A Checklist for an Energetic Volunteer Force

By Peggy Hoffman, CAE, Mariner Management & Marketing

What makes us different than any other organization is our members!

What makes us successful is engaging those members!

Here’s a list of Top 10 elements for a volunteer management program that engages and inspires volunteers. One recommended resource on association volunteering that includes data on volunteering and guiding questions to help you use the data is The Decision To Volunteer: Why people give their time and how you can engage them by Beth Gazley and Monica Dignam (2008, ASAE-The Center for Leadership).

1. **Connection to your association’s strategic and program plans** both in terms of how they contribute to the association and how the association is investing in this resource. It’s about establishing a commitment to volunteers.

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<th>Public Library Association</th>
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<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Organizational Excellence</td>
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<td><strong>Objective (3): Improve opportunities for member engagement.</strong></td>
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2. **Create a volunteer map** that (1) helps members visualize how they fit and navigate the volunteer opportunities and (2) helps staff see the connections and improve volunteer involvement.

3. **Create a volunteer management plan and vision statement.** Start with the vision statement since it then becomes a powerful guide in creating and living the plan.

   **AADE’s Volunteer Program Vision**
   
   AADE highly values its volunteers who, by their commitment to the profession, guide and assist in the development and furtherance of our mission.

4. **Develop job descriptions for every role.** They don’t have to be long or formal in all cases; just answer the 5 W’s (Who-What-Where-When-Why). The most important is likely the “why” for it both sets need and goal and can become the volunteer’s inspiration to keep them “on the job.”
5. **Hire a Volunteer Talent Scout** – someone or a task group whose full purpose is scouting for volunteers. This can be your new nominating committee or your new membership committee that is focused on engagement. The point is to consistently and intentionally be looking for future volunteers and for ways to plug members in.

6. **Activate an adhocracy.** This means populating your options with volunteer positions that offer members flexibility, short-term commitments, and convenient ways to connect. Here’s a [good piece by Deirdre Reid](#) on micro-volunteering. The why is clear as ASAE’s *Decision To Volunteer* and many other surveys tell us volunteers are looking for these small and virtual jobs.

7. **Be sure to reward and recognize volunteers.** But follow a golden rule: Recognize activity, Reward outcomes. It starts with a simple thank you and grows from there. For some ideas on rewards and recognition, check out a [post I wrote](#) and the [Points of Light National Volunteer Week](#) (it’s April 21-27, 2013).

8. **Set metrics for your volunteer program and identify measureable outcomes for all volunteer roles.** These metrics can be “customer,” volunteer or program oriented but in any case they set the performance benchmark. For one simple look at this, read “3 Volunteer Program Metrics That Will Get You Respect” by Tobi Johnson. For a more detailed discussion, download “Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make” by Melissa Eystad, with permission of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Both are geared for service organizations but have relevance to associations.

9. **Have a staff member who “owns” the volunteer program but require everyone to be in the boat.** Accomplishing this will require staff orientation and training to using and engaging volunteers, and inclusion of working with volunteers as component in staff’s job description and, where appropriate, their annual goals and review.

10. **Remember the key motivation for most volunteers is doing something for the greater good** (defined as your profession/industry, your association, the community your association supports, et al) according to ASAE’s *Decision To Volunteer*. For most there is also a need to see the value to themselves in terms of gaining new perspectives, skill development, and access to peer and others in the profession. For association volunteers, volunteering is a pro-social endeavor.