



FOUR FUNDAMENTAL TIPS FOR MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

Because we know how important
they are to your organization.



The Corporation for National and Community Service

estimates that in 2015 [more than 62 million American adults](#) volunteered through an organization completing 7.9 billion hours of service. That's nearly 25% of the U.S. adult population.

We know how important volunteers are for running your day-to-day operations and programs. However, they can also pose a huge risk to your organization. Do you know the top risks associated with volunteers? Learn how to get ahead of them.

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Content courtesy of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center.





8 RISKS TO CONSIDER WHEN MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

Many nonprofit leaders call their volunteers the lifeblood or heart of their missions. This is why, more than ever, volunteer recruitment, management and retention must be appropriate and thoughtful. This includes getting to know your volunteers and outlining your expectations. Without providing ample support and training, a volunteer could present greater risk than benefit to your nonprofit. Some of these risks include:

- + Accidentally or purposefully harming themselves.
- + Accidentally or purposefully harming a client or community member, nonprofit employee, or fellow volunteer.
- + Releasing sensitive information to an unauthorized party.
- + Promoting the wrong messages about your nonprofit's values in the media or online.
- + Disengaging and damaging the morale of fellow volunteers through complaints or negative statements about your nonprofit.
- + Claiming to be a paid employee (Which could lead to legal and financial consequences for your organization.).
- + Interacting inappropriately with a client or service recipient, a donor, or other external stakeholders.
- + Misunderstanding his or her authority, leading to decisions that might harm your nonprofit (e.g., signing contracts without authority, speaking to media representatives without permission, etc.).

To reduce the likelihood of these risks it is essential to empower your volunteers. Safeguard your mission by trying out the following fundamental tips for managing volunteers.

4 TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR VOLUNTEERS

1. *Distinguish volunteers from employees*

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a volunteer is an individual who donates his or her time and services "...usually on a part-time basis, for public service, religious, or humanitarian objectives... without contemplation of pay." Employee and volunteer roles must remain distinct in order to protect your nonprofit from legal and financial risk. If a volunteer is able to prove that he or she was improperly classified, then your nonprofit could face a fine and as well as being held liable for taxes and back wages owed to the individual.

Key Volunteer Roles

- + Volunteering is voluntary! Volunteers should never be coerced – they can only perform duties by their own choice. Similarly, you cannot require your paid employees to volunteer for your organization.
- + Volunteers should not displace regular employees.
- + Volunteer activities should be less than full-time.
- + Volunteers should not expect payment for their services, and nonprofits should not promise any form of payment to their volunteers.

Stipends

The Fair Labor Standards Act states that volunteers may be offered stipends to help cover out-of-pocket costs related to volunteering, as long as the stipends are de minimis, which means less than 20% of what a paid employee would receive for comparable work. Stipends are taxable income, so volunteers must include any stipends on their annual tax returns. Because volunteers are not compensated for their work, nonprofit leaders must be careful not to link stipends to a volunteer's productivity or the number of hours that he or she has volunteered.

Reimbursement

You may also choose to reimburse volunteers for regular business expenses that they have made with permission of the nonprofit as part of their volunteer roles (e.g., mileage, supplies to make signs, event staff t-shirts bought for the volunteer team, etc.). If you offer reimbursement, establish a clear reimbursement policy and communicate the policy to your volunteers.

2. Offer clear expectations and training

Volunteers are more likely to make a positive impact on your mission if they are given clear guidance and training to help them fulfill their roles. Don't make the mistake of assuming that your volunteer knows what you want them to do and how you want them to behave. In order to set your volunteers – and your organization – up for success, consider providing them with the following:

Volunteer Role Description

Just as employees have job descriptions, volunteers want to know what their key responsibilities and tasks are, too. Consider posting volunteer role descriptions on your nonprofit's website that prospective volunteers can review before applying.

On-boarding and Ongoing Training

One size training does not fit all. For example, an event volunteer might only need a short orientation on-site the day of your event whereas a long-term volunteer might require more in-depth training about your nonprofit's operations and programs.

Volunteer Handbook

Employee and volunteer handbooks should be distinct to reduce any confusion about different roles. A volunteer handbook might include:

- + The mission and history of your nonprofit
- + Core programs and stakeholder groups
- + Key messages from the volunteer orientation or on-boarding program
- + Volunteer screening practices
- + Volunteer code of conduct and any prohibited conduct
- + How volunteers can contact their supervisor, file complaints, or request additional training
- + How volunteers should submit reports about safety hazards or incidents they have witnessed

3. Screen with care

Screen volunteers consistently and fairly based on their specific roles to ensure that your nonprofit is selecting the most suitable applicants.

Screening mechanisms

- + Applications
- + Reference checks
- + Interviews
- + Criminal history background checks

Reminder: Screening should be designed to suit the specific volunteer role. For example, if you are engaging a volunteer who will have access to your nonprofit's financial information, donor information or young clients, then it is wise to conduct more rigorous screening than for a volunteer who would have little access to your greatest assets.

4. Understand volunteer protection laws

While some laws exist to provide protection to volunteers, these laws might only offer narrow protection. Nonprofit leaders must understand volunteer protection laws and be careful to not overstate a particular law's purpose or value in order to calm a volunteer's fears about liability.

The Federal Volunteer Protection Act (VPA)

The VPA provides defense for legal claims alleging negligence that have been made against volunteers. The VPA provides defense for a volunteer that falls under specific criteria.

Example: A volunteer is truly classified as a volunteer and has not received compensation in excess of \$500.

Aside from the VPA, each state has its own volunteer protection laws, and these differ greatly. Get to the know VPA and your state laws so that you can provide sound information to your valuable volunteers.

Volunteers are an essential tool in helping your nonprofit to stay afloat. By creating a positive environment and offering ample guidance and support to your volunteers, you can help to reduce the chances that volunteers will act against your nonprofit and help ensure that they will make a great impact on your mission.

▶ How can we help you and your nonprofit in your mission to make a difference? Call us today to find an agent or get a free, no-pressure quote and insurance proposal. **1.888.218.8561.**

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