

How to Assess Volunteer Expectations and Skills

Mismatched needs and work skills lead to volunteer dissatisfaction. Here are tips for identifying capabilities and wishes before engaging volunteers for nonprofits.

Posted by [Michele Dane](#) on Jul 12, 2009

Approximately one out of every three people that volunteered in 2006 opted not to continue their unpaid engagement in 2007 according to the report, *Volunteering in America Research Highlights*.

(www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/assets/resources/VIA_Brief_FINAL.pdf). One of the key reasons that volunteers chose not to continue their work with a nonprofit is that their talents and expectations for their involvement do not match the job or level of responsibility assigned. How can an executive director ensure that their volunteers are satisfied with their engagement? Here are some strategies for assessing a volunteer's abilities and expectations for their involvement.

Assessing Volunteer Skills and Expectations before Engagement

An executive director of a nonprofit can identify the desires and talents of a prospective volunteer by asking them key questions and interviewing them to flesh out the answers. To that end, each prospect should complete a special application and be interviewed by the executive director or volunteer coordinator

In addition to the usual demographic information, the volunteer application should ask for:

- A list of skills currently used in their day to day jobs or used in past employment.
- Their past volunteer jobs and the tasks that they performed there
- What they liked about their last volunteer engagement and what they did not like

- Reasons why they left that volunteer engagement (if they did indeed quit)
- What they hope to gain by volunteering with this organization

The application should be followed up with a one-on-one interview preferably by the executive director or key employee of the organization. This communicates right away the importance that the organization places on volunteering. During the interview the CEO or designee should review the application with the prospective volunteer and ask them for more information about what they like to do, what they dislike doing, their availability, their expectations for their engagement, etc.

The interviewer should list the potential jobs available that match the information in the application. Together the interviewer and the prospective volunteer can hone in on what would be the best use of the volunteer. In addition, it would be useful to identify training that would assist the volunteer in more fully serving the organization.

During the Volunteer Engagement

Just as employers evaluate an employee's performance and satisfaction at key intervals, so should a nonprofit company evaluate the work and satisfaction of their volunteers. It is important to use the original application to check back with the volunteer at one month, six months and annually to determine if the job continues to meet their expectations and capabilities and what can be done to ameliorate the situation if there is a mismatch.

It is important to understand that while the volunteer may enjoy their work with the organization or service club their expectations and ambitions for their involvement are likely to change over time. Sitting down with members or volunteers and reviewing what is going well, what needs to be improved and what they foresee themselves doing on behalf of the group is important.

Applications and one-on-one interviews are key strategies for identifying volunteer talents, dislikes and expectations. In this way, valuable volunteers can grow in their roles and be retained by the organization.