



Guiding Questions for Equity and Inclusion in Volunteer Engagement

This tool guides you through a series of questions on your organization's efforts in applying principles of equity and inclusivity when engaging volunteers. The questions will also help you look ahead and take steps to identify the individuals who need to be involved in making progress and creating plans for the future.

- When asking who is *responsible* for this work, think about who is actually completing tasks.
- When asking who is *accountable* for this work, think about about who is assigning the tasks, who has the ultimate say, and who has the ability to provide or take away resources.
- When asking who needs to be *consulted* about this work, think about all your stakeholders and whose input is needed.
- When asking who needs to be *informed* about this work, think about who simply should be kept in the loop about progress and results.

The guide contains eight sections, each with reflection and planning questions. Take a moment to consider how your organization is structured and adapt this guide to meet your organization's unique needs.

Content from Dr. Sue Carter Kahl's article, *Operationalizing Inclusion in Volunteer Engagement*, was used to create this tool. Faiza Venzant, CVA, and Teresa Oswald, CNP, modified the article for inclusion in the *Equity in Action Toolkit* in 2024 with permission. More of Sue's work can be found at

www.volunteercommons.com



ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

In this section, explore your organization's openness to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Answer these questions to understand what support systems or barriers are present as you go through the rest of this guide.

You may need to work with leadership, other staff, or volunteers at your organization to complete this section.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What values guide our work?

Are diversity, equity, and inclusion defined in our organization and community? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do we support volunteers in exploring how their backgrounds and perspectives influence their perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our organization? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do we invite the community we serve to volunteer? If so, how? If not, why not?

Does the strategic plan include volunteers in achieving mission and operational goals? If so, how? If not, why not?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



PLANNING

In this section, explore how your organization designs equitable and inclusive volunteer opportunities and experiences.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What would volunteer engagement look like if volunteers planned it? How about if the community we serve planned it?

To what extent are we practicing inclusiveness principles in volunteer engagement strategies, from planning and recruiting to retaining and recognition? Are volunteers included in or leading this work?

In what ways do we ensure that community and organizational needs are prioritized along with volunteer interests?

Do we decline (or re-direct) offers of volunteer support that do not align with community and organizational values and needs?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



ROLES AND QUALIFICATIONS

In this section, explore who gets to volunteer, how they volunteer, who makes those decisions and how this relates to your organization’s mission.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

In what areas of the organization can volunteers participate? Who decides this?

In what areas of the organization can volunteers not participate? Why not?

What roles do volunteers fill? Who decides this?

What qualifications do volunteers need in order to serve? Who establishes these criteria?
How often do we review the criteria?

What is the process to become a volunteer? Who might be left out of the process?

Do volunteer activities contribute to the organization’s mission in meaningful ways? How do we know this?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



RECRUITING

In this section, examine how your organization recruits and attracts volunteers. This section identifies who makes decisions on volunteer recruitment messaging and strategy and how to consider more equitable and inclusive approaches.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

In what ways do we create a welcoming environment for volunteers with different identities and experiences? What more could we be doing?

Where do we recruit volunteers? Who decides this?

How do we design volunteer recruitment ads? What images and language do we use?

Do these images and language affirm the dignity of volunteers and the community we serve? To whom do these ads appeal? Who might they turn off?

What approaches to recruitment might be more inviting to a broader cross-section of the community?

Are we trying to diversify who volunteers without doing the internal organizational work of improving equity and inclusion?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



ENGAGEMENT

In this section, reflect on who is volunteering at your organization and who is not. This section also guides you through ideas on providing volunteers with opportunities for education and for challenging biases and assumptions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Do we provide volunteers a structured opportunity to reflect on the community we serve? Why or why not?

Do volunteers need to have specific lived experience to volunteer with the communities we serve?

Who stays as a volunteer? Who leaves?

Are there patterns in volunteer participation and retention that suggest serving with our organization is more welcoming to some volunteers than others?

How do we help volunteers understand the complexity of the issues the organization is trying to address? Do we use self-reflection or group reflection as a tool?

In what ways do we challenge volunteers' harmful assumptions and biases?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



VOICE, POWER, AND WELCOME

In this section, reflect on whether or not volunteers are treated as valuable partners.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Are volunteers true partners in our work or do we limit their input and full involvement?

What roles do volunteers have in decision-making in the organization?

Are there structured ways for volunteers to share insights, ideas, and critiques?

Is volunteer feedback taken seriously and acted upon as appropriate?

Do all volunteers feel welcome and valued? How do we know this?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPERVISION

Leading volunteers can be a paid or unpaid role. In this section, examine if roles and responsibilities are being managed equitably, whether they are done by volunteers or staff.

You may need to work with leadership, other staff, or volunteers at your organization to complete this section.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

When selecting someone to lead volunteers, are they selected based on their volunteer management experience?

Are volunteers and/or staff provided ongoing training and support to be successful when leading volunteers?

When they are leading volunteers, do we measure the performance of volunteers and staff in the same way? Why or why not?

If a volunteer makes a mistake or does not complete a task, who is held accountable? How does this influence a supervisor's willingness to delegate work to volunteers?

When a volunteer demonstrates the training or skills to serve independently, do we allow them to do so?

Are volunteers treated differently than staff when we need to address actions that are discriminatory, offensive, or harmful? Why or why not?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?



EVALUATION

In this section, look at the ways your organization communicates the value of volunteer impact.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Do we track and report how volunteer contributions support the organization’s mission?

Do we track volunteer contributions and impact indicators that matter to those we serve? Do these same measures matter to funders and board members?

Who decides what volunteer data we track and report?

Do we acknowledge and recognize the diverse ways that volunteers support the organization’s work, including the contributions that can't be counted?

NEXT STEPS

What gaps are we aware of?

What change do we want to see?

Who is responsible for this?	Who is accountable for this?	Who needs to be consulted about this?	Who needs to be informed about this?