

Key Components of Creating A Volunteer Program



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Table of Contents

I. Facts and Trends in Volunteerism in the United States	page 3
II. Volunteer Program Planning	page 7
III. Running a Volunteer Program for Trail Building	page 10
IV. Appendix	page 19
A. Sample Volunteer Application	
B. Sample Liability Release	
C. Sample Safety Policy	
D. Sample Safety Fact Sheet: Tools for Trail Work	
E. Sample Hazards Fact Sheet: Snakebites	



Key Components to Creating a Volunteer Program

I. Facts and Trends in Volunteerism in the United States

In preparing a volunteer program, it is important to be aware of both the factors and the societal trends that influence individuals' daily lives and shape available volunteer opportunities. These factors will be important to keep in mind as you identify who may volunteer for your organization, the type and duration of the volunteer opportunities you offer, and where you promote these opportunities. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics provides interesting data regarding who volunteers:¹

Facts: Who Volunteers?²

- Approximately 65.4 million Americans, age sixteen or older, volunteered for an organization at least once between September 2004 and September 2005.
- The proportion of the population who volunteered was 28.8%, identical to the percentage of volunteers in 2003 and 2004.
- Approximately 25% of men and 33% of women volunteered in 2005, mirroring the number of men and women who volunteered in 2003 and 2004.
- Among all demographic categories, including age, race, marital status, labor force status, and educational attainment, women have demonstrated more of a willingness to volunteer than have men in 2005.
- Persons age 35 to 44 were the most active volunteers (34.5%), followed by those age 45 to 54 (32.7%). Teenagers also made up a significant portion of the American volunteer force (30.4%) while those in their early twenties (19.5%) and over age 65 (24.8%) showed a lower volunteer rate.
- With respect to ethnicity, Caucasians volunteered at a higher rate (30.4%) than any other major ethnic group, including African-Americans (22.1%), Asians (20.7%), and Hispanics and Latinos (12.2%). This has been the case each of the last four years.
- Married persons (34.1%) volunteered more than never-married persons (23.0%) and those of other marital status (23.1%).
- Parents with children under age 18 were more likely to volunteer than those without children (37.0% compared with 25.5%).

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Volunteering in the United States* and *Volunteering in the United States, 2005*, prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor; available from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Volunteering in the United States* and *Volunteering in the United States, 2005*, prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor; available from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.



- Persons employed (31.3%) volunteered more than those unemployed (26.4%) or not in the labor force (24.4%). Among the employed, part-time workers volunteered more than full-time workers (38.2% compared to 29.8%).
- Volunteering increases proportionally with educational attainment. In 2005, college graduates (approximately 45.0%) volunteered more than persons with less than a bachelor's degree (35.0%), high school graduates (approximately 20.0%), and those with less than a high school diploma (10.0%).
- Volunteers spent on average 50 hours on volunteer activities, down slightly from the year prior. Specifically, men spent 52 and women 50 hours volunteering. Volunteers over the age of 65 averaged the most time spent volunteering (96 hours) while those ages 16 to 19 and 25 to 34 averaged the least (36 hours).

Facts: Where People Volunteer and How People Become Volunteers³

- More volunteers in 2005 were involved with one organization (69.6%) than two (18.9%).
- Volunteers were involved most frequently with organizations that were either affiliated with a religion (34.8%), educational or youth related (26.2%), or had to do with community service (13.4%).
- Two in five volunteers (40%) sought out volunteer opportunities and organizations that interested them. A slightly larger number of volunteers (43.0%) were asked to volunteer by someone within the organization.
- The reasons for those who once volunteered regularly not volunteering in 2005 included a lack of time (45.6%), health problems (15.2%), and familial responsibilities (9.3%).

Facts: Why People Volunteer⁴

Many studies have been conducted to discover what motivates individuals to volunteer. Reasons people volunteer are as diverse as the individuals who volunteer themselves. However, studies indicate that the primary reason people volunteer is belief in the organization's mission. Being familiar with the archetypal motivational factors for volunteering is important and useful in identifying and understanding an individual's motive for volunteering. A person's motivation comes into play in the recruiting of a volunteer and satisfying the motivation is a key component to retaining a volunteer.

- Shared Conviction: belief in an organization's mission.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Merrill Associates, *Topic of the Month: Understanding Volunteer Motivations*; available from <http://www.merrillassociates.net/topic/2002/12/understanding-volunteer-motivations>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006. Cf. also Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network, *Findings From the Field, April 2005 Vol. I, No. 1* and *Findings From the Field, June 2005 Vol. I, No. 2*; available from http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/resources/research/FindingsField_2005-04.pdf and http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/resources/research/FindingsField_2005-06.pdf; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.



- Affiliation: the desire to be associated with a particular organization.
- Influence: the aspiration to influence the direction and aims of an organization.
- Altruism: the wish to show an interest in others welfare without any promise of tangible recompense.
- Social Interaction: meeting others with similar interests and life goals.
- Career Building: taking the opportunity to volunteer as an opportunity to develop occupational skills and network with others along a similar career path.
- Learning Opportunity: gaining newfound knowledge and experience.
- Accomplishment: wanting to help an organization create and complete projects the volunteer can share satisfaction and pride in.
- Community Service: volunteering to meet a requirement – to complete a class, graduate, etc.

Trends: Five Emergent Forms of Volunteerism⁵

- Employee Volunteering: Workplace volunteer programs have exploded in number in the last twenty years and vary considerably, from highly organized and supported corporate programs that tie volunteerism to strategic business initiatives to more grass-root, employee-driven programs. Such volunteerism benefits the employer, employee, and community alike: the employer demonstrates a commitment to principles of social responsibility; the employee develops certain skills and a new sense of self-worth while having the opportunity to advance in the workplace; and the community enjoys new connections with the private sector.⁶
- Episodic Volunteerism: It is estimated that one-third to one-half of all volunteers volunteer episodically. This is possibly a reflection of larger societal changes. Where once strong social and civic bonds encouraged sustained volunteerism and emphasized the importance of collective action, the erosion of these bonds has given rise to a more individualized volunteerism. Volunteerism is thus no longer centered around ideals or obligations held in common, but around a particular individual's availability, interests, skill set, personal motivations, and notion of commitment.
- Virtual Volunteerism: The advent and predominance of the Internet and the World Wide Web has led to a substantial, but gradual, increase in virtual volunteering where volunteer activities are completed via computer. Virtual

⁵ Merrill Associates, *Topic of the Month: Five Emerging Patterns of Volunteerism*; available from <http://www.merrillassociates.net/topic/2005/09/five-emerging-patterns-of-volunteerism>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006. Cf. Merrill Associates, *Topic of the Month: What Has Changed*; available from <http://www.merrillassociates.net/topic/2004/11/what-has-changed>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.

⁶ It should be noted that with the mass retirement of the Baby Boom generation imminent, corporations and other companies may have the single, largest influence over whether the soon-to-swallow retiree population will be one of active volunteers. Indeed, one study has found that 1) it is important for employers to develop in their employees an early interest in volunteering, and 2) that companies play a privileged role in helping employees set to retire transition between work and civic engagement (Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, *New Research on Volunteer Trends for the Baby Boom Generation*; available from <http://www.csrwire.com/article.cgi/4690.html>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006).



volunteerism allows organizations to expand their volunteer programs by welcoming more volunteers to participate, including those across distances. It also makes volunteering convenient for the individual in that specific activities can be done anywhere there is a computer, at anytime. The coordination of resources and customization of volunteer opportunities is likely to make virtual volunteerism more popular in the future.

- **Cross-National Volunteering:** In addition to organizations, such as the Peace Corps and United Nations Volunteers, that have sent volunteers abroad for years, corporations from around the globe are increasingly providing the means by which employees may undertake short-term volunteer assignments in developing countries. While this form of volunteerism underscores the growing scarcity of volunteers available for long-term project commitments and is generally restricted to those of higher socioeconomic status from developed countries, the exchange stands to improve the volunteers themselves and the countries they are working in.
- **VolunTourism:** Opportunities to take a volunteer vacation have been available for many years. The growth of study abroad programs in the 1970's, Ecotourism in the 1980's and Volunteer Vacations in the 1990's have increased interest in combining travel and service.



II. Volunteer Program Planning

Good planning is essential to the success of your organizations volunteer program. Volunteer program plans should be comprehensive in thought and action. Components of a good program plan follow in the coming sections.

Project Planning

Successful volunteer programs are built upon good work projects. The first step in building a successful program is to identify and to plan the project that will accomplish important work for the organization and will provide a sense of accomplishment for the volunteer. The following steps contribute to developing a solid project plan.

1. Identify work project.
2. Define how the project contributes to the organizations strategic goals, mission.
3. Outline the tasks associated with performing the project.
4. Identify potential project partners.
5. Identify volunteers skills needed to perform the task and to manage the volunteers.
6. Determine the number of volunteers needed.
7. Determine how the volunteers will be organized and managed (i.e. work as a team with team leaders, independent work, as committee, etc.).
8. Determine project location and logistic needs.
9. Assess the working conditions including:
 - a. Hazardous situations;
 - b. Hazard prevention;
 - c. Safety Risks; and
 - d. Environmental conditions (weather, terrain, etc.).
10. Determine the tools, supplies, food needed.
11. Determine the training needed for the work and for safety.
12. Determine lines of communication—who, how and when—prior to the project, during project and afterwards.
13. Plan for accidents (first aid training (staff and volunteer), first aid kit, routes to medical care, etc.).
14. Timeframe of project – length of duration, daily work hours, etc..
15. Determine Project cost.
16. Determine potential funding sources (in-kind, grants, etc.).
17. Plan for fun, i.e. activities that will be fun, social for volunteers during the project.
18. Identify the benefits to the volunteers and sponsors; plan how you will communicate them.
19. Develop information packets for volunteers (organization and project information, packing list, liability release, travel information, etc.)
20. Identify project documentation needs – photos, volunteer hours tracking.
21. Plan volunteer recognition/appreciation during and after the event.
22. Plan follow-up for volunteers, project sponsors, funders, partner organizations.



Volunteer Program Budget

A budget is an essential component of program planning. Budgets help program planners make their vision a reality. Knowing what resources you have and/or need to implement your program enables you to set priorities on where and how to utilize your resources for the most organizational and program impact. Budget planning will help you focus your vision. Consider the following when planning your program budget:

- Staff salary and benefits
- Equipment/Tools
- Safety equipment
- Materials for work
- Travel expenses
- Office supplies
- Other materials
- Printing/copying
- Postage
- Phone/email/internet
- Advertising/marketing
- Training expenses (safety training, volunteer orientation -- materials, food/drink, etc.)
- Recognition activities/events (awards, food/drink, location rental, etc.)
- Food
- Other:
- Other:

Building Organizational Support for Volunteers

Any organization that plans on having volunteers involved in projects needs to have organizational, staff and volunteer support for that volunteer involvement. Such support must include the devotion of staff time and organizational finances to develop the volunteer program. Staff and volunteers who will be supervising the volunteer program may begin building organizational support through engaging program staff or key volunteers in all volunteer organizations. This is best accomplished by discussing with program staff/volunteers the needs of their program areas and where they are having problems reaching their goals.

Some simple questions will help you assess staff attitudes:

1. The level of experience of paid staff working with volunteers.
 - Have they ever supervised volunteers before?
 - Have they ever worked in an organization that involved volunteers?
 - Do they volunteer themselves for an organization?
2. The level of comfort of staff in working with volunteers.



- Are there positions that staff feel volunteers should not be doing?
 - Are there program elements, such as additional staff training, which should be instituted before volunteers are placed?
3. The level of fears that staff feel towards working with volunteers.
- Are there risk management issues?
 - Are there worries about loss of staff jobs?
 - Are there concerns about specific tasks such as fundraising.⁷

Taking the time to address these issues will help you understand what you need to do within your organization to create an organization that is supportive of volunteers.

Communicating the benefits volunteers bring to your organization will also help build internal support. Some benefits of volunteer programs include:

- Volunteers are a group of informed individuals that can communicate your organization's mission to the community;
- Volunteers can help build visibility for your organization in the community;
- Volunteers will leverage your organization's capacity in terms of accomplishing your mission and goals;
- Volunteers will produce financial savings (the dollar value of work contributed to the organization); and
- Volunteers are more likely to become donors.

⁷ Cf. Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network, *Volunteer Program Planning: Incorporating a Program Within Your Organization*; Internet; available from <http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/networks/nonprofitgov/workingsolutions/WS-Sept2002.pdf>; accessed 30 May 2006.



III. Running a Volunteer Program for Trail Building

Volunteers Needed for Trail Building Projects

Trail building is much more than clearing vegetation and creating an assessable pathway – your organization can involve volunteers before you hit the trail and after you return to the office. Think about the behind the scenes work – who will write the press releases, purchase the food, send the information packets to volunteers, and design the trail. While not a complete list for volunteers who may be involved in trail building projects, following are some jobs identified by Outdoor Colorado⁸ in their trail building program:

Crew Leaders (CL). CLs are the “front line” of projects. They are the people-oriented volunteers who lead crews of six to ten people to complete a section of a project. CLs have received special training in leadership, safety, tools, and technical skills.

Crew Leader Manager (CLM). Organize and manage crew leaders and volunteers during the project.

Project Support Coordinators (PSC). These are the very special people who ensure that all our project volunteers are well fed, entertained, and comfortable. Volunteers solicit food and beverage donations, arrange for entertainers and educational speakers, pick up food and supplies, and do general event planning and logistics.

Technical Advisors (TA). Help design the trails, boardwalks, wildlife-viewing blinds, community parks and gardens and everything else we build during our projects. These volunteers may be landscape architects, carpenters, engineers, horticulturists, and other outdoor enthusiasts to work on projects providing technical guidance. This job can take a lot of time and commitment.

Tool Manager (TM). Take charge of the Pulaskis and McLeods. Help determine project equipment and tool needs, then transport tools to and from the VOC warehouse and project sites.

Youth Liaison (YL). Bridge the gap by working with youth groups before, during and after projects to ensure that youth participants have a positive volunteer experience. You may also be involved in developing the education component for youth at each project.

Photographers. Skilled photographers to take photos and capture the essence of projects, special events, and project scouting trips. Help document the excitement and accomplishments of VOC projects. Your work will be used for future guides, newsletters, brochures, fliers, slide shows, web site and more.

Additional needs include Trail Chef, Logistics Planner, Communications/Press, Office Assistance.

⁸ Outdoor Colorado, [Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado: Other VOC Opportunities](http://www.voc.org); Internet; available from <http://www.voc.org>; assessed 12 June 2006.



Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers involves answering a few key questions:

- Who believes in the mission of our organization?
- What are the user groups who use the trails (consider consistent, sporadic and special occasion use)
- Who will benefit from trail users; where might trail users buy supplies? (i.e. sporting good stores, food stores, etc.)
- Who may not want the trail developed?
- What communities are at the beginning, middle, end or close to a trail that may benefit from trail users?
- What are the community groups/businesses the organization wants to get involved in the project?
- What are the benefits of volunteer service to the volunteer? (Will they get access to restricted property? Will key pay a pivotal role in designing the trail? Can they use the experience to build their resume?)
- How does the volunteer project contribute to achieving our organization's mission?
- What is the time commitment required?
- Looking at the project as a whole, what skills are necessary and physical requirements for the project?
- Would people come from other areas – out of town or out of state – to work on the project?

Answering these questions will help you identify potential sources of volunteers specific to your community or project area. A general list of sources of volunteers includes:

- Advocacy groups
- Hiking, biking and equestrian riding groups
- Land Trusts
- AmeriCorps programs
- Board member contacts
- Business and professional organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Churches and religious groups
- Community Service Restitution Programs (court service required)
- Corporations and small businesses
- Farmers markets and eco-fairs
- Fraternal organizations
- Friends groups of local, state and national parks
- Job training programs
- Military units and retired military personnel
- National sororities and fraternities
- Public agencies and retired personnel
- Retired Executives, Teachers (associations of)
- Schools – service-learning programs, honor programs, vocational parent's groups



- Girl and Boy Scout troops or other youth groups
- Senior citizen groups, such as Senior Corps Programs
- Service organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary Clubs and Junior Leagues
- Trade Associations
- University/college/community college organizations
- Volunteer Centers

Many of the previously listed organizations may have statewide or national chapters that should also be considered as possible sources of volunteers.

Promoting Your Volunteer Opportunities

Promoting your volunteer opportunities is important for recruiting volunteers and has the additional benefit of making your program visible. The answers to the questions in the immediately preceding section should be incorporated into your promotional materials. Your message should be brief but compelling, communicate the benefit to the volunteer (examples – volunteers are provided training and/or special educational sessions from ecologists, etc. company employees develop new skills; build good-will in the community) and how the volunteer work forwards your organization mission/goals; indicate the time commitment and skills needed for the project.

Methods of promoting your volunteer opportunities include:

- **By Press Releases:** Press releases are perhaps the most direct and efficient way of reaching a large number of potential volunteers, and they increase the profile of any organization. The hallmarks of a good press release include being concise, the effective use of language to impact the reader, and reemphasizing several key points that reflect the focus of an organization.⁹
- **In Your Newsletter, on Your Website:** That which appears in press releases should appear in your newsletter and on your website with greater specificity and detail. The website, in particular, should be easy to navigate and might well include a Volunteer FAQ page and an easily identifiable ‘volunteer button’ on the homepage that would link the user to the appropriate forms and information regarding volunteering. Consider having volunteer testimonials including pictures of volunteers working on a variety of projects and a Volunteer FAQ. Remember to include diversity in your images – both in project type and volunteers represented.
- **At Community Volunteer Centers:** Volunteer opportunities can be registered with existing volunteer referral services, like those found at university student centers. Volunteer listings may also be posted on the community library and city webpages.

⁹ An excellent description of what makes for an effective press release can be found at the following: Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network, *Developing Media Messages for Volunteer Programs*; available from http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/networks/nonprofitgov/workingsolutions/Working_Solutions_Feb_March_2002.pdf; accessed 30 May 2006.



- With Community Groups and Leaders: Meeting and networking with local community and service leaders may lead to the development of a volunteer support system.
- By Word of Mouth: Inexpensive and low-tech, volunteers telling others about volunteering can be a particularly successful recruitment tool.
- Informal networks of friends, family members, listserves and distribution lists.
- Newsletters and websites of businesses, civic groups, partners, statewide organizations (conservation groups, public agencies, etc.)

The Volunteer Application

- Utilize a Volunteer Application. See appendix for sample.
- Provide organizational information, including your organization’s mission statement that describes goals, values, and ideals.
- Give a description of the volunteer project or service required, including:
 - Position Title: the title should properly indicate the volunteer’s role, giving the volunteer a sense of identity.
 - Work Location: indicate where the individual will be working, what the possible work conditions will be, and any potential hazards to the wellbeing of the volunteer.
 - Volunteer Impact: indicate the purpose of the project and the impact the completed project is intended to have for the organization. This allows the volunteer to identify their own contribution to the project’s success and the organization’s accomplishments.
 - Responsibilities and Duties: indicate specific tasks involved and what the volunteer is expected to accomplish as a project member.
 - Commitment Required: indicate the expected length of service, estimating the number of hours per day/week/month the volunteer can plan on dedicating.
 - Qualifications: indicate what level of experience, education, or set of skills the volunteer is expected to have prior to any additional training.
 - Training: indicate the length and nature of any training required or that will be provided for the project.
 - Contact Information: include the contact information for the individual supervising the project.

Interviewing and Screening Volunteers

- The interviewer should be as prepared as the prospective volunteer being interviewed. This means that the interviewer should have a list and description of potential volunteer opportunities available, an array of questions drafted to each opportunity, the interviewee’s completed application and information, as well as information and materials regarding the organization to provide to the potential volunteer.
- The interviewer’s questions should be pointed, but open-ended enough to allow the interviewee to elaborate upon them. Questions should encourage the applicant



- to describe experiences and situations that allow the interviewer to gain a sense of their skills, qualities, and motivation for seeking to volunteer.¹⁰
- Several points are worth remembering during the interview. First, interviewing is a difficult skill; call on others to help develop potential interview questions. Second, during the interview allow people time to think and formulate their response to questions. Refraining from filling the ensuing silence too quickly gives you the time to observe their body language. Third, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to establish with the interviewee a rapport that fosters a comfortable atmosphere conducive to honest and open conversation.

Placing the Volunteer

After interviewing the volunteer and confirming their interest and that they are appropriate for the task it is important for the volunteer to become engaged as soon as possible. They are giving of their time and expertise—a significant donation to your organization—and have responded to your need for help. It is time to get them involved! In some cases of building trails, the project may not begin immediately, but rather several weeks, or even months in the future. Consider your particular situation and construct methods of involvement that are appropriate—you may do this in person, via mail or electronic communication.

- Schedule an orientation – or provide materials (e-mail or post mail) that will orient them to the organization and project.
- Follow up to answer any questions regarding the volunteer’s role or the nature of the project.
- Provide a mentor volunteer, if appropriate, and provide introductions.
- Let the volunteer know what will happen next regarding the project and the approximate timeframe (i.e. you will send them packing information, list of suggested shots, health requirements, etc in the next two weeks)
- Write a thank you note!

The importance of integrating new volunteers into an organization by making them feel at ease in their new roles can hardly be overstated. A good orientation that familiarizes new volunteers with the history, goals, and values of an organization is necessary to accomplish this task. The Paradigm Project of the Points of Light Foundation has called attention to the role of an organization’s mission and vision in inspiring volunteer engagement and commitment. This sort of inspiration, they note, is likely to happen when a volunteer first joins an organization’s efforts. Hence, it is crucial for every organization to make a good first impression by providing the volunteer with the tools needed to be successful.

An orientation can be conducted one-on-one or in small groups. In either case, the

¹⁰ An excellent list of sample interview questions can be found at the following: Merrill Associates, *Topic of the Month: Sharpening Your Interviewing Skills*; available from <http://www.merrillassociates.net/topic/2000/10/sharpening-your-interviewing-skills/>; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.



following information should be provided:

- Mission, philosophy, and values of the organization.
- Organizational history, structure, and culture.
- Niche, or how the organization differs from others with a similar mission and philosophy.
- Interrelationships between different departments of the organization and their functions.
- Introductions to key volunteers and staff.
- Overview of organizational policies related to equal opportunity, non-discrimination, non-harassment, health and safety, confidentiality, etc.
 - Methods for resolving volunteer problems and grievances
 - Procedures for reimbursing volunteer expenses
 - Reporting forms and procedures
 - Review of your organization's publications and information resources
 - Staff support, that is, what can the volunteers expect of you in terms of your time and attention?
- Facility tour showing locations for phones, copiers, computers, and resource materials for offices or project site (perhaps a drive through the park or review of a map to provide the "big picture" showing trail linkages, etc.)

Orientation is best approached as an ongoing activity not a one-time event. Examples include keeping your volunteers updated on program and organizational developments and asking for feedback on their project through informal or formal routine communications. Continued communication develops the relationship between the volunteer and the staff and often leads to increased commitment of the volunteer towards the organization.

Volunteer Program Policies and Procedures

A good program is based on having sound policies and procedures which provide structure for the program and guidance for the volunteers. Policies also are a component in successful risk management for the organization. Can you imagine an organization or company running smoothly and effectively without procedures? Developing procedures for your program does not have to be a daunting task; reviewing your organization's employee handbook and adapting procedures and policies for volunteers is a good place to start.

Policies important for your volunteer program include:

- Confidentiality Agreement
- Alcohol/drug use at the work site
- No Discrimination Policy
- No Harassment Policy
- Grievance Procedure
- Termination Procedure
- Liability Release (See Appendix for sample.)
- Safety Policy (See Appendix for sample.)



Managing Volunteers

Managing volunteers begins with understanding the factors that motivate many people to volunteer which was discussed in a previous section. Good management involves the following steps:

- A through project/volunteer position description
- Screening the volunteer to make the best placement possible for the volunteer and the organization
- Clear expectations regarding performance
- Clear instructions on how to perform the task
- Appropriate training for performing the task
- Providing the tools volunteers need to perform the task
- Open and routine communication regarding the volunteers level of understanding and ability to perform the task
- Recognizing volunteers success and contribution toward achieving the organization's mission
- Soliciting feedback from volunteers – their input on how the project went
- Evaluating volunteer performance
- Providing information about future volunteer opportunities
- Saying thank you and saying thank you again!

Risk Management and Volunteers

Just as with employees, it is important to understand and manage any risks involving your volunteers. Risk management begins with planning the volunteer service opportunity. Levels of risk are of course relative to the volunteer job. There is generally more risk for the volunteer creating trails than for volunteers working in an office. However volunteer risk for all of your volunteer positions should be considered and addressed.

1. Identify potential risks for volunteer jobs.
 - What skills are needed for this work?
 - What are the physical demands the work will place on the volunteer – is there a minimum fitness level required to perform the job successfully?
 - What dangers might the volunteer encounter – use of dangerous equipment, steep terrain, poisonous snakes, extreme climate conditions?
2. Take precautions to avoid obvious and unforeseen risks that volunteers may encounter.
 - Establish minimum health requirements appropriate to volunteer work.
 - Recruit, screen and place volunteers with appropriate skills and physical capability for the work.
 - Provide training on correct use of equipment at the onset of work even if the volunteer states they are competent in using equipment. (See Appendix for sample.)



- Provide appropriate safety equipment items (goggles, snakebite boots, etc.).
- Require use of the safety equipment.
- Encourage volunteers to self-identify risks you may have overlooked and communicate them to you and the group.
- Write volunteer position descriptions that specify skills needed to perform tasks and get the volunteers' signatures (to reduce liability).
- Provide written procedures and protocol for situations that involve risk.
- Provide written fact sheets regarding hazards and safety precautions. (See Appendix for sample.)

Evaluating Volunteers and the Volunteer Program

Evaluating your volunteers and your volunteer program on a periodic or annual basis is critical to sustaining an effective and efficient program. The evaluation process should be tailored to your program and to the volunteer tasks. Questions to evaluate your program may include:

- Is our volunteer program meeting our goals; how is it contributing to achieving our organization's mission?
- How are volunteers contributing to achieving our strategic goals and mission?
- What is our program costing the organization (staff time, expenses, etc)?
- What are the tangible results (trails, presentations, etc,)
- What are the non-tangible benefits of our volunteer program?

Evaluating volunteers should be approached as a two-way dialogue between you and the volunteer. It is important to communicate at the beginning of your relationship with the volunteer that there is an evaluation process to provide them a mechanism to provide you feedback on what is working in the project/program and how their experience could be improved. Do not skip this part of managing your volunteers; it is a valuable tool to meeting volunteers expectations and having a successful program developed with the input of your volunteers. Questions for your volunteers to provide feedback on your project may include:

- Did our description of the project/activities you would be doing match the actual work performed?
- Was the project information package provided prior to the project useful?
- What additional information might be helpful to future volunteers?
- Were you made aware of potential hazards associated with the work?
- Were the potential hazards described adequately?
- Did you have appropriate training and/or gear to deal with hazards?
- Did you have the tools needed to perform your work?
- Were all tools in working order? (sharp blades, sturdy handles, etc.)
- Was the project well organized?
- Did project leaders follow the daily schedule– beginning, taking lunch and ending on time?
- Were the directions on how to perform the work clear?
- Was the project supervisor available to provide additional instructions?



- Were there enough volunteers to accomplish the project goals?
- Did you have enough food during the trip? Was the food good?
- In what 3 ways might we improve our project organization?
- What was the most satisfying part of the experience for you?
- Will you volunteer with us again? If yes, why and what is your timeframe of future participation (next year, 2 years, etc.). If no, please let us know the factors influencing your decision.

Retaining and Recognizing Volunteers

Recognition programs celebrate and reward volunteer efforts and highlight the importance of volunteerism generally. However, those applauded for their efforts believe that recognition benefits volunteer organizations in a number of other tangible ways.

Most active volunteers agree that recognition and awards:

- Enhance the public image of an organization and its efforts in the community (53.4%);
- Increase awareness of volunteer activities (41.3%); and
- Boost donations of money (18.8%) and/or equipment and supplies to organizations (14.7%).

Several recent studies have shown that recognition can also help mount an effective recruitment campaign of new volunteers. The conclusion, then, is that the appreciation of volunteers contributes directly to the health of the volunteer organization and the sustainability of its efforts.¹¹

Recognition varies from thank you letters to awards to annual volunteer recognition events. Organizations should develop their recognition activities based on their staff and financial capacity and create an activity that will be appreciated by the volunteers. When considering your volunteer recognition activity consider these items:

- Involve volunteers in planning the event and in the event itself;
- Budget – consider time, staff needs and cost of the event;
- Provide some immediate recognition such as a thank you letter from the project leader or organization’ leader; email photos, etc.;
- Publicize the successful project—update your website with pictures of the volunteers and highlight their accomplishments;
- Write an article for your newsletter; if a partner was involved collaborate on the article and publish it in the partner’s newsletter, website, etc.; and
- Send your success story to the places you contacted when recruiting volunteers – people want success stories! Routine communication also helps future recruitment efforts.

¹¹ Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network, *Recognition Programs and Volunteering*; available from <http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/resources/research/Frontline4.pdf> ; Internet; accessed 30 May 2006.



IV. Appendix

Appendix A. Sample Volunteer Application

VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

Please complete the application and return it to [organization name][mailing address]
Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Best time to contact you: _____ May we contact you at work? () Yes () No

Email Address: _____ May we contact you via email? () Yes () No

Employer/ School: _____

Occupation / Course of Study: _____

Degree(s) or Certification(s): _____

Health Condition. Please indicate if you have any of the following conditions or other conditions we should be aware of in making your volunteer assignment:

_____ Asthma/Shortness of Breath	_____ Emphysema
_____ Heart Conditions/Bypass Surgery	_____ Hip/Knee Replacement
_____ Shoulder replacement/problems	_____ Vertigo/Balance Problems

Have you volunteered with us before? () Yes () No

If yes, when and for which project? _____

Volunteers are encouraged to be members of the Organization Name. Are you currently a member? () Yes () No

Skills and Interests. Please place an **S** by your skills and an **I** by areas of interest.

_____ Fundraising Events	_____ Membership outreach
_____ Event organization	_____ Exhibit preparation
_____ Grant writing	_____ Youth programs
_____ Office / Administrative Projects	_____ Volunteer management
_____ Field Trip Leader	_____ Research/data collecting
_____ Creating maps using GIS	_____ Preserve stewardship
_____ Public speaking	_____ Trail building
_____ Graphic design	_____ Invasive weed control
_____ Writing	_____ Exhibit preparation
_____ Public relations	_____ Using heavy tools



Additional special skills I bring to the organization/project include:

Availability:

Weekly Monthly Quarterly Periodically Call me

Weekdays Weekday Evenings Weekends Weekend Evenings

I am interested in volunteering for the Organization Name because:

Please select all that apply.

The types of volunteer opportunities I am interested in are:

one time only short term: 1-3 months occasional long term: 6 months-year
and will utilize my existing skills provide me an opportunity to learn new skills
 provide me an educational opportunity.

Personal or Professional References:

1. Name: _____ Relationship: _____
2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____
3. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Have you ever been convicted of a misdemeanor? Yes No

Have you ever been convicted of a felony? Yes No

Thank you for your interest in ORGANIZATION NAME

We will contact you to learn more about your interests and discuss current volunteer opportunities.



Appendix B. Sample Liability Release

Sample is not legal advice. Have your organizations legal counsel review your liability release

WAIVER AND RELEASE AGREEMENT¹²

**THIS IS A RELEASE OF LIABILITY,
PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE SIGNING**

NAME:
ADDRESS:
CITY/STATE ZIP CODE:
PHONE (h) (w)
EMAIL

Are you registered as part of a group? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, what is the name of the group? _____

Are you under 18 years of age? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, what year were you born? _____

How did you hear about this project?

In return for receiving permission from _____ for allowing me to participate as a volunteer on the on _____, Project Description I agree to assume all risks of loss and injury that may arise out of my participation and I agree to waive any and all claims against and the other parties described below. I hereby release, and agree to indemnify and hold harmless _____ (Organization Name), project participants, and anyone else involved with this project and their respective agents, representatives, officers, employees, successors, assigns and insurers, hereinafter referred to collectively as "the Released Parties", from any and all liability, claims, demands or actions or causes of action whatsoever, arising out of damage, loss or injury to my person or property, whether anticipated or unanticipated, while participating in any of the activities contemplated by this agreement, whether such damage, loss, or injury results from the negligence of the Released Parties, their respective agents, officers, employees, successors, assigns and insurers or from some other cause. This release and agreement shall be binding upon me, my heirs, successors, assigns, administrators and executors.

I expressly acknowledge, represent and agree that expressly identifying and explicitly naming the respective agents, representatives, officers, employees, successors, assigns and insurers of the parties released, all of whom I intend to be released by this document, is a practical impossibility for the parties. I expressly acknowledge that, for good and valuable consideration, the terms "respective agents, representatives, officers, employees, successors, assigns, and insurers", however used in this Waiver and Release Agreement, are expressly and explicitly intended to

¹² Volunteer Outdoors, *Waiver & Release Agreement; Internet*; available from <http://www.voutdoors.org/Admin/Resources/Resources/17.pdf>; assessed 12 June 2006.



include all and each and every individual, person, firm, entity and corporation who are now, or at any time may have been included in the specifically listed categories.

I have read and understand the _____ project description related to this project. I realize that working on this project may involve risks and hazards, which may include, but are not limited to (1) the use of tools and other construction related equipment, (2) working around other participants who may not be accustomed to this type of labor or the tools and equipment associated with it, (3) working in mountainous, back country, or other urban or rural terrain that may be uneven, rocky and otherwise hazardous, (4) other risks and hazards that may be described in the project description. I am aware of these and other risks and hazards inherent in participating in this project and hereby assume sole responsibility for all such risks and hazards.

I _____ grant and other project sponsors permission to utilize my image in photographic recordings of the project, and I waive any right to claim compensation in exchange for participating in the project. I agree to abide by the rules and regulations of while participating in this project. I hereby acknowledge that I have read, understood, and voluntarily agreed to the foregoing waiver and release agreement.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian if you are under 18 years of age:

Signature _____ Date: _____

Person to contact in case of an emergency:

Name: _____ Phone: _____



Appendix C. Sample Safety Policy

OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION (ORTA) SAFETY POLICY FOR TRAIL WORKERS¹³

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that volunteers and employees participating in the construction and maintenance of the Oak Ridges Trail do so in a safe manner, thereby minimizing risk of injury and associated liability to the ORTA and its officers.

It is ORTA's duty to adopt reasonable standards, and to ensure that they are being applied on the Trail. All volunteers and employees shall be made aware of this policy.

1.2 TRAIL WORK

- (a) Trail workers should be made aware of the hazards and risks involved in the work to be done.
- (b) Trail workers participating in trail building or maintenance should sign an acknowledgement of risk and waiver of liability form (Appendix A).
- (c) Written documentation should be prepared for the project, describing the work; when, where, who is involved, expectations. This should be filed along with the above-mentioned waiver forms.
- (d) Trail work must only be done at the instruction of a Trail Captain or Chapter Chair. The Trail Captain, Chapter Chair or their designate shall be present and undertake responsibility for all trail work.
- (e) New trail construction must be done with the landowner's prior knowledge and approval including approval of the specific details of the physical construction planned.
- (f) Maintenance of the existing trail must be conducted within the restrictions and limitations specified in any land use agreement signed by the association and the landowner.
- (g) Trail building and maintenance should be done only by those who have been trained and equipped for the tasks at hand.
- (h) Trail workers should not work alone in situations involving the use of power equipment, climbing, or other increased risk activities.
- (i) Power equipment (e.g. chainsaws, brush cutters) must only be operated by trained persons or those whose experience with such machinery can be verified (examples: groundskeeper, farmer). Power equipment must never be used by inexperienced operators.
- (j) Safety equipment must be worn at all times when using powered equipment.

¹³ Oak Ridges Trail Association, *Trail Safety Policy*; Internet; available from <http://www.oakridgestrail.org/Documents/Safety%20Policy.pdf>; assessed 12 June 2006.



(k) When repairs are required to the trail, the Trail Captain or Chapter Chair should determine who has the primary responsibility to make the repair. For example, removal of a large fallen tree may be the responsibility of a conservation authority, on whose land the trail exists, and which has the trained and experienced staff to remove the tree.

2.0 USE OF EQUIPMENT

2.1 SAFETY

- (a) Power equipment includes, but is not limited to, chain saws, string trimmers, brush cutters, and any other machinery which is powered by gasoline or electricity. Battery-operated equipment is not included.
- (b) All operators of power equipment shall be properly trained in the safe use of the equipment (see Training).
- (c) All operators of power equipment shall use appropriate safety equipment and protective clothing. ORTA will provide same if the operator does not possess it.
- (d) All work crews should include at least one person trained in first aid and this person should not be operating power equipment.
- (e) In the case of chainsaws and brush cutters, appropriate safety equipment consists of a minimum of:
- hard hat with eye and ear protection
 - CSA approved safety boots
 - chainsaw pants or chaps
 - chainsaw gloves

In the case of string trimmers, appropriate safety equipment consists of a minimum of:

- eye and ear protection
- high top safety boots
- Long pants made of heavy material
- heavy-duty, non-slip gloves

2.2 TRAINING

- (a) Operators of chainsaws must have verifiable experience or have completed an approved chainsaw safety course.
- (b) ORTA may arrange training courses depending upon need and availability.
- (c) The Trail Director will maintain a list of approved chainsaw safety courses.
- (d) ORTA will reimburse the cost of required training courses.
- (e) Training courses are offered by some community colleges, equipment manufacturers and distributors, the Bruce Trail Association, the Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association, the Construction Safety Association of Ontario, Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association, and others. Courses may also be offered by your local Ministry of Natural Resources or Conservation Authority office.
- (f) A list of trained, qualified persons will be kept by ORTA.



2.3 OPERATING TIPS

- (a) During the use of a chainsaw, two people besides the operator should be present to ensure safety of the operator and any other persons in the vicinity. One person should be positioned on the trail to each side of the chainsaw operator to warn any approaching hikers.
- (b) The brush cutter operator must be given a wide berth; concentration on controlling the swath and the direction of the blade coupled with the noise of the machine will make the operator oblivious to other workers "in the way".
- (c) Operating a brush cutter can be tiring when used continuously for long periods. It is recommended that a second qualified person be present to take turns operating the machine.
- (d) One person should precede the cutter to remove rocks, branches, bottles, cans and other debris which could become a projectile or damage the equipment



Appendix D. Sample Safety Fact Sheet

Tools for Trail Work¹⁴

A wide variety of tools are available to layout, construct, and maintain trails. Local and individual preferences often dictate the kinds of tools which are chosen for various tasks. Some of the most commonly used tools and tips on using the tool safely and effectively are presented. Every trail worker needs to learn how to choose the correct tool for the job, use it effectively and safely, care for it, and store it properly.

Tool Safety

The following should be covered with crewmembers before the start of any trail work.

Proper use begins with a good grip. Wet or muddy gloves may cause a tool to slip from your hands, striking you or someone near you.

Watch out for people around you. When chopping or brushing, be aware of any people in the surrounding area. The combined length of your arm and tool could reach a person working near you. Also, be aware of trail users. Often a user may try to pass right into your back swing. If you see someone coming, stop work, notify your co-workers and wait for them to pass.

Make sure you have a clear area in which to swing. Watch out for overhead or side hazards. A hazard is anything that could interfere with the complete swing of your tool, and knock it from your hands or down onto any part of your body. Keep your tool in front of you at all times. You should never need to swing your tool over your head.

Be alert for hazardous footing. Make sure you have a firm, balanced, and comfortable stance before starting your work. Clear limbs, sticks, loose rocks, or other debris from your footing area. Particularly with striking tools—make sure your feet are spaced well away from your target area.

Choose the right tool for the job. The wrong tool can make you work in an awkward stance which will wear you out.

Make sure your tool is sharp. A dull tool that bounces or glances off of what it was attempting to cut can be very dangerous. A sharp tool will cut faster and be less tiring.

Carry the tool properly. Always carry tools in your hands and down at your side on the down hill side of the trail. Use blade guards whenever possible. Never carry tools over your shoulder.

Travel safely. Stay at least 10 feet apart on the hike in and out from the work site—space yourself along the trail.

¹⁴ Schmid, Jim. *Tools for Trail Work, excerpt*; Internet; available from <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/info/tools.doc>; assessed 31 May 2006.



Appendix E. Sample Hazards/Hazard Prevention Fact Sheet:

On the Trail: Snakes and Safety¹⁵

Just as trails come in many different shapes and sizes, so do the creatures you might encounter along the way. Observing an insect or an animal in its own natural habitat can make for a memorable hiking experience. With just a little knowledge and some common sense, it can be a safe experience too.

Snakes are one of the many fascinating creatures you might come across while hiking. Although the mere thought of snakes conjures up alarm in many hikers regardless of their skill or comfort level in the outdoors, most snakes mean no harm if they are not provoked or threatened. By taking a few simple precautions—such as by giving snakes a wide berth—most of the more than 75 million people that go hiking each year will never be bitten on the trail.

A trip into the woods need not be any more dangerous than a stroll through your own backyard. Before blazing that next trail, please remember to respect the wildlife that you encounter, and don't forget to read through our Q&A below for more information on snake safety in the outdoors.

Q: How can I avoid being bitten by a snake?

A: Some bites, such as those inflicted when snakes are accidentally stepped on or encountered in wilderness settings, are difficult to prevent. But a few simple precautions can lower the risk of being bitten:

- * Leave snakes alone. Most bites occur when people get too close or try to touch or kill a snake. Snakes can strike faster and farther than you might think—about half their body length.
- * If you see a snake in the wild, maintain a distance of at least 6 feet. If you accidentally step too close to a snake, take at least two giant steps backwards to get out of the snake's reach.
- * Never touch a snake, even if you think it is dead. The fangs of a dead snake can still inject venom.
- * Don't reach or step into places outdoors that you can't see. Keep hands and feet out of areas you can't see. Don't pick up rocks or firewood unless you are out of a snake's striking distance. Be cautious and alert when climbing rocks.

¹⁵ American Hiking Society, *On the Trail, Snakes and Safety*; Internet available from http://www.americanhiking.org/news/pdfs/Snakebite_Safety_2006.pdf; assessed 12 June 2006.



* Wearing boots and long pants when hiking may help prevent snakebites. Stay out of tall grass unless you wear thick leather boots, and remain on hiking paths as much as possible. Chaps or gaiters may further reduce the chance of a snakebite in tall grass.

Q: What if I am bitten?

A: Despite the best precautions, sometimes a person will get bitten. If you are bitten:

- * Call 911 or go to the closest emergency department.
- * Stay calm and cool. Minimize activity if possible. However, if you are alone in the wilderness or far from access to medical care, you may have to hike out to the nearest phone or radio for help.
- * Don't do anything to the place you were bitten—you might make things worse.
- * If you are bitten on the arm or hand, take off your rings, bracelets or watch in case your arm swells. Also remove any tight-fitting clothes around the bite area.
- * Avoid further injury by staying away from the snake. There is no value in trying to capture or identify the snake.
- * Mark the leading edge of swelling (and record the time) to gauge the progression of swelling.
- * Before going on any hike, always let someone know where you will be and for how long. In the event of an accident on the trail, these precautions can significantly shorten response time.
- * Make sure you carry plenty of water in your day pack.

In addition, there are several things you should not do:

- * Do not try to suck the venom out of the bite with your mouth or suction device.
- * Do not cut into or incise bite marks with a blade.
- * Do not apply a narrow, constrictive tourniquet such as a belt, necktie or cord.
- * Do not waste time or take any risks trying to kill, bag or bring in offending snake.
- * Digital or Polaroid images may be helpful if they can be obtained quickly and safely.
- * Do not drink any alcohol or take aspirin or ibuprofen after snakebite.
- * Do not place ice directly on the wound.
- * Do not apply either hot or cold packs.
- * Do not use a stun gun or electric shock of any kind.



- * Do not engage in strenuous physical activity if possible.
- * Antivenom is not recommended for field use.

Q: Are all snakes venomous?

A: Most snakes are harmless and the majority of snakebites are not fatal. Sometimes snakebites result in only minor injury. However, it is not possible to predict which bites will result in mild symptoms and which can more seriously harm or kill you. Therefore, all patients with snakebites should seek prompt medical attention at a hospital.

Of the estimated 45,000 snakebites each year in the United States, approximately 7,000 to 8,000 involve venomous species, leading to fewer than half a dozen deaths per year. To put this into perspective, over 75 million people go hiking each year—so you can see that the risk of snakebite, especially by a venomous snake, is fairly uncommon, particularly for people who take proper precautions and set out to avoid snakes. Serious injury and disability can result from a snakebite, such as the loss of a finger or the loss of movement at a joint. However, by following the simple guidelines provided above, you can significantly reduce your risk of a bite or injury.

This fact sheet was created by the American Hiking Society with the help of Dr. Sean Bush, Staff Emergency Physician and Envenomation Specialist, Loma Linda University Medical Center. Materials contained in this fact sheet are for informational purposes and are not intended to be a sole or complete point of reference for preparedness and safety in the outdoors.

