

OPENING THE DOOR TO *Volunteers*

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Have you noticed a decline in volunteer enthusiasm at your association? You wouldn't be alone. A [recent study](#)¹ from the ASAE Research Foundation found that more than 50% of association staff report accepting volunteers who are not as committed or qualified as they need.



Volunteers might be in our DNA and contribute a diverse range of skills and services that boost our ability to get things done – not to mention fill about 25% of our labor hours – but we're still struggling. So, what's the disconnect?

The truth is, the traditional volunteer model – long terms, rigid roles – isn't resonating with today's members. They crave flexibility and opportunities to contribute their skills in meaningful ways.

The Good News: A Shift Towards Engagement

The good news is some associations are embracing this change. They're moving from a focus on "volunteering" to a broader concept of "member engagement."

This shift acknowledges the diverse ways members can contribute, from attending events to offering expertise on short-term projects. American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) provides an example of how to embrace this.

AIHA's secret is creating an opportunity that addressed three triggers: meaningful work, reasonable time commitment and opportunity to have an impact. The job was creating up-to-minute briefings that helped members safely reopen workplaces during the pandemic.

Here's how they tackled it:

- **Focused on the cause:** They rallied members around a critical issue – workplace safety.
- **Offered bite-sized opportunities:** They created short-term work groups to develop the reopening guidance.
- **Benefits for members:** Participation provided valuable knowledge and sharpened leadership skills.

By focusing on what mattered most to members (safety) and offering flexible ways to contribute, the AIHA achieved its goal while boosting member engagement.

¹ <https://www.asaecenter.org/asae-home/publications/8/4/c/2/9/113590-a-holistic-approach-to-volunteer-management-pdf>



How Can Your Association Embrace This Shift?

Begin by embracing an engagement continuum (see figure above) as a catalyst for expanding the opportunities for micro and ad hoc touch-points that are key to unlocking deeper engagement. [The National Apartment Association²](#) and [Network for Change and Continuous Innovation³](#) volunteering models echo this shift.

Here’s how you can leverage the “Engagement Continuum” concept to revamp your approach:

- **Think beyond volunteering:** Acknowledge the spectrum of member involvement, from attending events to short-term projects to traditional volunteering.
- **Create micro-engagement opportunities:** Offer bite-sized ways for members to contribute, like surveys, focus groups, or one-time tasks.
- **Focus on member benefits:** Frame engagement as a way for members to gain new skills, knowledge, and connections.

How do we know this will work?

Beyond the anecdotal examples from AIHA, NAA, NCCI and others, members tell us they are ready and interested. [MCI’s 2024 Association Engagement Index⁴](#) reports that 31% of members and customers are highly interested in contributing actively to their association’s content, programs and strategy. This isn’t an isolated report.

Resources to Get You Started:

Want to learn more? Check out these resources:

- [Mutually Beneficial Volunteer Relationships⁵](#)
- [Holistic Approach to Association Volunteer Management⁶](#)
- [Volunteer Succession Woes?⁷](#)

By embracing a more flexible and member-centric approach, you can unlock the full potential of your association’s greatest asset – its members!

To learn more about volunteer engagement or Mariner Management, email Peggy at phoffman@marinermanagement.com.



Meet Peggy

Peggy Hoffman, FASAE, CAE, is president of Mariner Management, and has served in many association roles from executive director, volunteer liaison to key committees, and volunteer trainer and avid volunteer.

2 <https://www.naahq.org/volunteering> 3 <https://ncci-cu.org/volunteer/> 4 <https://www.mci-associationengagement.com/>
 5 https://www.asaecenter.org/~link.aspx?_id=AA997BEE461F41AA97C3FBA409F1AF12&_z=z
 6 <https://www.asaecenter.org/asae-home/publications/8/4/c/2/9/113590-a-holistic-approach-to-volunteer-management-pdf>
 7 <https://marinermanagement.com/volunteer-succession-woes-weve-got-you-covered/>