

Engaging Volunteers

[Menu](#)

How Your Performance Evaluation Might Help Your Volunteer Program

[Elisa Kosarin](#) | January 31, 2017 | [Leadership](#) | [No Comments](#)

Guest post by Elisa Kosarin. This post originally appeared on [Twenty Hats](#).

What if our annual reviews backed up what really counts?



I love the **aha! moments that arise** whenever a group of super-smart volunteer managers gets together. One of these moments occurred just last month during a workshop I facilitated on building nonprofit capacity with volunteers.

As part of the workshop, we talked about how important it was to **get strategic about measuring volunteer impact** – and what better way to measure impact than to connect volunteer efforts to the mission of the organization.

The flash of brilliance occurred when we looked at a fictional example of a nonprofit strategic priority. This particular example took each volunteer role and established metrics for them that contribute to the larger goal.

Here's the fictional example so that you understand what I mean. It's for a homeless shelter. You will see that table looks like a section of a typical strategic plan – but there are two additional columns: one that names the volunteer role, and one that ties the outcomes of the role to the goals of the program area. In this way, the volunteer role is seen in context, and as **an integral part of what's needed to achieve the desired outcomes**.

Establishing Strategic Outcomes Homeless Shelter

Strategic Priority: Create a continuum of supportive housing by December 2018			
Program Area	Volunteer Role	Volunteer Engagement Outcome	Strategic Goal
Rapid Rehousing Program	Credit counseling team	30% increase in number of clients maintaining good credit for at least 12 months	85% of clients remain rehoused for at least 12 months
Transitional Housing	GED Tutors	60% of clients obtain GED within 12 months	75% of clients increase earned income within 12 months
Permanent Supportive Housing	Hoarding Task Force	Eviction rate drops by 50% within 12 months	85% of clients remain in PSH for at one year or longer

At the workshop, one of the participants looked at the metrics and observed that they are more than an evaluation tool for volunteer engagement – they are **an evaluation tool for our own performance as leaders of volunteers.**

Think about that for a moment. What if our performance reviews were based on these same measures? Instead of looking at just at recruitment or retention (or our reliability and punctuality), what if we were held **accountable for what our volunteers actually contribute** to our organizations?

This is not an original concept. It's one that every thought leader in the field champions in one way or another. That's because these measures get straight to the bottom line – they demonstrate how the volunteers we manage improve the quality of life for our clients, our community, our planet.

All kinds of positive things come from this type of evaluation:

- **First, we are measured on what really matters.** It doesn't take long for volunteer managers to realize that the number of volunteers recruited has little relationship to their effectiveness on the job. Similarly, retention figures can mask a volunteer pool that is unreliable. These inputs tell a misleading story.
- **Second, the evaluation is inclusive** – it illustrates *how* the volunteer program benefits the organization, and it demonstrates that *you* don't work in a silo, separate from your programmatic counterparts.
- **Third, the evaluation becomes a teaching tool** for our decision-makers. By establishing strategic measures for our volunteers, we are showing our leadership how to think about volunteers and their potential to expand what's possible.

This final reason may be the most important one for volunteer management as a profession. As I've said before (because it's so darned important), we cannot wait for our decision-makers to wake up one day and appreciate the full potential of a volunteer program – we need to educate them about our role.

When we are able to tie what we do to the most important goals of our organizations, we elevate our role and build our credibility. Do these types of measures raise the bar for running an effective volunteer program? Absolutely. Is there a payoff for doing so? You bet – we can demonstrate our value in ways that cannot be dismissed.

Tweet this Post! If you agree with my POV, feel free to share this message:

What if those of us in #volmgmt were measured by our volunteers' impact on the mission? Food for thought @THNonprofit, goo.gl/OVMLNo

About The Author



Elisa Kosarin

Elisa Kosarin, CVA coaches, trains, and consults on volunteer management. She believes volunteers are a powerful force for change in our communities — if they are managed by volunteer engagement pros with the skills to cultivate this resource.