

The Three “Rs” of Volunteerism

Recruitment, Retention and Re-Training



Illinois Citizen Corps Conference

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Volunteer Trends

MACRO TRENDS

1. **Age as a Diversity Issue**

The population is aging but don't expect Baby Boomers (late 40s to mid 60s), the largest generation at 77 million, to retire in the traditional sense. Barring illness, someone aged 60 today does not think of himself or herself as old, nor does anyone else. As a result, organizations may find volunteers "aging in place," tenaciously clinging to traditional roles and responsibilities and entrenched in key leadership positions.

The second largest generation behind Boomers is the youngest generation – the Millennials – with the oldest Millennials being 26.

Solutions: Now is the time to build in enforced rotation of board members, committee chairs, and other functions. This gives newer volunteers room to grow. Simultaneously, your organization should find a variety of ways for veteran volunteers to continue to be of support. This could mean developing meaningful roles for active (and homebound) volunteers in their 80s.

2. **Technology**

The Internet has placed a growing wealth of volunteer materials literally a click away. With a little bit of search engine skill, your volunteers can find information on volunteer recruitment and retention, boardsmanship, recognition, community building, and so on.

Solutions: It is increasingly important that you use the Internet to manage and involve your volunteers and to build their base of knowledge. Show them where to find information to build their skills specific to your needs. Make sure your Web site has information of value to volunteers and consider developing an area where volunteers can post questions and support one another, if you have not already. Build a social networking, like Facebook, for your volunteers. Study ways you can use technology to your advantage.

MICRO TRENDS

1. **Volunteers want short-term assignments**

Reluctance to commit to a long-term volunteer assignment is so prevalent that it's moving from a trend to an established fact. People are stressed and time-starved. Has your organization earned the reputation of rewarding good volunteer work with more volunteer work? If so, you often burn out your best people.

Solutions: Give volunteers what they want. Involve them in specific, time-limited projects like task forces. Consider ways to involve people who would be willing to do some work but don't want to be bogged down by endless planning meetings. Find ways to provide single days of service or short-term assignments. The days of four-year terms are going out the window.

Additionally, examine your recognition practices. Do you give awards for longevity (the 15-year pin)? Do you only get to be a leader if you've "come up through the ranks?" If so, be careful. You may be sending the message that service, indeed, has no foreseeable end or that you only value intensity of service. Continue recognizing those who have volunteered for a long time, but consider adding awards for rookie of the year or the volunteer who did the most in the least amount of time.

Volunteer Trends continued...

2. **Volunteers prefer multitasking opportunities**

Volunteering is a leisure-time activity in which members participate after filling the priority demands of a job or family. Volunteers, however, will complete all sorts of tasks if they enjoy what they are doing and the people they are doing it with.

Solutions: Organizations that allow families to volunteer together, for example, may be more successful in recruiting. Be sensitive, though, to the changing definition of family. Your members may now consist of blended families from second or third marriages; single parents by choice; same-sex couples with or without children; grandparents raising grandchildren; older children caring for aging parents; and other variations on the theme. Similarly, many people feel that they don't have time to be with their friends. Recruit friends to volunteer together to support your efforts or cause. Be creative in finding multitasking opportunities for members.

3. **Volunteers are open to virtual volunteering or online service**

Virtual volunteering is probably one of the first genuinely new forms of volunteering in a century. And while face-to-face contact will always be important, consider replacing at least some of your time-consuming and costly meetings with well-run list-servers or even chat rooms.

Solutions: Members can fulfill many volunteer activities through electronic communication—from conducting research to proofreading materials to running publicity campaigns. This means that your volunteers can come from anywhere on the globe--holding out an interesting potential for 24-hour services.

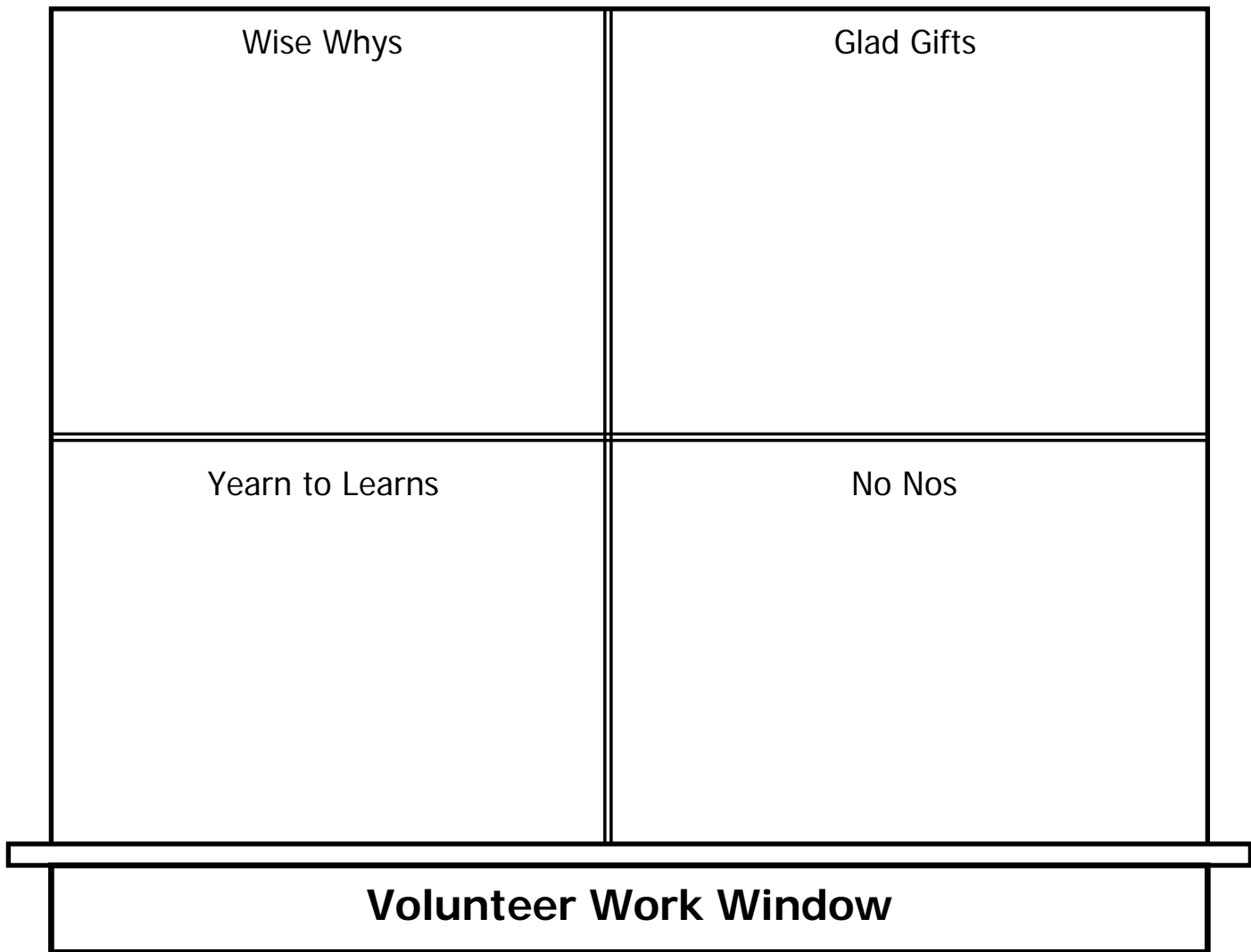
Example: The political group MoveOn provides one model for online mobilization. From holding bake sales to raising money, and from writing letters to the editors of major newspapers to mobilizing voter registration drives, these folks do it all by electronic communication, but with reminders, thank-you notes, and after-activity reports.

What will you do?

Now that you are aware of some of the trends affecting volunteerism, what will you do? Some suggestions:

- You can ensure that your board members/organizational leaders weigh the relevance of these trends to your organizational purpose.
- Evaluate your existing volunteer model.
- Develop a volunteer development strategy that includes recruitment, retention, and education to keep your organization on the cutting edge.

Others thoughts?



Instructions:

- Pane 1: The first pane of the work window under "**Wise Whys**," the respondent answers the question: "Why do you want to become a volunteer for this organization?"
- Pane 2: "**Glad Gifts**" are special skills, talents or interests the respondent can offer that the organization would benefit from; fairly specific things they like to do and can do well (*examples: good at public speaking, good with numbers, can design a website, etc.*).
- Pane 3: The third pane is for "**Yearn to Learns**": those specific things the respondent would like to learn more about, or skills they would like to improve or develop. An area the person would like to venture into because they find it intriguing and would like to learn more (*examples: would love to know more about investing, logistics planning, etc.*).
- Pane 4: "**No Nos**" or taboos. The fourth pane is for tasks the respondent never wants to be asked to do because they have no interest and/or no skill. (*examples: bookkeeping, public speaking, traveling, etc.*)

Concept by Dr. Ivan H. Scheier, PhD
<http://e-volunteerism.com/team/scheier.php>

A Successful Volunteer is ...

Aware

Exhibits foresight and understands the mission of the organization. Aligns volunteer work with organizational objectives.

Cooperative

Works as part of the team to make sure everyone gets a chance to participate and do a fair share of the work. Eager to work with others and help them succeed. Communicates regularly and effectively.

Dependable

Shows initiative by fulfilling all commitments and responsibilities and seeking the resources necessary to do the work well. Does what he/she says they will do and does their best.

Disciplined

Is realistic in accepting the responsibility of volunteering. Plans the time to dedicate to the volunteer role or opts out gracefully if he/she cannot fulfill the responsibility.

Eager and Enthusiastic

Seeks ways to be more effective and to stay engaged. Reaches out, if necessary, to be sure he/she is fulfilling responsibilities. Doesn't complain but seeks to help.

Humble

Doesn't volunteer for the perceived power or authority that comes with a position. Doesn't volunteer to get attention or to feel superior. Happy knowing that he/she is making a difference in whatever role asked to play. "Service over self-interest."

Knowledgeable

Knows and understands the job and the written job description. Actively participates in organized training (if available). Pays attention.

Respectful

Always shows respect for other people and experiences. Tries to empathize to be more effective.

A Role Model

Behavior, example, or success can and should be emulated by others, especially by younger people. One who considers his/her ability to recruit additional volunteers through example.

Selfless

A servant leader. One who doesn't think about what he/she can do to help themselves, but consistently thinks about what he/she can do to help the cause, community, or organization.



...because they've been shown the way.

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