

8 Strategies for Keeping Volunteers Stay Engaged

1. Understand Their Experience

Put yourself in the volunteer's shoes (or ASK your volunteers!), and consider:

- What is most rewarding?
- What is most frustrating?
- When is most challenging or emotional?
- When might someone not feel effective or useful?

2. Manage Expectations

- Be honest about the nature of the work from the start.
- Normalize challenges to help reduce volunteers feeling they're not effective.
- Provide tips for managing the expected bumps in the road.

What expectations do we need to manage for volunteers?

3. Build Meaningful Relationships

- Reduce isolation by helping volunteers and staff connect – particularly among those doing the same kind of work (comfort and strength in a shared experience).
- Pair up new volunteers with seasoned volunteers who can mentor them.
- Offer social time – both work related (book club) and fun (bowling, movie night, etc.).

How can we help volunteers build meaningful relationships?

4. Empower and Equip Volunteers

- Ensure they have access to training and resources (email address, office supplies, etc.) to do their work.
- Keep them informed on what's happening. They need to be "insiders" to serve as ambassadors.
- Provide proper workspace in the office.
- Include volunteers in problem-solving and decision-making.

In what additional ways do we need to empower and equip our volunteers?

5. Check In Regularly

- Ask them how their service is going -- What do they like most? Find challenging?
- Do they have the necessary tools to get the job done?
- Are there any problems with the work they need help with?
- What would they like to accomplish?
- How do they handle stress and what do they need?

Which volunteers do we need to check in with and when?

6. Intervene Early

- Don't wait if you sense an issue.
- Ask them what they need!
- Provide breaks and manage caseloads (i.e., at the end of a tough case, give an easier case as a break).
- Provide access to EAP or other services.
- Don't assume you've lost them – if someone starts trailing off or disappears, FOLLOW UP!

What tools or resources can we provide to help reduce burnout and support volunteers in managing challenges?

7. Celebrate Small Wins

- Break big goals into smaller, achievable goals (lower the bar).
- Baby steps are progress!
- Highlight early successes to fill the bank for tougher times.

What volunteer “wins” can we celebrate?

8. Provide Opportunities to Grow Their Involvement

- Start setting up new case before the previous one ends.
- Ask them to represent you or present in community, meet with donors.
- Expand responsibilities or opportunities to participate in new ways (legislative advocacy, mentoring other volunteers, etc.).

What steps can we take to grow volunteer involvement?