



How to Manage Volunteer Burnout

How do you manage volunteer burnout?

Managing burnout actually begins from your first contact with volunteers. Get to know them – what motivates them, why they're serving, what they hope to give and receive from the experience – and then match them with an appropriate volunteer opportunity. As they serve with your organization, watch for signs that they may be getting burned out. Signs may include changes in attendance, attitude or work performance.

Volunteer burnout may be rooted in a lack of volunteer infrastructure at the organization. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Do you adequately support volunteers?
- Do they understand their roles and know who to go to for additional information?
- Do the employees or volunteer leaders have the skills to supervise the volunteers?
- Do you have solid volunteer engagement practices in place?
- Do volunteers feel appreciated and see how their work is contributing to the mission of your organization?

A major cause of burnout is dissatisfaction. Volunteers may want to use or gain new skills. Perhaps they're tired of their current roles and are looking for a new challenge or even a leadership position. They may feel that their daily tasks don't align with the position description or recruitment message. Burnout also results when volunteer over-commit themselves to multiple tasks. Staying in contact with volunteers and maintaining open communication can help you spot potential problems before they occur.

Tools to consider when Managing Volunteer Burnout

At the most basic level, ask! Sit down and talk to your volunteers. Find out if they're truly burned out and why. More importantly, talk about ways to correct the problem and keep them actively engaged at your organization. Then follow through on your commitments.

Another useful practice is to ensure that all employees and volunteer leaders have adequate training to work with volunteers. Anyone who will be leading volunteers should be equipped with the necessary skills to recruit, train, support and recognize volunteers. Even those who aren't directly working with volunteers should understand how volunteers are contributing to the organization.



POINTS OF LIGHT

The importance of Managing Volunteer Burnout

People volunteer with an organization for a specific, and often very personal, reason. Burn out is a sign that the experience didn't live up to their expectations. Volunteers in this situation won't offer their best skills and may negatively influence other volunteers. This situation could impact how effectively and efficiently your organization operates. These volunteers will likely stop serving with your organization. Even before they leave, they may share only the negative aspects of their experiences with friends, family or their social media networks, which can in turn affect how the community, potential volunteers and potential funders view your organization.

Volunteer Burnout Management Case example

A student from a local college volunteered as the lead on a long-term project. Because the project was so large and was going to take several months, he could have easily gotten burned out. To help keep him motivated about the work, we divided the project into several smaller pieces. We celebrated each of these milestones and recognized his work toward the ultimate goal. We also talked often of the impact of this project and encouraged him to take off some time in the summer to prepare for the next semester of college. He just returned this week and is energized and ready for the next phase of the project.

Resources for Volunteer Management

The insights are primarily based on experience and best practices from HandsOn Network affiliates. However, another contributing factor is volunteer motivation. In *The Volunteer Development Toolbox* (1993), Marilyn Mackenzie and Gail Moore apply Atkinson and McClelland's research on motivation to volunteering. This research suggests that people have motivators that affect how they prefer to be supervised, recognized and placed in jobs or volunteer opportunities. Understanding a person's primary motivator can help you place and support volunteers and help prevent burnout.

Also use these helpful links;

- Volunteer Recognition
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/The_Nine_Rules_of_Recognition.pdf
- Volunteer Leadership
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/GI_DevelopingVolunteerLeaders_2010_HON.pdf
- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/BP_VolunteerRecruitment_2010_HON.pdf