

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

*Communication is key in helping to get your volunteers involved with the club. It keeps them updated and in the ‘loop’ with what is happening at the club and helps them and the club progress towards those goals. Communicating with volunteers will also help the volunteer to take greater responsibility in the club. Communicating should also help in encouraging ideas and where practical, allows responsibility to implement them.*

**Tips for Communication**

Volunteers play a key role in all clubs but they sometimes get short shrift when it comes to internal communication especially if they are not on committees etc. where they will receive information. However, when it comes to volunteer retention and level of engagement, how and how much you communicate plays a role. Here are five tips for better volunteer communication.

1. **A good beginning –** Volunteers often approach a club, or are approached, because something about their activities is appealing to them. Take the time to find out exactly what the appeal is and how much the potential volunteer knows about the club. This helps in terms of finding out where he/she can fit in. Use your introduction as a way to start orienting the volunteer. Discuss not only on your mandate but also the culture of the club and where volunteers fit.
2. **Volunteer manual –** A handbook specifically tailored to volunteers is a great way to ensure that volunteers have the information they need about your club, and their role in it, at their fingertips. Include task-related info as well as practical info such as changing facilities, bathroom and fire alarm locations. Whether online or in hard copy format, make sure that the content is well-organized and indexed. Although the volunteer may read the handbook cover to cover, it is more likely to be used as a reference so being able to quickly and easily find information is important.
3. **Regular check-in –** Just as you would for employees, have a regular check-in with volunteers. Find out how they are managing their role, whether they are having any difficulties, or if they would like to expand/deepen their involvement. Perhaps they have certain goals for themselves you can help them to achieve.
4. **Keep them in the loop –** Many times, clubs forget to communicate key structural changes, challenges or developments to their volunteer contingent. Often, the club management’s focus is on keeping only committees informed and volunteers are an afterthought. But to maintain the level of engagement and to make sure that everyone involved remains informed of critical developments, make sure you consider volunteer communication. In some cases, it’s appropriate to invite volunteers to meetings or to include them in routine memos or e-mail correspondence.
5. **Customized communication** – Depending on the number of volunteers and what type of unique roles they fill, it might make sense to develop tailored communication for volunteers such as an electronic newsletter, intranet space or even a social media platform such a Facebook page. You can use this tool not just for sharing information but also for developing a volunteer community with special recognition and unique stories that demonstrate the value of volunteer contributions.

Do these five tips seem basic? Common sense? They are, but it’s amazing how often volunteers get overlooked when it comes to internal communication. Having an organised program for volunteer communication will help to ensure that volunteers act and respond in ways that are appropriate to your club. It will also enhance their level of engagement and commitment.

Many times, volunteers drift away because they don’t feel they are really part of a team or sufficiently appreciated. When you formalize communication including volunteers it delivers the message that they are important and indeed part of the club.

Now it’s your turn. How will you communicate with volunteers?