

Communication With Volunteers Is a Two-Way Street

Communication is integral to a satisfying volunteer experience and can also pay off for the not-for-profit organization. Volunteers frequently offer valuable insights and fresh perspectives, and might be closer to the population being served.

But volunteers need information to frame useful input. Organizations should keep them informed of organizational and staff changes, new services, and pending issues, both internal and external.

An organization should stress the importance of volunteer input during the orientation process, encouraging it and explaining how it can be given. Regular meetings should be held to share information, including meetings between staff and volunteers who work in the same areas. Meetings must engender discussion, though, rather than just having a staffer or chairperson talk at the volunteers.

Additionally, not-for-profits might consider forming a task force of volunteers (both long-term and relatively new) to conduct periodic assessments of their volunteer programs. The task force can examine every volunteer job, asking why it was created, if it's still needed, and if that job is still the best way to accomplish its goal.

The task force also should take a more global perspective, asking whether the organization's critical needs are being met.

Finally, the organization should ask every volunteer if he or she 1) has skills that haven't been leveraged, 2) sees any unmet needs, and 3) has any suggestions for improvement. Soliciting this volunteer input, combined with providing regular informational updates, has the added bonus of serving as recognition of the volunteers' importance.



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