

# Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

Human Resources 6 | 2018

## Definitions

**Volunteer**—A person who performs a service or task willingly and without pay.

**Volunteer Management**—The process of recruiting, selecting, training, supervising, and supporting volunteers to enhance an organization's performance and results.

*Three key areas where volunteers can benefit your organization are governance, programming and resource mobilization.*

## References

### [Idealist Volunteer Management Resource Center](#)

Comprehensive site focusing on the role of the volunteer program manager from Idealist.org.

### [What Your Volunteers Need to Be Happy](#)

Volunteerism has changed and volunteer expectations have evolved. It's no longer enough to put out a generic call for volunteers and then treat them all alike once they show up. Volunteers expect to give in order to get something back.

## Engaging Volunteers to Strengthen your Organization

**Q.** What do volunteers add to an organization, and how do we maximize their contribution?

**A.** By giving their time, energy, and talents, volunteers can generate enthusiasm, provide new skills, increase community engagement, serve as bridges to target populations, augment fundraising efforts and complement the work of paid staff. They can be an especially vital resource for organizations with limited staff and budgets that are straining to meet the needs of beneficiaries. However, the degree to which they add value to your work and mission depends on how they are recruited, assigned tasks, trained, supervised, evaluated and appreciated.

To make the most of volunteers and ensure they have a positive volunteer experience, it is important to manage them effectively. The following addresses how to maximize the value of volunteer support.

### Getting Started: Key Questions to Ask

The value of your volunteers will be determined by the degree to which they meet your organization's needs. To assess this, carefully consider where you need help, what resources you have in place and whether volunteers are the right solution. Here are some key questions to ask to determine whether you should and can engage volunteers:

- Do we have activities or tasks that are appropriate for non-staff to do?
- What kind of skills or knowledge does a person need to perform them?
- Are the activities or tasks specific and short term? Or are they ongoing ones, which require a longer term commitment?
- Will we need to train volunteers to ensure they are able to perform the tasks and maintain the quality standards of our organization?
- Do we have enough paid staff to train and support volunteers?
- Do we have the supplies that volunteers need for the tasks?
- How will we supervise and evaluate the work of volunteers?

## 5 Common Misconceptions about Managing Volunteers

- 1. Volunteers are free.** In fact, volunteers require investments of time and money to be effectively utilized.
- 2. Anyone can manage volunteers.** Volunteer management is as much a skill as staff management.
- 3. You do not need much time to manage volunteers.** Volunteers need both supervision and support—as you know, this takes time!
- 4. You do not need staff to manage volunteers (volunteers manage themselves, volunteers will just show up).** To maintain the quality of your programs, you must assign staff to oversee the work of your volunteers.
- 5. Volunteer management is a luxury we cannot afford.** Not true! Managing volunteers helps you make them an asset.

- Once we have invested in training volunteers, how will we keep them committed to our program?
- How will we document time contributed by volunteers, either to meet our cost-share requirement or to demonstrate the community's support for our activities?

### Recruit by Reaching Out to the Community

Once you determine that volunteers are right for your organization, and you know what you want them to do and what resources you need to support them, the next step is finding them. In general, people become volunteers at an organization one of two ways:

1. contacting an organization to offer their help, or
2. responding to recruitment efforts

For recruitment, think about the kinds of people you are hoping to attract to serve as volunteers, keeping in mind that people from within the local community are often the most invested and dedicated volunteers, because they have a personal interest in the work. Also consider finding volunteers from different gender, age and ethnic groups (if appropriate) to create a diverse team.

Then develop a recruitment plan. This might include:

- *Enlisting staff, Board members, and other personal contacts:* Many volunteers start doing community work because a friend, family member or neighbor asks them. People often respond positively if someone they know extends a personal invitation to them.
- *Going where the people are:* Instead of trying to get people to come to you, try going to them. To recruit volunteers, attend meetings of other groups and go to places and events where potential volunteers gather.
- *Getting the word out:* It is important to inform people that your organization exists and welcomes volunteers. Post information at markets, schools and community centers, on websites and in newsletters and other places potential volunteers might look.

### Match the Volunteer to the Task or Activity

It is helpful to create an application for potential volunteers to fill out, so you can gather contact information, background, education level, skills, time available and any additional information that may be relevant.

Upon receiving applications, review applicants' qualifications and consider whether their skills and abilities match the tasks and responsibilities you need them to do. You may want to invite selected applicants to your office for an interview, solicit and check references and verify any important background information.

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If you have lots of volunteers at one time, create a chart that includes the potential volunteers' names, contact information, available days and hours, special skills and what they are willing and not willing to do. This will help you keep track and match volunteers to positions that suit them.

Clearly outline for applicants the roles and responsibilities of volunteers. This can take the form of a simple discussion or a written agreement. Items you may want to address are:

- time commitment required (short term, long term or ongoing)
- specific tasks to be performed
- reporting
- location
- any training and supervision you will provide

By clarifying everyone's roles from the very beginning, you ensure that the volunteers and your organization have a shared understanding of what you can expect of them and what they can expect of you. This will help to prevent confusion or disagreements in the future.

### **Orient Volunteers to Your Organization**

Just like staff members, volunteers need someone to orient, train and manage them. You want to make new people feel welcome and explain your work, why you do it and why their help is important. Many people function better when they see the "big picture."

Delegate a staff member to provide volunteers with a comprehensive orientation, introducing them to your organization, its staff, vision and mission, offices, activities and structures. Not only will this orientation help them understand and perform their duties, it will provide them with valuable information to share with friends, family and acquaintances. Remember that, by virtue of their work with you, volunteers become ambassadors of your organization within the community.

### **Training Volunteers Is Crucial to Success—Yours and Theirs**

Often volunteers are ready and willing to work but may not be technically skilled or understand your organization's systems and procedures. Do not assume that new people will just "figure things out."

Consider creating a training binder that contains general information about your organization and information specific to what the volunteer will be doing. Also, develop a volunteer manual with relevant policies and procedures that can be given to each volunteer at the beginning of his or her service.

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If you have a large cohort of volunteers, you may want to do formal training sessions; if there are just a few volunteers doing different tasks across your organization, you may find it more efficient to use individualized mentorship and coaching to train volunteers.

### **Supervise as You Would Paid Staff**

Overseeing the work of volunteers is just as vital as overseeing the performance of staff. Here are a few essentials:

- *Use people's time wisely:* Keep time demands reasonable and clear. People like to know in advance what time commitment is needed.
- *Supervise volunteers:* A specific staff member, either a central volunteer coordinator or another staff member with whom they work closely, should supervise every volunteer. The volunteer and supervisor should check in regularly to address any questions or concerns each may have. Frequent and open communication between supervisors and volunteers helps to improve performance, ensure volunteers feel supported and address any problems that may arise.
- *Monitor and evaluate volunteers:* Even though they are unpaid, volunteers represent your organization, and their work can affect your reputation. Put in place measures to track attendance and punctuality, participation in project activities and achievement of results.

### **Recognize Good Work and Reward It**

Recognizing the work, time and energy of volunteers is a crucial part of effectively managing and maintaining their interest. It not only thanks people for their service, it highlights the importance of their contributions and encourages them to continue their work. Some ways to demonstrate your appreciation include:

- certificates of service
- volunteer profiles in reports and other publications
- volunteer appreciation events
- small tokens that identify the volunteer with your organization, such as t-shirts, hats, or bags (which let volunteers show pride in their work and gives your organization a little extra visibility in the process)
- public acknowledgment during community events
- opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge through training and conferences
- leadership opportunities among the cohort of volunteers

## For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [www.NGOConnect.net](http://www.NGOConnect.net). The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks and CSO support organizations worldwide.

Funding for this publication was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development, under the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) Global Leader Award. Its contents, managed by SCS Global, do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

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A note of caution: Don't offer benefits to volunteers that regular employees receive. Remember, volunteers, by definition, are not monetarily compensated for their work.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to recognizing volunteers. Regardless of the size and set-up of your own volunteer program, the message is the same: Pay attention to your volunteers, make them feel included and don't forget to say "thank you" as part of your day-to-day culture. Do this and you'll find yourself with happy and productive volunteers.

