



Resources for Plugging the “Leaky Bucket”

According to the *Volunteering in America 2008* report, 1 in 3 American volunteers dropped out in 2007. This is a huge loss of valuable human capital – about \$30 billion a year. Essentially, many nonprofit leaders are holding a leaky bucket of vital volunteer resources.

The report cites factors for why volunteers are dropping out.

- Volunteer opportunities aren’t challenging or meaningful enough.
- Volunteer management is inadequate. Most nonprofits don’t have volunteer managers or follow best practices. Volunteers aren’t free; it takes an investment and infrastructure to get the most out of volunteers.
- Volunteering is too rigid and needs to be more flexible to meet the demands of today’s volunteers. New models need to be weekends, nights, virtual, family, employee-supported, and voluntourism.

If nonprofits are aware of these factors and take steps to combat them, they can begin to plug the holes in the leaky bucket of volunteer resources. Below are some resources to help improve volunteer retention.

Engage volunteers in repeat service opportunities and/or ones that require a commitment of a substantial number of hours (an average of two hours per week).

- “Managing Your Volunteers: 19 Ways to Work Wonders” by Nick Levinson, *Nonprofit World*, Nov/Dec 2007
A brief article with practical ideas for keeping volunteers busy, offering multiple opportunities, and recognizing the value that volunteers add to your organization
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5384/is_200711/ai_n21300075
- “Health Benefits of Volunteering”
Tell your volunteers that coming back is good for them! A summary of research demonstrating that frequent volunteering has positive health benefits
http://www.getinvolved.gov/newsroom/press/factsheet_health.asp
- “Ideas for Recognition”
Simple ideas for making your volunteers feel valued and necessary so that they will return to volunteer again
<http://volunteerweek.org/recognizingIdeas.html>
- “Motivating Generational Cohorts to Civic Engagement”
Understanding what motivates your target audience of volunteers can help you provide them with satisfying volunteer experiences that keep them coming back to serve again.
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/practices/4883>

Offer volunteers a variety of volunteering options to tap into their interests and skills.

- "Taking the Long View" by Eric Frazier, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Feb. 7, 2008. Article discussing ways to cultivate long-term volunteers by offering them volunteer options that match their personal interests and increasingly challenging opportunities to grow and serve in your organization
<http://philanthropy.com/free/articles/v20/i08/08003901.htm>
- "Working with Volunteers' Schedules"
Tips for creating volunteer activities that offer options for people with varying needs, schedules and interests
<http://volunteerweek.org/buildingSchedules.html>
- "ServiceLeader.org: Virtual Volunteering."
Resources to help organizations think through how to create and offer virtual volunteer options
<http://www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/index.php>

Create substantial social networking opportunities as well as staff-volunteer interaction and training for volunteers.

- "Retention and Recognition."
Excerpt from *Volunteer Management* by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch; describes specific ways to create a positive volunteer climate and develop volunteers' sense of connectedness, which is important for retention
<http://www.casenet.org/program-management/volunteer-manage/retenrec.htm>
- "Moving Volunteers from Service to Civic Engagement."
An online course in how to incorporate reflection and civic engagement into volunteer trainings and projects in order to deepen volunteers' understanding of and commitment to the social issues your organization addresses (Requires free registration to access)
<http://my.nationalservice.org/learning/>
- "Ask the Experts Q&A: How to Create a Staff-Volunteer Team" by Susan Ellis, *Nonprofit World*, Jul/Aug 2000.
Tips for creating positive staff-volunteer relations in your organization.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5384/is_200007/ai_n21458248/pg_1
- "Conducting Value-based Volunteer Training"
Practical tips for conducting volunteer training in ways that foster the creation of high quality relationships
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/practices/771>
- BeHandsOn.org
A social networking site for volunteers and volunteer leaders; training resources and videos, ways to find or create volunteer projects, and social networking tools for volunteers to find others who share their interests
<http://www.behandson.org/>
- "Should Your Organization Use Social Networking Sites?"
Article setting forth factors to assess whether social networking would be a useful tool for your organization
<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/internet/page7935.cfm?cg=searchterms&sg=social%20network%20volunteer>

Find creative ways to keep retirees and “empty nesters” engaged in volunteering.

- “Recasting Retirement” by Civic Ventures and Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning, March 2002
Provides research and practical suggestions for attracting recent retirees to public service and civic engagement
http://www.experiencecorps.org/images/pdf/Recast_Retire.pdf
- “Understanding the Motivations of Baby Boomer Volunteers”
Effective practices for attracting baby boomers as volunteers based on creating volunteer options that appeal to the roles they play in other aspects of their lives, such as activist, consumer, and worker
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/practices/985>
- “Organizing Seven Strategic Focus Areas to Optimize Recruitment of Baby Boomer Volunteers”
Strategies for restructuring your organization’s volunteer management techniques to recruit and retain baby boomer volunteers
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/practices/1047>
- Get Involved!
This is a national public awareness campaign conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service to engage Americans aged 55 and older in volunteering. At the campaign’s web site, organizations seeking volunteers can find PSA materials, tip sheets, and research to help engage baby boomers. Individuals can locate volunteer opportunities that match their interests. Corporate, media and nonprofit supporters can access promotional tools to promote the effort.
<http://www.getinvolved.gov/Default.asp>
- “Paving the Way: Volunteer Centers and Baby Boomer Volunteering” from The Points of Light Foundation, 2006
A resource for understanding the baby boomer generation, assessing how your current volunteer strategies relate to boomers, and implementing new strategies for engaging boomers as volunteers
http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/programs/50plus/PavingtheWay_web1.pdf

Use a talent-management approach to utilizing volunteers.

- “Volunteering Reinvented: Human Capital Solutions for the Nonprofit Sector” by Corporation for National and Community Service, July 2007
Paper arguing for the need to apply human resource strategies to the utilization of volunteers and offering case studies for how to do so effectively
http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0719_volunteering_reinvented.pdf
- “Taking the Long View,” by Eric Frazier, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Feb. 7, 2008. Article discussing ways to cultivate long-term volunteers by offering them volunteer options that match their personal interests and increasingly challenging opportunities to grow and serve in your organization
<http://philanthropy.com/free/articles/v20/i08/08003901.htm>

Check out the resources under “[Voluntourism](#)” and “[Innovative Human Capital Strategies](#)” for more ideas!