

Attracting and Retaining Great Volunteers

Summary of Club Connections Zoom Session May 2024

Purpose:

This session explored practical strategies for recruiting, supporting, and retaining volunteers, emphasising the importance of leadership, club culture, and personalised engagement. The discussion highlighted common challenges and actionable solutions to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction.

***Note:** there were 2 x sessions on this subject, a daytime session that was then repeated as an evening session. The content presented for each session was the same, however, the questions may have been different for each audience. This summary captures the key points from each session.*

Topics Discussed:

1. The Value of Retaining Existing Volunteers

- **Efficiency:** Retaining current volunteers requires fewer resources than recruiting new ones.
- **Strategies for Retention:**
 - Build loyalty by recognising contributions through public acknowledgment and personal appreciation.
 - Offer support through mentoring programs or professional development opportunities.
 - Ensure existing volunteers feel valued and engaged by soliciting their input and addressing their needs.

2. Leadership and Culture in Volunteer Engagement

- **Role of Leadership:**
 - Leaders and volunteers set the tone for a welcoming and supportive club environment.
 - Clear, open transparent communications to enable proactive decision-making fosters trust and reliability.
- **Building a Positive Culture:**
 - Define a shared vision and purpose for the club that motivates members.
 - Cultivate inclusiveness by ensuring all members feel heard and respected.
 - Prioritise enjoyment and camaraderie alongside club goals to create a vibrant and safe atmosphere.

3. Barriers to Volunteering

- **Practical Barriers:**
 - Unrealistic time limitations, unclear expectations, and lack of training.
 - Solutions: Offer micro-volunteering opportunities (short-term or task-specific roles) and provide comprehensive role descriptions together with ongoing support & recognition by providing training, mentorship, and regular appreciation to maintain motivation and involvement.
- **Emotional Barriers:**
 - Fear of overcommitment, feeling unqualified, or intimidation by existing committee structures.
 - Solutions: Reassure potential volunteers by outlining achievable tasks and providing robust support systems with regular appreciation to maintain motivation and involvement.

4. Attracting New Volunteers

- **Personal Outreach:**
 - Directly approach individuals and express confidence in their abilities. People are often flattered when personally invited to contribute.
- **Clear Role Definitions:**
 - Develop detailed position descriptions, avoiding ambiguity to ensure volunteers know what is expected of them.
 - Consider creating mentorship roles to assist new volunteers in building confidence and skills.
- **Creative Recruitment:**
 - Promote volunteering opportunities through informal conversations during events or activities.
 - Highlight the benefits of volunteering, such as skill development, social connections, and personal growth.

5. Micro-Volunteering and Flexible Opportunities

- Break larger roles into smaller, focused tasks to make participation less intimidating.
- Provide project-based opportunities, such as short-term working groups or task forces, to engage members without long-term commitments.

6. Creating a Supportive Volunteer Environment

- **Induction and Training:**
 - Formalise the onboarding process with structured induction programs.
 - Assign mentors to help new volunteers adjust to their roles and feel supported.
- **Recognition and Feedback:**
 - Regularly acknowledge contributions through awards, newsletters, or public forums.
 - Offer constructive feedback to improve their experience and effectiveness.
- **Accommodating Diverse Needs:**
 - Ensure roles align with volunteers' skills, interests, and availability.
 - Use flexible scheduling and hybrid participation options to remove barriers.

7. Establishing a Culture of Volunteering

- Define and document the club's expectations, values, and behaviours.
- Regularly communicate the club's vision, goals, and progress to members to foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose.
- Encourage collaboration and co-design opportunities by involving members in decision-making and project planning.

8. Effective Goal Setting and Club Structure

- Set clear, measurable, and time-bound goals to provide direction and focus.
 - Examples: Increase the number of active volunteers by 20% within 12 months or reduce committee workload by redistributing tasks across subcommittees.
 - Use subcommittees or working parties for specific projects to involve non-committee members and build their confidence.
 - Share responsibilities to prevent burnout and enhance efficiency, ensuring that no single person feels overwhelmed.
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Session Highlights and Success Stories:

- **Practical Example:** A club created subcommittees for specific tasks, mandating participation by at least one non-committee member. This encourages wider involvement and reduces the burden on existing leaders/volunteers.
 - **Volunteer Training:** Clubs shared experiences of mentoring new leaders/volunteers, emphasising the importance of building capacity through training programs and gradual delegation of responsibilities.
 - **Overcoming Fear:** A participant shared success in personally approaching members and identifying their strengths, resulting in enthusiastic responses and increased participation.
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Key Takeaways:

1. **Volunteer Engagement:**
 - Personal outreach is the most effective way to recruit volunteers.
 - Retention strategies, including recognition and support, are critical to long-term success.
 2. **Adaptability:**
 - Flexible roles, micro-volunteering, and hybrid participation options cater to diverse needs.
 3. **Sustainable Practices:**
 - Goal setting, clear communication, and structured induction processes are essential for sustainable volunteer engagement.
 4. **Shared Leadership:**
 - Involving non-committee members in specific projects or subcommittees fosters a sense of ownership and progression.
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Actionable Next Steps for Clubs:

1. Review and update position descriptions to clarify responsibilities and expectations.
2. Develop a formal induction and mentoring program for new volunteers.
3. Create project-based roles or subcommittees to engage a broader member base.
4. Use direct, personalised invitations to encourage participation.
5. Foster a culture of inclusivity, communication, and recognition.

The session emphasised the importance of aligning volunteer efforts with the club's goals and creating a positive, supportive environment to attract and retain great volunteers.