

Engage Volunteers to Advance Your Organization's Objectives

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The Volunteers are Ready... Are You?

Overview

Is your organization ready to accommodate the influx of volunteers eager to provide much-needed support to the community during troubled times?



According to the 2007 Canadian Survey on Volunteering and Giving, the most recent national survey of the non-profit sector, volunteerism in Alberta has risen to 52%, which is 4% higher than the national average. While this is certainly positive news for local agencies that depend heavily on volunteerism, these statistics may not be telling the whole story.

As we all know, since the fall of 2008, the changes in the economic climate have created a new reality for all of us.

As the corporate community looks for ways to adjust, the non-profit sector is also struggling to redefine its role and find the means to cope with the increased demands and needs of the communities they serve.

Spurred on by the expansion of National Service programs in the United States and the so-called 'Obama effect' calling upon people to engage in voluntary service within their communities, North Americans

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The Volunteers are Ready... Are You?

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on both sides of the border are motivated to give their time freely to help rebuild and support their own communities.

As a result, many non-profit and charitable organizations are not only seeing an increase in the need for support but also an increase in the number of people who want to be involved in volunteer work. On the surface, this is all very exciting news; however, it does not come without a challenge.

"Volunteers are looking for roles that acknowledge and utilize their unique skills and qualifications; volunteer work that enhances the communities in which they live and offers them a vehicle for personal and professional growth and development," says Janet Burstall, Community Development Manager of Volunteer Calgary.

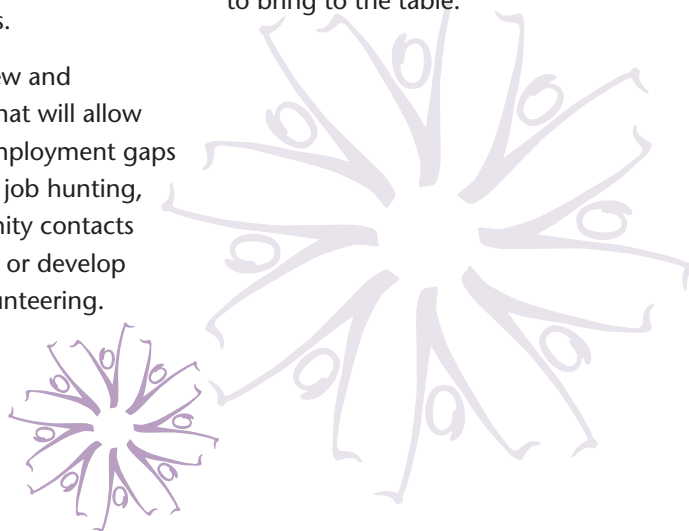
To address this, non-profit and charitable organizations need to take stock in their own organizations, dig deep and find new ways to utilize the skills of their volunteers.

They need to create new and unique opportunities that will allow volunteers to fill the employment gaps on their resumes while job hunting, enhance their community contacts and increase their skills or develop new ones through volunteering.

For this strategy to succeed, organizations must be flexible and supportive enough to allow volunteers to search for employment while volunteering. This may mean allowing volunteers to receive phone calls from prospective employers while on duty, adjusting schedules to accommodate a job interview, or preparing formal letters of reference for valued volunteers.

This supportive environment, coupled with duties the new volunteer enjoys, may win you a long-term volunteer even after new employment is found.

Our neighbours to the south have already begun to identify plans for recovery under the leadership of President Obama who has called his nation's attention to the importance of service through volunteerism. If non-profit organizations are to survive and thrive in the new economic reality, now is the time to re-evaluate volunteer engagement strategies to fully utilize the enormous benefits that volunteers are willing and able to bring to the table.



Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love...

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Volunteers are looking for roles that acknowledge and utilize their unique skills and qualifications; volunteer work that enhances the communities in which they live and offers them a vehicle for personal and professional growth and development"

*Janet Burstall
Community Development Manager
Volunteer Calgary*



Volunteers Connecting Community

*A quarterly publication
of Volunteer Calgary*

Volunteer Calgary's mission is to engage more people, more effectively, to volunteer in the community. In keeping with our goal, this newsletter serves as an information tool for the many individuals and organizations active within our community's voluntary sector.

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Empowering Volunteers

by Jim Selman

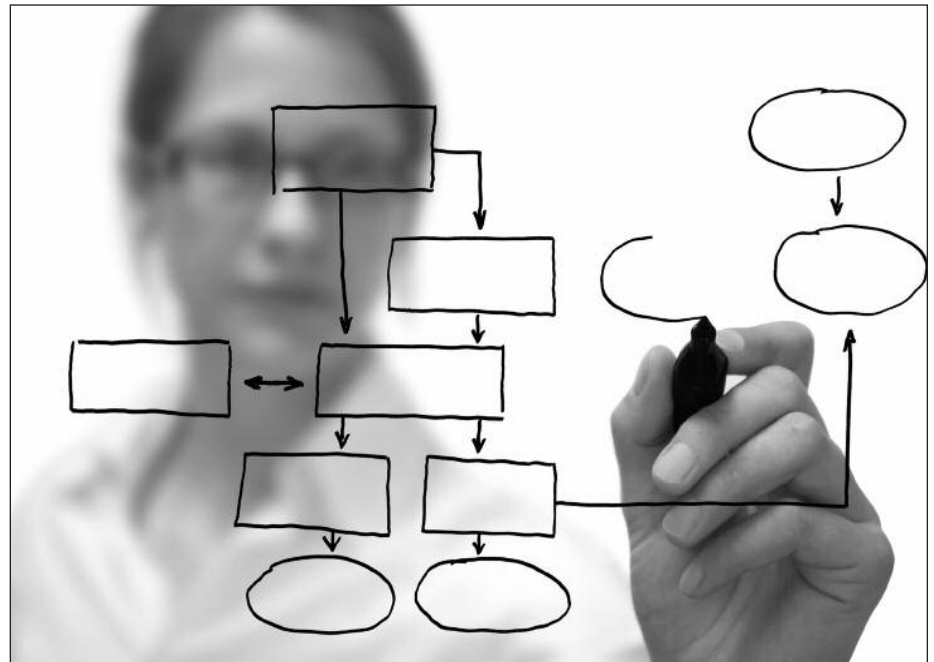
Tough times can bring out the best in people. In these days of financial, environmental and social challenges, more and more of us are stepping forward and asking “What can I do?” Wherever we look, people and organizations are taking on problems and working hard to create a better world.

People have an extraordinary capacity to go beyond what is reasonable to create breakthroughs — and achieve unprecedented results. Volunteers are often prepared to make an ‘unreasonable’ commitment when they offer to work with an organization, because of a strong belief in its mission. When not-for-profit organizations settle for being reasonable, the inspirational nature of a powerful vision or mission is lost. Much of the activities become gestures, token efforts without real possibility or commitment to resolve the issue for which the organization exists. In other words, the organization and volunteers are ‘playing small’ relative to what is possible and the scale of the challenge.

Three factors are central to building and sustaining a powerful — and empowering — volunteer program.

1. The organization must offer opportunities for volunteers to participate, rather than ‘need’ volunteers. Need-based approaches motivate people through guilt. This not only weakens the power of the organizations’ vision, but also undermines the commitment of the individuals involved.

2. The primary role of those managing the organization must be to empower volunteers (as well as employees). The leadership of the



organization must be willing to coach people, rather than be ‘in control’ of what happens.

3. A volunteer culture must be intentionally created based on the vision and authentic commitments of both staff and volunteers working together to create a common future. Create an organizational culture in which people choose to volunteer because they experience making a difference and in which their contribution is recognized and appreciated. Create a culture where people matter!

I often challenge not-for-profit organizations to consider if their vision is big enough. Is their organization creating objectives that are worthy of a volunteer’s time? On my desk I keep an anonymous quotation to remind myself that the details of my vision are not as important as creating a vision that is big enough to include and inspire others.

Article re-printed with permission from “Empowering Volunteers” A People Lens: 101 Ways to Move your Organization Forward. Volunteer Vancouver. 2009.

Volunteers can provide skills and expertise to help non-profit organizations achieve objectives

About the Author

Jim Selman is a recognized leader and authority in the field of organizational transformation and culture change. Beginning over 35 years ago, he was among the pioneers of organizational/management practitioners who identified the need for manifesting organizational change, distinguishing the leverage points for leaders and managers to generate change and developing a technology for accelerating the pace of change. As a coach, facilitator, consultant, he has made numerous breakthrough contributions to his clients’ capacity to mobilize people and build competencies in the areas of communication, relationship, business process design, coordination and executive leadership. www.paracomm.com

Strategic Volunteer Engagement

Every non-profit organization has depended on the service of volunteers at some point for the manpower that they provide. But those that have been willing to work out of the box have found that involving volunteers for the skills that they offer has enabled them to optimize this valuable resource and be even better equipped to meet their organization's goals.

Strategic Volunteer Engagement involves integrating volunteers in every level of the organization, negotiating a volunteer's role so that it suits both the needs and skills of the volunteer and the organization, and aligning volunteers with the strategic direction of the organization.

How to start being strategic

Make the organization's direction your business. Think "big picture", how can you involve volunteers to reach that vision?

Find skill or task gaps within the organization and explore ways these gaps can be filled by volunteers.

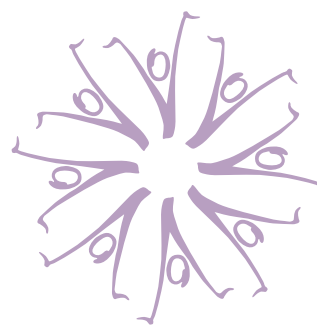
Find other staff willing work with volunteers or to grow their supervision to involve them.

Listen to the ideas that volunteers have on how they can be involved.

Learn more about Strategic Volunteer Engagement. If you are interested in learning to adapt your volunteer programs, Integrating Volunteers in your Organization – Strategic Volunteer Engagement course is offered by Volunteer Calgary.

All Volunteer Calgary courses are based on a strategic approach to volunteer engagement.

For a full list of available training courses and workshops, check out www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca/programs/workshops.aspx



Optimize the impact of volunteers by involving them in every level of your organization and aligning them with your strategic direction



Business, labor and civil society organizations have skills and resources that are vital in helping to build a more robust global community.

Kofi Annan, 7th UN Secretary-General

The Volunteer Interview

The challenges that non-profits face when recruiting and interviewing new volunteers can be similar to those faced when hiring fully paid staff, but it is the differences that really need to be considered. It's important that volunteer managers don't make the mistake of assuming that everyone who applies to volunteer will automatically fit into the existing volunteer roles that the organization has traditionally relied on. In the non-profit environment, flexibility usually results in a better fit for both the volunteer and the organization.

An excellent tool to help you evaluate the fit is the informal meeting or interview. This meeting should give both parties the opportunity to share goals and objectives, determine the best fit and work in cooperation to design and develop a volunteer role that meet each others needs.

Take the time to prepare prior to the actual interview or meeting. Create a list of questions that relate to the volunteers past work and skills or experience (paid or volunteer) that will help both of you understand each others needs.

Review the resume or application of the potential volunteer in order to have a thorough understanding of their skills and experiences. Take stock of the volunteer positions you currently have available in your organization and look for possible matches with the skills of the incoming volunteer. If no obvious match appears then take a moment to consider opportunities that might

exist to create a volunteer position that would benefit your organization and be in line with the skill sets of the potential volunteer.

The beginning of the interview can set the tone, not only for the interview, but the potential volunteer's view of the organization. Make sure that very first meeting or conversation makes the volunteer feel welcome, builds a rapport between the candidate and the organization and provides the candidate with a brief synopsis of the organization. Include the purpose of the organization and the community that it serves.

You should discuss the candidate's interests, skills and abilities. Find out why the candidate is considering volunteering for the organization and what they hope to get out of their volunteer work. Discuss the various volunteer positions that are available and if possible, talk openly about the needs of your organization and look for ways to create a volunteer position that will allow the volunteer to put their skills to work in your organization.

At some point in your initial conversation or interview make sure to discuss time commitments, training, and expectations to ensure that both of you are on the same page.



The initial interview allows you to get acquainted and build a rapport with the volunteer

Remember, you don't have to approve the volunteer immediately. Don't forget such things as reference checking, and possible security checks that may be needed prior to approving a new volunteer. Clearly explain the next steps in the process including the time frame for making a decision. The candidate should also be given time to digest the information that they learned during this process to determine if volunteering for the organization is still something that they feel strongly about.

The bottom line is don't rush to fill volunteer positions. A systematic approach to the recruitment process will ensure that both the volunteer and the organization can exist in productive harmony.

The highest destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule.

Albert Einstein



Advancing the Profession of Volunteer Management

by Janet Burstall

Managing volunteer resources is both demanding and complex.

Most recently Volunteer Managers have been forced to navigate through a changing economy, an aging volunteer work-force, new online technologies, increasing demands for service and, in many cases, decreasing financial resources.

Despite all of these challenges, the role of Volunteer Manager remains one of the most potentially impactful areas within a non-profit organization. Volunteers and volunteer resources can directly affect the success of an organization's ability to raise financial resources, deliver services, fulfill its mission and achieve its goals.

The role of Volunteer Manager requires a person who can adapt and take leadership for their organization. Professional learning and experience help make that possible and a standardized certification process reinforces those qualities.

Any manager of volunteers looking to further develop professional attributes should consider pursuing a professional designation. The certification process helps foster qualities such as leadership, adaptability, ethics, and philanthropy. It encourages an individual to develop beyond their current capacity and allows an organization to reap the benefits that come from professionally managed volunteer resources.

Certification strengthens the profession as a whole, by building credibility, enhancing reputation, and increasing respect for those who provide support and leadership to the engagement of volunteers.

Other non-profit professionals have adapted certification as a means of increasing the level of professionalism in their professions. Fundraising professionals who earn the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) designation recognize the benefits of aligning themselves with a professional identity in the form of certification. Over time, the profession has enjoyed an increased profile and influence within organizations. The same process can be used to elevate the profession of managers of volunteer resources.

Currently in Canada, there are two options for certification, the Certified Administrator of Volunteer Resources (CAVR) and the Certified Volunteer Administrator (CVA). The certification process is slightly different for each designation; however, each involves an element of writing, experience, leadership and practice of standards.

Margaret Blackburn recently achieved her certification in the CVA and reports that "Becoming certified was important to me as a professional. Managing a volunteer program is much the same as managing a Human Resources department. This certification supports the profession of Volunteer Management and recognizes that there

is a level of professionalism and skill required to manage a successful program. This then should increase the profile and role of Volunteer Management within the organization."

To support the pursuit of certification, Volunteer Calgary offers ongoing professional development opportunities, has volunteer opportunities for managers of volunteers to grow their professional experience, and for the first time this Fall, will be offering a study group for those wishing to certify with the CVA which requires an examination.

The future of volunteer engagement will rely on those who are passionate, proactive, and professional in their careers. Professional certification is essential in moving ourselves forward and positioning us for the continued challenges to come.

For more information on these sessions, check out www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca. For more information on being certified, go to www.cvacert.org.

Janet Burstall has been with Volunteer Calgary for 5 years. In her current role she develops resources and workshops for Volunteer Calgary members.



Certification is a means of increasing the level of professionalism in the field of Volunteer Management

Engaging with Engagement

by Erin R. Spink

In the last decade, there has been an explosion of interest in the engagement of human resources across sectors. Whether paid or voluntary, there is a need to get the best from everyone on your team. This unique 'people' advantage is what we are told will be the defining competitive edge to enduring success in the future as new technology becomes quickly obsolete. While originally conceived of as the opposite of employee burnout, the social profit sector has not hesitated to apply the concept of engagement to volunteer resources. All despite an utter lack of research quantifying the concept as it applies to volunteers.

The energy associated with embracing new ideas and perspectives is necessary in order to imbue life into what can become stale and rote — equally true in both personal and professional realms. As professionals and as people, we should always have an eye on how we can continue to evolve and grow. However the question must be asked is that when new skills and ideas are adopted, if the goal truly is growth, will that happen through the blind incorporation of concepts that have not undergone rigorous investigation and reflection? It's akin to using shallow shovels to dig an ocean — you may be like everyone else with a shovel in your hand, but you won't get the outcomes you are hoping for. The overall result of such dogmatic adherence to the 'brand new and improved' is the creation of mindless slaves to trends, caring more about sounding up-to-the-minute than

being wise and increasingly skilled. Both the leaders and followers in this scenario lose out because scraping the surface never brings about deep change or learning.

It can be argued that the idea of volunteer engagement has become the latest in a long line of 'silver bullets' sold as the solution to the recruitment, retention and capacity challenges faced by so many non-profits and charities. Perhaps it is, but as committed, capable professionals, should we not have tested that theory before going ahead with it?

Think back to the problems that have arisen since volunteer managers began including monetary equivalent figures to demonstrate the value of their programs. The focus became less about what volunteers contribute and more about how much an organization is getting for free.

Although the intention was meant to strengthen understanding of the bottom line impact volunteers have, the results created exactly the opposite effect in many cases. Instead of increasing appreciation of volunteer worth, it made volunteer programs look like a garage sale bargain. To now place the same trust in 'volunteer engagement' could be both premature and false. It may very well be that engaging volunteers has all sorts of positive benefits, but no one stopped to define what engagement meant for our sector, for our reality, for volunteers. In 2008 I conducted academic research on volunteer engagement and the results

poke a pretty big hole in one of the key outcomes attributed to engaging volunteers.

Few would argue that people prefer being managed over being engaged, regardless if they're employees or volunteers. But what are the unexamined implicit promises when considering volunteer engagement? Examples might include increased cognitive commitment, heightened emotional connection between an individual and their work and a decreased intention to quit. These are all fine examples and have been accepted generally for populations of employees, but none of them have been either studied or proven for volunteers; in fact the last one, less intention to quit, was disproved in my research on a volunteer population. Differences elsewhere in the study also pointed to gaps in engagement results between employees and volunteers.

My research also took a look at the relationship between role and organization engagement and the length of time a volunteer had been in their role and the frequency of their volunteering. I found that frequency of volunteering was positively related to both role and organization engagement but length of volunteering was only related to organization engagement.

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Whether paid or voluntary, there is a need to get the best from everyone on your team

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

Charles Darwin

Engaging With Engagement

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It's unknown how this compares to employees or under what conditions this finding could change. While the study was robust with several hundred volunteers taking part, more investigation is needed to determine if there are more factors that haven't been considered when defining the engagement of volunteers.

With so many variations possible from one volunteer experience to another, as well as one volunteer to another, we can make an informed presumption that the study's results speak broadly to volunteers and volunteering but until it is pursued further, it's still only a presumption.

Does this mean that the validity of volunteer engagement is defunct or that we should start using other terminology? Fortunately, no.

It does however shine a light on the opportunity to truly understand what volunteer engagement is about, what



Erin R. Spink

it comprises, how to define it and how to create and sustain it. The hard work and deep thought required in the discovery of the answers to these questions will be what genuinely imbues life into stagnant and tired practices and will take the sector to another level both now and in the future.

Creating Engaging Leadership for Volunteers

**Come out to meet Erin R. Spink in Calgary!
On November 26, 2009, join her on a one-day session entitled Creating Engaging Leadership for Volunteers.**

Session Overview

People who lead volunteer programs are an important leadership resource for organizations and for communities. Through the introduction of leadership theories relevant to working with volunteers and the drivers of volunteer engagement, participants will identify the important differences between managing volunteers versus leading them. Gain a better understanding of the types of leader power and influence to increase your ability to advocate effectively. Understand your role as a social architect by creating vision and strategic direction, shaping culture and values, building teams and fostering a learning organization.

For more details about the session, check for updates on www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca.

About the Author

Over the past 15 years, **Erin R. Spink** has been passionately involved as a volunteer, advocate and employee in the social profit sector spanning work with animals, Special Olympic athletes, cancer patients and more. Spink completed an Honours Sociology Degree, including a year spent in France working towards a License de Sociologie, before receiving her Certificate with Distinction in Volunteer Program Management from Conestoga College (Ontario). She later joined the faculty and has been an associate instructor for the past 3 years. Last year, Erin completed an M.A. in Leadership, submitting a major research project entitled "A Leader's impact on the Antecedents and Consequences of Volunteer Engagement". Since the completion of her Master's Degree, Erin has been sharing her learnings with others, encouraging rigorous and deep conversations about the future of volunteerism and what role staff who work with volunteers can play.

Spink's interest in volunteers began at the age of six, when she pronounced that while it was wrong to eat animals, hamburgers at McDonald's came from "volunteer cows," and therefore an exception could be made. Spink currently lives in Toronto, no longer believes in eating volunteers and hopes neither is held against her.

The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession.

Mark Twain

