



Volunteer
Toronto

Advanced

Volunteer Communities & Mentorship

Resource Guide & Workbook

Compiled by Engaging Organizations Department

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Using this Resource Guide & Workbook

The Volunteer Communities & Mentorship resource guide & workbook has been compiled by Volunteer Toronto to help community groups, non-profits and charitable organizations with the basic tools to create volunteer communities and mentorship programs. Each resource has been selected to help you develop a community that supports your volunteers, and mentorship relationships to help volunteers grow. It is important to remember that these are guidelines informed by best practices; you can adapt them to your situation as needed.

Volunteer Communities & Mentorship

Building a **volunteer community** is an integral part of ensuring your volunteers are engaged with your organization throughout their time in your program. Communities can exist online and offline, and even form during volunteer shifts. Your short-term and casual volunteers can also participate in your volunteer community, helping to increase retention and a sense of fellowship in your organization. **Mentorship programs** can help to support community development and build up your volunteers in a variety of ways. This resource guide can help you understand and create volunteer communities and mentorship programs that work for your organization. This workbook is in two parts, as follows:

Volunteer Communities

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Mentorship Programs

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A community is a sense or feeling of fellowship with others around a shared attitude, interest and/or goal, similarities of identity or aspects of identity. For example, you may consider yourself in a community of others born in the same year, or interested in the same kind of movie. Communities can form through actions and activities that create a social network and sense of belonging for everyone involved.

Creating community in your volunteer program relies on the development of fellowship among your volunteers around their work with your organizations – and their identities as individuals. Volunteer communities can involve the entire volunteer program, or multiple communities can be connected together, creating numerous opportunities for connection and fellowship. To start forming a meaningful volunteer community, establish some shared attitudes, interests and identity similarities that you can identify among your volunteers:

Shared Attitudes/ Beliefs	Shared Interests	Shared Identities (& Aspects)
<i>Example:</i> Volunteers feel strongly about helping Toronto thrive	<i>Example:</i> Volunteers share an interest in outdoor adventures	<i>Example:</i> Many volunteers are newcomers in the last 2 years

Forming Communities

Communities for volunteers can manifest in a few different ways. On this chart, take a look at the examples and come up with your own ideas for volunteer communities formed online, outside of shift hours and on-site or on-shift:

Online	Outside of “Shift” Hours	On-Site/On-Shift
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media group (share, communicate, talk casually, change shifts) • Hashtags on social media • Blog (volunteer highlights, conversations) • Volunteer newsletter • Chat systems (Slack) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal & informal training (role-related, personal development) • Informal appreciation events • Inviting volunteer guests/families • Participating in similar-minded community events together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared communication method (note binder, whiteboard) • Provide information up front (volunteers know what’s going on) • Volunteer space/office/room • Information meetings, welcomed to staff meetings • Role shadowing
Other Ways to Form Communities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer leaders can build communities themselves • People always bond over food 		

Benefits of Building Community

Why is it important to build and maintain a community of volunteers?

- Communities keep volunteers connected and better engaged with the volunteer program, the organization and the mission – especially if the community is built around the common goal of the organization's mission
- The community can be a benefit for the volunteer; it can provide fellowship and camaraderie, and can help volunteers build networks and relationships
- Communities can be a useful retention tool – volunteers may stay longer in their role because of the community, and/or consider the community as a reason to return to volunteering with your organization
- Dedicated, connected and engaged volunteers can increase the value and impact of your volunteer program for clients and the served community
- Clients may observe the community formed around volunteers and decide to become volunteers themselves, helping to build a stronger connection to the organization and its served community
- Volunteer communities can increase the collective voice of volunteers when addressing problems and/or celebrating impact

What other benefits can you think of for building community in your volunteer program?

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Motivations for Community-Building Worksheet

Keeping volunteers motivated is a key element of retention and successful volunteer management. Volunteers may work with you for a variety of reasons, so broadly enhancing motivations is important to ensure your volunteers feel successful and can develop in their role and serve your mission. Below a list of motivation “enhancers” – how can a volunteer community help to support these enhancers and therefore boost the motivations of volunteers?

Motivation Enhancer – Volunteers want:	Community Action:
To do something meaningful and understand the impact	<i>Example:</i> Monthly impact updates on volunteer newsletter/Facebook group
To be recognized appropriately	
To be respected	
The proper tools to do their role	
To be seen, heard & valued	
To be supervised appropriately	
To be & feel successful	

The following are considered motivation “crushers” – how can a volunteer community help to avoid these crushers?

Motivation Crusher – Volunteers might feel:	Community Action:
A lack of support	<i>Example:</i> Create an accessible in-person, online and voicemail feedback system to get a sense of needs, and address them frequently
A lack of contact with supervisors	
The working climate is difficult	
Their role is ambiguous	
There is no recognition (or recognition is too general)	
A lack of voice	
They are being overused or underused	
There is inequality in the volunteer program	

How To Build Social Media Communities

As noted on page 3, online communities can be formed using social media. Use the tips on this page to think about how you can build communities for your volunteers on social media.

Facebook Group

How it's used: Volunteers' personal Facebook accounts are invited to a private group to allow them to connect and communicate.

How it's monitored: The volunteer coordinator and/or leader of specific volunteer program should be an "admin" on the group (usually the person who creates the group, but anyone can get admin status from the creator) to oversee and moderate conversations.

Ideas:

- You can post volunteer-only events directly to the group using Facebook Events or another system
- Invite volunteers to "animate" the group by asking interesting questions, sharing links
- Talk about upcoming changes to the program or ask for feedback about changes
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Twitter Hashtag

How it's used: A hashtag (#) is a term preceded by the #. When used, any tweet or post using the hashtag will be connected. For example, #VTvolunteers for Volunteer Toronto volunteers.

How it's monitored: Anyone can tweet with the hashtag once they know what it is, but ideally it'll be specific enough to your program that only your volunteers will use it. You can click on the hashtag in any tweet to see all tweets using it and report those that may not be appropriate.

Ideas:

- Make a specific hashtag for a volunteer event or sub-program
- Use an additional hashtag with a question to start a conversation
- Encourage volunteers to tweet with the hashtag when they're on shift (if they're able to tweet in their role)
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Instagram Storytelling

How it's used: It's not possible to create groups on Instagram, but volunteers can follow a specific Instagram account – this can be used to share pictures, videos and stories of volunteer activities.

How it's monitored: You can give control of the account to some volunteers with specific social media training, but still approve posts by using a social media scheduler app like Buffer. Alternatively, you can ensure that one of the people in charge of the account is a leadership volunteer or staff member (an “account takeover”).

Ideas:

- Use short clips to entice volunteers to visit your Instagram “Story” (montages that exist for 24 hours after posting) to learn more
- Post clever jokes or funny images to keep the tone light and keep volunteers engaged
- Ask questions in the comments and invite volunteers to tag others to gain more followers
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LinkedIn Group

How it's used: As a more professional network, a LinkedIn group works well for certain roles that attract job seekers or young professionals. It's similar to Facebook groups, allowing for links, posts, images and polls to be used.

How it's monitored: If your organization has a LinkedIn company page, make sure your account is connected and have the company page “create” the group and send invites.

Ideas:

- Post LinkedIn job postings relevant to volunteer roles, skills & abilities
- Share relevant articles, links and videos
- Start conversations within the group to encourage volunteers to respond
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Building Community with Short-Term Volunteers

Volunteer communities aren't limited to your long-term and ongoing volunteers, and can welcome event-based, project-based and other short-term volunteers. Since these volunteers may only be engaged for a shorter amount of time, how can you help them feel like a part of the team and the community? This is also important for long-term volunteers who might take time off and return to the role later. Consider each of these questions for your program and how you might approach communities for short-term volunteers.

What do you need to change about how your community looks/works and its scale?

Tip: Think about building communities that can work around the events (like a hashtag on social media) or engages just the short-term volunteers as part of the larger community (special training for these volunteers, open to all volunteers)

How can you build communities specifically around events/project-based volunteers?

Tip: Make sure you're eliminating silos of volunteers if they might be in a smaller or off-site project – it should still be connected to your overall volunteer community

How can you welcome all volunteers into the same community, regardless of their term?

Tip: Think about the language you're using – making sure everyone feels like a part of the team, regardless of role or activity; and consider how you can welcome new volunteers to the community to help it grow

How do you keep short-term volunteers connected between engagements (i.e. events)?

Tip: Make sure volunteers know you're thinking of them, and set the expectation that you're still around and still interested in having them volunteer

Barriers, Tips & Ideas for Your Own Community

The reality of volunteer communities depends on the structure of your volunteer program. What are some barriers you might encounter when trying to build volunteer communities?

Examples:

- *Lack of time (for volunteers and volunteer managers)*
- *Lack of resources*
- *Program spread out*
- *Volunteers are short-term*

Here are some tips for building your volunteer community from volunteer managers across Toronto:

- Find out the motivations your volunteers have to work with your organization and build the community around that
- Consider the orientation process – how can senior/leadership volunteers help welcome new volunteers, talk about their positive experience and what motivates them
- Include quotes from volunteers about their roles, along with photos of volunteer activities and telling the volunteer story
- Talk about the volunteer community and how it works & benefits volunteers in the recruitment process
- Use icebreakers and social games to help volunteers communicate, connect and get to know each other
- Recruit and engage volunteers to be “community animators”
- Build excitement about your organization’s community for volunteers and keep the impact of their work a central component

Consider the barriers you identified above and the tips suggested from your peers to determine the best idea for what your community can look like. Think back to the chart on page 3 and determine what community (or communities) would work best:

What is a Volunteer Mentorship Program?

Volunteer mentorship programs help to support sustainability and retention in the volunteer program –and volunteer communities – to allow volunteers to take on leadership roles and pass on their knowledge to new volunteers. The program is made up of two components: the mentor & the mentee.

Mentors are individuals with specific skills, experience and/or knowledge to pass on to others. Mentors pass on knowledge, take on a leadership and help enhance mentee volunteer experiences. They are often volunteers but can also be staff, board members or even community members. Mentees are volunteers looking to develop skills, change roles or eventually become leaders themselves. Mentorship can meet mentee motivations and encourage them to grow and develop with your organization.

Mentors can:

- Help to ensure volunteers meet their expectations & understand the scope of the role
- Ensure volunteers don't break boundaries & understand the risks associated with the role
- Guide volunteers to perform properly, effectively, safely and successfully
- Role model their own volunteer work and provide front-line experience and knowledge

Mentorship relationships can help your volunteers develop and enhance their sense of community – and motivation to continue volunteering with you. It can also help you maintain knowledge and decrease training needs.



Finding the Right Mentor Worksheet

The opportunity to be a mentor may be a primary motivation for some volunteers. If you're forming a mentorship program, how do you ensure you find the right mentors? Using this chart, identify the qualities you're looking for in a good mentor for your program:

Leadership Skills/Experience	Program/Organization Knowledge
<i>Example: Serves in a leadership role</i>	<i>Example: Been with the organization for 2 years</i>
Supportive Personality	Desire to Pass On Skills
<i>Example: Helps other volunteers on shift</i>	<i>Example: Keeps detailed notes on role activities</i>

While anyone can theoretically be a mentor, you should be looking more specifically for someone who exhibits some or all of these traits.

Once you've identified these qualities, use the space below to think of individuals in your program that could be mentors. Mentors don't have to always be other volunteers, so think outside box to find a choice that works for you:

Volunteers

Senior/leadership volunteers can pass on program- and role-specific skills

Staff/Volunteer Supervisors/Volunteer Managers

Provide guidance to volunteers looking for work or interested in supervising others volunteers

Board Members

Often bring a unique, specific skill to the board that can be passed on to mentee volunteers or mentee board member

Community Members

Could include donors & supporters, mentee can learn more about community network and create meaningful relationships in the future

Mentors Providing Support

Use the chart below to consider the ways that mentors can help volunteers succeed and keep volunteers from failing:

How do mentors help volunteers succeed?	How do mentors keep volunteers from failing?
<i>Example: Meet expectations of the role</i>	<i>Example: Understand risks of the role</i>

Volunteers benefit from mentors addressing issues with them directly:

- Mentors directly address behaviour and suggest solutions
- Mentors can help volunteers fulfill motivations & develop stronger ones
- Mentors provide support system for volunteers
- Mentors can help give volunteers a sense of direction & increased knowledge

Building a Mentorship Program Worksheet

Consider each question below to help you build your mentorship program:

Who manages it & how?

Who will choose & work with mentors? Who will oversee their relationship, check-in on meetings and more?

How do they connect?

Who matches mentees to mentors? How will they be matched? When will they meet, is it by phone, in-person, online? How often?

How long are they connected?

How long is the relationship between mentor & mentee? Who & what determines this?

What's next for mentees?

Do mentees automatically become mentors? How can they pass on their knowledge? What are other next steps?

Making the Mentor Match Template

Once you find your mentors and mentees, you need to match the right ones together. Start by thinking about the motivations each have to volunteer, and that can help you start thinking about matches you can make. Use this chart to think of distinct motivations that mentors and mentees might have:

Mentor motivations:	Mentee motivations:
Pass on skills & experience to others	Learn new skills
Volunteer in a leadership role	See how to work in the role effectively
Contribute to the community	Make a bigger impact

Beyond the motivations, you want to make sure you're creating a relationship that makes sense for both the mentor and mentee. Think about the way the program is structured in how they will connect and consider how this works for the role. Use the chart on page 15 to help you plan this.

Finally, how are the mentor and mentee compatible? Think about different ways to approach each challenge below:

- Communication – how will the mentee & mentor communicate?
- Presence – will the mentor be hands-on or occasionally check-in?
- Timeframe – how long is appropriate for the relationship to meet the goals of the mentee?
- Personal vs. Professional – what are the mentor & mentee comfortable discussing?

Volunteers Transitioning into Mentorship Roles

Volunteers may be attracted to your organization due to the presence of a mentorship program. While some may be eager to be mentored, others may specifically want to become mentors themselves. Successful mentorship programs rely on past mentees to eventually become mentors.

Here are a few common examples of mentees becoming mentors:

- Mentorship within the Board of Directors can see newer board members becoming mentors after a year of being mentored into their role
- Leadership volunteers can mentor volunteers interested in developing leadership skills; when these leaders move on, the mentees can become leaders themselves
- Volunteers looking for a change of role can pass on their knowledge and skills to other volunteers in a mentorship capacity, leading to a consistent cycle

In the chart below, think about the different elements you'll need to have in place to encourage mentees to become mentors:

Meet volunteer motivations of serving the community	
Provide mentee with the knowledge to be a mentor	
Explain mentee-mentor relationships & boundaries	
Understand conflict of interest or other issues when becoming a mentor	
Ensure mentee can still meet their role requirements when they become a mentor	
Manage transition from mentee to mentor	
Find the right match for the new mentor	

By creating the tools to transition mentees into mentors, you can develop a cycle of mentorship, keeping the mentorship program sustainable and helping you focus on other aspects of the volunteer program. This will also help you develop more high-quality volunteers who can offer more to your organization through the knowledge and skills they gain through the mentorship program.

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Next Steps

To continue your volunteer management journey, there are a number of other workbooks created by Volunteer Toronto to assist you every step of the way:

Basic

- Planning, Recruiting & Selecting
- Training, Supervising & Supporting
- Evaluating, Retaining & Developing
- Engaging Group Volunteers
- Professional Development for Managers of Volunteers
- Measuring Impact of Volunteer Programs

Intermediate

- Planning for Volunteer Involvement
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteer Selection
- Training & Orientation
- Volunteer Retention & Recognition
- Volunteer Supervision

Advanced

- Accessibility and the AODA
- Giving Volunteers Feedback
- Short Term Volunteers
- Long Term Volunteers
- Volunteer Boundaries & Dismissal
- Volunteer Handbook Sample

Check out our **Online Learning Centre** for a variety of courses to further enhance your learning and improve your practice - go to volunteertoronto.ca/OnlineLearning

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