



VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch Learning Center
Introductory Approaches

Designing Virtual Opportunities Managing Remote Volunteers

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Agenda

- Building – or rebuilding – a foundation
- Building a Relationship with Remote Volunteers
- Challenges and Pitfalls
- Tools and Tips
- Getting Started

Virtual Opportunities

Virtual opportunities and remote volunteers can expand your program – Think about the work now.

What could be different?

- Remote and offsite, not necessarily computer based, or far geographically.
- What can be done offsite? What has to be done onsite?
- What can be expanded?
- What support or foundational work could be done?

Create a Strong Foundation

- Clear roles, responsibilities even more important with remote volunteers.
 - Position descriptions, timeline, authority continuum, agreement letters, responsible decision makers.
- Formalize communication channels.
 - Regular check-ins, informal/ad hoc communication, communicate decision making.
- Make it easy to stay on track.
 - Process/work templates, checklists, job aides, impact tracking, welcome packet/getting started toolkit.

Don't abandon what works!

- Processes and policies are in place for a reason– Still want to screen and interview. Orient and train.
- Create an authority continuum
 - What can volunteers decide on their own, decide with consultation, never decide?
- Needs assessment for the role/work
 - Make sure you include evaluation and close the loop!

Building the Relationship

A little preparation can create big impacts

- Understand your management style and share that with remote volunteers.
- Meet volunteers where they want to be met.
 - Clear conversations around how much management they need/want. Be open to feedback.
- Be aware of patterns that create unsustainable expectations.
 - High-touch relationships with remote volunteers? Volunteers over extending themselves – too much on their plate, out of sight, out of mind.

Challenges

- Build a strong relationship with someone off site.
- Develop strong communication with someone you've never met in person.
- Create a strong foundation using process and documents.
- Outline clear expectations and make sure everyone is on the same page.
- Ensure that remote volunteers are included in the work of the nonprofit and share the work of remote volunteers with your organization.

Two-Way Communication Plan

- Be prepared to have dynamic conversations.
 - Can't assume or know what a volunteer is thinking.
- Work to ensure two way conversation.
 - Important to communicate out about goals and expectations and day-to-day happenings.
 - Just as important to allow remote volunteers to contribute ideas, expertise, impact into the organization.
- Keep things on track and break up the routine.
 - Document activities, and re-engage, retrain, recognize and/or remove. Don't let communication style become auto-pilot.

Manage Expectations

Expectations should be so transparent everything is in black and white:

- Updates from the office and management –what’s going on behind the scenes, happening in the organization
 - Nothing should be assumed, no one is being ignored, and that their voice is being heard.
 - Insure that everyone is assured
- Include the process for providing feedback
 - Be prepared/Plan for more difficult conversations - mentoring or coaching shouldn’t be a surprise

When things don't go as planned...

Design processes ahead of time because it won't always go as expected

- Be clear about ramifications as well as expectations
 - If you can't finish this by the due date I'll have to reassign this project
- Create a Plan B or Special Ops Team for these situations
 - Ensure that the Plan B doesn't trigger more guilt
- Plan B triggered with enough time that deadlines can be met.

Tools for Building Relationships

- Tap into Technology:
 - Collaboration - Google Docs, Google Forms, Slideshare, DropBox, Pinterest
 - Communications - Zoom, Google Meet, Slack, Google Chat, WhatsApp, Twitter Hashtags, LinkedIn/Google Groups
 - Online icebreakers or activities – avatar or the week, view from my window
- Keep it Old School:
 - Pics of notes or whiteboard
 - Phone and voicemail check in
 - FAQs
 - Welcome binder, mailing/packing supplies

Using Tools to Build Relationships

Tools can help develop and maintain successful relationships with remote volunteers:

- Make sure what you're using works! Don't duplicate work or create difficult systems.
- Don't be afraid of new ideas or tools – Brainstorm or ask what's new/hot.
- Remember to keep people engaged and don't go on auto-pilot with your communication style.
- What online tools are your volunteers using already?

Getting Started Building Better Relationships

- What's working now, and where do you have room to improve?
 - Don't throw everything out, ask what's working, and be open to feedback.
- Get comfortable with your leadership and communication style.
 - Feedback and coaching can be uncomfortable but they're key to successful remote volunteers
- Understand what challenges your remote volunteers bring to your organization
 - Out of sight, out of mind? Inability to set boundaries?

Getting Started Building Better Relationships

- Work with remote volunteers to create a strong foundation
 - Agreement letters, authority continuum, planned and ad hoc communication
- So transparent it's Black and White!
 - But, have a Plan B or Special Ops team ready to go
- Be prepared to adapt and evolve, and seek feedback
 - It's not going to be perfect on the first try. Plan for feedback and program changes.

Thank you!

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