A top-down view of several people's hands of various skin tones and clothing (tan jacket, blue jeans, light blue shirt, plaid shirt) reaching towards the center to hold a small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. A thin yellow horizontal line is visible at the top of the image.

# **Volunteer Engagement: The Basics**

Volunteer opportunities come in many forms, and offering a diverse range of options is a smart strategy to boost long-term engagement and allow for varied participation. As you develop your volunteer management plans, consider including some of these different roles that volunteers can take on.

Here are several types of volunteering to incorporate into your approach:

**Event Support** Your organization likely hosts several fundraising events each year to promote your cause and raise funds. Volunteers can provide essential on-the-ground support to ensure these events run smoothly. Event support roles may include tasks like setup, guest registration, discussion facilitation, and merchandise sales.

**Skills-Based Volunteering** Skills-based volunteers contribute their professional expertise to nonprofits, offering services such as accounting, event planning, legal work, PR assistance, or digital marketing. These volunteers typically use skills they already employ in their careers and can be valuable on a one-time basis or throughout an ongoing project.

**Long-Term Volunteering** Long-term volunteers commit to ongoing roles within the organization, with set expectations and a designated time commitment communicated upfront. Examples of long-term volunteering include roles like youth mentors, tutors, coaches, and troop leaders.

**Administrative Support** Volunteers who provide administrative support assist your staff with office tasks, such as clerical work, data entry, or reception duties. While these volunteers often spend significant time in the office, their commitment may not be as extensive as that of long-term volunteers.

**Advocacy Work** Advocates play a key role in raising awareness for your cause and can be considered a type of volunteer. Their responsibilities may include promoting campaigns, securing petition signatures, or hosting discussion events to further your organization's mission.

**Committee or Board Service** Committee and board members hold vital roles in advancing your projects and ensuring your organization stays on course. Committees typically focus on specific tasks, like event planning, while board members take on a broader range of responsibilities, such as attending meetings, shaping strategies, and voting on key decisions.

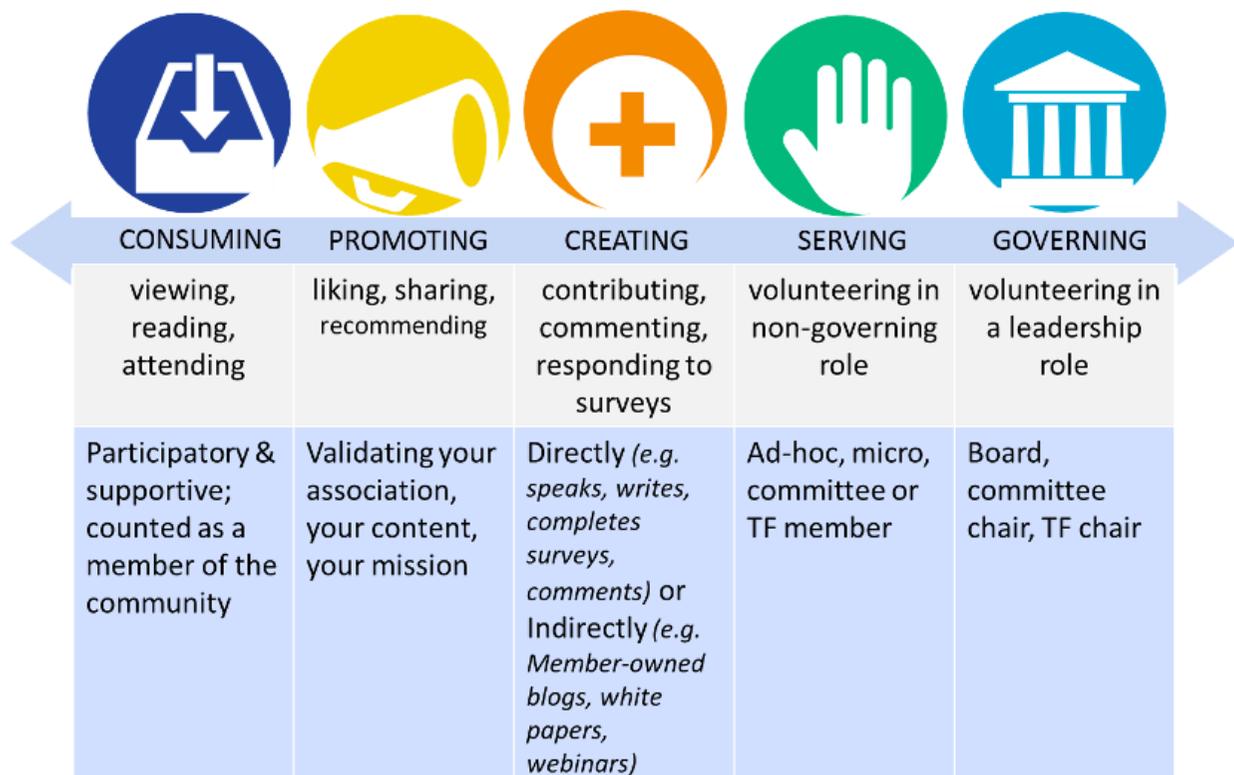


Virtual Volunteering Virtual volunteers contribute remotely, making it possible for supporters to engage with your organization even when they can't be physically present. This approach also expands your reach to a wider geographic audience. Virtual volunteering opportunities might include:

- Hosting or participating in virtual discussion events, like town halls and roundtables
- Joining online meetups and celebrations
- Engaging in phone and text banking and training
- Training others for online advocacy
- Participating in live-streamed programming

As the world becomes more digital, virtual volunteering is likely to remain a vital aspect of volunteer engagement, ensuring your strategies are effective for both virtual and in-person events.

### The continuum of volunteering:



# Volunteer Management Best Practices

The volunteer management cycle consists of five key steps:

- Recruitment
- Onboarding & Training
- Engagement
- Retention and Post Engagement
- Reporting

Each of these steps plays a crucial role in streamlining your volunteer management process. Mastering these steps ensures that you can easily recruit volunteers, keep them informed and prepared, and motivate them to remain committed to your organization over the long term.

## **Step One: Recruitment**

Recruitment is the first step in the volunteer management cycle. Without volunteers, your organization cannot train or retain a team. The strategies you use to recruit volunteers are crucial because your nonprofit relies on dedicated, mission-driven individuals.

To optimize volunteer recruitment:

- Enhance your online presence to make it easy for potential volunteers to find opportunities with your organization.
- Be transparent about your organization's needs, ensuring volunteers understand their roles and are prepared for the tasks ahead.
- Create a detailed volunteer information page on your website, showcasing the impact they can make and providing all necessary information to get started.

## **Step Two: Onboarding & Training**

After recruiting volunteers, it's essential to prepare them for their roles through a comprehensive onboarding and training process. If new volunteers are unclear about their next steps, they may either miss important steps or decide that volunteering is not worth the effort.

To ensure a smooth onboarding process:

- Make sure the onboarding steps are clear, and that volunteers understand their roles, how to begin training, and who to contact with questions.
- During training, set clear guidelines and expectations upfront.
- Provide ample opportunities for volunteers to ask questions and seek clarification, such as webinars with email reminders.
- Gather feedback from current volunteers to identify areas for improvement in the training process.



### **Step Three: Engagement**

Volunteer engagement is vital to maintaining an active and committed team. Volunteers are more likely to sign up for shifts and support your organization if they feel personally connected to your mission and invested in your story.

To foster volunteer engagement:

- Organize fun events and activity days to help volunteers connect with each other and enjoy their involvement with your nonprofit.
- Send out newsletters and updates so volunteers can see the impact of their work and stay informed about your organization's progress and achievements.
- Encourage microdonations, which help volunteers feel more invested in your mission and contribute to your shared goals as a community.

### **Step Four: Retention and Post Engagement**

Lifelong volunteers are essential for the long-term success of your nonprofit. Retention and post-event engagement strategies are critical to keeping volunteers involved beyond a single event.

To cultivate lifelong volunteers:

- Send thank-you notes and other expressions of appreciation after volunteers help with an event.
- Acknowledge and celebrate milestones, making volunteers feel part of something special. A volunteer management system that tracks hours served, days volunteered, and the monetary value of volunteer contributions can help with this.
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to voice concerns or issues in real-time, so problems can be addressed promptly. Volunteer management platforms with feedback forums can be particularly useful for monitoring volunteer sentiment.

### **Step Six: Reporting**

Reporting is the final step in the volunteer management cycle and is crucial for increasing donations and re-engaging volunteers. Accurate reporting showcases your organization's impact and can lead to increased funding and grant opportunities.

To improve reporting:

- Use volunteer management systems that make self-reporting easy for volunteers.
- Send reminders immediately after a volunteer checks out from an event.
- Provide incentives or hold competitions to reward volunteers who track their hours.