



Learning Pathways
Building Volunteer Relationships
Part 1: Creating the Relationship Foundation

Welcome!

- This is a new format for learning at VolunteerMatch
- Designed for more participation.
 - All resources and slides will be available afterwards.
 - Please register for all Parts of a Learning Pathway – they build on each other.

It's really about relationships

We need a new model!

- Recruitment, Retention, & Recognition – these are all relationship building.
- We need to consider and develop volunteer opportunities with relationships at the forefront.
- Authentic relationships are two-way - it cannot just be about what a volunteer can do for you

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

good listener

Respectful and
responsible

Reliable, empathetic

Honesty

good communication

supportive

Honesty. Dependability
interesting. Creative.
Compassionate

Collaboration

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Someone you can share feelings with that will listen and give advice

Encouragement, support

Genuine interest in you, your thoughts, feelings, your wellbeing :)

Kindness, Trust and Respectful

reliable, communication

Reliability and cooperation

open communication

Truly care about me

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Someone who is kind to others, who follows through, and who checks in with me.

Trustworthy, loyal

growing together

Same values and goals

Trust

Open communication and trust

Caring, staying in contact, being there.

Supportive

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Listening well

Someone who listens and understands what you may need in the moment.

Fun - no pressure

Follows directions

Good listener, genuinely interested in you

communication, clear and direct

Kindness, good listening, mutuality, caring

Good listener

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

supportive

Respect, trust, authentic.

Respect and
dependable

interested in the things I
do and appreciate me

authentic

empathy, understanding,
honesty

Being themselves with
respect and kindness for
all

reciprocity,
communication, trust,
loyalty, generosity

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

They genuinely care about you, what you care about, and they appreciate your genuine reciprocity.

Someone who checks on how you are doing

Mission alignment

TRUST

Loyal, good heart Team player

Clear communication

good communication, honesty, dependability

respectful

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Reliable

Authenticity

able to provide feedback in a constructive manner. Not demanding or whining

Good listening skills

support

Someone who genuinely listens. Empathetic. Someone who doesn't one up! Collaborative. Loving. Puts the relationship first and outcomes second.

Integrity

Engaged

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Honest feedback

encouragement
Understanding
presence

Genuine interests in
volunteer and
organization

Authenticity, reliable

Kind, empathetic, good
communication

positive attitude

Trust, encouraging,
caring,

fun

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Dependable, willingness to learn, open communication.

Understanding that things don't always go as planned.

Kindness

authentic; innovator; forward thinker (i.e. visionary)

positive, happy

They invest in the relationship

mutual respect

Reliability

What makes someone a good friend, colleague, or partner?

Is there when you need
him/her

Passionate. Busy.

Real relationships are based in respect and understanding

- For personal relationships and relationships with volunteers
- Build pathways for more involvement and allow volunteers to step back, not away
- Respect and Understanding
 - For volunteer time and talent
 - Impact/Mission driven opportunities with decision-making authority
 - Understand how volunteers are a key component of your organization's strategy
 - AND – managing our, and our organization's, expectations

What does successful volunteer engagement look like?

- Volunteers come for a reason, a season, and maybe for a lifetime
 - One can lead to the next, but success cannot just be a lifetime.
- How can volunteers grow or contract their relationship
 - If they want more responsibility or need to step back – can they?
- Volunteers deserve open, honest, transparent communications

Designing Two-Way Relationships

Volunteer's needs are met - Organization needs are met

- Respect for mission, standard operating procedures, and policies - respect for time and experience, and impact
- Feedback and evaluation goes both ways
 - Channels and opportunities for volunteers to provide feedback on the work, the program, opportunities
- Suggestions and questions are encouraged - guidance and support is provided
- Recognition is personalized, authentic and includes opportunities for additional responsibility

Relationship Building

Opportunities to Build Relationships

- Recruitment
- Onboarding
- Training
- Supervision
- Communication & Feedback
- Impact & Celebration
- Other

Take a moment...

- Think about how you are designing relationship building into volunteer engagement. Are you:
 - Centering mission and impact?
 - Creating two-way communication?
- Where are your opportunities to create better relationships?
- What initial steps can you take to better understand your current relationship building challenges?

Building Ongoing Relationships with Volunteers

Activity	Successes	Opportunities	Challenges
Recruitment			
Onboarding			
Training			
Supervision			
Communication & Feedback			
Impact & Celebration			
Other			

Where do you have relationships building successes?

Volunteer trainers are doing great with new volunteers!

Everywhere!

I like to get to know my volunteers, I spend time out of my day to go down and talk to them and introduce myself.

I feel like I don't have enough training to fully be successful in my job

We host an end of year party for volunteers with games and food! It's a bit hit.

Meeting potential volunteers for coffee to get to know each other

Where we have staff or volunteers who are specifically dedicated to volunteer management and communication

onboarding - it's personal, low barrier, quick

Where do you have relationships building successes?

Building partnerships with nearby community centers!

Periodic volunteer get togethers

starting to show some consistency in their coordinator

Check ins with volunteers, onboarding feels more cohesive now

Due to the nature of our organization we are able to spend time chatting and get to know them.

When a current volunteer helps us by recruiting new volunteers. Other times we've had volunteers help us by using their network and connects us with funding.

One-on-one initial trainings and orientations to answer personalized questions and create a strong introduction

Getting to know them and show interest in them and their lives. Building the relationship.

Where do you have relationships building successes?

Connecting with volunteers

Work with them, meet with them where they volunteer.

Creating a society for young folks who are just getting into volunteer work. They have ownership and oversight of programming and volunteer ops

Staff have great relationships with volunteers built over time

I've had lot of time to get to know volunteers individually

Connecting one on one getting to know what they do when not volunteering

building connections with local universities and other organizations for recruiting, creating moments of connection during orientation, connecting with recurring volunteers regularly

intentional conversations with people prior to onboarding. Utilizing mentors and regional managers. (our volunteers are nationwide!) Quarterly training on ZOOM/TEAMS to meet and greet.

Where do you have relationships building successes?

including volunteers with staff fun activities, trainings, etc.

We spend time at the beginning of onboarding giving a tour of the wider organization and introduce them to other departments.

Creating training and staff positions that focus on volunteer management as a start.

During the first phone interview make to ask a lot of questions about them, my staff continuing the training and communication, I have weekly check in calls with each staff (there are 4). Texting vols

Coffee chats 1 on 1 or zoom depending on the volunteer's time and comfort level.

Engaging families volunteering in "families for families" events (fun+functional and open to kids) is resulting in increased volunteering inquiries from adults

Parent mentors are trained 1-on-1 with the program manager to get comfortable with their role

We have an annual baseball game activity.

Where do you have relationships building successes?

Meeting with volunteers or groups of volunteers for Volunteer Spotlights in our quarterly newsletter. We get to learn so much about their experience this way, and it helps volunteers meet each other

lots of word-of-mouth volunteers - one person comes to volunteer, then tells a friend to come and join!

Specially trained volunteers mentor new volunteers.

Coming up with projects for volunteers

Trying to keep good notes about each volunteer on the applications, Keep track of vacations and when they will be out so I don't bug them a lot.

volunteer cafe conversations

We send all volunteers our company newsletter with monthly impact. How many households served, and hours served.

We have an orientation with our volunteers, where they can ask questions and we can know better where to place them.

Where do you have relationships building successes?

remember and celebrating special events like birthdays

Volunteers donate personally to support mission.

Offering new trainings like trauma informed care

Finding the "right" people to connect with (ex. community engagement staff at local universities, who then share with students)

I spend a lot of time with them, we have special events every quarter. I do tours for them. I know everything about them and their families and sometimes I meet their families.

Language issues, not being able to understand them.

being more intentional about talking with volunteers on a consistent basis and getting to know them after orientation

We are an RSVP program so most of our volunteers help at our partner organizations. We don't always know how things are run there.

Where do you have relationships building successes?

We are a RSVP program, so most of our volunteers actually help at partner organizations. We can't control what happens there.

Welcomed

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

More interaction with prospective volunteers

Some staff are stronger at relationship building than others. We lack consistency

Finding projects for volunteers

facilitating better relationships among staff and volunteers

Want to do more onsite training to support volunteers

Ask them more questions during our 1:1 Zoom orientation

making use of lead volunteers

More opportunities for engagement activities outside of their volunteer service

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

Making processes streamlined & efficient

Being more outgoing as a volunteer coordinator

I want to be able to check in more often

onboarding

Opportunity for volunteers to leadership

Previous volunteer coordinator did not conduct any outreach into the community or work on recruitment

Ask more questions

There is a struggle with advancing volunteers - eventually they outgrow the role, needing new opportunities but I cannot provide more.

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

As a volunteer manager, I don't see the actual volunteers very often.

Coffee with volunteers like was just suggested.

communication and feedback

regular check-ins can improve

Supporting virtual and in person volunteers so they all have support and training needs met.

Creating more interaction opportunities with volunteers for staff

Would like to have volunteers read their emails which shares communications. We also text, but some don't text

enable addition ways to obtain volunteer feedback

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

supervision - having regular check-ins

Including volunteers in different areas of interest. Projects, events...reaching out to them in times of need.

Display boards to advertise positions and recognize volunteers.

Need a recruitment plan

better relationship building with virtual volunteers

being able to facilitate better relationships between volunteers so they can work better together!

broadcasting the greatness of volunteers systemwide

Stay connected with newsletter and education to stay engaged

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

Using tech to connect more. Not just tractional.

Train the volunteer

Surveying volunteers to understand them better

Provide different levels of volunteering within each shift. Increase responsibilities and authority.

the hand-off to their staff supervisors -- they can sometimes get lost in this transition

Some folks at the organization push fundraising and bringing in money- it's a BIG turn off. Especia when we tell volunteers we want them to feel connected by participating in volunteer ops.

Expectations given up front (background screening, signed documents, etc.)

Connect volunteers together

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

More meaningful evaluation

being more intentional about reaching out to volunteers outside of new volunteer orientations, creating more opportunities to build relationships with me/other staff & vols

Being careful with how we present the organization. It's not always in the best light.

Need a part time person to help with paperwork! I am stuck in admin. I currently have an Intern and it is helping, but will end in May. How do I keep this support? I use volunteers, they not consist

No public facing office.

staff turnover

staff workload

Retention and recruitment

Where are your relationship building opportunities?

Volunteer's conflict with each other

Need vol appreciation ideas now for planning. We will be doing this in April so ideas are appreciated now. Thank you!

Speaking in front of others! I'm invited to speak at a Gala to share how they help bring in volunteers and it causes me a lot of anxiety.

Creating training materials and presentations

outdated

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Getting the actual volunteers on front of me

Difficult Personalities

Frequent staff turnover

Not enough time to get to know the volunteers

buy in from other departments

Very new ongoing volunteer team at our organization learning the ropes.

I am the only person in the volunteer office so impossible to build deep connections with everyone but want everyone to feel valued/seen

Time

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Not knowing what questions to ask

distance

Retention

Staff turnover

Our volunteers are spread across the state so I don't always get face to face time with them

I echo difficulty virtual volunteers, but also being an introvert!

We have hundreds of volunteers nationwide. Hard to meet with them and keep up with each person.

turnover makes volunteers wary of getting to know new staff and building relationships

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Getting parents, grandma etc in front in me.

Having a lot of volunteers to manage

I dont think that others in the org understand this job

If other staff don't work at connecting with volunteers as well

training time

People don't read emails.

no regular training schedule

Large amount of volunteers, small amount of staff for personal relationship building

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

not having procedures and policies in place

Time - I have other responsibilities. Some difficult personalities. Turnover - volunteers moving on.

Volunteers gossip, share misinformation and get each other "riled up".

Being told to recruit volunteers, but not being supported with the ways to do that- ie not always being in the office.

not enough capacity

Retention and recruitment

Getting the organization leaders and staff understanding what a volunteer relationship should look like.

My own anxieties of pressuring others

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Rarely see the volunteers

Staff being torn in so many directions that they don't have time to properly train their volunteers and make them feel welcome

Large geographic area served, limited staff.

Not enough financials for appreciation

Lots of turn over in volunteer manager position

Staff turnover leading to lacking relationships with volunteers

busy with other tasks and not enough time spent getting to know the volunteer

Time! Traveling to multiple locations

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Keeping up with recognition of volunteers

Public speaking

Volunteers continuing to leave

staff turnover

I'm a department of one. Too much for one to handle

Changing old school folk's mindset on what it means to volunteer in 2024.

Diffused leadership. As the volunteer director, sometimes my supers want to be 'in charge'. It's confusing to volunteers.

meeting with volunteers for specific projects

What challenges and barriers do you have for building relationships?

Capacity! I am ONE person!

Need two people, but 1st person waiting for another person before they will step up.

Community not supporting us.

Organizations whose success depends on volunteers, yet the org doesn't want to create a volunteer budget.

having tough conversations

I don't see the volunteers much after training.

I think we are more middle of the road. This is due to the nature of our business.

Trying to keep up with them all!

What does it feel like to be a volunteer?

- Unrealistic expectations around time commitment
- Lack of respect for volunteer time or experience and impact
- Volunteers held to a different set of standards than others
- Environment is welcoming and inclusive or are volunteers siloed or ignored
 - Micro-aggressions, sub-cultures, can be driven by volunteers as well as paid staff
- Are volunteers included in decisions, do they have visible representation

Take a moment...

- How is your culture holding back your organization's engagement of volunteers?
- What could your organization accomplish if you changed what it means to be a volunteer?
- What happens if you do nothing?

What is your current culture of volunteer engagement?

Extremely excited and welcoming!

Fairly engaged!

Welcoming of all

separated from the organization as a whole

needs improvement on appreciation

New and exciting with lots of room for growth

Welcoming, celebrating

Seems like they might be a number that is required.

What is your current culture of volunteer engagement?

We could use some work with other staff accepting and engaging them

an engaging, safe space to learn and practice skills

We don't have any outreach or engagement other than for existing volunteers

moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model of volunteering to figuring out how to match volunteer skills with more opportunities to get involved - so much potential for growth!

Positive culture, but definitely siloed by type of volunteer. Would love to build more community!

Excited and thankful for their help

Vol are treated differently at different sites. Hard to create a uniform culture

too busy to notice them sometimes

What is your current culture of volunteer engagement?

Lacking consistency

Volunteers are pretty siloed because of regulations, but most of our staff appreciates having them.

We are trying to have get together to have more interaction with volunteers.

Volunteer appreciation month

welcoming and thankful, but needs improvement on involvement

Volunteers are wanted but opportunities not really utilized or projects not currently prepared for volunteers to take over.

Variety of volunteer opportunities

need more engagement in the Fall/Winter. We are very heavy Spring and Summer

What is your current culture of volunteer engagement?

We have great volunteers, but it's hard to get new ones to stay longer than their required hours.

Those staff engaging and using volunteers are happy and think it is great. Those staff that don't use volunteers are hesitant and feel it is too much work. Wildly different viewpoints throughout org

We've got plenty of good volunteers for specific interests and tasks! Lots of interest in our org!

definitely siloed.

Most locations are in a good place but some locations are stretched so thin they don't engage much.

approaching volunteers who often sign up but do not show up

Too many hands in the execution. Volunteers are missed or not contacted

Needs much improvement-varies between programs in our organization.

What is your current culture of volunteer engagement?

Looking forward to connect with community organizations/companies to provide an avenue for relationship building.

It's MY job because I'm the program coordinator so the rest of staff doesn't willingly engage in welcoming volunteers and engaging them actively to make them feel like they are part of the team.

Multiple volunteer events throughout the year

It is not to open and welcoming to a more diverse group of volunteers

We need to listen more and provide other growth opportunities

Ask for Volunteer Input

We can guess what volunteers are thinking, why they aren't staying, but it's better if we ask!

- Regular volunteer engagement/satisfaction surveys. Past and current volunteers.
- Combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. Support the results with additional quantitative data like attrition rates.
- Consider additional opportunities for feedback - focus groups, stakeholder interviews.
- Be thoughtful about when and how you conduct surveys - anonymous v named, timing, etc.

Relationships from Day Zero

Relationship building needs to start before you recruit

- Two-way relationships meet the needs of the volunteers as much as volunteers contribute to the organization.
- You cannot - and should not - be the only person building relationships with volunteers.
 - Supervisors, mentors, SMEs, volunteer and paid staff
- Create realistic expectations – time commitment, training and support, feedback/retraining, supervision.
- It has to be ok for volunteers to change roles or leave when their commitment is complete!

Designing from Day Zero

Successful volunteer engagement doesn't just happen

- How is work designed?
 - Mission driven with real impact or outcomes
 - Meaningful decision-making authority
- How are relationships developed?
 - How are volunteers invited in?
 - Where are the opportunities for community or connection?
 - Who's responsible for orienting, supporting, training, or mentoring?
 - Check in systems and processes for additional training, retraining, reassignment
 - Are you incorporating toxic elements – guilt, pity, need

Start from day zero – before you recruit

- How will volunteers receive feedback? How will they share it?
 - Regular check-ins, satisfaction surveys, connections to supervisors/colleagues.
 - Formal and informal pathways
 - Respect for volunteers knowledge and experience
 - Ideas for roles, processes/procedures
 - Leadership opportunities
- Real recognition events
 - Match to volunteer motivation and impact on clients/organization
 - Variety of recognition activities
 - ASK! – recognition styles

Engagement Gap Analysis Worksheet

Engagement Activity or Goal	Current State - What's happening now?	Future State - What should it look like?	Gap - What's different/needs to change?	What actions are needed to close the gap?

What is a Relationship Success

A volunteer departure is not necessarily a failure

- Completed a minimum requested time commitment or a project.
- Built skills, went on to school or paid work.
 - Or learned that this field/work is not a good fit for them.
- Learned about your mission and the needs of the community.
- Became a donor, supporter, advocate.
- Went on to volunteer for another organization.

For Next Time:

Explore the Resource Packet:

- Can the worksheets help you start conversations?
- What additional resources do you need, what resources do you have to share?
- Join the LinkedIn Group to share ideas, ask questions, get support.

Thoughts, Ideas, Questions?



Thank You!

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