

Building the Leadership Pipeline

Every member is a potential volunteer, and every volunteer, on their first day or at their first activity, is a potential future board member.

In recent research through Association Laboratory, participants were asked to identify what they believed were success factors important to creating and sustaining volunteer and strategic leadership. Two of the top factors included¹:

- The need for associations to implement volunteer identification, recruitment, and development strategies that ensure a funnel of high-quality leadership into the association.
- The need for associations to develop strategies to orient all volunteers to their role and the unique characteristics and corresponding expectations of a peer-to-peer decision making environment.

If recruitment or nominations for your Board have decreased, or you're having trouble identifying the right individuals to serve, the solution is a holistic evaluation of your volunteer process. Think of volunteering as a long-term process that evaluates strategic orientation, identification and recruitment, and development.

Orientation

What is the purpose of your volunteer opportunities or groups? The clearer the association is about how the volunteer group is serving the mission and vision of the organization, the more successful volunteers will be at operating in that environment.

Some insights include the following:

- Why is the volunteer group (Board, Committee, Task Force) important to the association? How do they relate to the association's strategic goals?
- What parameters guide their activities?
- How will the success of the volunteer group be determined?
- What is the role of the volunteer?
- What kinds of competencies are needed?
- What is the commitment?
- Is there training?
- What are expectations?

Some organizations have created "job descriptions" to orient members to the organization, the volunteer opportunity, as well as their roles and responsibilities. By having this information available, the volunteer is prepared from the very beginning for a potential leadership position.

¹ Creating and Sustaining a Strategic Board – A Strategic White Paper for the Association Industry, by Association Laboratory, Inc. ©2016

Identification & Recruitment

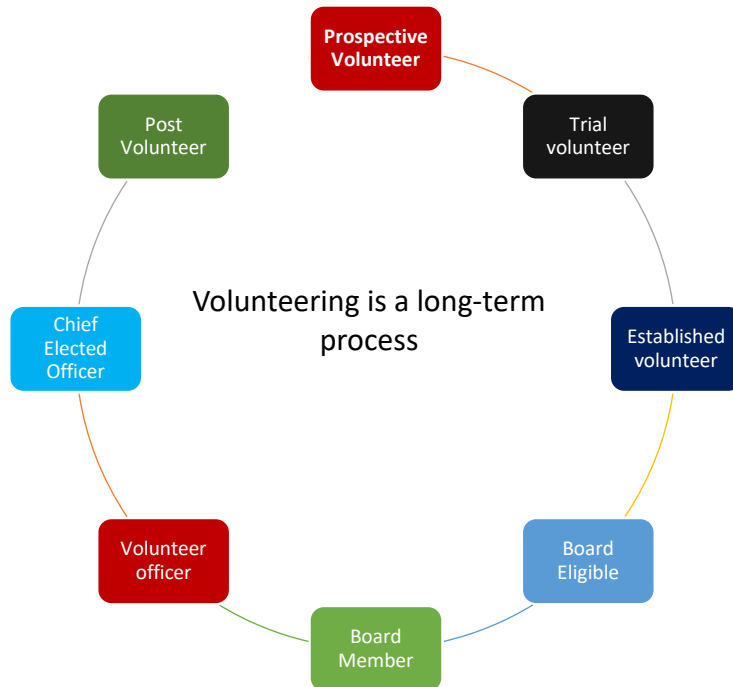
Identifying and recruiting members to serve in a volunteer capacity can extend beyond a nominating committee’s responsibility.

Highly qualified individuals could be identified by reaching out to internal staff, revisiting the list of individuals who were not accepted on a committee or other volunteer opportunity (like writing an article), reviewing former award participants, or reaching out to fellow chairs and committee members.

The following check list can help you when identifying and recruiting volunteers:

Volunteer Type	Questions	Yes/No
Prospective volunteer	Do the individuals you seek out for volunteer roles meet the needs of the association? Can staff identify where a given member might be a good fit as a volunteer?	
Trial volunteer	Does the performance of a person participating in their first volunteer activity reflect the behaviors and organizational values necessary to be successful in a decision making environment?	
Established volunteer	Does the person have particular strengths need to be supported? Are there weaknesses that can be addressed?	
Board eligible	Does the person model strategic decision making behaviors and can these behaviors be improved or incentivized?	
Board member	Does the person understand their role on the board and the board’s role within the association?	
Volunteer officer	Does the person understand how the role of board leader is different from board member?	
Chief elected officer	Does the person understand the roles and responsibilities and exhibit attributes of an effective chief elected officer?	
Post volunteer	Does the person understand how to use their experiences to mentor future volunteer leaders?	

This is a critical step. If the volunteer does not have the right competencies for future involvement, this should be addressed immediately.



Development

Continuing to orient and educate volunteers to maximize their effectiveness in strategic decision making is essential for continued development in a volunteer’s commitment to serve:

- Are the volunteers still clear on expectations? Continue the process of familiarizing the volunteer with the organization’s strategy, strategic decision making, and their roles/responsibilities relative to the volunteer opportunity to ensure success.
- Are they familiar with past decisions of the volunteer group to understand the decisions that need to be made today or in the future? As a new committee member, it can be intimidating to be involved if others on the committee are more familiar with past actions/recommendations. Consider sharing past notes and summation reports to newly appointed volunteers.
- Are there touchpoints throughout the volunteer’s commitment to incentivize continued participation? Making volunteers feel important and valued increases the likelihood of continued engagement.

By creating intentional strategies to address these areas, the association can build and improve the leadership pipeline.

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