Why Your Organization Should Be Matching Volunteers by Passions, Interests, and Abilities

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Research suggests that one of the most successful tactics a charitable organization can undertake to increase volunteer retention is matching volunteers to tasks by their passions, interests, and abilities. Volunteer satisfaction contributes more than almost any other factor as to whether or not volunteers continue to donate their time and efforts to a particular organization. When you match a volunteer to tasks they are genuinely passionate about, interested in and able to do successfully, they are much more likely to feel satisfied by the work they are doing for your organization and continue to contribute towards your mission.

Mark A. Hager and Jeffrey L. Brudney of The Urban Institute, a nonpartisan economic and social policy research organization, discussed the benefits of effectively matching volunteers to tasks in their report, Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. This study explores the results of a 2003 survey of charities and religious congregations designed to examine volunteer management capacity. In the authors’ view, the volunteer management practices that are most successful in increasing retention rates, “all center on enriching the volunteer experience.” Screening and matching volunteers to tasks by their passions, interests and abilities was one of the top three best practices the Institute identified that organizations can use to increase volunteer retention rates. The other two best practices were recognizing volunteer achievements and developing effective training programs.

How to Begin Matching Volunteers by Passions, Interests, and Abilities

Screening volunteers and matching them to jobs based on their passions, interests and abilities is one of the best management practices that a charitable organization can make to increase retention. So, how can you begin doing that? Your website is one of the most powerful tools you can use. Here are four suggestions:

1. Potential volunteers will come to your website looking for opportunities they are already passionate about. Make it easy for site users to filter through the list of volunteer opportunities to find a need that matches their interests and skill sets. For example, a bilingual person should be able to see a list of all bilingual volunteer opportunities at the click of a button.
2. Volunteers should be able to create profiles on your website that collects information about their areas of interest. Matching volunteers by passions, interests, and abilities is only possible when you know more about who your volunteers are.
3. Use the power of social media. If volunteers do not wish to create a personal profile on your website, allow them to use their Facebook accounts to log in. Facebook Connect will also make it easy for volunteers to share stories about your organization with like-minded friends who are also candidates for becoming volunteers.
4. Use a web based volunteer management software, such as Get Connected, that offers built in matchmaking solutions.

These are just a few of the things your organization can do to begin matching volunteers to organizational needs by their passions, interests, and abilities. Research shows that the efforts your organization undertakes to make this happen will be well worth the investment. In the closing remarks of their study, Hager and Brudney observed that, of the charities they surveyed, the organizations that adopted best practices designed to increase volunteer satisfaction had the overall highest retention rates.

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