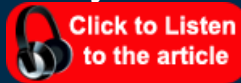


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Educational Article

Create a More Engaging Volunteer System

Jenny Nelson

August 3, 2022



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Create a More Engaging Volunteer System

By: Jenny Nelson

An ASAE Research Foundation study shows that association volunteers are generally satisfied with their volunteer experience, but the responses also highlight opportunities for associations to engage more members more effectively.

Volunteers make association work possible, but associations often rely on the same volunteer management processes that staff have been using for decades to engage and retain volunteers. Generally, the tried-and-true works—according to the ASAE Research Foundation’s study on mutually beneficial volunteer relationships, 88 percent of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with their volunteer experiences.

But the research findings also make a case for volunteer management innovation. Specifically, associations have an opportunity to create lasting engagement with a greater number of members while helping those who volunteer better understand their contributions.

Volunteering Is a Gateway

The study confirmed that most volunteers find their experience rewarding: 57 percent reported they were very satisfied, and 31 percent reported they were somewhat satisfied. They also reported high rates of satisfaction with their volunteer meetings, the networks they created through volunteering, and the opportunity to contribute as an individual and as part of a committee to the profession.

Once a member becomes a volunteer, they are likely to stay engaged as a volunteer. Seventy percent of current volunteers said they were very likely to volunteer again in the next several years, and another 20 percent said they were somewhat likely to do so. Only 1 percent of current volunteers said they were not at all likely to volunteer in the next several years.

Current volunteers were also likely to promote volunteering opportunities to others. Seventy-one percent of current volunteers said they were very likely to recommend volunteering for their association to a friend or colleague, and another 21 percent said they were somewhat likely to do so. Again, only 1 percent of current volunteers said they were not at all likely to promote volunteering for their association.

Dig Into the Research

Get the complete findings and recommendations for improving volunteer management in the ASAE Research Foundation’s report *Mutually Beneficial Volunteerism: Opportunities for Enhancing Association Volunteer Management Systems*.

Overcoming Uncertainty

While volunteering is a gateway to greater engagement, non-volunteers may need help finding the path. Among those who have never volunteered for their association, only 20 percent said they were very likely to volunteer in the next several years. The good news: The number of those who expressed uncertainty about volunteering in the near future (33 percent) was much higher than those who said they were not at all likely to volunteer (9 percent).

Similarly, 13 percent of non-volunteers said they would recommend volunteering for their association to a friend or colleague, but only 10 percent said they were unlikely to make a recommendation at all, while 49 percent said they were unsure about making a recommendation.

Associations may be able to overcome that uncertainty by connecting with non-volunteers, especially through other members. According to non-volunteers, time constraints were the top reason they hadn't volunteered (54 percent cited this reason), but the second and third most common reasons were uncertainty about what volunteering entailed (42 percent) and the fact that no one had asked them to volunteer (31 percent). A personal invitation helps: Among current volunteers, about half (51 percent) said they became a volunteer after being asked to serve by another member.

Associations also can make volunteering more meaningful. While overall satisfaction with volunteer experiences was high, respondents were least satisfied with the amount of feedback they received about their performance as a volunteer. When asked how associations could improve the volunteer experience, respondents suggested that their associations could better explain how their work fits into the larger picture, create clearer expectations for volunteers, and provide volunteer training. Greater openness and inclusivity of new and younger members was also a common response, especially popular among those who had never volunteered.

Jenny Nelson is director, content and knowledge resources, at ASAE. This article originally appeared on asaecenter.org. Reprinted with permission. Copyright ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership (May 2021) Washington, DC."

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