Cutting Edge Strategies for Engaging Volunteers to Meet Mission
Educates: Conferences, VILT, Workshops
Connects: Networks, District Council Meetings
Strengthens: Capacity-building
Advocates: Research, Public policy
VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT
What have you noticed about…

1. What has changed?
2. Who is volunteering?
3. What volunteers want?
What has Changed?

- Increased Community Needs
- Decreased Capacity to Meet Needs

“What used to work is not working.”
Who is volunteering?

Generational Trends

In 2021, 45% of organizations saw decreased participation of older volunteers

• Traditionalist volunteers (age 77-95) have not returned at pre-pandemic levels
  ▪ They are hard to replace
• Baby Boomers (age 58-76) seem more busy than ever
  ▪ Looking for flexible opportunities
Who is volunteering?  
Generational Trends

**Millennials** (1981-1996)

- Volunteer more than any other cohort
- Interested in leadership and feedback

**Gen Z** (1997-2012)

- Most civically-minded generation
- Interested in inclusion – most diverse generation
- More distrusting of organizations
WHAT VOLUNTEERS WANT

Meaningful
Understand impact & contribute their unique skills

Flexible
Sporadic & short-term roles
Five Cutting-Edge Strategies

1. Build Organizational Buy-in
2. Increase the Flexibility of Volunteer Roles
3. Offer Options to Volunteers
4. Partner with Volunteers
5. Leverage Story-telling
1. Build Organizational Buy-in

- Align your volunteer roles with the organization’s strategic plan and mission

- Facilitate Conversations:
  - About volunteer contributions
  - Dreams and Wishes Exercise
Mission Game

How do volunteers relate to the mission of your organization?

1. **All** volunteers at the heart of your mission
2. **Some** volunteers at the heart, some volunteers on the fringes
3. **Few** volunteers at the heart
Volunteer Contributions Below the Surface
Building Organizational Buy-In

Ask about their dreams and wishes
- What do you wish you could get done?
- What are your dreams for your role?

Listen and Learn
- Ask questions
- Identify potential obstacles
2. Increase Flexibility of Volunteer Roles

• Ask: what we can learn from Informal Volunteerism?

• Explore potential barriers

• Consider restructuring burdensome roles
Informal Volunteerism

70% of the world’s volunteers give their time informally.

Benefits:
• No screening and onboarding
• Total flexibility

Rates of informal volunteerism are high in BIPOC communities.
Potential Barriers

- Background checks
- Lack of flexibility
- Language
- Exclusive policies
Tips for Restructuring Roles

• Create a **committee** to spread out the work
• **Rotate** members of a **team** who fill the assignment seasonally
• **Segment** the role into short-term opportunities
• **Specialize** the functions and make some remote
3. Offer Options to Volunteers

• Onboarding
• Special Skills

• Recognition
• Volunteer Roles
Volunteer onboarding isn’t optional, but we can offer options for completing it.

• You can attend the training virtually OR in person.
• Read the policies on your own OR we can talk through them together.
• You can jump in OR you can observe first.
Options for Recognition

Research shows that volunteers find different types of recognition meaningful.

They may value:

- Connecting with other volunteers
- Receiving gifts
- Public recognition on social media
- Attending a special event with a nice meal
- Understanding their impact
Options for Special Skills

Tapping the special skills, talents, and expertise of volunteers can help the organization meet its mission.

• Ask volunteers:
  • Would you like to try something else?
  • Do you feel your strengths are being used?

• Track their special skills
Offer a wide range of volunteer roles:

- Virtual/remote positions or tasks
- Short-term positions at a variety of times
- Skills-based volunteer opportunities
- Roles that impact the heart of the organization’s mission
- Projects with agreed-upon outcomes, where the volunteer can take charge
4. Partner with Volunteers

Volunteers want:

• Influence
• Feedback
• Ownership
• Leadership
Who has the power?
Are your volunteers teammates or workers?

“Power with” looks like:
• Asking for their ideas for improvement
• Seeking their advice about changes

“Power over” looks like:
• Making decisions that affect volunteers without asking for their input
New way of thinking:
“Volunteers lead, staff support”
Feedback

Volunteers today want to give and receive feedback

• Surveys
• Regular check-ins
• Focus Groups
Ownership and Leadership

- Set up advisory committee of volunteers for the volunteer program
- When recruiting board members, include volunteers
- Include volunteers in strategic planning
- Create openness and be ready to act on ideas that will move the organization forward
5. Leverage Storytelling

• **Empower volunteers** to tell their stories

• **Storytelling for recruitment**
  - Tell the story of what they’ll be doing
  - Tell the story of who’ll be volunteering

• **Creative ways** to tell the story of your opportunities!
Empower volunteers to tell their stories

Make it easy for volunteers to share the story of why they volunteer with you.

• On social media
• In emails and other communications
• For peer-to-peer recruitment
• Develop a “bring a friend” campaign
• Create a stories depository
Storytelling for Recruitment:  
Tell the story of what they will be doing

**Impact:**  What difference will this role make?  
**Action:**  Are there verbs to paint a picture of the role?  
**Fun:**  Does the role sound fun?  
**Clarity:**  What is expected of the volunteer?
Adult ESL Tutor

Partner with an adult immigrant or refugee learning English. Meet people from around the world while helping them build literacy skills to thrive in the United States.

Sound like something you're interested in? The Minnesota Literacy Council is seeking enthusiastic individuals who want to teach or tutor English in a classroom or one-to-one setting. You'll meet interesting people while making a lasting difference in the life of an adult learner.

No previous experience is necessary; training is provided. The only language requirement is the ability to read, write and speak English. Flexible morning, afternoon and evening opportunities are available throughout the metro. The time commitment ranges from one to three hours per week.

Volunteers must be 18 years old, or 16 if volunteering with a parent or guardian.

Contact Wendy for more details: wroberts@mnliteracy.org

Teach English to your neighbors!

Partner with an adult immigrant or refugee learning English. Meet new people from your community and work with them as they build literacy skills and achieve their goals.

Sound like something you're interested in? Volunteer as an English tutor!

- No experience or diploma needed – we’ll provide all necessary training
- English speakers of all levels are welcome and encouraged to volunteer
- Time commitment is 2 to 3 hours once per week
- We will match you with a program in your neighborhood at a time that works for you
- Must be 18 years old to volunteer
- We strongly encourage volunteers who are people of color, indigenous, immigrants and refugees, LBGTQ+ and people with disabilities

Contact Wendy for more details at wroberts@literacymn.org or 651-251-9063 or fill out a volunteer interest form and we’ll contact you with next steps: http://mnliteracy.org/volunteers/volunteer-interest-form.
Creative ways to tell the story of your volunteer opportunities

Meetups
Lawn Signs
Every Door Direct Mail

Attend Community Events
Local Radio Stations
Libraries, community centers, etc.
Action Plan

Which 2 of these strategies are most critical to advance volunteer engagement in your organization now?
Thank You!

Learn more about MAVA and other MAVA trainings at mavanetwork.org.

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