Volunteer Management: Tips and Strategies

Volunteer management is crucial to the continued success of most theatres. They bring skills, dedication and, most important, passion to the time they give you.

Proper volunteer management has the potential to grow your volunteer pool and foster retention, helping you maintain access to skilled, reliable support. In this guide, we'll cover the core components of an effective volunteer management strategy, including:

- What is volunteer management?
- The volunteer management lifecycle
- Volunteer management best practices
- How volunteer management software can help

Volunteer management defined

Volunteer management is the process used to recruit, track, engage and retain volunteers. Managing volunteers is key to developing and maintaining an effective, passionate and dedicated supporter base.

Proper volunteer management is important because it helps avoid excessive volunteer turnover. Because volunteers are unpaid, keeping them excited and incentivized can be challenging. Prioritizing volunteer management gives volunteers a sense of belonging within your theatre, encouraging them to continue working to bring your vision to life.

The volunteer management lifecycle

The volunteer management lifecycle simply means the process volunteers go through during their engagement with your theatre, from when they're first recruited to when they become recurring supporters.

When you understand the volunteer lifecycle—specifically its four steps—you can identify ways to improve your volunteer management processes at every stage.

Volunteer recruitment

Volunteer recruitment is the process your theatre uses to bring new volunteers on board. It includes marketing your volunteer opportunities, allowing volunteers to sign up easily and screening potential volunteers.

Volunteer empowerment

Volunteer empowerment ensures that volunteers feel equipped and excited to get to work. By matching volunteers to jobs that suit their skill sets, giving them quality training and being available for questions during their shifts, you can empower your volunteers to do their best.

Volunteer engagement

Just as your organization uses donor communication to stay in touch and encourage repeat contributions, you must develop a volunteer communications plan to keep volunteers engaged. This should include methods used to deliver important volunteer information as well as avenues for volunteer feedback and questions.

Volunteer recognition and retention

We all appreciate being recognized for our hard work, and volunteers are no different. Recognizing your volunteers can involve sending a thank-you note, giving them a shoutout in your monthly newsletter, presenting them with a certificate of appreciation, or honoring them at a special event.

Similar to a donor appreciation event, a volunteer appreciation event can go a long way in showing your theatre's appreciation for the hard work and dedication of your supporters and advocates—and it doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. These events are meant to build trust and show appreciation, respond to volunteers' questions, and help demonstrate the alignment between your volunteers' interests and passions with your theatre's mission.

Ultimately, when volunteers feel recognized and appreciated for their contributions, they'll be much more motivated to stay involved with your organization for the long term.

Volunteer management best practices

Through every stage of the management process, your theatre has plenty of opportunities to better connect with volunteers, understand their motivations and provide a positive experience. Ultimately, volunteers will decide whether to stay involved with you based on their connection to your theatre. Consider the following best practices to enhance your approach to volunteer management.

Streamline your registration form

Your volunteer registration form should be simple and easy to fill out, no matter what type of device volunteers use. Ask only necessary questions, such as volunteers' contact information (including their emergency contact), interests and availability. Use large text and buttons to make the form easy to read on mobile devices.

Make your registration form easy to find on your website by including it in your navigation menu and using calls to action on your homepage that lead to the form.

Write clear, compelling role descriptions

Your volunteer role descriptions should entice new volunteers to get involved and offer all the information they need. Include details such as:

- The role's title and responsibilities
- The date, time and location of the opportunity
- Any supplies or equipment volunteers should bring
- Benefits volunteers will receive from participating, such as the ability to meet new people, discount tickets, or a complimentary branded t-shirt
- The link to the signup form

Post your volunteer description on social media, share it via email and publish it on volunteer hubs like [VolunteerMatch](#) to maximize your recruitment reach.

Recruit existing supporters

Reach out to current supporters to see if they'd be interested in joining your volunteer program. Send invitations to board members, donors, and corporate partners. These individuals have already expressed support for your mission and may be looking for new ways to get involved. Reach out with a personalized email or text addressed with recipients' names to ensure that your message stands out.

Use multiple marketing channels to promote opportunities

Share your volunteer posting widely across your marketing channels, including:

- Email
- Social media
- Your website
- SMS communications
- Flyers
- Direct mail

A multichannel marketing strategy will help you reach the broadest possible audience. You can even ask current volunteers to invite their friends or family members to your opportunities, widening your reach to new audiences.

Gather feedback from volunteers

Show volunteers that you're committed to building your program with their needs and interests in mind by asking for their feedback. Send surveys with questions like:

- What is your favorite part of our volunteer program?
- What is something you would change to improve our volunteer program?
- What is your preferred communication method to hear about volunteer opportunities?
- Do you feel like our volunteer opportunities work well with your schedule?
- Would you recommend our volunteer program to a family member or friend?

After receiving responses, outline a plan to adjust your program based on volunteers' input. Communicate your plan to volunteers to show that you're taking their recommendations seriously.

Don't be afraid to cultivate volunteers as donors

Some theatre professionals hesitate to ask volunteers for donations. The idea is that volunteers already contribute plenty of support, so volunteer managers don't want to overwhelm them with additional requests.

However, theatre volunteers often *want* to contribute financially alongside their volunteer work. According to the [Global Trends in Giving Report](), 76% of volunteers in the United States and Canada donate to the nonprofit organizations they volunteer for.

If you choose to go this route, cultivating volunteers as donors starts with the following steps:

1. Identify your most engaged volunteers
2. Send tailored messages to this group
3. Illustrate the incredible impact volunteers have already made through their work
4. Provide multiple donation options, including one-time donations, monthly giving, in-kind donations or gifts of stock

When you focus on building genuine relationships with volunteers, they'll happily support your fundraising efforts in addition to their volunteer work.

Volunteer management software

For large theatres, with hundreds of volunteers, volunteer management tools can provide tools to keep volunteer information, scheduling, communications and other activities organized.

Just like a donor management system, it's important to consider what features your organization needs most when choosing a volunteer solution. Here are a few must-have features to look for when researching volunteer management systems:

- **Scheduling tools:** Assign volunteers to projects and shifts, send shift reminders and identify scheduling gaps
- **Volunteer profiles:** Track volunteer history, contact information, interests, skills and other important information. Attach important documents to volunteer profiles, like background checks and waivers.
- **Data reporting:** Monitor volunteers' progress through your training process, track volunteer hours and measure volunteer impact
- **Communication tools:** Message volunteers privately, offer a communications board and create communication segments for targeted messaging. Categorize your volunteers by availability, age, gender, geographical location, years of service and other characteristics of your team's choosing.
- **Software integration:** Some software integrates volunteer management with donor management systems and email marketing tools.

A volunteer management system can play a major role in handling your program's logistics and planning, allowing you to stay organized and continue providing a streamlined, positive experience. Some options include (in alphabetical order) Bloomerang, Civic Champs. Galaxy Digital, Giveffect, Mobilize, SignUpGenius, Volgistics, and VolunteerMark,, among others. Because changes in software providers can occur, you want to do a web search for "volunteer management system."

The bottom line

Intentional volunteer management is essential for any theatre organization. Recruit and retain valuable volunteers by crafting a plan that includes an effective system for managing volunteers.