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Volunteers

Volunteers are a tremendous resource for charitable nonprofits. Absent volunteers, many charitable nonprofits would not be able to conduct programs, raise funds, or serve clients. The vast majority of board members who serve on charitable nonprofit boards are volunteers.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on nonprofits' ability to recruit volunteers. "Volunteerism had been declining for years before Covid-19, and the pandemic sent many charities' volunteer programs into disarray," according to a [September 2022 article](#) in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Nonprofits have been working to engage volunteers virtually and recruit more young volunteers, among other adaptations.

If you are searching for a volunteer opportunity, or would like to grow your nonprofit's volunteer program, [state associations of nonprofits](#) as well as [state service commissions](#) are also great places to start.

Did you know?

- Many charitable nonprofits have no paid staff and are run entirely by volunteers.
- Volunteering can have [positive effects](#) on a volunteer's mental health!
- Volunteers should not receive compensation or in-kind benefits for their services. [Receiving even even a small amount can turn volunteers into employees](#) in the eyes of the law, or create other risks to the nonprofit.
- In many states, volunteers are not covered by workers' compensation insurance, which is why some nonprofits elect to purchase [volunteer accident insurance](#).
- [Volunteer time](#) has value – but volunteers cannot claim a deduction for their time, or the value of their professional services, on their personal income tax returns.
- For purposes of a nonprofit's annual report to the IRS, Form 990, [volunteer time is NOT reported as a contribution](#) but may need to be acknowledged on IRS Form 990, Part III, *Statement of Program Service Accomplishments*.
- Volunteers are among the most loyal donors, so don't overlook them as prospects for gifts or bequests. See [The Role of Volunteering in Philanthropy](#), which also presents research on the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering (Fidelity Charitable).

Practice pointers for managing volunteers

Managing volunteers is similar to [managing paid staff](#), except that volunteers don't expect to be compensated for their services. However, they do expect to be treated with respect, trained (as needed), supervised, and provided with feedback and rewarding experiences.

Some nonprofits only engage a few volunteers a year – others several hundred volunteers each day! The extent to which your nonprofit relies on volunteers will determine how extensive a volunteer program is needed at your nonprofit.

Thinking about seeking [pro bono services or skilled volunteers](#)? Prepare your nonprofit for success with pro bono and skilled volunteers using the [Readiness Roadmap](#).

All the steps nonprofits take to ensure the “right fit” in the workplace for paid staff apply equally to volunteers. Many nonprofits conduct background checks on

volunteers; some adopt written policies that apply specifically to volunteers and find that a volunteer handbook is a useful tool.

Tools for managing volunteers

- [A-Z Volunteer Management Resources](#) (Energize, Inc.)
- MAVA (the nonprofit Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement) offers resources and training on [inclusion and racial equity in volunteerism](#), including a 2021 report, “Co-Creating Racial Equity in Volunteer Engagement.”
- [Points of Light](#) offers many resources for nonprofits seeking assistance with volunteer management.
- Model [Volunteer Policies Handbook](#) (National Wildlife Federation).
- [Sample Minor Waiver](#) (Habitat for Humanity, San Antonio, Texas)
- [Sample Adult Volunteer Waiver](#) (Habitat for Humanity, San Antonio, Texas)
- Capterra lists [volunteer management software](#) with user ratings.

Volunteer matching

- The nonprofit [VolunteerMatch](#) can help match the right volunteers with service projects and some skilled-volunteer opportunities, and also offers learning programs in areas like managing remote volunteers and engaging skilled volunteers.
- The nonprofit [Taproot](#) matches nonprofits with corporate volunteers for marketing, operations, IT, HR, strategy, and finance projects, events, and consultations. Their programs are free of cost for all US-based nonprofits, and they provide nonprofit coaching services to help organizations successfully plan for and manage pro bono resources. Although there is no cost to the nonprofit, be prepared to invest time and energy, as well as other resources if needed.
- [Catchafire](#) provides a project platform and skilled volunteer matching for nonprofits at a cost, sometimes underwritten by foundations.

Data on volunteers

[Americorps](#) publishes a report on American volunteering, including demographic breakdowns such as by gender and generation. The [value of volunteer time](#) is calculated hourly and by state each year (Independent Sector and DoGood Institute).

We published several articles on volunteering in April 2023, in recognition of Volunteer Month: [New Data and Resources on Volunteers](#) and [Clearing the Path to Make Volunteerism Easier](#) (looking at various issues with an advocacy lens).

Related Insights and Analysis

- [Interns: Employee or Volunteer?](#)
- [Pro Bono and Skilled Volunteers](#)

Additional Resources

- [The Essential Guide to Managing Volunteers at Your Nonprofit](#) (Volunteer Pro)
- [Managing Volunteers: Balancing Risk and Reward](#) (Nonprofits Insurance Alliance of California and Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance)
- [Many Nonprofits Struggle to Recruit a Diverse Volunteer Force](#) (*Chronicle of Philanthropy, September 2022*)
- Tax considerations for volunteers and volunteer programs ([IRS Phone Forum recording](#))

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