



[Resources](#) » [A-Z Volunteer Management](#) » [A-Z Volunteer Management](#) » [How to Effectively Manage People Who Are HIV-Positive as Volunteers](#)

How to Effectively Manage People Who Are HIV-Positive as Volunteers

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From *An Untapped Volunteer Resource: People with HIV Disease, ARC or AIDS*

How to Effectively Manage People Who Are HIV-Positive as Volunteers

In the United States approximately one and a half million people are living with HIV infection. A large segment of this population of people is in the prime of their lives and careers. Frequently, they are professionals. After coping with the shock of being diagnosed as HIV-positive, they often embrace life with an enthusiasm and energy that few of us ever experience. Tapping their energy and giving it direction can help them as individuals and us as volunteer managers.

As Volunteer Administrators, What Is Our Obligation to This Population?

As volunteer managers we see the many contributions that volunteers provide. These contributions become even more important for HIV-infected persons because for them, helping others is very important. As volunteer managers we have the rare opportunity to empower these people by channeling their energy into focused volunteer work.

By Using HIV-Positive Volunteers, You Can:

- Expand your horizons as a volunteer manager.
- Set a public example for compassion during a time of widespread misunderstanding about the AIDS epidemic.
- Support volunteer managers' needs to make changes in their programs which match societal changes around AIDS and AIDS-related discrimination.
- Use your leadership skills to change community responses to the needs of those with HIV infection.

How Can Managers Best Learn to Support This Volunteer Base?

The ability to look at our fears about HIV infection and what this means to us personally is a critical first step. The second important step is to educate ourselves so that we overcome our fears. As effective volunteer managers, we must:

- Sensitize ourselves to HIV infection.
- Reduce homophobia.
- Reduce irrational fears of HIV infection.

- Sensitize our staffs and other volunteers to the needs of people with HIV infection.
- Educate ourselves and our staffs about the issues surrounding a life-threatening illness, such as HIV-infection.
- Support the will to live in all persons with life-threatening illnesses.

Benefits to Volunteer Administrators and Their Organizations When They Work With People With HIV Infection:

People living with AIDS or HIV infection will expand our volunteer bases, providing flexible schedules, enormous talent, and extraordinary motivation to help others. Other benefits are:

- Their contributions to AIDS prevention education. They can speak to these issues first hand.
- They offer volunteer managers the opportunity to learn about AIDS and HIV infection in a way that can lessen irrational fears.
- They can provide volunteer managers the personal enjoyment of getting to know and to support individuals with AIDS or HIV infection.
- They offer volunteer managers the opportunity to learn special supervision skills.
- Their individual skills increase an organization's talent pool.
- They provide an organization a way to make a direct contribution to fighting AIDS and to make a statement to other agencies about their leadership role in the AIDS/HIV epidemic.
- They provide remarkable volunteer leadership.
- They can help your agency play a role in changing your community's response to AIDS.
- Their desires to help others are furthered by providing them meaningful work in the organization of their choice.

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