



HOW VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS CAN USE THIS RESEARCH

1. DESIGN ROLES FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT, NOT JUST SERVICE

Volunteer roles should be built with clear expectations, defined scope, shared ownership, and a clear connection to impact.

The research shows that unclear roles and uneven workloads increase strain. At the same time, when volunteers understand how their work contributes to real outcomes, they are more likely to stay engaged. Clarity in both responsibility and impact strengthens the overall experience.

What this looks like:

- Clear role descriptions with realistic time expectations
- Defined start and end points
- Team-based responsibilities instead of individual ownership
- A clear understanding of how each role contributes to community impact

2. BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTION INTO THE WORK

Social connection is a key factor in whether volunteer work feels rewarding or overwhelming. Organizations should strive to create environments where volunteers know each other, interact regularly, and feel part of a group.

What this looks like:

- Small team structures or cohorts
- Built-in time for connection during meetings and activities
- Peer support systems that encourage consistency and accountability

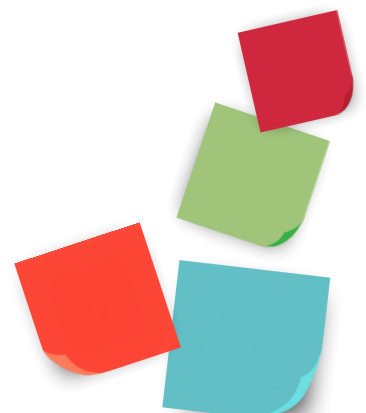
Build in time at the end of a project to reflect on both the individual impact and collective impact and why it mattered.

3. PRIORITIZE ONBOARDING, TRAINING, AND LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Feeling unprepared is one of the fastest ways to increase volunteer strain. Volunteer onboarding should be consistent, clear, and ongoing. Support should not stop after the first meeting.

What this looks like:

- Standard onboarding processes across roles
- Clear communication channels
- Accessible leadership and mentorship
- Regular check-ins throughout the year
- Opportunities to regularly interact with staff if applicable



4. ALIGN ROLES WITH PURPOSE AND IMPACT

Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged when they understand how their work contributes to something meaningful. Purpose helps volunteers stay connected to the work, especially during busy or demanding periods. When that connection is missing, the same level of effort can feel significantly more difficult to sustain.

What this looks like:

- Clearly communicating the purpose behind each role and how it contributes to the whole
- Connecting tasks to real outcomes and community impact
- Sharing stories and results regularly

5. REDUCE INDIVIDUAL BURDEN THROUGH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Volunteer roles become difficult to sustain when fewer people carry the full responsibility. Shared ownership reduces pressure and improves consistency across teams.

What this looks like:

- Co-chair or co-lead models
- Rotating responsibilities when possible
- Team accountability instead of single-point ownership

6. DESIGN VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES THAT ARE ENRICHING

Volunteer organizations shape how people experience their time, energy, and connection to others. The volunteer experience should feel engaging, meaningful, and worth the time invested. When experiences lack structure, connection, or purpose, engagement drops and strain increases.

What this looks like:

- Paying attention to how volunteers experience their roles, not just what gets done
- Creating opportunities for connection and engagement within the work
- Evaluating volunteer experience regularly and making adjustments as needed

7. REDUCE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN TO PROTECT VOLUNTEER CAPACITY

Administrative work is necessary, but it is also one of the most common sources of strain. When administrative responsibilities are unclear or concentrated on a few individuals, they can quickly become overwhelming. Reducing and restructuring this work helps preserve time, energy, and engagement.

What this looks like:

- Streamlining processes and reducing unnecessary steps
- Using tools, templates, or staff support where possible
- Setting clear expectations for administrative responsibilities
- Distributing administrative work across teams
- Connecting administrative tasks to the broader purpose when possible.

Organizations that prioritize structure, connection, and clarity create volunteer experiences that people want to stay part of.

