Introduction to Providing Support
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This resource guide contains tools and templates to help you plan and prepare training for your volunteers along with details on coaching volunteers and providing support. For more information on these topics, the “Supporting Volunteers” resource guide provides more details.

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The Importance of Training

Training is an opportunity to:

» Provide volunteers with specific information about their role
» Ensure that volunteers have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their roles safely and effectively
» Explore volunteer boundaries or other important topics deeply
» Provide volunteers with learning related to their personal or professional goal

When to train volunteers

Training should be provided at the start of a volunteer’s role but also on ongoing, proactive basis. When possible, provide training regularly throughout the volunteer experience – including monthly in-person trainings or online offerings. Some training can or should be mandatory while others can be optional and more beneficial for the volunteer than the organization.

Ongoing training

Higher-risk roles will usually require more ongoing training. For instance, if a volunteer is engaged to provide support to clients with serious illnesses, training should be provided up front and refreshed throughout the volunteer’s engagement on the necessary knowledge of maintaining safe and healthy practice with these clients.

Adult learners

Most of your volunteers are “adult learners,” individuals who are not currently in a formal learning environment. Adult learners tend to be internally motivated, self-directed and goal-oriented. You should focus your training efforts on using practical tools like games, scenarios, case studies and assessments to enhance the learning process.

How does learning happen?

Learning is the process of transforming a person’s previously held knowledge, skills and attributes. This takes place through two main stages: sensory intake, which is how someone takes in information; and processing and interpreting the information, comparing with their own knowledge and experiences. Examples for each include:

Sensory Intake

» Hearing instruction or stories from a facilitator
» Seeing handouts, slides, videos or other visual media
» Experimenting with a case study, role play or activity relevant to the learning material

Process & Interpret

» Using individual reasoning methods
» Comparing new information with what a learner already knows
» Referencing past experiences or held beliefs and applying this to their own context
4 Easy Ways to Keep Volunteers Learning

Training and learning opportunities allow your volunteer to continue to grow throughout their engagement with your organization. These four easy ways of rethinking volunteer learning will help you and your volunteer program succeed.

1. Think ahead
Reconsider what training looks like. Training doesn’t always need to happen in the classroom; plan ahead to make sure that learning continues after the workshop is over. For example, you could set up a buddy system to pair up your new volunteers with more experienced ones, so that volunteers can learn on the job through observation and hands-on practice.

2. Mix it up
Use lots of different training strategies to help your volunteers learn. Webinars, work groups, readings, mentoring, learning aids, and peer to peer coaching can all supplement traditional training sessions. Ask your volunteers how they like to learn or they would like to learn and try to accommodate as many volunteers as you can.

3. Use existing resources
What resources and opportunities do you already have? Do you have staff members who can share expertise in particular topics? Do you have experience volunteers who would like to share their insights? Do you have a partnership with another agency that might be willing to team up for training sessions? Set realistic goals to increase continuous learning opportunities by taking advantage of your current resources.

4. Let it happen
It takes more than just training for your volunteers to apply the things they’ve learned. The learning process continues after formal training is over, and it requires ongoing support. Make sure that volunteers are encouraged to apply practice their new skills, that they have plenty of opportunities to give and get feedback, and that they have the support they need while they adjust to changes.
# 6 Approaches to Communication

Being an effective volunteer supervisor requires good communication skills. Adapted from Heron’s model of intervention, these six approaches to communications will encourage better dialogue between you and your volunteers and foster greater performance in your projects and programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STYLE</th>
<th>APPROACH</th>
<th>EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **“TELLING”** | Be a Guide | » Give advice and guidance  
» Tell them what to do  
If I were in your place I would...  
In that situation, you need to...  
In my opinion, you should...  
When that kind of situation happens it's better to...  
I think you should... |
| Be a Great Source of Information | » Explain background and principles  
» Help the person understand concepts and practices  
This article/book/blog is a good source of information  
The context and background of that is situation is...  
In this sector, this how we....  
The best sources of information in the sector are... |
| Be an Honest Mirror | » Challenge their thinking  
» Tell them what you think is holding them back  
» Help them avoid making the same mistake again  
What would you do differently nest time?  
What can we learn from this?  
How do you think you contributed to that outcome?  
Why do you think that keeps happening?  
What are the weaker parts of your resume?  
How can you take this from thought to action? |
| **“FACILITATING”** | Be a Friendly Ear | » Help the person express their feelings  
» Provide empathy  
How did you feel about...?  
It must be difficult (frustrating, confusing etc.) to...  
Do you have any concerns about...?  
Is there anything else you want to discuss?  
Are you comfortable with your decision? |
| Be a Set of New Eyes | » Ask questions to encourage fresh thinking and a new point of view  
» Encourage the generation of different options and points of view  
What do you think would happen if...  
What's the best thing that could happen?  
Brainstorm 10 different ways you could reach this objective.  
If (someone they admire) were in this situation, what do you think they would do?  
Which option you’ve mentioned seems most exciting to you? |
| Be a Cheerleader | » Provide praise  
» Show them they have your support  
Congratulations, you deserve it!  
You are qualified for that position.  
That’s a great idea!  
You are working hard towards your objective  
What did you do to accomplish that? |
Supporting Volunteers Coaching Exercise

**What makes a good coach?**
Coaching your volunteers can help to improve their performance and to increase their satisfaction with their volunteer experience. A volunteer who has a good coach, instead of just a supervisor, will be more likely to understand their responsibilities, be dedicated to the role, and be able to master new skills and adjust to changes in the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What makes a good coach?</th>
<th>When someone first starts, a good coach does the following things:</th>
<th>When a person is not performing as expected, a good coach will...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When a person does well, a good coach will...</td>
<td>Aside from providing instruction, a good coach provides...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good coach understands the importance of...</td>
<td>In order to be a good coach, I need to...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Coach” has come to mean trainer, teacher, tutor, supervisor and other guiding or leading roles. By coaching your volunteers, you go above and beyond supervisory duties to ensure the success of your volunteer program. In most sports, the coach is influential to the athlete’s success, so with every project and program you work on with your volunteers, always aim to get them at the top of the podium and at the top of their game.
Motivation and Retention

Canada-wide data
Understanding volunteer motivation is the first step in recruiting and retaining great volunteers. In the 2013 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, Statistics Canada asked Canadians their motivations for volunteering. Some of the top motivations include making a contribution to the community, using skills and experience and being personally affected by the cause or mandate.

93% make a contribution to the community
77% use skills and experience

Consider this
Here are a few questions to help you understand your volunteers’ motivations and enhance their engagement:

What do volunteers who come to your program say was their initial motivation to volunteer?

What factors might be un-motivating to volunteers in your organization?

What do you currently do to keep your volunteers motivated?

Considering motivations
Volunteers can have a mix of motivations, including exploring personal strengths and networking or social opportunities. Since the data collected in this survey is national in scope, some motivations may be lower than others, such as “improving job opportunities.” By thinking about why volunteers want to work with your organization, you can learn a lot about how to keep your volunteers happy and engaged.

23% improve job opportunities

How do you know?
You can ask your volunteers directly through a survey or feedback form for their motivations, or even ask them during the recruitment and screening process. The more you know about your volunteers, the easier it is to find meaningful ways to engage and retain them.
Evaluation is an important part of supervising volunteers. Determining the right forms and format of evaluation should depend on your reporting structure and the formats you employ in performance evaluation in your organization in general. When evaluating your volunteers, there are two common methods:

**Evaluation formats**

- **Evaluation forms**
  - Can be digital (e-mail) or physical (mailed, handed out, printed)
  - Can be available before, during and after shifts
  - Should be somewhat standardized across your organization with variations based on the role
  - Can be perceived as impersonal by volunteers

  *Example:* Volunteers receive an evaluation form at the end of a program from their direct supervisor, or at the end of a three-month period, highlighting their successes and some room for general improvement.

- **Face-to-face evaluation**
  - Can be scheduled or impromptu
  - Can follow a standardized set of questions/evaluation areas
  - Directed at a specific volunteer (or occasionally a group of volunteers)
  - Comes across as more personal for volunteers
  - Allows for immediate response from volunteers during evaluation process

  *Example:* Volunteer supervisor meets with volunteer after probation period to talk about the role, volunteer challenges and successes.

**Regular evaluation**

It’s important to provide an evaluation and/or feedback on a regular basis so that volunteers know how they’re doing. The schedule should depend on the work of the volunteer and the amount of time they are committing to your program. If a volunteer breaks a rule or boundary, you should address this immediately and provide your feedback – preferably in person – to help this volunteer solve the problem.

**Getting feedback**

As part of evaluation, it’s important to take the time to listen to volunteer feedback about the role and the program. You can do this informally by asking a few general questions about their experience or include it as a formal part of a more structured evaluation, using a standardized questions either through an online survey or as part of a face-to-face evaluation meeting. You can also ask the volunteer to evaluate their supervisor’s performance.