

Volunteer Retention

Keeping volunteers is work! However, retaining volunteers is cost effective, as returning volunteers offer greater skills, knowledge, and experience.

What Are Best Practices for Volunteer Retention?

- **Define Roles and Expectations:** Do volunteers understand the jobs they've been assigned? Do you provide guidance regarding how you want a task done and the result that you're expecting? Do you provide a time frame for getting something done?
- **You should have job descriptions:** A job description will clarify various duties attached to volunteer jobs. [Click here for a sample volunteer position description.](#)
- **Match volunteers with jobs:** Is an effort made to match volunteers with their jobs? Have you learned what skills and interests they have and do you make an attempt to assign jobs accordingly?
- **Create new volunteer opportunities:** For example, ask a volunteer or volunteers to help with your newsletter. [Check out this case study on that issue at ruralvolunteer.org.](#)
- **Foster a Sense of Community and Belonging:** Create a welcoming environment. Hold volunteer meetings and occasionally one-on-ones. Provide guidance for tasks. Bring coffee and snacks!
- **Communicate:** Have you developed a method of communicating with your volunteers via email or text? You can notify them of events, any relevant organizational changes, volunteer meetings, etc.
- **Develop an Orientation Plan:** If you don't already have one, develop an orientation plan for new volunteers. It can include learning more about your organization and the tasks/jobs that volunteers will be performing. Get input from existing volunteers for your orientation plan.
- **Educate:** Provide training for volunteers for their jobs and tasks. It will not only help with efficiency but will make them feel better about the work they are doing. Remember you can turn a volunteer meeting into a training session.
- **Appreciate:** Recognize and celebrate your volunteers regularly. Get some ideas from our "How do You Show Appreciation" section below.
- **Respect:** Solicit feedback and advice from your volunteers. See the sample volunteer feedback form below.

How Do You Show Appreciation?

- A personalized thank-you card or letter.
- Board Members or Team Leaders reach out in person to thank for a job well done.
- Offer merchandise – Give away T-shirts and mugs.
- Offer training opportunities.
- Communicate Regularly with Volunteers - Establish a method of communication – email, text, etc. where you can communicate with volunteers about upcoming events, meetings, etc. An occasional newsletter might be nice if feasible.
- Ask for their feedback and input.
- Offer updates on how their volunteer efforts have impacted the community - Consider acknowledging in a newsletter or at a volunteer meeting.
- Hold a volunteer lunch or picnic - [Check out this case study from the Rural Volunteerism Initiative about hosting an appreciation picnic.](#)
- Keep track of who you want to appreciate and why - [Click here for a sample form that might help you.](#)
- “The very best way to show appreciation for volunteers is simply with a well-run volunteer program”.¹

¹ <https://volpro.net/appreciation-for-volunteers/>

Struggling with Retaining Volunteers?

- **Be positive!** Make them feel like they are part of the team - Where possible, work with volunteers to create solutions for solving problems. A positive environment helps keep morale high.
- **Welcome Feedback!** Volunteers are in the trenches - They're in a position to view the operation. Soliciting their input can provide you with valuable information.
- **Be Organized and Train your volunteers!** Make sure to offer training and guidance about their tasks in a clear and concise way. You run the risk of not appearing reliable when you're not organized and let volunteers sort through jobs on their own. A little preparation goes a long way.
- **Fight Boredom!** Some Volunteer jobs aren't exciting but are necessary. Consider partnering volunteers for more basic tasks. Let your volunteers know how important the smallest tasks are. Be motivating and go out of your way to show appreciation. Stopping to say thank you goes a long way.

References and Articles

Rural Volunteerism Initiative – Download their toolkit of various volunteer forms and case studies (<https://ruralvolunteer.org>)

501Commons – Article on Volunteer Supervision, Dismissal and Feedback.: <https://www.501commons.org/resources/tools-and-best-practices/volunteer-management/volunteer-employee-relations-1/recognition>

Volunteer Pro – Preventing Burnout for Yourself and Your Volunteers: <https://volpro.net/how-to-prevent-burnout-for-yourself-and-your-volunteers/>

Volunteer Pro – Showing Appreciation for Volunteers Everyday: <https://volpro.net/appreciation-for-volunteers/>

Volunteer Pro – Variables to Consider in Your Volunteer Retention Strategy: <https://volpro.net/volunteer-retention-strategy/>