MAVA MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

Advice from the Field:
100+ Tips, Tactics and Tools for
Keeping Pace with Today's Volunteerism

In the MAVA 2018 Trends Survey, Volunteer Managers and Nonprofit Leaders were asked about strategies they've implemented to make their volunteer program as effective as possible. Over 100 tips, techniques and tools were shared. How many of these have you tried?

Designing Positions

Shorter term and flexible positions
1. Break down a traditional long-term task into a mini grab and go.
2. Define the volunteer task so that one volunteer can pick up where the other left off.
3. Have task forces meet only a few times a year vs. every month.
4. Assign volunteers in pairs and teams as to not ask for as much time from the volunteer.
5. Set up evening volunteer opportunities.
6. Be flexible with how long volunteers can leave program for travel time.

Higher responsibility positions
7. Create a volunteer leadership program.
8. Develop roles for high capacity volunteers to take on more responsibility - i.e., volunteer newsletter editor, teaching monthly classes.
9. Empower volunteers to set their own schedule to work with the person they are assisting on a day, time and location that works best for them, instead of scheduling them yourself.

Variety of opportunities
10. Empower all staff to identify ways volunteers can support their work.
11. Increase variety of volunteer opportunities to increase the number of participating volunteers and number of hours served.
12. Develop a new virtual volunteer program.
13. Assign projects directly to volunteers, shifting tasks from staff to volunteers.
14. Create positions for families volunteering together

Position descriptions
15. Clearly define the role and expectations of volunteers.
16. Tweak how you write up volunteer opportunities so they sound more interesting and/or doable.
17. Collaborate with departments to review/revitalize volunteer roles.

Recruiting

18. Develop postcards to give to present volunteers, volunteer sites, friends and family to recruit other volunteers.

19. Reach out to current and previous volunteers, and see if they have friends who want to volunteer.
20. Utilize all staff for volunteer recruitment with team incentives.
21. Make more use of LinkedIn, Facebook and social media for recruitment.
22. Expand your list of resources you use to recruit volunteers (print media, online resources/sites, and social media).
23. Reach out to individuals who may have experienced the benefit of a volunteer's assistance in the past.
24. Hold regular outreach events to recruit new volunteers.
25. Highlight the skills needed for each particular position.
26. Use Next Door website for recruiting.
27. Use the Talent Gather app on an Ipad or tablet at intern recruitment events.
28. Place articles on LinkedIn and Facebook re volunteer opportunities.
29. Get hyperlocal – use community Facebook pages to find volunteers for neighborhood-focused initiatives and events.
30. Send a monthly short video clip and invitation to participate to both volunteer prospect list and to client referral sources.

Onboarding

31. Update your volunteer application form (printed and online copy).
32. Have volunteers participate in an introductory session before signing on as volunteers.
33. Make it as easy to sign up to volunteer as possible.
34. Use a formal volunteer interview process to get to know your volunteers better from the start.
35. Change from a paper-driven onboarding process to a more electronic process
36. Make onboarding quicker from the time a volunteer applies to when he/she starts.
37. Standardize the onboarding of volunteers throughout the organization.
38. Create a nametag that has pins attached to give to every new volunteer at their first event to make them feel welcomed and to keep for future volunteering.
39. Involve volunteers in onboarding process of new volunteers.
40. Have your entire application and basic orientation/training online, so volunteers can access it 24/7 at home.
41. Use a database such as Volgistics or Better Impact for volunteer application, assignment, communication and tracking volunteer statistics.
42. Set up direct deposit for volunteer mileage reimbursement instead of mailing checks.

Assigning

43. Offer self-schedule option (picking up shifts online) vs. making volunteers commit to a weekly schedule of same-day, same-time.
44. Have a mobile app option for signing up for shifts.
45. Provide a yearly comprehensive brochure of upcoming volunteer opportunities for the year so volunteers can plan in advance, and allow volunteers to sign up early.
46. Create a diversity of ways for volunteers to sign up for volunteering opportunities on their own, rather than individually calling volunteers and asking them; include a physical sign-up at your site, online Sign-up Genius, and monthly newsletter listing upcoming opportunities.

Orienting

47. Refresh your volunteer orientation and volunteer handbook to appeal to different learning styles and increase accessibility.
48. Use face-to-face orientation to create a relationship with volunteers.
49. Use a system-wide volunteer orientation so volunteers at all locations get the same information.
50. Offer online training followed by a Saturday morning wrap-up session for personal contact.
51. Develop an online orientation and post-test to ensure that all new volunteers are receiving the same information in a standardized presentation.

Training

52. Spread out training requirements and opportunities so it doesn't slow down the onboarding process and lets volunteers get started more quickly.
53. Try to be as flexible as possible with when and where volunteers complete their in-person training requirements; go to convenient locations for the volunteers.
54. Incorporate quarterly brunch/trainings with a social aspect and relevant training session.
55. Offer additional support/coaching sessions to help volunteers better understand role/responsibilities, if needed, that are optional to attend.
56. Standardize the initial volunteer training and offer different, more advanced trainings for returning volunteers.
57. Bring together volunteers who mostly serve independently.
58. Use distance technology for volunteer training - e.g., webinars or calls accessible online (via smart phone or tablet/laptop), so volunteers can be part of trainings in a "live" webinar but participate from the comfort of their home, car, or other location.

Communicating and Building Relationships

High touch
59. Visit sites when volunteers are working and talk with them, ask for input/ideas to improve.
60. Build personal connections when possible.
61. Have regular contact with volunteers to discuss concerns, make sure problems are taken care of early, and/or just an opportunity to socialize with those in the same position.
62. Implement a volunteer newsletter to share upcoming opportunities, recognize volunteers, create connections to the mission, and build relationships.
63. Create volunteering documents in other languages.
64. Note that seniors still like face-to-face communication and like to read the newspaper for information; while it's good to move forward with technology, remember where seniors are looking for information.

High tech
65. Send general "News and Updates" emails on an as-needed basis - weekly or monthly, depending on the particular news items.
66. Increase communication with volunteers through email, social media and regular mail.
67. Text volunteers who work remotely to make sure they're making their visits as expected.

68. Carry a cell phone to be easily reached; advocate for your organization to provide the phone as a necessary tool so you don't have to give out your personal information.
69. Develop volunteer blog that is shared with staff, leadership and volunteers.
70. Use Skype for Business to hold monthly committee meetings and support volunteer management for remote volunteers.
71. Start a closed Facebook group to allow volunteers to communicate, share and get to know each other better.
72. Use MailChimp or Constant Contact for more professional looking communication.
73. Use Instagram Stories to share volunteer activities.
74. Have volunteer teams use Basecamp or other project management software to communicate back and forth.
75. For those working in natural resources, have volunteers use eBird or iNaturalist apps to collect data.
76. For event volunteers, increase social media posts and emails with volunteers between the time of registration and the event.

Recognizing and Supporting

77. Send handwritten thank you postcards.
78. Report client satisfaction to volunteers.
79. Offer a recognition program that includes lifetime membership after X amount of hours served.
80. Do more recognition such as lunch events or gift cards twice a year, t-shirts and personal thank yous.
81. Free food.
82. Centralize recognition program to replace decentralized, non-standardized recognition.
83. Highlight volunteers in the local paper.
84. Thank them. Thank them. Thank them!

Evaluating and Tracking

85. Offer mobile-friendly reporting options that volunteers can utilize in the field as they are doing their work.
86. Develop online reporting to eliminate paper and reduce work on your end.
87. Conduct a comprehensive volunteer survey to determine the satisfaction levels of volunteers and how they would like to be more involved or recognized.
88. Assess volunteer satisfaction and reassign to a more personally rewarding volunteer role.
89. Implement ideas from the annual volunteer survey.
90. Have volunteers evaluate themselves.
91. Offer an app to provide a mobile way for volunteers to record hours as well as find opportunities and find information.

Partnering with Staff

92. Present on volunteer engagement to new staff during New Hire Orientations.
93. Train key employees on best practices for working with volunteers.

94. Train staff on the process of requesting a volunteer and creating a volunteer role and position description.
95. Invite MAVA staff to train volunteer supervisors on effective volunteer management practices.
96. Encourage staff to take time to communicate with volunteers to make sure they feel valued and are engaged in meaningful activities.
97. Develop training manual for staff that manage volunteers.
98. Create a communication piece on "why" volunteers choose to volunteer with us and use to help educate staff.
99. Develop a form and process for departments to use requesting a new volunteer position.
100. Initiate a traveling showcase of your volunteer program to take to different several teams or departments within your organization.

Positioning Volunteerism in the Organization

101. Establish a full-time volunteer program manager position if the organization don't already have one.
102. Invest in project and time management tools to track tasks and communicate with others about shared projects.
103. Set up a volunteer committee with Board Members and volunteers.
104. Consider forming working groups that meet just a few times a year.
105. Develop agency-wide volunteer policies and procedures to provide consistent services.
106. Go through Service Enterprise! It is a game changer!
107. When re-certifying as a Service Enterprise, take the opportunity to toot your horn internally by sharing information about volunteering an All Staff meeting, working with leadership team to get their buy-in on the action plan, and holding planning meetings with all departments.
108. Set up a cross-functional team that represents all departments that work with volunteers within your organization to create and monitor the processes used to engage volunteers.
109. Talk to leadership about the successes of volunteers and their importance to the organization.
110. Share the impact of the volunteers' work with internal staff.

To learn more about where these ideas came from, and get up-to-date on the latest trends in volunteer engagement, visit the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) website – www.mavanetwork.org – and look for the Trends in Volunteerism 2018 Report at www.mavanetwork.org/shiftingenv.

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