Volunteering should be an experience that makes everybody feel energized and excited, so it is important to set up a system that ensures that every volunteer feels like they are making a positive impact.

For different organizations, this goal can be reached through different approaches. Some organizations rely on volunteers who come along and conduct some group activities for a few hours, then go home happy and feeling creative. Some other organizations view their work as a campaign or awareness raising activities. They need volunteers to contribute and engage more deeply. No matter what your organization’s goal may be, you need to consider implementing a system of volunteer management that allows volunteers to start with a minimal workload before increasing participation and enriching their learning experiences at your organization.

Next, we introduce how to set up a volunteer system step by step:

1. Plan a Volunteer Project Schedule
2. Recruit and Hire Volunteers
3. Orientation and Training
4. Managing Volunteers
5. Developing Future Leaders