

Successful Volunteer Management

Working with volunteers can be very fulfilling and energizing! After all, they are dedicating their personal time and energy to the organization, which means they have a lot of passion for the work. MBA CSEA volunteers in particular are a great group of people to spend time with, contributing their time, talent and energy to help their association succeed.



Managing volunteers can bring nuances and challenges as well, that at times can differ from managing paid staff. The following tips can help ensure the volunteer experience is a positive one for our leaders and our volunteers.

Set the Stage

1. Make sure the volunteers have watched the Volunteer Orientation, which provides an overview of organization roles and volunteer expectations. This is important to minimize frustration and ensure they have a positive experience.
2. The Executive Director will provide a walk-through of the Standard Operations Procedures (SOPs) a few times per year, and will answer questions throughout the year as needed. Committee leaders can help by reminding committee members to check the SOPs and referencing them often.
3. Delegate. Make sure you are not taking on the work of the full committee you are leading. That's what the committee is for! If tasks are delegated well, the workload can be well-managed so that no one becomes overburdened. When assigning tasks, keep in mind the timeline for each. For example, you wouldn't want to give one committee member multiple tasks that are all due at the same time. Also keep in mind each committee member's experience on the committee. Experienced committee members are typically able to take on more long term, time consuming tasks. Volunteers who are new to the committee should be given smaller tasks so they can get to know the committee before taking on something more substantial. The Executive Director can provide tips and suggestions for how to delegate if needed.
4. Set goals and objectives for your committee, within the parameters of the organization's overall objectives. Make sure these goals are communicated clearly and often, and that progress is measured against the goals. The Board Liaison and Executive Director can help make sure your committee's goals are aligned with the organization's.

Communicate

1. Get to know your team. Spend some time talking with your committee members to get to know them personally. Learn what motivates them, and what they want to get out of volunteering. This can be done with small talk at the beginning of committee meetings, through ice breakers, or even individual conversations.
2. Provide continuous feedback. Volunteers want and need to receive feedback about the work they are doing, to ensure the experience is the best for all involved.
3. Communicate in multiple ways. Volunteers sometimes need to be communicated with in multiple ways to follow through. If someone hasn't responded to an email in a timely manner, a phone call reminder may be a good idea (or vice versa).

4. Recognize volunteer contributions. You can never say “thank you” enough! Remember, these volunteers are contributing to your committee on top of their day jobs, and often do their committee work on personal time. Be sure they know they are appreciated. MBA CSEA has a Volunteer Plan that outlines the ways volunteers are formally recognized as well.
5. Provide multiple reminders. Volunteers often need multiple reminders about tasks that are due. Generally speaking, you will most likely have to reminder volunteers two to three times more often than you might remind paid staff.
6. Encourage open communications. This is key to making sure your team members have the tools and resources they need. This includes making sure the Executive Director is informed about committee questions and issues so they can be addressed right away before more frustration occurs.

Time Management

1. Provide specific requests and timelines. Most volunteers work well within specific parameters and timelines. For example, you might send an email and let them know you need a response by a certain date. This helps them manage their own schedule and make the best use of their time. The same goes for requests that you make of them. Be sure not to be vague or leave instructions open to interpretation.
2. It’s important to be reasonable with timing requests and deadlines, especially when working with volunteers. Committee members may take longer to respond to a request regarding their volunteer work than they would a request at their paid job. As a committee leader, it’s important to plan ahead and pay close attention to deadlines so that you can provide committee members with reasonable timing to complete tasks.

Lead With Ease

3. Work closely with other organization leaders, such as the Executive Director and Board Liaisons, who can provide you with feedback and advice if you are experiencing a challenge with committee management.
4. Remain flexible. There may be times when a shift is needed in expectations, procedures or timelines based on a myriad of factors such as organizational timelines, volunteers who may need to leave their position mid-year, or other aspects. It’s important to be open to changes as needed, in order to continue to work toward the goals.
5. Utilize the tools provided. Working with virtual volunteers has many benefits, including being able to select individuals based on their contributions and skills set rather than physical location. One downside is the lack of face-to-face communication that is sometimes helpful in resolving conflicts or establishing a good working relationship. MBA CSEA provides many resources to assist with virtual team management. Become familiar with these tools early, so you can derive the best benefit from them.

Managing Challenges

How to handle a volunteer who isn’t meeting expectations:

While volunteers have the best intentions, often times things get in the way of them fulfilling all of the expectations of the committee role. For example, someone may stop attending phone calls or

responding to emails, or they may not be reading or following the procedures or tasks. The following suggestions can help with cases like this:

For a non-responsive volunteer:

1. Reach out to them and request a phone call to talk about their experience on the committee. During the call, ask them how things have been going, and how they feel the time commitment is working within their schedule. Typically, an open-ended conversation like this will bring out any concerns on their own. If not, you may need to ask some more probing questions about the specific concerns you have. For example, if they have not been able to attend phone calls, you could note that they have been missed on the calls, ask if the timing still works within their schedule and if they will be able to make the next call (remind them of the time and date). If they haven't been responsive to emails, ask if they have been receiving your emails.
2. If they don't respond to your request for a phone call, you may need to ask some of these questions in an email, and follow up with a voicemail.
3. If they continue to be non-responsive after your outreach efforts via phone and email, ask the Executive Director to reach out to them as an additional contact.
4. If they are still not responsive, it may be time to consider removing them from the committee. This should be done as a last resort, and only after conferring with the Executive Director. If this is the case, the Executive Director can help craft the communication to the committee member.

For a volunteer who isn't following procedures:

1. Send them an email with a reminder of the procedures that pertain to what they are working on, copied from the SOP's. Copy the Executive Director on the email, with an offer to speak with her if there are any questions or if clarification is needed. Ask if they have any questions or need further clarification.
2. If needed, set up a time to speak with the volunteer on the phone, along with the Executive Director, to talk through the issue.