

Volunteer Program Design Tip Sheet

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Introduction

Volunteer management professionals have access to many resources to help learn how to evaluate volunteers. However, there are fewer resources available to help design and launch a volunteer program, and learn how the design model might enhance or detract from the ability to meet program goals.

To identify and explore different volunteer program models, experienced volunteer management specialists were consulted. The pros and cons in each of the four volunteer program design models were identified based on personal experiences and surveys from over 424 older volunteers who were primarily served through centralized, distributed, and captain models.

Evaluators often measure efficiency and effectiveness in programs, but also engagement or connectivity from both the staff and volunteer perspective is considered. While staff is paid to work in an organization, volunteers engage without a financial benefit. Important variables that support volunteer retention and satisfaction include feeling connected to the mission of an organization and knowing their personal contribution makes a difference.

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Model Name	Description of Volunteer Program	Pros of the model	Cons of the model
Collective	This is a whole team approach to volunteer management. All staff members are involved in the decision-making regarding the recruitment, assessment, training, and management of volunteers. The team makes decisions and the volunteer manager implements the plans.	The collective model is engaging. Staff contribute to all aspects of the volunteer management cycle. Volunteers and staff often have a close working relationship. Staff turnover has less impact on volunteer operations as knowledge is shared between participants. This model works well in programs that are new or re-forming and in programs where outcomes are dependent on strong relationships and good communications.	The collective model can complicate and slow down decision making processes. This model relies on a well functioning team that is familiar with volunteer management principles and practices. Multiple stakeholders may complicate reporting structures for volunteers. It can be less cost-effective and time-in efficient.

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Centralized	A single volunteer manager or team of volunteer managers coordinate all aspects of the volunteer management cycle. There may be limited support from other team members .	This model provides volunteers and staff members with a dedicated person or volunteer department to respond to all aspects of volunteer program needs. The policies, processes, and practices for the entire volunteer management cycle are housed in one central location. The volunteer manager is often responsible for all aspects of the volunteer management cycle. Volunteers report feeling very connected to their volunteer manager and appreciate being a part of a volunteer team– regardless of the length of their service or role in the organization. ¹ This system works well with fewer than 150 volunteers or with a larger team of volunteers doing regularly scheduled similar roles. This one-stop shop model is cost effective and efficient – particularly at smaller scales.	The centralized model places a lot of stress on a single individual or point of contact. This can lead to devastating consequences when there is high staff turnover. A supervisor typically oversees the work of between 10 and 15 staff members. A supervisor of volunteers typically oversees the work of over 185 volunteers ² . The volunteer coordinator is less likely to be able to complete regular check-ins with volunteers, provide direct supervision to all volunteers, or engage effectively in every part of the volunteer management cycle This model is scalable to around 150 volunteers. The model works best when the staff member is a trained volunteer management professional where volunteer management is their only focus and commitment.

1 Stage based Volunteering Report Volunteer Victoria, 2017

2 (The Interwoven Workplace: Paid and Unpaid Staff Working Together, Kate Kerr, 2017).

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Distributed	Different parts of the volunteer management cycle are distributed amongst many team members across an organization. For example volunteer recruitment and assessment might stay centralized with the volunteer department, while responsibilities for volunteer scheduling, supervision, and training may be transferred to another staff member, department, or location.	The Distributed Model works very well in large organizations and in small or medium sized organizations with multiple locations – such as a head office and a social enterprise. It also works well in organizations where there are distinct roles for volunteers who require specialized training, and on-going supervision from subject matter experts. Many people are engaged in different parts of the volunteer management cycle, so volunteers report feeling like they are part of a team and are able to access staff from many areas in the operation ³ . This model is very scalable and is not reliant on one person. Retention rates in this model tend to be high as there are often strong connections between the volunteer, the mission of the organization, and the supervisor(s).	The Distributed Model relies heavily on the good will of staff members not directly connected to the volunteer department. Staff supervisors may or may not have any experience or training supervising and supporting volunteers which can mean inconsistencies in how volunteers are treated and how challenges are reported and addressed. Volunteers may be disconnected from the volunteer department. Reporting issues can be more complicated in this model as not every staff member connects regularly with the volunteer department. Distributed models are rarely able to calculate the entire cost of volunteer management because so many people are involved in various different ways.

3 Stage based Volunteering Report Volunteer Victoria, 2017

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Model Name	Description of Volunteer Program	Pros of the model	Cons of the model
Captain	<p>This model relies on formal, consistent policies and practices to build multiple small teams of volunteers who work within a much larger framework. Many emergency response teams use this model. The Thrifty Foods Sendial program also uses this model to manage more than 500 volunteers across multiple locations around Vancouver Island.</p>	<p>The Captain Model requires a formal structure where every group of 10 volunteers is assigned a volunteer captain who provides direct supervision and support to the volunteers, and relays communications to and from the management team. The Captains meet as a team regularly to share information and updates. Each team of 10 follows the same set of policies and procedures, making this model very scalable, very fast to implement and repeat, and it provides great consistency. This is particularly useful model for organizations that need volunteers to follow strict health and safety requirements. Volunteers engaged in this model report the highest rates of connectivity⁴. The model is easily parachuted into scheduled and unscheduled events, as the frameworks and structures are all designed and tested before becoming operational.</p>	<p>The Captain Model is the most hierarchical and least flexible option of all the models. The model does not allow for a great deal of individuality and negotiation with volunteers. It also requires volunteers to take on leadership roles and to act as supervisors – which can be difficult in locations where volunteers are in short supply. As every part is a cog in one large unit this model consistency is paramount across the whole system.</p>

4 Stage based Volunteering Report Volunteer Victoria, 2017

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Additional Resources

Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement © Volunteer Canada, 2017

https://volunteer.ca/vdemo/ResearchAndResources_DOCS/Volunteer_Canada_Canadian_Code_for_Volunteer_Involvement_2017.pdf

About Volunteer Victoria

The Greater Victoria Volunteer Society, more commonly known as Volunteer Victoria, is a volunteer centre and hub to help volunteers, volunteer managers, and volunteer-led organizations.

Our mission is to *inspire and empower volunteerism!* We:

- Help volunteers and volunteer-led organizations
- Build and share knowledge through the delivery of professional development, training, learning and networking opportunities
- Offer specialized services and resources that advance the quality of volunteer programs and build capacity
- Treat all members, volunteers, partners, staff and stakeholders with fairness, dignity, and respect
- Provide welcoming spaces that embrace diverse ideas, knowledge, cultures, and experiences

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