

Building Trust with Your Volunteers

Don't overlook this all-important alliance.

The best relationships are those built on trust. Your organization's relationship with your volunteers is no different. Begin building trusting relationships with the following suggestions.

What You Can Do for Volunteers

The most important thing to remember is that the trust relationship is a two-way street. It requires effort by both parties.

Because volunteers are the ones coming forward and donating their time, it's best if you're the first to "give" in the trust-building relationship. So, start by explaining how you're going to be a trustworthy partner. For instance:

- **Remind volunteers that you'll never loan,** sell, or give out their information.
- **Let them know that any electronic files** have appropriate levels of security.
- **If you use volunteer scheduling software, make sure the provider** gives excellent security.
- **Assure volunteers that you'll never give out their schedule** to anyone they haven't authorized in writing.
- **If you keep volunteers' information locked in a special file,** highlight that fact.
- **Ask if it's OK to recognize them as volunteers in organization-generated media.** Ask this same question about third-party media sources. For various reasons, some people may cringe upon seeing their picture or name in the paper, even if it's in connection with a good cause.

What to Ask of Your Volunteers

Your relationship will be most solid if volunteers understand up front not only what you'll give but what you'll expect of them. Here are a few basics:

Ask all volunteers to consent to a criminal background check. Explain that you aren't looking for traffic tickets (unless they're driving your organization's vehicle), credit checks, or financial records. Your concern is to avoid putting someone with a serious criminal record in touch with clients, staff, and other volunteers. Most volunteers will welcome this scrutiny, appreciating the fact that you put forth effort to insure everyone's safety.

“Explain how you're going to be a trustworthy partner.”

“Just because you aren't paying volunteers doesn't mean there aren't performance expectations.”

Require them to sign off on the same policy and procedural manuals you give to paid staff.

Just because you aren't paying volunteers doesn't mean there aren't performance expectations. And gaining their signature to show that they understand those expectations is important for the sake of liability. If a volunteer were to be involved in an accident or some other incident, you might need to show that the volunteer was aware of your policies.

Start with the Foundation

These simple suggestions can establish the ground floor for building a trusting relationship between your organization and your volunteers. With a little thought, you'll likely think of numerous other ideas specific to your situation. Trust building does take time and effort, but you'll be glad you made the investment. **S**

This article is adapted, with permission, from content by VolunteerHub (volunteerhub.com), originally posted on the Guidestar website (guidestar.org).

Building Blocks of Trust

Use these *Nonprofit World* articles (NonprofitWorld.org) to construct a tower of trust:

How to Create a Motivating Environment (Vol. 28, No. 5)

Volunteer Protection Act: What Does It Mean? (Vol. 16, No. 2)

The Key to Building Productive Teams (Vol. 21, No. 4)

Earn People's Loyalty: Here's How (Vol. 17, No. 5)

Common-Sense Answers about Volunteer Involvement (Vol. 33, No. 1)

Free Webinar Recording for Members: Welcome, Adapt, Or Avoid? Responding to Trends in Volunteerism. This webinar offers an overview of key trends and the issues they raise for volunteer engagement.

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Volunteer Management (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).