



Where's the

NEW GUY?

HOW TO OVERCOME THE 3 BIGGEST OBSTACLES TO
AN EFFECTIVE CHAPTER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM



That new guy (or gal) who was a guest at a recent meeting joined your chapter. Sounds like you made it easier for him and worth his time and

money to join. Your next goal is to get (and keep) him involved, as your chapter can't run effectively without members in volunteer roles.

SADLY, MANY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS ARE SET UP TO FAIL.

There's a good chance your board members and your volunteers are stretched in many different directions. Being shortsighted when it comes to your volunteer programs keeps you scrambling to run your programs and your chapter, especially when the new guy (as well as your existing volunteers) –

- Isn't aware of the available volunteer opportunities
- Ends up in an unengaging role
- Is overwhelmed with all he's being asked to take on without needed direction and support
- Lack of resources to do the role

Without proper guidance, the new guy has no idea how his help can strengthen your chapter. But, by identifying and understanding your volunteer program's needs, you can better plan, strategize, and adjust accordingly.

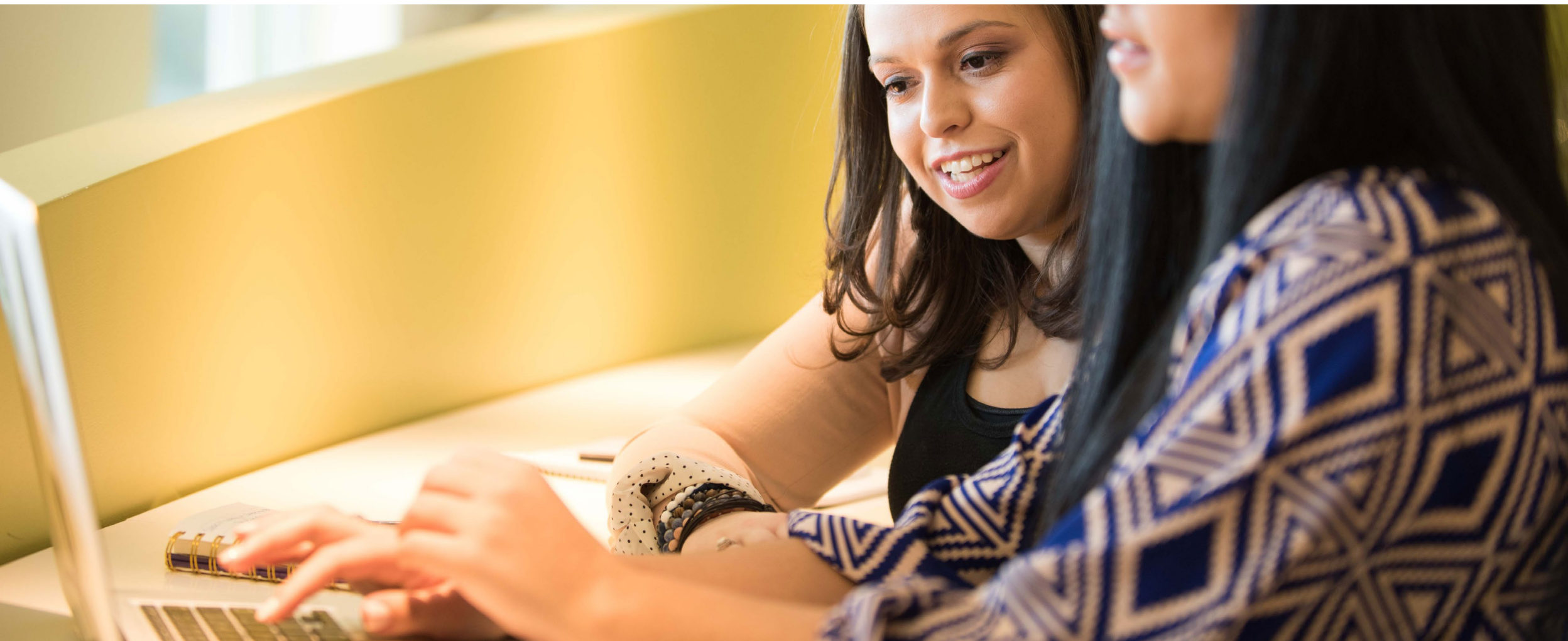
Does this this sound like your chapter?

- Board members assume members will offer their assistance without being asked. And once members take on a volunteer role, the board assumes they'll know what is expected of them and how to best fulfill the role, and they'll stay in the role.
- For the most part, non-board volunteers get meaningless tasks. They don't get to provide tangible input to processes or planning.
- The volunteer program just "happens" organically. There isn't any real organization or structure.

How does each of these missteps negatively impact the new guy and your overall membership?

The new guy wants to volunteer. He remembers hearing about a volunteer role that sounded interesting, so he visits the chapter website. There, he doesn't find anything that talks about that particular need or other areas where his skills and expertise could be useful. Or contact information for someone to talk to.

Asking in your monthly email for volunteers to organize your next meeting isn't a great way to get him to step up either. Will that 4-line blurb, or the page on your website that asks members to contact a general email if they want to volunteer, even get his attention?





There's a good chance your board members are also waiting for the new guy to tell them where he wants to help. If he does bring it up, how long does it take?

He starts in a role that sounded interesting. The new guy found a position that seemed like a good fit "on paper". But, he finds himself handing out programs and ordering pizza, while the more seasoned members are organizing speakers and managing the website.

Are your volunteers in roles with meaning to them? Has anyone asked what they really want to do and why? Some volunteer for the social aspect, while others have more business-focused reasons, like networking or enhancing their skills. Sadly, volunteers often end up in roles that just need to be filled. They're not in roles that engage them, which means that after a time, you're looking for their replacements.

The position begins to overwhelm him. The new guy is realizing he doesn't really understand what the role entails, and he didn't know how much of a commitment it would be. He's not ready to give up, but he needs some guidance.

As he becomes increasingly frustrated and starts to think that this volunteer position isn't a good fit for him, he begins to:

- Skip meetings
- Stop collaborating
- Become short-tempered
- Miss deadlines

Your board probably assumes that the volunteers will continue in their roles for the long term. Do any of your volunteers stay in their jobs for more than a few months? If so, you're lucky. Many volunteers realize quickly they have competing priorities, both in and out of your chapter.

Many volunteer programs get derailed because the volunteers' expectations don't match the needs of the role they're in. Perhaps you take the "warm body" route, figuring it's better to have anyone in a role, rather than being shorthanded. How does that work for you? Remember the time you asked the new guy to oversee the registration table at a monthly meeting? Did he need to answer questions that, as a new member, he didn't have the answers to?

THE STATE OF VOLUNTEERISM

\$174

BILLION

Current estimated value of volunteerism*

63
MILLION

Americans volunteered through a membership organization*

7.7
BILLION

Hours Americans volunteered altogether*

* in 2013¹

Bureau of Labor Statistics survey showed the number of volunteers declined in 2015²

18.4%

Volunteer rates were lowest among people 20 to 24

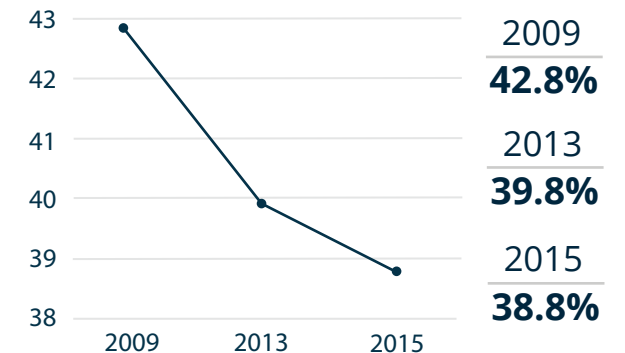
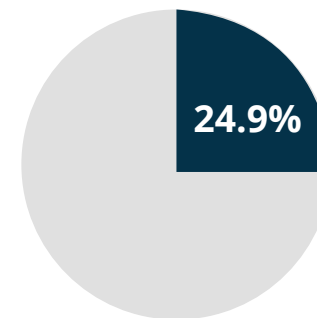
28.9%

Those 35 to 44 were the most likely to volunteer

VOLUNTEER RATES DECLINED

In 2015, rates dropped to a low of 24.9%

Among people with at least a bachelor's degree, volunteering continues to fall



Why Don't People Volunteer?

- Opportunities don't match needs
- Unclear expectations
- Not given meaningful work
- No one asked

How to Fix the Problem

A new-member engagement plan can significantly improve retention of first-year members. On average, renewal rates for new members rose from 62 to 68 percent after implementing a plan.³

6%
increase

1. THE POWER OF ASSOCIATIONS An Objective Snapshot of the U.S. Association Community. January 2015. Retrieved from: www.thepowerofa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/PowerofAssociations-2015.pdf

2. Stott, Rob. (2014 March 4) SURVEY: VOLUNTEERING NUMBERS ARE ON THE DECLINE Retrieved from <https://associationsnow.com/2014/03/survey-volunteering-numbers-decline/>

3. Kaiser, Amanda. (2018 January 8). New Member Engagement Study Report. Retrieved from <http://www.smooththepath.net/2018/01/08/new-member-engagement-study-report/>

We're not telling you something you don't know.

With your limited resources, your chapter does it all with less and relies heavily on volunteers to help with:

- Monthly meetings
- Speaker series
- Continuing education
- Local advocacy
- Communications
- Recruitment
- Outreach
- Programming

When a program is well-structured and properly executed, big things happen. Programs are impactful, members are happy, and those members renew, often bringing new members with them.

When you don't have enough volunteers, and the ones you have aren't in the right roles, programs don't run the way they need to.

And your members suffer.

With the decline in volunteering across the country, how can you keep your members engaged in your volunteer program, supporting you and the other members in ways that benefit everyone?



3 WAYS TO OVERCOME THE BIGGEST OBSTACLES TO A QUALITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

When a volunteer you count on stops helping, where does that leave you?

By time you hear about it, it's too late, and you scramble to fill the void. Are there things you could do early on, before the new guy starts or before you start a new program, to get members into volunteer opportunities they'll enjoy and stick with,

to increase their engagement and satisfaction, as well as the outcomes of your programs?

Armed with the right tools, the right volunteers will accomplish the things you need in ways you may never have thought of, letting your board focus on its central task - managing the chapter.

To ensure the success of your volunteer program:

- Keep your programs—your needs, your successes and your concerns—visible
- Structure your program to attract, align, and empower volunteers
- Make your program appealing and show the benefits of getting more involved



KEEP YOUR PROGRAMS—YOUR NEEDS, YOUR SUCCESSES AND YOUR CONCERNS—VISIBLE.

Members can't help if they don't know what you need and how that need matches their interests, skills, and availability.

Here are some effective ways to get the word out:

Publicize your needs. Share, share, share, regularly, repeatedly, and in different formats, through your website, email, and social media, as well as at meetings and in one-on-one conversations with the new guy and his longer-term counterparts.

Remember, not everyone accesses and retains information in the same way. Reach out in ways that will attract your different audiences. It's not enough to talk about your volunteer needs on your website; bring them up in meetings, in email communications, and even in new member orientations.

Make your volunteers your ambassadors. Name them in your communications and as contacts for questions. Then, at the events they're involved in, be sure they have name badges with an identifying ribbon that say "volunteer". Chances are, they're excited about their work on the event and would love to talk about it.

Members and potential members want and need to hear what it's like to volunteer in your organization. Encourage volunteers to tell their stories. Honor them for their work and put them in the spotlight. These conversations also allow members to better connect with one another; the more connected they are with volunteers, the more likely they are to volunteer.

Thank them in ways others see. As the glue that keeps the chapter running efficiently, volunteers deserve to be honored. They'll continue to feel valued, and your members will be aware of the recognition you give to those who take on extra tasks.

You might consider:

- Holding a volunteer appreciation event and allowing volunteers to bring guests.
- Posting successful volunteer stories on your website. (You get the visibility for your program and your members can have a bit of self-promotion.)
- Presenting volunteers with plaques or certificates at award events.

Volunteers are the backbone of your organization. But if left to figure out your needs on their own, without any direction or oversight, how successful can they or your chapter, really be?

Have someone oversee your volunteer program.

A VP of Volunteering, or someone in a similar role, can be the liaison between your committees and your board. This individual will help ensure that your volunteers, especially your committee heads, get the support they need.

Create job descriptions for each volunteer position.

We have them for work roles, and the same need exists for volunteer positions. Job descriptions clarify expectations and eliminate potential confusion. In addition to responsibilities and skills, include your best guess on the number of hours and any training that will be provided. Be sure to

communicate the value of the volunteer's time to the overall success of the event and show how this experience can benefit them in their career.

Publish your realistic, achievable goals for each event and committee.

Making this information public helps set expectations and gives a potential volunteer the information they need to decide if they want to get involved. It can also help with recruitment, as it's easier to find people who have the skills you need to meet the goals of the project, if they know beforehand what you're looking for.

Include training and mentorships. The new guy, and even those who've been members for a time, may have the interest, but not the skills. If a member wants to update the website but doesn't understand the backend of your system, consider using your

vendor. Or ask someone in the chapter to train him. Offer training to the right individual in exchange for their time in a volunteer role. Members will be thrilled with the skills they've gained and be happy to apply it to your needs.

Mentoring is win-win for everyone involved. It's a great way to encourage new member participation, in the chapter and in your volunteer program, while giving both members a chance to expand their network.

Include a process for engaging with your

volunteers. You've formed your committee, and it's just as important to stay in touch with your volunteers. Set up checkpoints, to identify and resolve any problems. And be sure to hold a closeout meeting after they have completed a project, to collect any lessons learned.



Turn necessary, routine tasks into meaningful experiences and make those experiences worth your volunteers' time.

Before you can do that, you need to understand what makes your volunteers tick, including their motivations, to best match them to the right jobs. Your members volunteer for several primary reasons. They want to:

- Help
- Give Back to their industry
- Network
- Build their resume/LinkedIn profile
- Contribute to your chapter's mission
- Try something new or enhance their skills



Expand the routine to make it interesting.

Instead of having someone order pizza every month, for example, let them make all the decisions regarding food for the chapter meetings. They can research food, dietary needs of members, and look for the best pricing. And the person sitting at the registration table? How can they help you better use the information they gather from those they meet?

Avoid volunteer burnout. Give members the opportunity to complete a variety of tasks requiring different levels of commitment and skill. If your volunteers are engaged and balanced, there's less chance for burnout.

Track areas like workload, availability, interest, and stress. As you monitor your committees as well as individual volunteers, offer help, add new volunteers, or remove members that are no longer needed. Recognize the signs of burnout – lack of interest or attendance, increasing conflicts - so you can make changes proactively before small issues become insurmountable problems.

Give them something in return for their time. If your volunteers agree to provide a certain number of hours, can you offer them free entrance to the event in return? Also, to encourage volunteering at other events or activities, consider free or reduced registration to other events even if they are not involved in organizing them.

Talk to the new guy about volunteering as soon as he comes on board. Don't wait for him to come to you. Engaging members in your volunteer program should start as soon as they join your chapter, and making volunteer planning part of your new member plan can ensure this happens.

How you say it is as important as what you say.

You want your members excited about the volunteer opportunities you're offering. Word choice, as well as voice and tone, can go a long way.

Survey your members to give them a voice in the process.

Volunteer surveys provide insight into what works and what doesn't. Gather the information regularly, as well as after specific events, and use what you learn to improve your programs.

Keep your volunteers, well...volunteering.

The more involved your members are with those things they believe add value to their lives professionally and/or personally, the more they'll get from your chapter. And, the happier they are, the better chance they'll attract others to join your chapter and your volunteer program.

Getting and keeping volunteers is not a one-and-done process. Finding the right ways to reach and engage your members early on is critical to the success of your programs, as well as to having a pool of candidates for your committees and your board succession planning.

Improving the new guy's participation in your volunteer program goes a long way toward turning new members into long-term, active participants. Stay tuned for more new guy adventures, brought to you by StarChapter – Association Management Software Made Easy.