

## The Influence of Volunteers

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When I was an undergraduate student in my organization, some of the first individuals and leaders I worked with were my volunteer advisors. I remember so distinctly sitting in a recruitment workshop that was led by my province president and thinking to myself, “This sister is incredible. I want to learn more from her.” It was that same woman who inspired me to apply for executive council positions in my organization and was the first person to tap me and show me that I had the potential to be a leader and make a difference in my group. When I reflect back on this story and my desire to continue working in the fraternity/sorority community, it is then that I realize the first person to inspire me was a volunteer. Our volunteers matter and make an impact on us in many different capacities. As a current fraternity/sorority professional who works with volunteers in some capacity and as a volunteer for my organization, it is now that I see the impact our volunteers have and how they truly matter and make a difference.

According to the *Volunteers Function Inventory* (Clary & Snyder, 1999), volunteers are motivated to contribute by six different personal and social functions. These functions of volunteering include the following:

- Values – Volunteering allows volunteers to express or act upon values they believe in, i.e. sisterhood.
- Understanding – Volunteers have the opportunity to learn more about the world or practice skills while volunteering.
- Enhancement – Volunteers have the opportunity to grow as individuals.
- Career – Volunteers can gain experience in a field to get a “foot in the door.”
- Social – Volunteers have the opportunity to strengthen social friendships.
- Protective – Volunteering provides an opportunity for volunteers to reduce negative feelings, an “escape” per se.

All of these functions can relate to fraternity/sorority volunteers and all contribute to the importance of volunteers. The functions show that volunteering is primarily a selfless act and one that displays how much volunteers truly care. The following is a short list to show how volunteers matter and make a difference based off these functions.

### Top Five Reasons Volunteers Make a Difference

1. **Many volunteers put in the hours of a full time job for no pay.** Fraternity/sorority volunteers come from all paths of life. Volunteers span from parents, doctors, lawyers, graduate students, student affairs professionals, and more. Many volunteers have full time commitments but still essentially work a second job volunteering to work with fraternities and sororities. These volunteers are answering emails all hours of the night, showing up to chapter meetings on the weekend, facilitating leadership institutes, and driving to campuses to sign paperwork last minute; these volunteers do this for no pay. It is out of love for the organization and for the love of fraternity/sorority.

2. **Volunteers model the way for lifelong membership.** Recently, I was driving to an officer training with a woman that serves on my chapter's advisory board. She was telling me how she did not get involved as an advisor until she was a little bit older and many years out of college but did so because she wanted to reconnect with our organization. To me, that was powerful. This exemplifies the characteristics of lifelong membership and how it is prevalent in members. Volunteers range in all ages, come from all different places and schools, yet they all understand what it means to be a lifelong member. They understand what it means to give back to the organization.
3. **Volunteers give different perspectives.** As I mentioned, the first person to make an impact on me was a volunteer. That was the first individual I went to with any doubts or concerns I had. I have seen that our volunteers sometimes know things about our students that we may not. Many times volunteers are the people who are on the frontline of student issues; members feel comfortable enough at times to reach out to them as a brother or sister, rather than someone in a "superior" role. There is a lot to be said about those types of relationships and something that should be tapped into. In addition, with volunteers coming from all paths of life, volunteers may have a different perspective on how to approach situations. Volunteers have the ability to challenge the status quo and can work in partnership with campus-based professionals and headquarters professionals on developing ideas and collaboration.
4. **Volunteers are the faces of our organizations.** One of the first things I learned in my new member education was who our national president was at the time and what her role was. When I was initiated, it was her signature on my membership card. When students go to conventions, receive organization magazines, and more, it is the volunteers they see. Organization leaders are prominent and a big part of understanding our groups. These leaders model the way for undergraduate members especially because it is who they see. It is so exciting to hear a student talk about how they met a leader in their organization at a conference. These are some of the most pivotal and important moments in membership for some students, and volunteers should be thanked for this!
5. **They truly LOVE fraternity and sorority.** As fraternity/sorority professionals, we feel this way, and so do volunteers. Someone somewhere made a significant enough impact on these volunteers that they continued their lifelong commitment to the organization. One turning point for students I have seen has been watching our volunteers receive an award or recognition for 50 years of membership in a special ceremony. Seeing volunteers continue to give back to our organizations, continue to establish special relationships with our students, and continue to help advance fraternity/sorority is a powerful image.

All of the items on this list contribute to the functions behind the motivation for volunteering. Volunteers are able to meet each of those needs and desires in the ways they would like to, by customizing their experiences. Fraternity/sorority volunteers

matter; they matter to the members, to fraternity/sorority advisors, to headquarters staff members, to campuses, and to the entire fraternal community. Volunteers help keep the heart of the organization beating and help us continue to advance fraternity/sorority.

## References

Clary, E., & Snyder, M. (1999). The Motivations to volunteer: Theoretical and practical considerations. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8(5), 156-159.