Role of Volunteers in Non-Profit Organizations

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Why Have Volunteers?
There are three strong reasons IECA incorporates volunteers into its programs. First, it helps build organizational strength. That strength comes not only from growing and retaining members and enhancing association programs, but also in the sense of ownership that volunteers gain when they become visible advocates for the association.

Second, you, as member volunteers, have credibility that paid staff or consultants never have. You can discuss peer-to-peer, and you can promote the association because you believe in it. Volunteering is a personal choice, not your job. Never underestimate the power of peer-to-peer communication.

Third, using volunteers extends the resources of an association. Volunteers provide extra hands that enable an association to do tasks and activities that might not otherwise get done. Volunteers also provide valuable input to association leadership and staff.

What do Volunteers Receive?
Volunteers gain from their experience in many ways, such as the following:

- You have a sense of giving back to the erosion and sediment control profession.
- You can express your values in activities that are meaningful.
- You will increase your knowledge and learn new skills through networking with other knowledgeable peers.
- You gain an insider’s knowledge of the organization to grow the value of your membership.
- You enhance your career and gain prestige by building relationships with new contacts and old friends.

Guidelines for Working With Volunteers

1. Match the job to the volunteer. First, evaluate the requirements of the volunteer job to be filled. What skills or knowledge does it require? How much of a time commitment is necessary? What are
the benefits to the volunteer? Once these questions are answered, then look for members who are a good fit.

2. **Clearly define expectations.** You should develop detailed job descriptions for each volunteer position. The job description should spell out exact duties, the timeframe for service, what training will be provided, who the volunteer reports to and the financial considerations. The description also should describe the purpose of the position, expected outcomes and how success is defined. Having all of these points in writing helps avoid misunderstandings and gives volunteers clear direction. For samples of job descriptions for various IECA volunteer opportunities, please see the section on IECA’s *Get Involved!* member volunteer program.

3. **Provide appropriate training and information.** Many volunteers fail to reach their potential because they never receive the training and/or information they need to succeed. Be sure to think about what the volunteer will need to succeed. Always look at the task from the volunteer’s point of view and ask: What do I need to know to succeed?

4. **Assure appropriate follow up.** Use deadlines to keep tasks on schedule. Progress reports serve as early warning signs for problems. Make it easy for volunteers to report their results.

5. **Thank and recognize volunteers.** Thanks and recognition are critical factors in motivating and retaining volunteers. There has never been a volunteer who has been thanked too often! Look for creative and fun ways to recognize volunteers in varied settings. Recognition before peers can be a powerful tool not only for providing a fulfilling experience for current volunteers but for recruiting new ones who want to bask in the limelight as well.

### How to Recruit Volunteers

The most successful volunteer programs use multiple avenues to promote the opportunities available and to entice participation.

- **Publicity:** Get the word out about the volunteer opportunities available and how to apply using the association’s publications and web site. Feature active volunteers in the newsletter and the on the web site and always include instructions about how to volunteer.
- **Surveys:** You can recruit new volunteers by surveying members. There are two approaches. One is to list the volunteer opportunities with a brief description of each. The other is to list topics or issues and/or skills, then use the responses to match the volunteer to the appropriate opening. In either approach, it is important that everyone who returns a survey receive a response and a thank you.
- **New Members:** A welcome telephone call to new members is a great time to ask about their interest in becoming active in the association. Usually, the most successful approach is to propose a one-time or limited-time assignment that does not require in-depth knowledge of the association. IECA recommends that its Chapters call new members on a monthly basis to encourage members to get involved with their Chapter and to inform members of volunteer opportunities with the international organization.
- **Talent Scouts:** Empower the current volunteers to recruit their colleagues. For instance, it can be a part of the job description of every committee to identify at least one potential member for next year’s committee.
- **Volunteer Job Fair:** Set up a Volunteer Job Fair at the next association meeting or conference. Committee members can be on hand to answer questions and to sign up new committee members. This can be a fun and creative addition to a standard association reception.

### What Makes an Effective Volunteer Group?

The selection of volunteers to serve as members of committees is based on several criteria:

- Demonstrated interest in the industry and association.
• Willingness to serve — commitment.
• Ability to serve — time, company support.
• Something of value to contribute — knowledge and skill.
• Professional reputation — ethical and cooperative.
• Reliability — will assume necessary responsibilities.
• Leadership and communication skills.

**Checklist of a Volunteer Management Program**

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The organization has a clearly defined purpose of the role that volunteers have within the organization.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Job descriptions exist for all volunteer positions in the organization.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>The organization has a well-defined and communicated volunteer management plan that includes a recruitment policy, description of all volunteer jobs, an application and interview process, possible stipend and reimbursement policies, statement of which staff has supervisory responsibilities over which volunteers, and any other volunteer personnel policy information.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The organization follows a recruitment policy that does not discriminate, but respects, encourages and represents the diversity of the community.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>The organization provides appropriate training and orientation to assist the volunteer in the performance of his or her volunteer activities.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>The organization is respectful of the volunteer’s abilities and time commitment.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>The organization does volunteer performance appraisals periodically and communicates to the volunteers how well they are doing or where additional attention is needed. At the same time, volunteers are requested to review and evaluate their involvement in the organization and the people they work with and suggest areas for improvement.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>The organization does some type of volunteer recognition periodically and staff continuously demonstrates their appreciation towards the volunteers and their efforts.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The organization has a process for reviewing and responding to ideas, suggestions, comments and perceptions from volunteers.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>The organization provides opportunities for program participants to volunteer.</td>
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**Committees**

An organization’s strength depends on the level of membership involvement in its programs. If an organization is to succeed, it must combine and coordinate the efforts of its members to develop useful and relevant programs. A meaningful and active committee structure provides a mechanism for members to get involved.

The organization should form the committees that it can reasonably manage based on membership size, goals and resources.

**IECA Board Requirements for Committees**

The IECA Board requires that all IECA committees include the following details. Chapter Boards should consider a similar policy to ensure that your committee descriptions are addressing all relevant details.

1. Each committee will set a term limit for chair and members of the committee.
2. All committees must review their description and goals on an annual basis. The description/goals will reflect the Long Range Plan.
3. All committees will determine how often they will meet and what is the time commitment for a volunteer.
4. All committees will actively recruit new members whenever they have an opening on the committee.
5. Each committee will determine the criteria of who needs to be on the committee.
6. Committees will determine how often reports are necessary. A committee report will be submitted, at a minimum, once a year to the Board.
7. It is the Administrative Vice President of the Board’s role to manage committees. The Administrative Vice President will work with the chairs of the committees to be sure they are making progress towards the Long Range Plan.
8. Each committee will have an IECA staff liaison.

**Committee Member Roles**

It is important to understand the roles and responsibilities of the various members of a committee. If everyone understands what their responsibilities are, the committee has greater chances of making progress and achieving desired objectives on a consistent basis.

**Committee Chair Responsibilities**

The key to a successful committee—even with committed committee members and solid objectives—is the chair. The smooth management and creative achievements of a committee are in direct relation to the chair’s ability to lead and direct the committee’s functions. An effective committee needs a chair who will accept responsibility while encouraging others to offer thoughts and recommendations on the committee’s activities.

While the chair’s responsibilities should be outlined in detail in the committee description, in general, the chair’s responsibilities and duties can be placed in four general categories:

1. **Planning.** The chair consults with the association staff liaison and other key members of the committee in planning the committee’s agenda within the framework of the committee’s responsibilities. The entire program of committee work responsibilities should be thoroughly reviewed so that individual committee assignments can be made effectively.

2. **Conducting Meetings.** The chair consults with the staff liaison to develop an agenda and directs the committee’s work. He/she maintains the group’s focus, stimulates group thinking, encourages and channels discussions, weighs the value of expressed ideas and suggestions, summarizes constructive suggestions and seeks out decisions.

3. **Maintaining Records and Information.** He/she ensures that accurate minutes are kept, motions recorded, necessary reports prepared, and a record of committee work maintained. In addition, the chair remains constantly informed regarding the progress of individual committee members’ assignments.

4. **Getting Action.** The chair must motivate members toward active participation and involvement in committee activities. With overall objectives in mind, he/she must channel the interests and talents of individual committee members into productive efforts and ensure the necessary follow-up action.
Committee Member Responsibilities

The role committee members play is an important one. The success of the committee depends on the contributions made by each of its members. While the committee members’ responsibilities should be outlined in detail in the committee description, in general, their responsibilities and duties are outlined below:

- Attend all meetings.
- Review the agenda and accompanying materials prior to attending the meeting. Seek clarification of any items that are not clear.
- Stick to the agenda during the meeting.
- Determine what the exact purpose of the meeting is and decide in advance how and what to contribute.
- Keep replies short and to the point.
- Do not hesitate to comment, criticize constructively or disagree.
- Keep in mind that the volunteer group has authority to decide and act, not individual members.

Committee Liaison Responsibilities

Since most Chapters are run by volunteers, the chair of the Chapter committee typically serves as the staff liaison. But if the Chapter has a paid administrator, the function of the staff liaison is to ensure that the channels of communication are kept open amongst all committee members. Here are some typical roles of the committee liaison:

- Coordinates meeting time and agenda with chair and sends out meeting notification to all committee members.
- Takes minutes at meetings and distributes to committee members.
- Assists chair as needed with communication with members and follow up of action items.
- Facilitates ensuring that the committee’s needs are met with budgeting.

Committee Reports

Formal committee reports, recommending a course of action or conveying information to the Board of Directors, are to be presented in written form. Committee reports can accomplish several objectives:

- Convey activities and tasks that have been taken towards the committee’s goals and objectives.
- Recommendations for organizational changes.
- Recommendations for association programs or services.
- Request for approval of a new policy or for a change in an existing policy.
- Request for emergency action to adopt policy.
- Request for information.

Sources

Book
