**7 Tips for Building a Volunteer Engagement Strategy**

Sometimes the real challenge is not recruiting volunteers – but, rather, keeping them engaged, happy, and eager to come back. Engagement efforts should not be localized to any certain part of the volunteer lifecycle, but instead need to be ongoing. Laying the groundwork for engagement starts the first time the volunteer comes through your door and continues with consistent communication and recognition.

In this post, we present seven tips for keeping your most important supporters engaged.

**Understand Motivation**Although volunteers obviously want to help your organization, they are often drawn to volunteerism for other reasons. This is something you will want to explore with each volunteer from the very beginning of his or her relationship with your nonprofit. Some individuals want a total change from their day jobs, while others may want to share their specific expertise, such as marketing or accounting. Your volunteer may also be looking for a way to incorporate a hobby, gain experience to add to a resume, or simply connect socially with others.

One of the fastest ways to lose a volunteer is to ignore his or her motivation. However, if you can match a volunteer’s interests to the tasks you assign, this will go a long way toward keeping him or her coming back on a regular basis.

**Tell Your Story**To deepen the connection to your cause, it’s critical to keep the focus on your mission and not on the organization. Inspire your volunteers by telling them about the people they will be assisting and the difference they are making. Don’t just rely on words. Show them pictures, or, better yet, some video footage of your nonprofit doing what it does best.

**Provide Orientation, Training, and Feedback**Volunteers expect a nonprofit to be professional and organized. This includes investing the time for proper orientation and training. You’ll want to distribute a handbook of your policies as well as outline the individual’s duties and how these play a role in the larger picture. Ease new volunteers into their tasks by pairing them up with more experienced supporters.

At the beginning of training, let volunteers know that you’ll be giving feedback periodically. Highlight the fact that this meeting will also be an opportunity for them to offer their suggestions to your organization. Follow up on your promise and be sure to solicit volunteer feedback regularly. The net result will be a better program – and happier volunteers.

**Be Flexible**Volunteers have busy lives. The more opportunities you can schedule in a variety of time slots and on various days, the better. Additionally, providing online scheduling through a cloud-based management system allows volunteers to register from any Internet-connected device at their leisure.

**Encourage a Sense of Community**

Another way to keep volunteers engaged is to develop a sense of connection – not just to your organization and mission but also to other volunteers. When possible, make your volunteer opportunities a chance for fun and an environment for friendships to develop. You can also leverage social media, but keep in mind that there’s nothing like face-to-face interaction.

## **Stay in Touch** Keep the lines of communication open with your volunteers. Take advantage of all the types of media available for engaging those who donate their time. For example, always remember to email or text the information about new volunteer opportunities.

On the flip side, ensure that you are also sharing your organization’s successes with volunteers. This is where storytelling comes into play once again. Tweet, post, send out newsletters, and be specific. Let your volunteers see how their hard work has translated into an impact in your community. The more vivid, the better. Give stats on the number of individuals helped, talk about the amount of volunteer hours donated to the project, and make it come to life with pictures and/or video.

## **Show Appreciation** Don’t forget to say “thank you.” Let volunteers know how much you appreciate their work each time they volunteer. And, although verbal encouragement is always welcomed, be sure to make a formal effort to recognize volunteers as well. Plan a party to say thanks or give small gifts on volunteer anniversaries. Communicate how much volunteers mean to you, and it will increase the likelihood of them coming back. **Engage More Volunteers** It’s important to maximize the time and effort that staff expends on new volunteers. By taking the time to incorporate engagement strategies, you’ll be pleased with your retention numbers and build deep, lasting relationships with your volunteers. These individuals often go on to become donors, and many times they recruit their friends to help out as well. Far from being haphazard or an afterthought, engagement should be viewed as a cornerstone in your volunteer program. It’s an investment that will continue to reap rewards.

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