

Answering the President's Call to Service: Best Practices for Charities and Congregations in Volunteer Management and Mobilization

This document is a USA Freedom Corps compilation based on a series of four reports produced through a volunteer management capacity survey project, which was launched by USA Freedom Corps in 2003. The project was supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the UPS Foundation. The research was conducted by the Urban Institute. This compilation includes copyrighted material from these 2004 publications. USA Freedom Corps would like to acknowledge and extend sincere appreciation to the Urban Institute and the Corporation for National and Community Service for agreeing to allow the use of these copyrighted materials. The Urban Institute is not responsible for our recommendations based on this research. To view the full text of the four reports, visit www.cns.gov/about/role_impact/performance_research.asp.

Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C.

Urban Institute, 2004. Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. Washington, D.C.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2004. Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations. Washington, D.C.

Urban Institute, 2004. Balancing Act: The Challenges and Benefits of Volunteers. Washington, D.C.

Executive Summary

Volunteers are a vital resource for most charities and congregational social service outreach programs (congregations), boosting the quality of service and public support while reducing costs.¹ Four out of five charities use volunteers to help meet organizational needs and one in three congregations manage volunteers in social service outreach programs.² Although volunteers play a critical role in strengthening community transformation, charities and congregations are not always fully equipped to make the most of their volunteers.³ In fact, “(fewer) than half of charities and congregations that manage volunteers have adopted most volunteer management best practices advocated by the field.”⁴

Building volunteer management capacity to involve and retain volunteers makes sense for both charities (and congregations), and the volunteers upon whom they rely.”⁵ Charities and congregations should adopt relevant volunteer management practices and invest in the infrastructure that will keep volunteers coming back.⁶ This document provides the necessary information and resources for charities and congregations to coordinate high-impact volunteer programs.

President George W. Bush's Call to Service

America has a long and proud tradition of volunteer service. To continue to encourage this proud national legacy, in his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush laid out a bold vision for a stronger union rooted firmly in the power of volunteer service. Convinced that

volunteer service is vital to meeting community needs and safeguarding the principles of freedom, President Bush issued a call to service to every man, woman, and child. President Bush challenged all Americans to give two years or 4,000 hours over the course of their lives in volunteer service. And he created USA Freedom Corps, an office at the White House and a coordinating council across government, to strengthen Federal policies and help more Americans answer his call.

Since President Bush issued his call to service in 2002, there has been an increase of more than five million Americans volunteering their time and talent in communities to help meet critical needs. We also know that one in three volunteers serve through a religious organization.⁷ In an effort to build on this trend, USA Freedom Corps, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) are working together to ensure that faith-based and community organizations have the capacity, tools, and volunteer power they need to help America's communities flourish.

Volunteer Management and Mobilization Best Practices

1) Devote Substantial Staff Time on Volunteer Management⁸

“The best prepared and most effective volunteer programs are those with paid staff members who dedicate a substantial portion of their time to the management of volunteers.”⁹ In fact, the percentage of time a paid staff volunteer coordinator devotes to volunteer management is positively related to the capacity of charities and congregations to adopt volunteer management best practices and take on additional volunteers.¹⁰

2) Apply for Federal and State Human Capital Resources

Many charities and congregations solidly support the use of a full-time, stipended volunteer to assist with their volunteer program.¹¹ National service members are human capital resources that charities and congregations can tap to better leverage and manage volunteer service. AmeriCorps is the most popular capacity-building option among charities and congregations, as AmeriCorps members can serve as full-time volunteer managers. To learn more about this resource and apply, visit www.nationalservice.gov.

3) Implement Effective Volunteer Management Techniques

“The cultivation of a well-managed volunteer program is important in maximizing the benefits and minimizing the challenges of working with volunteers.”¹² The following are nine key volunteer management techniques to strengthen volunteer programs:¹³

- Provide written policies and job descriptions
- Screen and match volunteers to jobs
- Supervise and communicate regularly with volunteers
- Collect information on volunteer involvement regularly
- Measure the impacts of volunteers annually
- Offer volunteer liability coverage (where relevant)
- Offer training for paid staff in working with volunteers
- Offer volunteers training and professional development opportunities
- Recognize outstanding volunteers with awards, including the President’s Volunteer Service Award

4) Offer Meaningful and Flexible Volunteer Opportunities

More and more Americans, particularly Baby Boomers, are interested in meaningful and flexible volunteer service opportunities in which they can share their skills, talents, and experience. And charities receive maximum benefits and fewest challenges (net benefit) when they offer volunteers a variety of options to contribute to the operations of the organization, ranging from direct service to bookkeeping to advocacy and fundraising.¹⁴ However, “when charities use volunteers primarily for office tasks, their net benefits are notably lower.”¹⁵ Creating more meaningful and flexible volunteer opportunities will often require a cultural shift in the thinking of the charity or congregation in how they use volunteers. In sum, it is beneficial for both the

charity and the volunteer to have meaningful volunteer opportunities that tap the skills, experience, and talents of the volunteer.

5) **Consider Establishing Partnerships with Religious Organizations**

One out of three volunteers in America serves through religious organizations.¹⁶ A typical volunteer with a religious organization serves 52 hours per year, which is more than the typical volunteer overall. Charities that partner with religious organizations report greater benefits from their volunteers than do charities without these partnerships.¹⁷ “While 73 percent of charities with a religious mission (faith-based) report that they partner with a religious organization, only 15 percent of charities with a secular mission report such a partnership, highlighting the lack of interaction between religious and secular organizations in social service activities.”¹⁸ Charities and congregations should consider strengthening their partnership with other religious organizations, as they can prove fruitful. To learn more about potential partnerships in your community, contact your local volunteer center.

6) **Join the USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network**

The USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network is the largest online clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities. Since it was established, there have been more than 1.8 million searches for volunteer opportunities. Prospective volunteers can search the database by simply entering in their geographic information, such as zip code or state, and their area of interest. The network features both local and international volunteer opportunities. To recruit more volunteers, charities and congregations can feature volunteer opportunities for no financial cost by visiting www.usafreedomcorps.gov/recruit.

7) **Honor Outstanding Volunteers with the President’s Volunteer Service Award**

The President’s Volunteer Service Award, an initiative of the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, encourages and recognizes outstanding volunteer service. The award honors those Americans who have made serving a central part of their lives and shows that when you help your neighbor, you are helping your nation. The award includes: an official President’s Volunteer Service Award pin; a personalized certificate of achievement; a note of congratulations from the President of the United States; and a letter from the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation. Charities and congregations can honor outstanding volunteers with this award by simply signing up as a Certifying Organization (C.O.). To learn more and to sign up as a C.O., visit www.presidentialserviceawards.gov.

8) **Stay Informed on Volunteer Management Trainings and Trends**

The volunteer management field is vibrant and growing. Volunteer Coordinators in charities and congregations should actively stay informed on trends, including best practices on leveraging volunteer service, by receiving newsletters and participating in conferences and workshops. USA Freedom Corps and CNCS both offer free electronic newsletters. To sign up for the USA Freedom Corps e-newsletter, visit www.usafreedomcorps.gov/subscribe and to sign up for the CNCS e-newsletter, send an email to join-fbcilist@lists.etr.org. In addition, the Corporation for

National and Community Service co-sponsors an annual conference with the Points of Light Foundation called National Conference on Volunteering and Service. To learn more, visit www.volunteeringandservice.org.

Conclusion

Now more than ever, Americans are renewing their commitment to helping others and engaging in community transformation. Augmenting current organizational structure and implementing some simple best practices can help charities and congregations provide more meaningful volunteer experiences and help mobilize more Americans in volunteer service. Indeed, “investment in volunteer management and the benefits derived from volunteers feed (off) each other, with investments bringing benefits and these benefits justifying greater investments.”¹⁹ “The value that volunteers provide to organizations should make the effective management of volunteers a key priority.”²⁰

Checklist

- Devote substantial staff time on volunteer management, ideally designating a full-time, paid volunteer coordinator
- Apply for Federal and State human capital resources, such as national service programs like AmeriCorps
- Implement effective volunteer management techniques
- Offer meaningful and flexible volunteer opportunities
- Consider establishing partnerships with religious organizations
- Join the USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network to recruit more volunteers (www.usafreedomcorps.gov/recruit)
- Honor outstanding volunteers with the President’s Volunteer Service Award (www.presidentialserviceawards.gov)
- Stay informed on volunteer management trainings and trends

¹ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 4,7, and 21.

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- ² Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 4.
- ³ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 4.
- ⁴ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 5.
- ⁵ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 12.
- ⁶ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 12.
- ⁷ The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2004. Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations. Washington, D.C. Page 2.
- ⁸ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 4.
- ⁹ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 4.
- ¹⁰ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 13.
- ¹¹ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 22.
- ¹² Urban Institute. 2004. Balancing Act: The Challenges and Benefits of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 1.
- ¹³ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 1.
- ¹⁴ Urban Institute. 2004. Balancing Act: The Challenges and Benefits of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 1.
- ¹⁵ Urban Institute. 2004. Balancing Act: The Challenges and Benefits of Volunteers. Washington, D.C. Page 1.
- ¹⁶ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 22.
- ¹⁷ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 16.
- ¹⁸ The Corporation for National and Community Service, 2004. Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations. Washington, D.C. Page 3.
- ¹⁹ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 21.
- ²⁰ Urban Institute. 2004. Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report. Washington, D.C. Page 21.