

## Shorter Term Volunteers Commitments: The Trend and How Organizations are Responding

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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One of the most talked about trends in volunteerism is volunteers making shorter term commitments. However, there is very little documentation about how this trend is manifesting and how organizations are responding. In March 2015 the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) conducted a survey to learn more about what organizations were seeing regarding this trend and to learn how they were responding. 255 leaders of volunteers and nonprofit managers across Minnesota and in Canada responded to a survey. We asked specifically about one-time and up to four month volunteer commitments. We learned that what is considered short term volunteering varies between organizations. We also learned about the challenges this trend presents and strategies developed for success in responding to it.

#### **Have you seen an increase in volunteers wanting to make shorter term commitments?**

- 38% Yes, seeing a lot of increase
- 48% Yes, seeing a little increase
- 14% No, not seeing this increase

#### **What percentage of volunteers at your organization volunteer for less than four months?**

- 49% reported 0-19% of volunteers
- 16% reported 20-39% of volunteers
- 18% reported 40-59% of volunteers
- 16% reported 60% or more of volunteers

#### **With which of these categories of volunteers have you seen shorter term volunteer commitments?**

- 72% Millennials (age 20 – 34)
- 61% Job seekers
- 52% Youth
- 47% Generation X (age 35 – 50)
- 44% Corporate volunteers
- 35% Groups
- 32% Boomers (age 51 – 69)

#### **How essential to your organization are one-time volunteers?**

- 37% Could not meet mission without them
- 44% Nice, but not necessary to mission
- 19% Do not contribute to mission

#### **How essential to your organization are volunteers who volunteer more than once, but commit to less than four months to your organization?**

- 47% Could not meet mission without them
- 37% Nice, but not necessary to mission
- 16% Do not contribute to mission

#### **Three years from now, what change do you expect in how many volunteers who commit for four months or less that your organization engages compared to now?**

- 34% Expect it to grow a lot
- 47% Expect it to grow a little
- 19% Do not expect it to change
- 1% Expect it to decrease

#### **What factors might limit your organization's ability to engage volunteers in roles that would take less than a four-month time commitment?**

- 62% Staff time to train volunteers
- 53% Staff time to screen and onboard volunteers
- 52% Staff time to manage volunteers
- 50% Staff time to recruit volunteers
- 39% The work we have to be done does not fit with short time commitments
- 32% Staff being willing to work with shorter term volunteers
- 33% Financial costs
- 26% Too hard to manage volunteer expectations to have meaningful experience
- 14% Do not have barriers

## Strategies

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Leaders of volunteers shared over a hundred strategies for successfully responding to the trend of shorter term volunteering. Top recommended strategies are:

1. Design some volunteer roles that are specifically for shorter term commitments.
2. Restructure roles to work for shorter time commitments by volunteer job sharing, dividing long-term volunteer positions to multiple short-term positions, and splitting shifts.
3. Simplify the application, training, and scheduling for shorter term positions to keep investment of time in proportion to the amount the volunteers will give. Use technology to reduce time for scheduling and training. Involve volunteers in the onboarding and training of other volunteers.
4. When possible, build in flexibility to meet the volunteer's needs.
5. Take a new approach to recruitment that includes recruiting a larger base of volunteers to draw from and recruiting specifically for the new shorter term positions. Develop partnerships to help provide an ongoing supply of volunteers.
6. Train staff to have a new perspective on the value volunteers can bring in a shorter period of time and in skills to work with shorter time commitments.
7. To make efficient use of your time, schedule specific times for one-time volunteer projects or times for volunteers to drop in.
8. Take steps to make short term group projects work better such as building ongoing relationships so the same groups come back, the business/organization bringing the group does more training, and limiting groups to projects that have been identified as needed.
9. If you decide shorter term volunteers cannot help meet your mission, the key is to clearly communicate that to the prospective volunteers so that they understand why your organization does not accept volunteers for shorter than a certain time period.

## Thank You

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***The full survey report will be available in late August at:  
<http://www.mavanetwork.org/shorterterm>***