



Developing a Volunteer Talent Management Program

By John Heymann

Nonprofits rely heavily on volunteers, but most organizations do a poor job of managing them. As a result, more than one-third of those who volunteer one year do not donate their time the next year—at any nonprofit. That adds up to an estimated \$38 billion in lost labor. To remedy this situation, nonprofit leaders must develop a more strategic approach to managing this overlooked and undervalued talent pool. The good news is that new waves of retiring baby boomers and energetic young people are ready to fill the gap.

Mismanaging Volunteers

Most nonprofits do not manage their volunteers effectively

Good volunteer management practices	Percentage of nonprofits that use practice regularly
Matching volunteers' skills with appropriate assignments	45%
Recognizing the contributions of volunteers	35%
Measuring the impact of volunteers annually	30%
Providing volunteers with training and professional development	25%
Training paid staff to work with volunteers	19%

Source: *Volunteer Management Capacity Study - the Corporation for National and Community Service*

Nonprofits need more talent

The nonprofit sector desperately needs the professional skills offered by volunteers. The nation's nonprofits are under strain from the current economic crisis, a leadership drain as older executives retire, and high turnover among younger nonprofit staff. Volunteers are an undervalued and underused resource for tackling these challenges.

Why volunteer talent leaves

National volunteer rates are declining. Between 2005 and 2006, the percent of volunteers who did not do any volunteering the following year increased from 32 percent to 36 percent. Although nonprofits can expect, and in some cases even desire, some attrition, losing more than one out of three volunteers from one year to the next is clearly a problem.

1. *Not matching volunteer skills with assignments*

Volunteers with valuable and specialized skills are often dispatched to do manual labor rather than tasks that use their professional talents. (painting houses, planting flowers, taking inventory)

2. *Failing to recognize volunteers' contributions*

Nonprofits need to recognize volunteers through an organizational culture that values them and through specific appreciation ceremonies and events. (list volunteers just as you would donors)

3. *Not measuring the value of contributions*

Measure the dollar value that volunteers provide to the organization. With hard data demonstrating the value of volunteers, boards and donors would be more likely to invest time and money in developing volunteer talent.

4. *Failing to train and invest in volunteers and staff*

Volunteers need training to understand the organizations with which they are working, and employees need to be trained to work with volunteers.

5. *Failing to provide strong leadership*

Take the time to develop or support volunteer talent adequately to avoid a poor or bland experience that leads to an unmotivated volunteer with little reason to return. Place a high value on volunteer talent and dedicate adequate resources to the task— don't assign volunteer coordination to a receptionist

Leveraging Volunteer Talent

1. *Rethink Work Roles*

To create compelling opportunities for volunteers, some organizations are elevating the roles of volunteers and blurring the distinctions between paid and nonpaid staff

2. *Assign Appropriate Tasks*

3. *Create Bonding experiences*

Keep volunteers engaged with challenges fresh and appropriate to skill levels

4. *Support & Train*

Have staff and volunteers train together, or work together on important tasks like creating new curricula or programs

5. *Use new Technology*

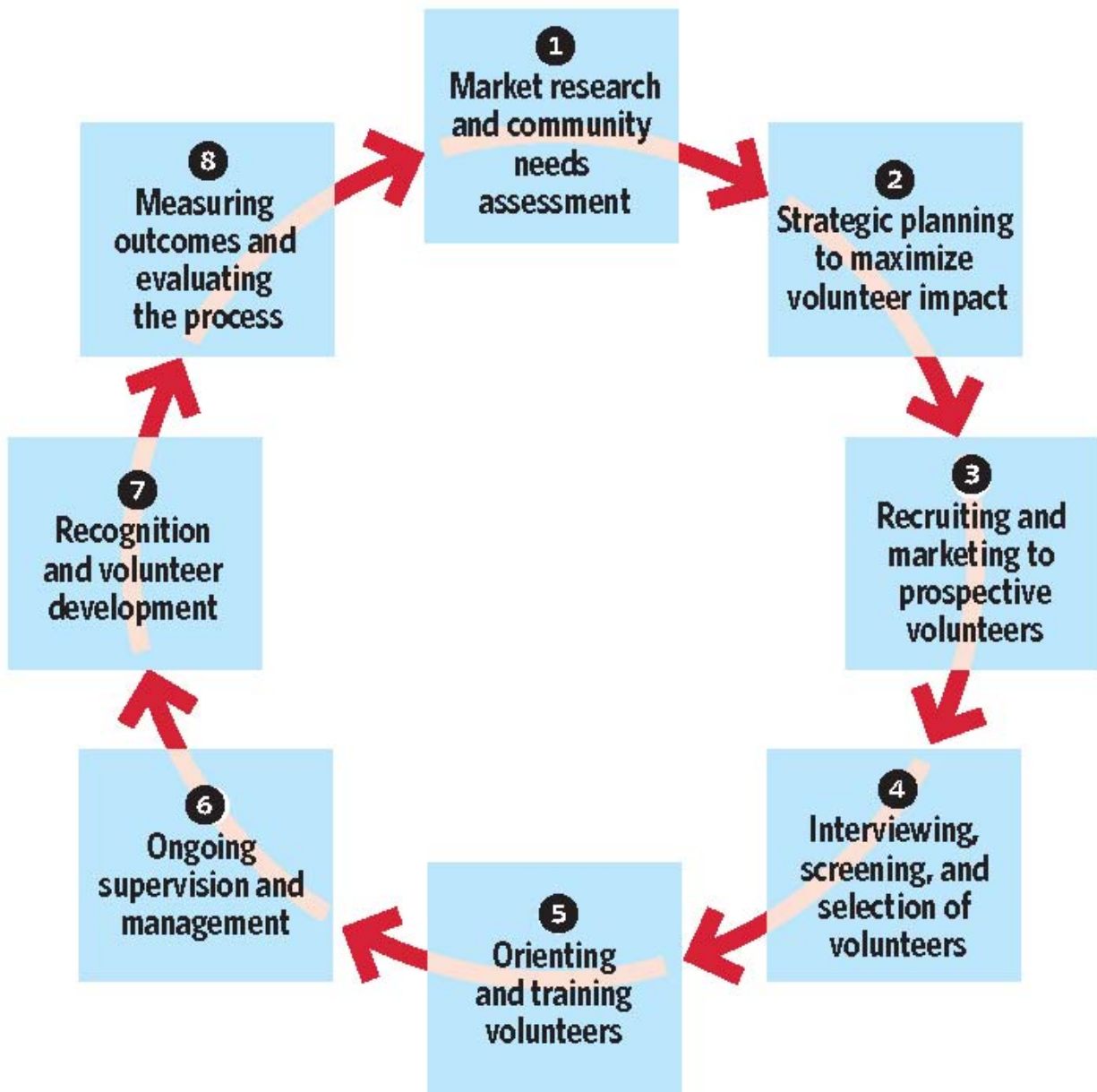
Build social networks to connect volunteers with each other and the organization

6. *Develop a Strategic Plan*

Integrate volunteer roles and policies into formal planning

If you want highly skilled volunteers to come and stay, you need to expand your vision of volunteering by creating an experience that is meaningful, develops skills, demonstrates impact, and taps into volunteers' abilities and interests.

Creating a Strategic Volunteer Plan



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