

# 7 SECRETS TO HIGH VOLUNTEER LOYALTY

Use this worksheet to consider whether your volunteer management practices align with today's scholarly research on volunteer retention.

# 1

## Connect the Dots Between Practice & Impact

By purposefully choosing management practices that have shown promise and are most likely to work in your context, you will be more likely to have a positive effect on volunteer satisfaction. This will impact volunteer retention and, ultimately, increase the impact you can have on your mission.

MANAGEMENT  
PRACTICES

VOLUNTEER  
SATISFACTION

VOLUNTEER  
RETENTION

COMMUNITY  
IMPACT

### Consider:

*Which evidence-based management practices noted below do you have in place now? What might you add? How can you assess whether or not new interventions are having a positive impact on volunteer satisfaction? Jot down your thoughts below.*

## 2

**Align Planning Processes for the Right Volunteer Roles**

Researchers found evidence that human resources management planning practices were associated with fewer retention problems for volunteer sport coaches and volunteers in other formal positions.

- Identify potential volunteers before the season commences
- Target individuals for volunteer positions based on their skills
- Engage in succession planning to replace key volunteers
- Provide role or job descriptions for individual volunteers
- Actively encourage turnover of volunteers in key positions
- Maintain a database of volunteers' skills, qualifications and experience

However, planning practices were not a significant predictor of fewer problems with volunteer leadership positions.

**Consider:**

*Which planning processes noted above does your agency invest in for regular volunteer positions? For leadership roles?*

*Research: Cuskelly, et al., "Volunteer Management Practices and Volunteer Retention: A Human Resource Management Approach," Sport Management Review, 9 (2006)*

## 3

**Uncover the Promises Volunteers Think You've Made**

Psychological contracts (PCs) drive much of our understanding of fairness in the workplace, both as employees and volunteers. They represent the mutual beliefs, perceptions, and informal obligations that each party perceived to be true. These include both the implicit "unwritten" and explicit "clearly expressed" promises.

A psychological contract is based on what the individual and the organization each bring to the relationship, and it rests on the notion of reciprocity. For example, volunteers may expect that nonprofit staff will be friendly and supportive at all times. Employees may expect that volunteers will be loyal to the organization at all costs. When either party believes the promise has been broken, they may withdraw support or leave the organization.

**Consider:**

*What do volunteers expect of your organization? What do you expect of volunteers?  
Are these expectations clearly explained and understood by both parties?  
Is everyone following through?*

*Research: Stirling, Christine, Kilpatrick, Sue & Orpin, Peter, "A psychological contract perspective to the link between non-profit organizations' management practices and volunteer sustainability," Human Resource Development International, 14:3 (2011)*

## 4

## Focus on Volunteer Satisfaction for Both Episodic and Long-term Volunteers

Researchers identified five key antecedents and experiences that may affect episodic volunteer retention. These include:

- **Motives** for episodic volunteering (e.g., **social motives** of spending time with family/friends & having fun or **other-oriented** of fighting cancer)
- **Psychological sense of community** (sense of connection the EV feels to the community in which they live)
- **Social norms** (perceived support or pressure from others for episodic volunteering)
- **Satisfaction** with episodic volunteering
- **Organizational commitment** (loyalty to the organization and willingness to exert effort for the organization & acceptance of the organization's values)

For all three phases of volunteering (**Novice** – first time, **Transition** – sporadically for 2-4 years, **Sustained** – 5 or 6 years consecutively), satisfaction with the episodic volunteering experience, above all others, predicted an intention to continue volunteering in the future.

### Consider:

*How do you currently track the motivations and satisfaction of episodic volunteers?  
What do you do with the information you collect?*

*Research: Hyde, Melissa K., et al. "Episodic volunteering and retention: An integrated theoretical approach." Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 45.1 (2016)*

## 5

## Foster Emotional Connectivity With Volunteers

Researchers conducted a total of 40 interviews with “pro-social ventures” in Europe focused on sustainable energy or food and spent about a month with various volunteers in the field. They also examined internal correspondence/documentation and social media posts.

Their findings show that successful entrepreneurs apply the following emotion-focused practices in order to emphasize a feel-good atmosphere, in spite of the inherent dualities and ambiguities present in their initiative, to secure volunteers’ emotional attachment to the venture’s mission.

### Energizing

- Inducing excitement & enthusiasm
- Visualization (describing, imagine if...)
- Ritualized interaction (meetings, voting, etc.)

### Dissociating

- transfer conflicting feelings into a repository
- creating greater social meaning (e.g., ethics)
- portraying the experience as a necessary evil

### Perspective-taking

- place an individual in another person’s position
- Listening sessions to release stress
- Walking in another’s shoes

## Consider:

*How and when can you use these strategies in your own organization? How can you train staff who supervise volunteers to use them, as well?*

Research: Farny, Stefan, et al. “Volunteer Retention in Prosocial Venturing- The Role of Emotional Connectivity” *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (April, 2018)

## 6

## Support Volunteers as a Unique Stakeholder Group

Researchers found a statistically relevant relationship between the components of interactional volunteer management and preferred volunteer management outcomes -- both retention and recruitment -- even when controlled for organizational characteristics.

Interactional management is different than traditional HR management practices equated with paid staff. They include:

- Balance of interest & persuasion
- Participation & co-determination
- Strategic commitment
- Coordination beyond org borders
- Role clarity
- Team spirit
- Respect & informal recognition

Also significant, interactional volunteer management consisted of behaviors and attitudes promoted not only by the volunteer coordinator but also by paid staff, the strategic “body” (decision-makers), and other key stakeholders.

### Consider:

*How do you currently address the “people” side of leading volunteers in the areas listed above? Who is responsible for modeling these attitudes?*

*Research: Studer, Sibylle, “Volunteer Management: Responding to the Uniqueness of Volunteers,” Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 45(4) (August, 2016)*



## Help Build Volunteer Confidence

Researchers found that volunteers who encountered greater organizational constraints and role ambiguity were less engaged. In addition, job demands that are considered stressful or frustrating lead to less task investment and lower engagement. Volunteers with higher confidence in their ability to make a difference in their communities through service, are more likely to be engaged.

### Consider:

*What steps can you take to identify current constraints and increase volunteer confidence, or self-efficacy, that they can be overcome?*

*Research: Harp, Elizabeth, et al., "Volunteer Engagement and Retention: Their Relationship to Community Service Self-Efficacy," Psychology Faculty Publications. 178. (2017)*