



Volunteer Management

Volunteering is an American pastime. Nearly 25 percent of Americans volunteered in 2015 – approximately 62.6 million people. These volunteers completed an estimated 7.9 billion hours of service, which adds up to \$184 billion worth of donated services.

What does this mean for your volunteer program? There are plenty of people across the country interested in becoming volunteers! The key is connecting your cause with what they care about.

Know Your Volunteers

Understanding what motivates your current and potential volunteers is critical to engaging them. Some volunteers are interested in learning new skills, perhaps to help them with school or professional development. Others have a deep commitment to a specific natural resource or place. And still others may be interested in meeting people with similar conservation interests.

Learning what motivates volunteers is as easy as talking with them about their interests. You can also draw some initial conclusions based on other groups to which your volunteers belong. For example, members of a canoe club are likely to care about clean streams while people involved with a local land trust may be concerned about specific waters that flow through properties owned by the trust. Volunteers also have varying amounts of available time.

Based on U.S. Census data, the number of volunteers ages 65 and older will increase 50 percent over the next 13 years. Don't dismiss this group of potential volunteers because you assume they are not interested in (or physically capable of) monitoring streams. In many cases, they will be as excited and capable as younger people. In other cases, based on their career experience, Baby Boomers could become the chapter's next volunteer coordinator, grant writer, or website guru.

Be a Good Host

Ensuring volunteers have a good experience is an essential element of successful volunteer programs. Here are a few guidelines to being a good volunteer "host."

- Provide an orientation and/or training for your volunteers.
- Create job specifications for volunteer activities to ensure everyone is on the same page before getting started. Matching volunteers with challenging assignments and treating volunteers as valued partners can help increase – and sustain – volunteer participation.
- Ensure volunteers are working in a safe environment with proper equipment. Know what you are asking your volunteers to do and try it out yourself. For example, if you are working near a stream or road, check the site conditions before you announce the location of the event and check again the night before the event to ensure it is still safe. Have a way to contact each volunteer onsite in case of an emergency.

- Thank volunteers for their work. Share their accomplishments on social media, in newsletters, and at an annual volunteer appreciation event such as a picnic.
- Consider creating certificates for volunteers who reach a certain number of hours or years of service.

Follow the League on social media and check our website (www.iwla.org) for webinars and other volunteer management tips and ideas.

Contact the Izaak Walton League at sos@iwla.org with questions specific to stream monitoring partnerships and fundraising.