

7 Tips for Reviewing Your Volunteers and Volunteer Programs



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Do you have evaluation methods for both your volunteers and volunteer program? If the answer is “no,” you are not alone; in fact, you’re in the majority. However, these components can provide crucial quantitative measures that help nonprofit organizations make informed decisions and determine their next steps. The goal of this whitepaper is to break down the process of developing and using these assessment tools into easy, manageable pieces.

Evaluating Your Volunteers



To many volunteer coordinators, the concept of actually evaluating volunteers may seem strange. After all, these folks are freely giving their time. Putting them through an evaluation may seem unfair and even unappreciative. The truth is, however, that these helpers are anticipating something in return for their efforts. Among other motivations, they expect a well-run program filled with dedicated and competent volunteers. By completing evaluations, you’ll send a clear message that you are running a serious program.

You’ll also insure that volunteers are utilizing — and not draining — precious resources.

Tip 1: Outline Your Volunteer Review Process

Once you’ve decided that you are going to evaluate your volunteers, it’s time to think about the process. Even though the tendency may be to interact with volunteers more casually than with paid staff, some experts recommend making sure the volunteer evaluation process closely mimics that of the one used for those on your payroll. In fact, you may even want to use an identical process. This means you won’t be doubling your efforts by creating a whole new set of forms and systems specifically for volunteers.

Tip 2: Decide on a “Probationary Period” for Volunteers

Once you’ve honed in on your process, you’ll want to decide how often you are going to give feedback. One of the best evaluation devices most businesses use is the “probationary period.” This is also a great way to set the tone for your volunteers. Letting them know that for the first 30, 60, or 90 days they will be receiving a lot of instruction and feedback both assures them they won’t be thrown to the wolves and lets you keep a close eye on them. In addition, this creates a sort of forced reflection point to see if the volunteer and the organization are a good fit for each other.

Evaluating Your Volunteers (cont.)

Tip 3: Determine Volunteer Review Frequency

Of course, you will also want to decide how often volunteers will be evaluated after the probationary period. Most of your successful volunteers will probably welcome the opportunity to receive feedback, and some of the marginal candidates may weed themselves out. All in all, evaluations will help significantly aid in the volunteer management process, which will ultimately help your program.

Tip 4: Develop Your Volunteer Review Template

The last step in setting up your volunteer review framework is to create standard documents to use as review tools. This should include both a form for a volunteer coordinator or other supervisor to rate the volunteer and a survey for the volunteer to give his or her thoughts on the organization, and more specifically, its volunteer program.

Let's start with developing a review of the volunteer. A common evaluation technique is to devise statements that reflect what you expect out of volunteers. These may include:

- Volunteer clearly understands the organization's mission.
- Volunteer reports for duty as assigned.
- Volunteer accomplishes tasks as assigned.

Now, decide on a rating scale for the reviewer to use regarding how volunteers measure up to these standards. For example, an evaluator could use a rating scale such as this:

- 3 = Exceeds standard
- 2 = Meets standard
- 1 = Needs improvement
- NA = Not applicable

If you need more leeway, consider a scale like this one:

- 5 = Strongly agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly disagree
- NA = Not applicable

Evaluating Your Volunteers (cont.)

Scores can then be added together and averaged by the number of ratings given to produce an overall figure that reflects the volunteer's performance. Be sure to leave room for the reviewer's additional comments. Once you have all this data, of course, don't just tuck it away in the volunteer's file. Set aside time to sit down and talk with the volunteer about the overall score and touch on what she or he is doing well and what may need some work.

However, this task just completes half of the picture. As we mentioned earlier in this section, not only should this be a time to let volunteers know how they are doing, but also an opportunity for volunteers to give a view of your organization from their standpoint. A volunteer may have been given a low rating on understanding the organization's mission or his or her specific tasks. However, if a volunteer reports that orientation or training was spotty, perhaps this played into the sub-par performance, and your organization may need to revamp. Volunteers are also in a unique position of seeing some of the inner workings of your organization from a fresh vantage point and may be able to provide valuable suggestions. You may want to use a rating scale for some areas, such as orientation and supervision. Open-ended questions are also good, such as:

- Are there any skills you would like to develop through your volunteer work?
- What could we provide to make performing your tasks easier and/or faster?
- What suggestions do you have for the organization as a whole?
- What suggestions do you have specifically for our volunteer program?

Making evaluations a two-way street opens lines of communication and strengthens both volunteers and your organization.



Following are examples of volunteer evaluations:

[Sample Volunteer Performance Evaluation](#)

[Mercy Health Volunteer Evaluation](#)

[Lake County Volunteer Evaluation](#)

Evaluating Your Volunteer Programs

As you can see, giving and receiving regular reviews from volunteers is one key to a thriving nonprofit. However, here's a secret that is sometimes overlooked: your volunteers can only be as good as your volunteer program. Therefore, it's also important to review and assess it as well. In this section we lay out the steps for doing so, from goal-setting to assessment.

Tip 5: Start with Goals for the Program



To properly evaluate your volunteer program(s), it is important to have previously stated goals to measure progress. When setting up your volunteer program, you should have developed some goals for it. Ideally, these benchmarks could be quantified and exhibited by some key performance indicators (KPIs). Every situation is different, but some examples of KPIs include the total number of active volunteers, number of volunteer hours logged, individuals served, monetary value of services rendered, or any other number of possibilities related to your organization. The main point is to make sure the

indicators are meaningful and measurable.

If you haven't already established any goals, be sure to make it a priority. It's hard to know where you're going if you don't know where you've been. With the proper volunteer management software, tracking and compiling these numbers should be easy.

The way to identify results and success is to articulate goals and objectives. Following is some basic information that may help demystify the goal-setting process.

A goal, of course, is simply what you want to accomplish. Goals are defined in broad strokes and are often long-term. As a simple example, your organization's goal might be to expand its impact on individuals within the county.

How will the organization know if or when it has achieved its goal? This is where objectives come into play. An objective brings a specific aspect of the goal into sharp focus. In addition, an objective is concrete and short-term. All objectives should address the following components:

- Your target demographic – What group of individuals do you seek to help?
- Your agency's impact – What is the desired outcome of your efforts?
- A timeframe – What is the deadline to meet your objective?

Evaluating Your Volunteer Programs (cont.)

- A “yardstick” for measuring success – In what quantifiable way(s) will you measure your efforts? This is where KPIs come into the discussion.

Using our earlier example, an objective for your organization may read as follows: To develop a new service program for county residents, we will recruit 50 new volunteers within the next four months.

Tip 6: Gather Stakeholder Feedback about Your Program(s)

Goals and key performance indicator data are important: they can assure us that things are going well or alert us when there is a problem. However, on their own, KPIs don’t show us the whole picture. To get a more global view of why your numbers are up or down, you will probably have to dig deeper by asking for other people’s perceptions.

An easy way to do this is through surveys. Make sure to send them to all involved in order to get a global view. You’ll want input from attendees, volunteers, and paid staff. Each group is likely to have a completely different perspective.

For more detail, conduct some interviews. Create situations in which the interviewee can be honest. Solicit help from those outside the program to perform the interviews. With the interviewer as a neutral party, interviewees won’t be as tempted to “sugarcoat” their answers. Similarly, exit interviews of volunteers are a great method of getting honest feedback, since they are on their way out the door.

The important thing to remember is to take your evaluation results in stride. Some folks will always be extra-critical, while others will glow about everything. Focus on what most of the people think of your program most of the time.

Tip 7: Translate Feedback & Data Into an Action Plan

Now, with your numbers and feedback analyzed, it’s time to look forward and create an action plan and a new set of goals.

Continuing our example, your organization might decide on the following activities to accomplish an objective of recruiting additional volunteers:

- Develop and distribute updated volunteer recruitment flyers
- Run volunteer recruitment ads on local TV and radio
- Increase focus on volunteer recruitment in social media avenues

Evaluating Your Volunteer Programs (cont.)

As you can see, achieving just two or three objectives may require a significant amount of time and energy. In fact, to set yourself up for success, make sure your objectives are SMART. This commonly-used acronym reminds us that objectives should be:

- Specific – Your objective is tightly focused and concrete.
- Measurable – You have defined a means to quantify your efforts.
- Attainable – Your objective may be a stretch to achieve; however, at the same time, the bar has not been set unrealistically high.
- Relevant – Your volunteer program’s objectives mesh with the overall goals of your organization.
- Time-oriented – Set a deadline for which to accomplish your objective (e.g., six or twelve months).

Although it does take effort to formally review volunteers — and your volunteer program in general — the process can be invigorating. It’s an opportunity for staff and volunteers alike to re-evaluate, refocus, and recharge.

Need a Tool to Help Manage Volunteers & Volunteer Programs?

VolunteerHub is the industry’s leading volunteer scheduling and management software. Since 1996, VolunteerHub has been used by nonprofits to track over 5 billion hours (yes, billion with a “b”), adding over \$110 billion in value to nonprofits worldwide. With innovative features such as integration with The Raiser’s Edge and eTapestry, customizable landing pages, and mobile device compatibility, VolunteerHub helps organizations engage more volunteers.

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