Volunteer Toronto

Planning for Engagement

The Future of Engagement

COVID-19 has significantly impacted volunteer programs and organizations across Toronto are in varying phases of response. Some are looking to maintain relationships, or are preparing to re-engage (or dismiss volunteers formally), others are looking to fill gaps left by volunteers that are unable to return. Regardless of the sector or program, all are looking to adapt to a new volunteer engagement landscape. It's time to renew our focus on community building and succession planning strategies.

Succession planning is an important part of the volunteer management cycle as it provides a road-map to identify key volunteer roles, volunteers with the right skills, and position descriptions that fulfill relevant needs and time-frames. Responding to change is also an opportunity to recognize your most dedicated volunteers, and honour their service by including them in the decision making process about the future.

Here are a few steps to help you get started:

- ☑ Inquire about your organization's vision and growth plans. At the senior leadership level, this will include strategic planning and budget forecasts.
- ☑ Create a list of current volunteer skill sets. Determining the skills you have in-house will help identify new recruitment needs.
- ☑ Check-in with existing volunteers about their roles. Ask volunteers about their future and preferred tasks/duties.
- ☑ Evaluate all existing volunteers in relation to your organization's new or future needs. Determine if volunteer preferences are practical, realistic, and meaningful.
- ☑ Check-in with high potential volunteers about their status. Share your plans with volunteers whose skills fulfill your needs.
- ☑ Develop training to address desired skills and goals. Consider cross-departmental exposure for diverse staff engagement.
- ☑ Develop recognition tactics that celebrate growth and innovation. Highlight impact for both long-term and micro-volunteer roles.

(Re)Building Community

While the pandemic has created new challenges, it has also forced many organizations to assess their volunteer programs and plan for the future – an undertaking that often gets put on the back-burner due to other organizational priorities, heavy day-to-day workloads, and a "set it and forget it" mindset. During this time, it is important to consider a broader definition and refine your understanding of the community you wish to grow. Be clear about the motivations for building (or re-engaging) your volunteer community and consider:

- Motivations for current and new volunteers
- Program designs that reflect your volunteer's needs
- Your capacity to facilitate a meaningful two-way relationship through support and education
- The most appropriate and effective medium to engaging with your volunteers ongoing
- Commitment to communicating honestly with volunteers not involved in the planning process
- Authentic appreciation of volunteer impact
- Opportunities to engage volunteers as facilitators for your broader volunteer community

Other Planning Resources

- **Alternative Volunteer Engagement Programs** featuring the Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities
- **Rebuilding a Sense of Community** featuring the Harbourfront Centre's New Outreach Initiatives
- Volunteer Toronto's Workbook on **Volunteer Communities**

Volunteer Toronto's 30-minute webinar on **Program Planning During COVID-19**