

Volunteer Management Guide

BryteBridge
Nonprofit Solutions

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Volunteers are the heart and soul of every nonprofit organization. Nonprofit volunteers are priceless additions to your origination. The average volunteer is equal to an in-kind donation of \$25 for every hour they work. While not necessarily providing monetary donations, volunteers are providing their precious resource of time. Ensuring that volunteers are well-managed and well-utilized is essential to the organization's operation.

When it comes to volunteer management, think of the Three Rs: **Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition.**

Recruitment

When looking for volunteers, start with your Board of Directors to define the characteristics wanted in volunteers. It doesn't hurt to develop volunteer job descriptions to clearly define expectations and priorities and their role in the organization.

Volunteers want to align their passions with a compelling story — they want to know they can make a difference for the causes they care about. To recruit committed volunteers, you must help people see themselves as part of your organization.

Highlight how potential volunteers' involvement will allow them to both **give** and **grow**: give their time (and dollars) to your worthy cause and grow their leadership and service skills.

Creating a compelling volunteer recruitment flyer, page on your website, or social media ad will attract people to your organization. However, your existing network is the best way to find potential volunteers.

Similar to creating a pool of potential donors, the Board of Directors should consider developing a list of potential volunteers. Consider people with skills that align with your organization's needs. For example, if your organization packs meals for people experiencing homelessness, you might think of people who can lift heavy boxes of food.



Here are a few places to find potential volunteers:

- **Your Circle:** Ask your immediate circle of family, friends, and coworkers if they will volunteer for the organization.
- **Local Schools:** Contact local schools and universities to see if students wish to engage in community service. Many students require annual volunteer hours for scholarship eligibility, so why not help them earn their hours while assisting your organization?
- **Local Organizations:** Consider partnering with local churches, faith-based organizations, civic groups, or local companies looking for opportunities to serve.
- **Your Website:** Add a volunteer section to your website, including the volunteer job descriptions and ways for potential volunteers to get involved.
- **Community Events:** Attend community events to spread your organization's message. These are excellent ways to meet prospective volunteers (and donors).
- **Senior Citizens:** Engage with local senior citizen centers if you have appropriate volunteer opportunities. Many seniors enjoy ways to get involved and help their communities and often have a lifetime of skills and knowledge at their disposal.

Once the board develops a working list, it comes down to connecting. When you communicate with potential volunteers, personalize the ask -- let them know why you think they would be a perfect fit for the volunteer role. People like to know that you're not just looking for a warm body but want their valuable expertise, skills, or abilities.

Develop a clear and straightforward volunteer sign-up process. A website form requesting contact information is a great way to start. You may want to consider a formal application process, too. This may be important for specific types of volunteer roles. For example, anyone working with children or youth should have a background check that complies with your state's laws -- the information necessary will likely require a formalized application process.



Retention

While volunteers are seemingly in endless supply once you look hard enough, you should only seek the volunteers you need and can adequately manage. Volunteers must understand your organization's mission and the role they play in its operation. Including volunteers as an essential part of the nonprofit's mission leaves them feeling connected to the entire organization and helps retain them for future needs.

Happy volunteers are great recruiters, so it's essential to make sure all volunteers feel valued and grow in their roles. Remember, people don't want to be warm body; they want to be valued. Since they're giving the most precious resource they have (their time), you want to make sure they keep doing so in the future.

The best way to retain volunteers is to ensure they receive something for their time -- not just a thank you (which we will talk about next), but that they grow as a result of donating their time. Help teach the volunteers a new skill or spend time to help them learn from their experience. For example, if your organization provides after-school mentorship to children, consider providing volunteers with leadership training or skills assessment. These tools help volunteers learn about themselves while applying the information to their volunteer role.

Volunteers should feel empowered in their role. They are a vital part of your organization, and you should treat them accordingly. Solicit their feedback and opinions, and lean into their skills and expertise. They may have ideas that can support the board's work or processes.

However, it's vital to set boundaries. Not every idea is a good idea; even good ideas take time and resources to implement. Make sure the volunteer feels heard and supported. Let them know you'll consider their feedback and discuss it with the appropriate people -- the board or the program team. If the idea is eventually implemented, be sure to appreciate and recognize the volunteer who made the suggestion; you may also consider having them be part of the team to kick things off.



Recognition

Most volunteers don't do it for glory, but everyone likes to be appreciated. It's important to recognize and appreciate volunteers regularly. After all, happy volunteers are more likely to continue their service, tell their friends, and give more than their time. Great recognition is a form of recruitment.

Quality recognition happens in many different ways. Simple acknowledgment or a personalized thank you during or immediately after the volunteer service is essential. For example, a homeless shelter having volunteers paint the facility should know the impact the beautification will have on the residents. Take time after the painting event to thank volunteers and explain how their work will help bring pride to the people there.

Depending on the size of your volunteer pool, consider sending personalized thank-you notes or emails. If sending an email, include pictures from the volunteer event. Consider posting photos to your social media channels or website to celebrate the volunteers.

Another excellent volunteer recognition opportunity comes every year in April. Volunteer Appreciation Week falls on the third week of every April and is a great time to highlight your volunteers' fantastic work.

Not only do these public displays help recognize your current volunteers, but it also helps others see themselves as part of your organization. If the volunteer event looks fun, others will want to join and be part of your next one.

Don't just recognize volunteers after the event; make it ongoing. Consider having an annual volunteer appreciation dinner or event where you invite your most active volunteers. Give them something to look forward to that also celebrates them. If they feel honored or celebrated, they will tell their friends. Remember, recognition is also recruitment!

Putting It Together

Most organizations could not exist without volunteers. Their time is an invaluable resource that fulfills countless needs. Consider the Three Rs, and your organization will manage a high-quality volunteer program in no time!