

STARTING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM?

Success starts with knowing key concepts in volunteer management.

1. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS:

- Volunteer programs should be strategically aligned with organizational goals, ensuring that volunteer activities directly contribute to objectives such as community engagement, enhancing public services, building civic participation, and improving service delivery.
- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - How does the volunteer program align with our overall mission and goals?
 - What specific organizational objectives will the volunteer program help achieve?
 - How will volunteer activities be integrated into our existing operations?

2. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES:

- Effective recruitment involves clear communication of volunteer roles, benefits to the community, and pathways for civic engagement. It should leverage various channels, including social media, partnerships, and community events. Retention requires creating a supportive environment, offering meaningful work, and providing ongoing recognition and support for volunteers.
- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What target demographic are we aiming to recruit for our volunteer program?
 - What recruitment channels will be most effective for reaching potential volunteers?
 - What incentives and benefits will we offer to attract and retain volunteers?
 - How will we recognize and reward volunteer contributions?

3. CLEAR ROLE DEFINITION:

- Volunteers need well-defined roles that specify their responsibilities, expected outcomes, and how they fit into the broader organizational structure. Clear role descriptions help volunteers understand their tasks, the skills required, and the impact of their work. This clarity helps prevent role confusion, enhances efficiency, and fosters a sense of purpose and direction.
- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What specific roles and responsibilities will volunteers have?
 - How will we communicate role expectations to volunteers?
 - What qualifications or skills are required for each volunteer role?
 - How will we ensure that roles are clear and understood by all parties?

4. RESOURCE ALLOCATION:

- Adequate resources must be allocated to support volunteer programs, including funding for coordination, training, and recognition activities. Investment in volunteer management infrastructure is necessary, and may cover aspects like software for tracking volunteer hours, training materials, and staff dedicated to volunteer coordination.
- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What budget will we allocate for the volunteer program?
 - What resources (e.g., staff, materials, facilities) are needed to support the program?
 - How will we secure funding or donations to sustain the volunteer program?
 - What technology or tools will we use to manage volunteer activities?
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5. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:

- Comprehensive training programs are essential to equip volunteers with the skills needed for their roles. This includes initial orientation sessions covering policies, safety protocols, and role-specific tasks, as well as ongoing development opportunities such as workshops and seminars to enhance volunteer skills and keep them engaged.

- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What initial training will volunteers need before they start their roles?
 - How will ongoing training and development be provided to keep volunteers engaged and skilled?
 - Who will be responsible for designing and delivering training programs?
 - How will we evaluate the effectiveness of our training programs?
- 6. MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION:**
- Effective volunteer management involves dedicated staff or coordinators who oversee volunteer activities, maintain regular communication, provide feedback, and support volunteers in their roles. This includes addressing issues promptly, resolving conflicts, and creating a positive and productive volunteer experience.
 - **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - Who will be responsible for managing and supervising volunteers?
 - What systems and processes will be in place to monitor volunteer performance?
 - How will we provide feedback and support to volunteers?
 - What conflict resolution mechanisms will we have in place?
- 7. LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:**
- Volunteers must be aware of legal obligations, including liability coverage, background checks, and adherence to regulations. Clear policies and procedures should be established to protect both the volunteers and the organization. Ethical considerations include transparency in volunteer roles, ensuring fair treatment, and respecting volunteer rights.
 - **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What legal requirements must we comply with in our volunteer program (e.g., liability coverage, background checks)?
 - How will we ensure that volunteers are aware of and adhere to organizational policies and procedures?
 - What ethical standards will we uphold in our volunteer program?
 - How will we handle issues related to volunteer misconduct or breaches of policy?
- 8. IMPACT MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION:**
- Measuring the impact of volunteer contributions is crucial for demonstrating the value of the program to stakeholders. This includes tracking volunteer hours, activities, and community benefits.
 - **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What metrics will we use to measure the impact of our volunteer program?
 - How will we collect and analyze data on volunteer activities and outcomes?
 - What feedback mechanisms will be in place to gather input from volunteers and beneficiaries?
 - How will we report on the success and areas for improvement of the volunteer program?
- 9. VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT:**
- Understanding what motivates volunteers (e.g., civic duty, social connections, skill development) and addressing these motivations helps in keeping volunteers engaged and committed. Creating a motivating environment involves recognizing achievements, providing meaningful work, and offering opportunities for personal and professional growth.
 - **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - What are the primary motivations of our target volunteers (e.g., civic duty, skill development)?
 - How will we create a motivating environment for volunteers?
 - What opportunities for personal and professional growth will we offer to volunteers?
 - How will we keep volunteers engaged and committed over time?

10. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:

- Volunteer programs should promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring that volunteer opportunities are accessible to all community members, regardless of their background.
- **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**
 - How will we ensure that our volunteer program is accessible to all community members?
 - What strategies will we use to promote diversity and inclusion in our volunteer recruitment and management?
 - How will we create a welcoming and supportive environment for volunteers from diverse backgrounds?
 - How will we address and overcome any barriers to participation for underrepresented groups?

LIST OF RESOURCES:

WEBSITES

1. Wild Apricot: <https://wildapricot.com>
 - Nonprofit software provider with blog posts related to nonprofit management.
2. Volunteer Match: <https://www.volunteermatch.org>
 - A comprehensive volunteer matching platform connecting volunteers with nonprofit organizations.
3. Idealist Website: <https://www.idealists.org>
 - Provides resources and opportunities for volunteer recruitment and engagement in various causes.
4. Points of Light Website: <https://www.pointsoflight.org>
 - Offers resources and training for volunteer programs, promoting volunteer service globally.
5. The Corporation for National and Community Service Website: <https://www.nationalservice.gov>
 - A federal agency offering support and resources for volunteer programs and community service initiatives.
6. Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) Website: <https://www.avaintl.org>
 - Provides professional development and resources for volunteer administrators.

BOOKS

- Connors, T. D. (Ed.). (2011). **The Volunteer Management Handbook: Leadership Strategies for Success** (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. (*Essential reading for managing volunteers, covering all aspects of volunteer program management*)
- McLaughlin, K., & Pope, E. (2004). **Volunteer Program Management: A Guide for Nonprofit Organizations**. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. (*Practical guidance on developing and managing volunteer programs.*)

ARTICLES

Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L. (2015). In search of strategy: Universalistic, contingent, and configurational adoption of volunteer management practices. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 25(3), 235-254. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21123>

Hernandez Ortiz, T. L., Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L. (2020). What do nonprofits value in their volunteers? *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml>

Kang, S. C., & Nesbit, R. (2020). Local Government Volunteer Use: A Resource Dependence and Transaction Costs Explanation. *Public Administration Review*, 82(5), 806-817. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13320>