

How to Manage Volunteers in the Library with Pat Wagner

How to Manage Volunteers
in the Library

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plan panhandle library  
access network

with Pat Wagner  
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Pandemic Footnote

This webinar deals with issues that apply to both in-person and virtual volunteers. If some one represents the library or works behind the scenes, *legal concerns still apply*. Making sure they have working technology and ensuring there is oversight are special issues for virtual volunteers.



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Key Idea

Take your library's  
volunteers seriously.  
Volunteers are not  
second-rate employees.



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**Caveat**

Don't assume volunteer help  
means lowering standards  
for productivity and  
reliability (*showing up on time*).

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**Outcomes**

- Research Florida personnel laws governing volunteer employees.
- Create volunteer job descriptions and performance contracts.
- Develop policies for addressing volunteer issues, such as nepotism and cronyism.

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**Agenda**

- **Planning for Volunteer Success**
- **Management Issues**
- **Keeping Volunteers Engaged**
- **Saying Good-bye**
- **Resources**

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Agenda

**Planning for  
Volunteer Success**

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**Volunteer Myths: Pro**

- Volunteers are free help.
- Volunteers don't require training.
- Volunteers aren't subject to laws pertaining to personnel and employees.
- Volunteers have nothing better to do.
- Older volunteers always are productive.

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**Volunteers Myths: Con**

- Can't hold them accountable.
- Volunteers show up when they want.
- Can't fire volunteers.
- Use volunteers only for "grunt" work.
- Impossible to recruit volunteers.
- Young volunteers can't be trusted.

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**Exercise**

**Why do you want to  
recruit volunteers?**

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**Good Reasons**

- Engage first-hand library customer advice.
- Free up paid staff for more complex jobs.
- Recruit help for special events.
- Build partnerships with other agencies.
- Expand pool of vetted potential employees.
- Utilize specialized skills in your community for specific projects on a temporary basis.

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**Good Reasons**

- Provide internship opportunities.
- Better represent your community's diversity.
- Engage community in supporting library.
- Introduce new ideas and perspectives from people outside of the library profession.
- Develop trained pool of substitutes.
- Encourage careers in library science.

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### Not So Good Reasons

- To save money in the short term and avoid dealing with library's ongoing budget crises in the long term
- To take advantage of random offers to volunteer without planning or oversight
- To expect volunteers to take key roles Forever, and count on them for pricey positions, aka IT.
- To offer busy work for kids, teens, and seniors.



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### Caveats

- Managing volunteers takes more resources, time, and money.
- *Double-whammy*: Managing part-timers takes more resources, time, and money.
- Not every supervisor is good at managing volunteers.
- Not all supervisors like volunteers.



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### Volunteer Costs

- Advertising and other recruitment costs
- Legal background and credit checks
- Paid time of those managing volunteers
- Time and money for training volunteers
- Money for thank-yous and awards
- What happens when they leave?
- Hiring and training volunteer supervisors



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**Agenda**

**Management Issues**

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**Exercise**

**Is your library ready  
to welcome volunteers?**

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**First Steps**

- Clean up existing personnel policies.
- Update job descriptions.
- Assign responsibilities.
- Identify volunteer staff needs.
- Ensure everything is legal.
- Train paid staff in volunteer management.
- Identify budget.

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## Identify Budget

- Staff time taken away from other projects in order to manage volunteers, including hiring a full-time volunteer manager.
- Fees to vet for criminal records, credit check.
- Budget for thank-yous, recognition events.
- Potential added insurance and HR duties
- Any supplies related to more bodies present



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## Caveat

Ensure you are compliant  
with government regulations  
as well as your insurance  
company's requirements.



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## Organizational Issues

Who are the volunteers' supervisors?  
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Who gets to hire, discipline, promote, demote,  
and fire current and potential volunteers?  
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What is the *chain of command* regarding  
multiple assignments in multiple departments  
from multiple managers?



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## Before You Hire

- Resume and references
- No surprises: Clear expectations both ways
- Rules for staff, including library ethics
- Dress codes if applicable
- Limits on what volunteers get to do
- No employment promises
- ADA issues?
- And...this is a job: not just showing up!



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## After You Hire (Active)

- Establish a probationary period.
- Orientation regarding entire library
- Introduce volunteer to staff
- All those rules and codes and policies.
- Assign a mentor.
- Identify the supervisor(s).
- Written instructions for everything.



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## Special Issues

- College students and interns
- Library school practicum (practicum)
- Senior programs, such as *R.S.V.P.*
- Community workers aka “criminals”
- School “community” assignments
- Legacies: Volunteering for years
- Former employees returning to volunteer



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## Special Issues

- Teenage and middle school volunteers
- Friends group volunteers
- “Loaners” from other organizations
- Someone else is paying their wages.
- Embedded from nonprofits or other agencies
- Library trustees and “important” people
- Volunteers with ADA issues



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## Homework

Is your library ready  
to welcome volunteers?



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## Agenda

**Keeping  
Volunteers Engaged**



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## Keeping Volunteers

- Understanding individual values and goals
- Information to conduct their jobs well:  
Formal orientation and training
- Treated as equals
- Appreciated: Not taken for granted, aka  
positive reinforcement



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## What Volunteers Want?

- Adding sense of value to their lives
- Hanging out at the library: a place to be
- Working at library for pay, maybe, eventually
- Hanging with friends and meeting people
- Building and updating their resume
- Giving back to their community
- Using existing talents



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## What Volunteers Want?

- Learning new skills
- Fulfilling contractual agreement (ex. school)
- Acquiring status and perks????
- Rebuilding after big life change (ex. move)
- Job requirement: Career building
- Upholding legacy: Family tradition
- Working with children, New Americans, etc.



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## Recognition

- Some library swag, badges, certificates
- Acknowledgement for contributions
- Awards: longevity and accomplishments
- Gifts that are appropriate:  
Beware candy or any food, liquor, books,  
gift cards to coffee bars, meals, entertainment
- Instead, something that reflects them
- Best gift ever: Cat toy basket!!!!!!



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## Homework

Is your library ready  
to welcome volunteers?



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## Agenda

**Saying Good-bye**



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## Homework

Do you know why your  
volunteers quit?  
Do you know volunteers  
you need to fire?



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## Evaluations

- Just the same as for paid staff
- Each volunteer has a personnel file.
- Weekly check-in w/ mentor/supervisor
- Monthly meeting with mentor
- Written report after projects



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## Why Volunteers Leave

- Life changes—otherwise they would stay
- Unhappy with their library supervisor
- Feel that they are taken for granted
- Feel that their talents aren't utilized
- Broken promises
- Someone else hired to do their "free" work
- Don't like their assignments
- Don't like other volunteers
- Unpleasant interactions with public



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## Why Volunteers are Fired

- Not reliable or productive
- Don't pay attention to rules
- Misrepresented skills and talents
- Treat library like social club
- Violate library ethical standards
- Inappropriate behavior
- Misuse of computers
- Theft of materials



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## Firing Volunteers

- Set up disciplinary cycle with steps.
- Weekly meetings to evaluate
- Course correction: Assignments with deadlines and criteria for success
- Back to the pool for a different assignment:  
Is there something they are better suited for?
- Who decides to let go of a volunteer?
- Exit interviews



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## Resources

- **Energize, Inc.:** Consulting focus on volunteers; free stuff onsite  
<https://www.energizeinc.com>
- **American Association for Museum Volunteers**  
<https://aamv.wildapricot.org>
- **Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement**  
<https://www.volunteeralive.org>
- **National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government** <https://www.navplg.org>
- **Wiley & Sons, Inc.:** Pat's favorite publishers of volunteer-related books  
<https://www.wiley.com/en-us>



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