



VOLUNTEER!

Brief: Encouraging Volunteerism

Volunteering Provides Health Benefits!

- Volunteering is associated with **greater life satisfaction** and can provide feelings of **purpose in life**.^{1,2}
Volunteering serves as a protective factor to feelings of purpose in life for those with major role-identity absences (partner, employment, and parental).²
- Volunteers report **better self-rated health** and **decreased functional dependence**.³⁻⁵
While there is no relation between volunteering and the number of chronic conditions or nursing home residency rates, it is possible that volunteers may be better able to cope with their chronic conditions versus their non-volunteer counterparts.^{4,5}
- Volunteering to help others can **reduce mortality risk**, on average, by 24%.⁶
Research suggests that volunteers' motives are important and volunteers with self-oriented motives (versus other-oriented motives like considering others) have mortality rates similar to those of non-volunteers.⁷
- Volunteering **lowers depression** levels.^{8,9}
Volunteering itself is associated with lowered depression levels. Social resources such as attendance at meetings may play a minor role in this association.⁹
- Volunteering **increases one's social connections** and **prevents isolation**.¹⁰
Social integration theory stresses the importance of social connections and possessing social roles. Positive social integration is good for one's health, providing mortality, physical, mental, and physiological effects.¹¹
- Volunteers have **lower hypertension risks** and **lower blood pressures**.¹²
Hypertension is a leading risk factor for cardiovascular and renal disease. Therefore, volunteering can have important implications for volunteers' health.¹² In addition, states with higher volunteer rates have lower age-adjusted incidences of heart disease.¹⁰
- Most studies exploring the health benefits of volunteering have been conducted in older adults, but there are **benefits for all ages**, including younger adults.
Volunteering in college predicts adult volunteering, which predicts adult well-being.¹³ Adult well-being is defined as personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and life satisfaction.
- Encourage **100 hours a year** or approximately 2 hours a week of volunteering.
While just being a volunteer confers benefits, studies indicate that the health benefits of volunteering are nonlinear and aiming for 100 hours a year will help maximize the benefits.^{3,5,14} Overworking volunteers and causing increased stress may actually be harmful.¹⁵

Tips on Volunteer Retention

Volunteers are vital members of an organization.

In 2011, Idaho volunteers donated **68.7 million hours** of service worth **\$1.5 billion**.¹⁶
It is important to continue harnessing volunteers' talents through good retention practices.

Proper volunteer management is essential to retention.

- Practices tied to greater volunteer retention include¹⁷:
 - Recognizing volunteers
 - Providing training and professional development for volunteers
 - Providing a welcoming culture
 - Allocating sufficient support resources
 - Enlisting volunteers in recruiting other volunteers
- Take a talent management approach and **invest in the infrastructure** to recruit, develop, place, recognize, and ultimately retain volunteers' talent.¹⁸
- Retention starts at the **beginning** with recruitment and continues throughout the entirety of the volunteer process. When recruiting, accurate position and organization descriptions will help ensure that the volunteers' interests align with the goals and mission of the organization.
- Each volunteer brings his or her own talent to the organization. Harness these talents by **matching volunteers' skills** with appropriate assignments. In some situations, this may mean creating new placements or developing new positions that will engage the volunteer.¹⁸
- Determine each **volunteer's goals** and ensure that the organization is doing what it can do to ensure that these goals are being met.
- Create a **strategic volunteer plan** and ensure that volunteers are incorporated into the organization's strategic plan.¹⁸
- Ensure that everybody at the organization **recognizes** and truly **values** the volunteers. Train paid staff to work with volunteers. Volunteers can fill important roles within the organization.¹⁸

Key Actions!

- Increase awareness** about the health benefits of volunteering!

Volunteering is a win-win situation for those that volunteer and the community that volunteers serve. Spread the news!

“Volunteering for this program helps me even more than it helps my participants.”

- Idaho Volunteer

- Actively **ASK** individuals to volunteer their time and talents.

Individuals need to recognize the need for their services and the best way to do this is by simply asking for their help.

- Utilize your current volunteer workforce in your recruitment efforts.

- Reevaluate** your volunteer program and be prepared to **make changes** if needed.

This will not be an easy undertaking, but it may be necessary if your organization is to create an appropriate infrastructure that can truly optimize volunteers’ talents.

- Ensure that the informal and formal rules, regulations, and policies governing volunteers are conducive to volunteers’ retention.

- Ask yourself: “Are the talents of our volunteers truly being harnessed?”

- o Examine how volunteers are matched to their current positions.

“I get a thrill from doing something that I am good at doing.”

- Idaho Volunteer

“I’m addicted to that ‘good feeling.’ I have the time and the skills and it’s fun.”

- Idaho Volunteer

- Recognize** and **thank** your volunteers TODAY.

Ensure that your volunteers say:

“I am proud to be a volunteer for this organization!”

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