

How to Make the Most of Your Volunteers, No Matter What



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It's National Volunteer Week, a good time to remember the people who give their time to your organization, even if they are not perfect. Volunteers are a valuable resource, and cultivating their talents and

input is always a good idea.

Reward and recognition are essential parts of successful volunteer management. But almost anyone who has worked with volunteers can tell you that not all volunteers contribute equally.

Rewards for good behavior and consequences for bad behavior are ingrained into our DNA and guide our actions, how we respond, who we prioritize, and who we are more likely to dismiss. In most areas of life, this makes sense and seems reasonable. But it does not necessarily apply with underperforming volunteers.

“Good” or high-performing volunteers are reliable. They always show up on time and prepared. They make valuable contributions to propel the organization’s mission and inspire others to be a part of progress. These volunteers are gems. High-performing volunteers make our jobs easier, too, because we know what to expect. We want to keep them happy, so they keep showing up.

“Bad” or underperforming volunteers rarely or never show up. When they do, sometimes they aren’t prepared for the task at hand, remain silent, make no relevant contributions, or simply disagree for the sake of disruption.



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A knee-jerk reaction to underperformers is to ignore or dismiss them, which places additional tasks in the hands of high performers. But underperformers often shine a light on areas that need improvement and give us an opportunity to ask ourselves how we can make their experience better.

Instead of turning a blind eye, let underperformers know their contributions are crucial to the association’s success and ask what support or training they need to better engage. You may learn that the problem is a simple miscommunication or misunderstanding, or you may unearth a systemic issue.

Maybe some volunteers are underperforming because they do not have time to contribute or are not interested. But maybe they don’t feel included, don’t see a return on their investment, or feel like their time is being misused. Their answers may surprise you, but you might learn something from the exchange and start coming up with ways to address whatever the trouble is head-on.

It's National Volunteer Week

We invite you to share some of your volunteer appreciation activities in ASAE's **Component Relations and Volunteer Management Collaborate Group** [member login required] and inspire a little thanks.

ICYMI, check out **this article** on making 2021 the year of the volunteer.

If, like many organizations, yours doesn't have a culture of showing volunteers that they are valued, Volunteer Appreciation Week (April 18-24 this year), is a good time to take some initiative and make a small effort to appreciate those unpaid armies—even the ones who don't show up. This doesn't have to be a daunting task. Carve out 30 minutes to put together a nice note or social media post or take advantage of online tools—which are often free—to send a thoughtful and personalized e-card.

Members of ASAE's Component Relations and Volunteer Management Advisory Council have some examples of ways they show appreciation for their volunteers to inspire you and your organization:

- **Social media campaigns.** Highlight the work of your board and committee leaders by creating a "Meet Your Leader Monday." Use a simple form to ask your volunteers questions and then use the content to build out your campaign. Don't forget to tag them for additional exposure.
- **LinkedIn recommendations.** Use National Volunteer Week to write recommendations for your volunteers.
- **Send a handwritten note of gratitude.** In a digital world, this old-school way to show appreciation makes a big impression.
- **Make a postcard.** Got a Zoom call coming up? Take a moment to have participants write down one word of gratitude and hold it up to the camera for a quick snapshot. It will make a great postcard to send out to your volunteers.

It's important to celebrate all volunteer leaders and contributors—even the underperformers. They have all made an impact in your efforts toward a better outcome, and all deserve thanks.

Tags:

 **VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT**

 **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

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