



eVOLve

technical assistance for
leveraging volunteers

Dear Jeannie ,

Welcome to **eVOLve: technical assistance for leveraging volunteers**. In this electronic technical assistance (eTA) brief, you will find tips and tools to help you leverage volunteers in your community. It is sponsored by HandsOn Network, a training and technical assistance provider for the Corporation for National and Community Service.

This Month's Quote

The secret of change and improvement is a change of attitude.

~ Remez Sasson

Dear HandsOn,

How can I retain volunteers during economic hardship?

The Answer Corner

With the high price of gas, rising utility bills, and mortgage crisis, volunteers are presented with many difficult choices. These times are some of the most challenging that many of us have experienced. Even for nonprofit leaders who are accustomed to "making much of little," the effects of the unfolding economic hardship are likely to pose new challenges. It's hard to imagine that many of us in the sector will escape unharmed from financial woes. As we go through economic hardship, we can prepare for volunteers to continue to serve in communities.

So what to do? Not surprisingly, there are no easy, or even particularly novel, answers to that question. However, being open to new ideas, concepts, and strategies in the face severe crises can be extremely useful. Here are five ways to retain volunteers during economic hardship.

Protect the foundation.

Challenging financial constraints may mean that your organization cannot pursue all of your current activities. The positive news is that not all of the activities are absolutely necessary in terms of impact. Now is the time to allocate your funding and best staff to activities that make the greatest difference in your community. Identify activities that make the greatest difference in your ability to achieve and sustain results: the programs and services that have the greatest impact on those you serve and the organizational infrastructure required to support them. It is also the time to consider whether you need to cut back or discontinue less critical projects.

Now is the time to bring board members and key staff together to wrestle with three critical questions that can help to create clarity:

- "What results are we trying to achieve, and for whom?"

Quick Links

The Resource Center
CNCS
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Ask Us

Do you have a question about working with volunteers or a topic suggestion for a future issue of eVOLve? Send it to HandsOn Network at:

training@handsonnetwork.org

- "How do we achieve them?"
- "What does that really cost?"

Ask the tough questions NOW.

Like it or not, asking tough questions is critical to weathering the economic storm.

Take the necessary steps to endure the tough times. According to the Bridgespan Group, here are just some of the questions that you should be asking yourself:

- Do we know what we need to do if we had to cut some of our projects?
- Do we know what we need to do if we had to reduce the number of volunteers?
- Do we know what we need to do if we had to decrease our budgets that support volunteer projects?
- Do we know which of our projects are critical to the community?
- Are we actively in touch with key founders/board members?

(Source: The Bridgespan Group: Learning Center, "Managing Through Tough Times: Sidebar: Questions to be asking ourselves," November 14, 2008.)

Communicate honestly.

The only thing worse than sitting, helpless, on the side of road waiting for a tow truck to pick up your car is not knowing why the car broke down or how long it will actually take for the tow truck to pick you up. People get antsy, worried, and even panic stricken. A good company contacts the customer frequently to explain the situation, its root cause and an estimated time of arrival. The representative is there to assist you with any questions or concerns. Leading volunteers through tough times calls for similarly open and frequent communication from the top. Volunteers need to know that leadership has a handle on the problem and a plan to address it. Volunteers are eager to know how the economic hardship affects them and what changes will occur as a result of possible budget cuts. But most importantly, volunteers want to know what they can do to help. The very volunteer who is asking may just be the one who can help generate funding.

Partner with other organizations.

Reach out to your community to see what resources are available. Partnering with other organizations can help maximize agency resources to support volunteers. At this crucial stage, ensure that partners understand how your organizations can work together and identify key resources that each brings to the project.

Create your own "Volunteer, We Care System."

You can retain volunteers by implementing your own "Volunteer, We Care System." Here are some creative ways that you, your organization, and volunteers can develop your unique system.

- Car pool - Each volunteer take turns to drive other volunteers to projects.
- Cost share for gas - Volunteers share costs with another volunteer to drive to a project.
- Donate a dollar on payday - Depending on organization size, organization staff assist volunteers with gas by donating one dollar each pay period.
- "Volunteer Change" - Organization staff, partners, volunteers, public donate loose change to volunteer fund to support volunteers activities: transportation, supplies, food.
- "Volunteer Transport" - Depending on organization size, each staff member sign up to transport volunteer(s) to projects.

Resources

The Resource Center offers tools and resources to address these new findings and strengthen volunteer management. [New materials are available](#) on the topics of volunteer retention, recruitment, human capital strategies,

and cost-effective volunteering.

Please visit [Volunteering in America](#) (2008) for comprehensive data on cost saving approaches on the following topics:

Creative Costs During Economic Downturn

Volunteer Cost Savings Tips

Tax Benefits for Volunteering

Virtual Volunteering

Additional resources:

[Leading During an Economic Downturn \(Links\)](#)

[Costs Are Cool: The Strategic Value of Economic Clarity](#)

[The State of Economy and Positive Attitude](#)

[How will the Economic Crisis Affect Volunteering](#)

HandsOn Network Training Opportunities

Weathering the Storm: Volunteerism in an Economic Crisis

Please join us as we look at the current economic climate, its effect on increased need for social services and the impact on specific communities. During this session participants will tackle some common assumptions about responses to tough times and see if they hold a silver lining. As a group we'll discuss creative ways to utilize new and returning volunteers to maximize their impact, as times get even tighter. Lastly, we'll revisit key aspects of a good volunteer program, recognizing that the tenets of good volunteer management don't change when things get difficult; they become even more important. **Susannah Fotopulos will facilitate this session Thursday, January 22nd at 3:00 p.m.** The session will last one hour and will be recorded. Click [here](#) to register for this free webinar.

NOTE: Starting this month, HandsOn Network will conduct training webinars on the fourth Thursday of each month. All sessions will begin at 3:00 p.m. Eastern. Webinar topics will coincide with our monthly eVOLve topics. We will continue to notify you when of these and other training opportunities..

If you have any questions, please [contact us](#).



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