

## Overview: Engaging & Retaining New Members

### Motivation & Expectations

Research into volunteers dropping out found that it had less to do with a waning of enthusiasm & much more to do with how reality didn't match expectations about how the volunteers expected to feel. The study noted that volunteers often felt alone & unrecognized, leading to anger & disappointment. It is important to remember that people volunteer for different reasons. Six primary reasons to volunteer are:

1. Express humanitarian values – These volunteers tend to stay!
2. Search for understanding
3. Obtain career skills/contacts (High dropout rate)
4. Alleviate guilt about having more than others
5. Enhance self-worth/self esteem
6. Join a like-minded group to socialize

*Volunteer outcomes are influenced by the extent to which the experience matches the person's motivation to join*

Past experience with other organizations can also impact the volunteer's experience. When a volunteer has experience with a well-established, high functioning and well-funded organization versus newly formed grass-roots organization

- Volunteer may be more likely to be critical of grass-roots lack of structure, funding, etc.
- Leadership feels apologetic and a sense of "not measuring up"
- Grass roots organizations need to embrace where they are – "We are a work in progress and will become more sophisticated over time"
- Leadership needs to allow itself leeway

### Leadership Style and Volunteer Retention

The relationship between leaders and volunteers play an even greater role in fostering commitment within the volunteer. Leadership styles:

- Transactional leadership refers to the exchange relationship between leaders and followers and is aimed at controlling followers through reward or punishment.
- Transformational leadership inspires followers to move past their own self-interests to achieve more than what they thought possible.

In a volunteer setting with little tangible exchange between organizations and volunteers (no salary, bonuses, or health benefits), transformational leadership, with its focus on engagement at a personal level, is crucial.

***We must be transformational leaders and inspirational to our volunteers***

## **Under transformational leadership:**

- Leaders foster group identification and cohesion and volunteers feel confident in other volunteers
- Leaders show concern about volunteer development, involve them in decisions, and focus on the meaning of the work leading to more satisfied volunteers
- Volunteers develop a positive perception about the importance of their work
- Volunteers view their activities as more meaningful
- Volunteers have more positive relationships with other volunteers

## **Communication & Interaction**

Studies show that volunteers do better with more frequent contact with leaders and other volunteers

- Solitary activity appears very dissatisfying as having an individual assignment is less likely to keep a volunteer engaged
- Volunteers often become more engaged if they develop relationships with others
- Communication provides the opportunity to replenish volunteer's motivation and enthusiasm between interactions

Note: Volunteers may be reluctant to join new projects which could involve a different team of people because of the positive relationships they form with other volunteers. It is important to prevent cliques from developing to avoid perception of exclusive groups and actively demonstrate the message we are all in this together.

## **Recommendations:**

- Understand why your volunteer is involved – Ask why they joined and what they hope to achieve
- Prepare a summary document to define likely experience: “Some Fun, Some Not”, Define what we do, what is involved, types of activities
- Consistent message from leaders about the state of the organization
- Remember that we each have our own goal and a common goal.
  - Remind volunteers that is our common goal that is driving us and they are important to reaching that goal
  - Remind volunteers why they are involved – restate why we are working on this
- Recognized efforts publicly – example: Open invitation conference calls to spotlight a group to share challenges and accomplishments
- Communication frequency - at least monthly - maximum six weeks
  - Inspirational message is the first and last thing addressed in communications
  - Provide a teachable moment – open with a quote
- Do things together – both big and small efforts are important

## **Suggested reading list**

Dwyer & Bono (2013, Winter). Sources of volunteer motivation. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 24(2), 181-205

Sustaining grassroots community-based programs: A toolkit for community and faith-based service providers.

<https://sites.ed.gov/aapi/files/2014/03/SAMHSA-Toolkit.pdf>

Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir (2002, August). Impact of transformational leadership on follower development and performance: A field experiment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(4), 735-744.

Fisher & Ury (1981). *Getting to yes*. Penguin Books.