



VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch Learning Center  
Core Components

# Rethinking Retention: Understanding Strategic Volunteer Relationships

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# Agenda

- It's all about relationships
- Retention is an outcome
- Building relationships from Day Zero
- Designing two-way volunteer relationships
- Considering the impact of volunteer engagement culture
- Getting started

# 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

# Retention is an outcome

## Retention is not a thing we do to volunteers

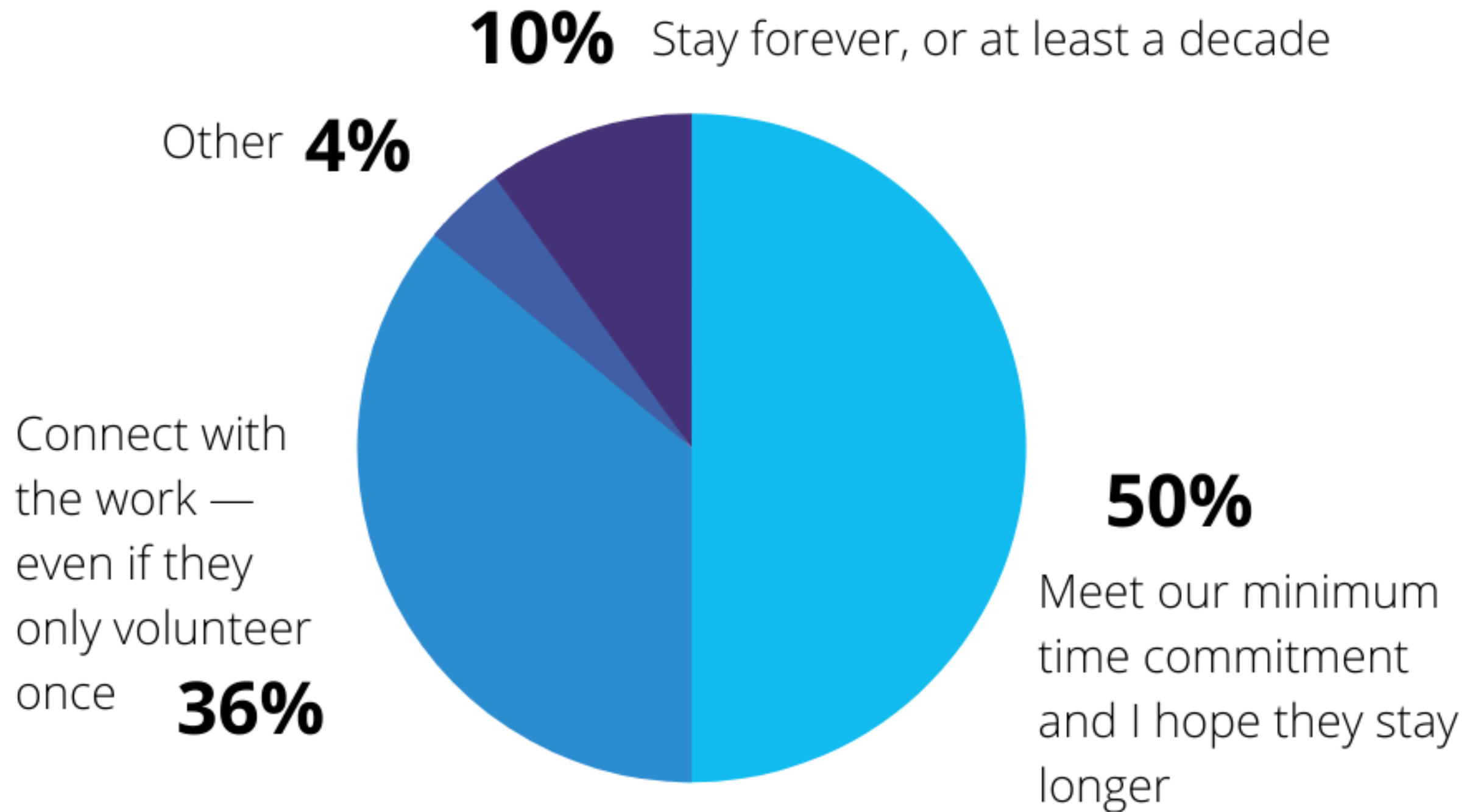
- Successful retention is not keeping the same volunteer from now until the end of time
- Retention happens when we:
  - Build good relationships
  - Design meaningful opportunities and make the right match
  - Create a connection between our volunteers and our mission
  - Provide authentic recognition
  - AND – manage our, and our organization's, expectations



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# What does a successful volunteer relationship look like for you?

I want volunteers to:



# Rethinking volunteer relationships

## 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 with relationships in mind

“We can’t find anyone to...”

- Are you designing roles with mission or impact in mind, do volunteers have real responsibilities with decision making authority?
- What work do volunteers want to do – flexible, mission-driven
  - Ask them! Current volunteers, returning volunteers, incoming volunteers, past or retired volunteers.
- Are you recruiting for the volunteers you need? Volunteer personas for a two-way relationship

# 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!



# What is an engagement 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.

# 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

# Culture plays a role

## 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
  - Microaggressions, sub-cultures, can be driven by volunteers as well as paid staff
- Are volunteers included in decisions, do they have visible representation

# Getting started

- Understand how culture influences relationships with volunteers.
  - This is a more strategic step – it is not a quick fix, but ultimately may determine if real change is possible.
- Normalize the two-way relationship with volunteers
  - It is not just about what you need volunteers to do
- Develop mission or impact-driven volunteer roles, and create volunteer position descriptions/personas
- Engage others – paid and volunteer staff – in building relationships with volunteers.
- Be open to, and actively solicit, feedback on volunteer satisfaction and experiences

# Thank you!

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