



[Resources](#) » [A-Z Volunteer Management](#) » [A-Z Volunteer Management](#) » [Seven Tips to Capitalize on Volunteer Resources During Tight Financial Times](#)

## Seven Tips to Capitalize on Volunteer Resources During Tight Financial Times

When cash resources are tight, the value of volunteer resources assumes additional importance to nonprofits and governmental organizations. Every volunteer hour is value added to the organization. In the United States, the value of the volunteer time is an estimated economic contribution of \$158 billion dollars annually.<sup>1</sup> With well-planned and well-executed efforts, it is possible to bring an increased share of those resources to your organization during these challenging financial times.



Many organizations found volunteers to be a strong asset during past recessions. Organizations learned that volunteers were motivated to give more help to meet increased needs. Nonprofits found the higher contribution level of donors who are also volunteers to be more important than ever. The energy and commitment to the mission that volunteers brought into the door every day helped keep organizational morale high during challenging times.

However, an economic downturn is not the time to take volunteer programs for granted. There are complex factors during a recession that both encourage people to give time and create barriers to volunteering.<sup>2</sup> According to an Independent Sector report in 2001, "When people are concerned about their personal finances, their overall giving declines by almost half and their volunteering decreases as well."<sup>3</sup> To gain the most value from the volunteer program during an economic downturn, wise program management is needed. The Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) offers these tips to capitalize on the value volunteer resources bring to organizations during tight financial times.

- 1. Maintain the volunteer manager position, even if faced with the need to make cuts.** The dollar value of volunteer service he/she brings an organization is many times the salary cost of the volunteer manager. Volunteers will not continue to work for an organization without a solid infrastructure to support them.
- 2. Intensify the impact of volunteer recruitment messages by drawing powerful images from media attention about increased needs.** Tap increased public awareness about human suffering with a well-crafted recruitment message that is reflective of conditions and concerns in local communities.
- 3. Look for new pools of volunteers such as job seekers or people who want to give gifts of skills and time because they are less able to give financially.** Seize opportunity from the advice job counselors are giving people who are laid off to volunteer by designing positions and recruitment messages targeted to people

temporarily out of the workforce. Also, look for opportunities to create a mutual exchange between people experiencing tight resources and other creative ways volunteerism can respond to the times.

4. **Assess the organization for new ways volunteers can meet needs and reduce staff stress.** Create volunteer positions to address new pressing service needs. Review the strategic plan for direction on where to involve volunteers. If staff are stretched to thin to supervise volunteers, add volunteer leader positions so that volunteers can do some of the supervision of other volunteers.
5. **Avoid any perception that volunteers will be used to replace paid staff.** Be aware of how staff members concerned about possible downsizing may perceive efforts to add volunteer positions. Staff members might see this as an attempt to replace paid positions with volunteer labor. Planning for new volunteer positions during a time of cutbacks should be highly transparent and involve key staff members throughout the brainstorming and development process.
6. **Make sure there are volunteer opportunities that do not require out of pocket costs.** During tight times, some volunteers will stay away because they can no longer afford discretionary expenses associated with volunteering. Explore ways to offer the option of reimbursement for out of pocket costs – especially transportation – as a way to maintain and grow the volunteer core, or support long-time volunteers who may be experiencing changing financial circumstances.
7. **Power up the volunteer program by taking steps proven to build organizational capacity through volunteers:**
  - Make sure that leaders of volunteers are well trained in the best practices for volunteer management as a means of increasing volunteer recruitment and retention. A study commissioned by the UPS foundation found that two-fifths of volunteers stopped volunteering for an organization at some time because of one or more poor volunteer management practices.<sup>4</sup>
  - Put the volunteer manager on the management team, if he/she is not already on it. For an organization to be nimble in building capacity for volunteers, the manager needs to be at the center of organizational decision-making and aware of changing conditions affecting the organization.
  - From the top down, develop an organizational climate that values and welcomes volunteers. Include volunteer supervision in staff job descriptions and performance appraisals as a valued job duty, and recognize volunteer supervision skills during annual reviews. Create a volunteer philosophy statement on the value volunteers bring to the organization and the role they play; ensure that staff members throughout the organization are familiar with it.

With well-planned efforts, organizations can capitalize on the value of volunteer resources to meet increased service needs and to provide stability during an economic downturn. It is possible to increase volunteer retention, bring in new volunteers and use their energy to grow stronger during tight financial times.

*Article written by Mary Quirk, MAVA Volunteer Resources Leadership Project Manager, with contributions to the article from Judith Russell, Polly Roach, Elizabeth Ellis, Katie Bull and the MAVA Strategic Directions Committee.*

*For more information on MAVA, go to [www.mavanetwork.org](http://www.mavanetwork.org)*

*Mary Quirk may be contacted at [mquirk@mavanetwork.org](mailto:mquirk@mavanetwork.org)*

- 1 The Corporation for National & Community Service estimates 8.1 billion volunteer hours in 2007, <https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/national>. According to the Independent Sector the estimated dollar value of volunteer time is \$19.51 per hour for 2007, [http://www.independentsector.org/giving\\_volunteering\\_tough\\_times?s=tough...](http://www.independentsector.org/giving_volunteering_tough_times?s=tough...)
- 2 Susan Ellis, <https://energizeinc.com/hot-topics/2008/november>
- 3 Independent Sector, *Giving in Tough Times*, [http://www.independentsector.org/giving\\_volunteering\\_tough\\_times?s=Giving%20in%20Tough%20Times](http://www.independentsector.org/giving_volunteering_tough_times?s=Giving%20in%20Tough%20Times)
- 4 [www.urban.org/publications/411005.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/411005.html)

#### Related Topics:

[Finances](#)

[Labor Unions, Relations with](#)

[Monetary Value of Volunteer Time](#)

Permission is granted to download and reprint this material. Reprints must include all citations and the statement: "Found in the Energize online library at <http://www.energizeinc.com/a-z>"

**Get free tips and updates  
directly to your inbox!**

Sign up for your choice  
of our monthly  
e-newsletters.

Enter E-mail Address

Next



## Related Books



### **The (Help!) I-Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management**

Is managing volunteers only part of your job? Or just not enough hours in a day? Learn to build a management team and feel some relief from carrying the whole weight of leading volunteer involvement alone.

**Sign up for our Newsletter**

**PRIVACY STATEMENT**

Energize, a program of Adisa <https://www.adisagroup.com/>

Follow us   

Copyright © 1997-2021