



REPAIR THE WORLD

The Engaged Congregation:
A Guide to Acknowledging
Volunteers

This guide was originally published as a STAR Map. STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal) was a philanthropic partnership of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, and The Samuel Bronfman Foundation. It was designed to promote Jewish renewal through congregational innovation and leadership development. These guides were originally published under the auspices of STAR and, through the generosity of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, have been updated and are now distributed under license by Repair the World.

The Engaged Congregation Series

This guide is one in a four-part series designed to provide synagogues with a step-by-step process of creating and maintaining a culture of volunteer engagement. Volunteer engagement is a strategy that can build a congregation's capacity beyond what staff alone can accomplish. It transforms a congregation into an engaged community in which congregants are partners in co-creating their community's future, as they serve as members, learners, volunteers, contributors, donors, participants, and passionate advocates. The four main steps to implementing a volunteer engagement initiative are addressed in these four guides:

The Engaged Congregation:
A Guide to Creating a Volunteer Culture

The Engaged Congregation:
A Guide to Volunteer Cultivation

The Engaged Congregation:
A Guide to Supporting Volunteers

The Engaged Congregation:
A Guide to Acknowledging Volunteers

The guides can be downloaded at <http://weRepair.org>

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Learn more at www.jffixler.com.

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How to Use this Engaged Congregation Guide

1

Set aside an hour to read through the material and make notes.

2

Come back a few days later with 90 minutes to 2 hours to devote to this Guide's activities.

3

Work through the contents of each section.

Introduction	2	Activity 2.....	8
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4

Share results with at least one other individual at your synagogue. Brainstorm together on next steps.

5

Make it practical: Immediately try at least one new idea.

Use this guide to...

- Match volunteers to the tasks/projects that best fit their motivational style
- Design a personalized benefit plan for each of your volunteers.
- Craft a communications plan for volunteers to keep them informed and recognize their successes

Every worker, whether paid or volunteer, appreciates hearing these two words after they complete a project or a day's tasks. But the art and craft of volunteer recognition and retention is based on more than just acknowledging people's efforts. Volunteers also appreciate when they are matched carefully to the tasks that best suit them, and when they are recognized in appropriate and personal ways. They need clear communication about issues affecting their jobs and opportunities to provide feedback to those with whom they work. Volunteer managers who set up systems that meet these needs create a solid foundation for volunteer success and enjoyment.

When Moses broke the
Tablets of the Law, the Holy Blessed
One said to him, "Well done!"
—**B. Bava Batra (14b).**

2 do:

Review Figure 1, page 3

Figure 1

Creating the Environment for Volunteer Success

Introduction

Organizations can lay the groundwork to ensure that volunteers will enjoy their volunteer experience by:

- **Being prepared** for them
- Having **the right amount of work of the right type** when they arrive for an assignment
- Providing them with the **resources they need** to do their work successfully
- Creating **position descriptions for each assignment** and then **providing work that conforms** to the description
- Providing **guidance** and (when necessary) **training** for them
- Creating **fun, challenging, enjoyable, and meaningful** assignments
- **Integrating volunteers** with each other, as well as with congregants and staff
- Keeping them **informed** of important information
- Drawing **clear lines between the work they do and the impact** it has on the mission of the congregation
- **Following up** when a volunteer offers to help

How well are you creating the right foundation for volunteer success and enjoyment? Consult the **Engaged Congregation Guide to Creating a Culture of Volunteer Engagement** and the **Guide to Volunteer Cultivation** for activities and information that will help you develop these skills and orientation towards your volunteer resources.

How to Move With Motivation Understanding Motivation

Jewish tradition teaches us that those who serve the community should do so out of devotion to God. But in the real world, people volunteer for all sorts of reasons, some religious in nature and some not. While one volunteer may genuinely want to do a mitzvah, another may be looking for a social outlet, while another may be seeking public recognition and honor. The important thing to remember is that there are many motivations for people to volunteer. Paraphrasing our Sages, "one who comes to do a mitzvah for external reasons may eventually come to do it for its own sake." We should not denigrate motivations we think are not pure enough; any motivation that causes someone to volunteer is by definition a good place to begin.

To begin learning the art and craft of volunteer recognition and retention, volunteer managers first must understand the motivation underlying individuals' willingness to give their time, money or other resources to their synagogue. When you understand what motivates volunteers, you can engage them more effectively in synagogue life. It is said that you can't motivate others; rather you uncover what motivates them and celebrate their passion.

In their book, *Motivation and Organizational Climate*, David C. McClelland and John W. Atkinson identified three motives that impact work behavior: achievement, power, and affiliation. It is important to understand this principle in the context of volunteers:

2do:

Review Figure 2, page 5

Complete Activity 1, page 6

Treat your volunteers well—
they define your work!
As the old saying goes,
"If there were no flock, what
need for a shepherd?"
—Yalkut, Bo (187)

Achievement volunteers

- Look for projects that have a beginning, middle, and end
- Want feedback that is clear and concrete
- Are interested solving problems
- Seek assignments that are time limited
- Want control over the outcome of the work

Power volunteers

- Seek volunteer assignments that have significant and definable impact
- Desire to have influence
- Want to share their ideas
- Are interested in prestige, status, and position

Affiliation volunteers

- Are interested in being with others
- Value friendship and relationships foremost
- Desire a warm, friendly, and supportive work environment
- Demonstrate concern and caring for others
- May value relationships more than the work itself

By placing volunteers in positions that align with their motivational style, you increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied with their assignment. Ask your existing volunteers what they want to do and why. "Pay" them by giving them the opportunity to do the work that best aligns with their personal style.

Figure 2 Types of Motivation and How to Learn About Them

How To Move With Motivation

What motivates your volunteers? What motivates you when you volunteer? Sometimes it can be difficult to understand how styles apply to the complex individuals who offer their talents on a volunteer basis. This table lays out the three styles with the characteristics that define each style. The “typical statements” in the third column are conversational clues you can use to uncover what kind of motivation might apply to a given volunteer.

Motivational Style	Description	Typical Statements
Achievement Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for projects that have a beginning, middle, and end • Want feedback that is clear and concrete • Are interested in assignments where they have the opportunity to solve problems • Seek assignments that are time limited • Want control over the outcome of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the timeframe for this project? • How are you evaluating success? • Who will I be working with? • How does this address the need(s)?
Power Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek volunteer assignments that have significant and definable impact • Desire to have influence • Want to share their ideas • Are interested in prestige, status, and position • Who does this position report to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much input can I have? • I have some ideas about how we can do this differently. • I want to leave my mark with this organization.
Affiliation Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are interested in being with others • Place high priority on friendships and relationships • Desire a warm, friendly, and supportive work environment • Demonstrate concern and caring for others • May consider the relationships to be more important than the work itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we pick our own teams? • I'll bring the coffee and bagels! • How can we make sure that everyone who wants to can participate?

Activity 1

What's My Motivation?

How to Move with Motivation

Make a list of 8 to 10 of your current volunteers. Using the information in Figure 2, see if you can answer the following questions about each of them.

- What motivational style do they have?
- What should you do to support each motivational style?
- What will you do when the motivational needs of the volunteer change over time?
- How will your volunteers get a motivational paycheck for their volunteer contributions?

Volunteer name	Motivational style	Ideal "motivational paycheck"
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

If a volunteer is power motivated, what happens if the position he or she is assigned has little access to decision making? What about the affiliator who has limited access to other people? What can you do to support these volunteers so that their motivational needs are fulfilled?

Rethinking Recognition

Judaism teaches us that we ought to serve the community out of a pure motivation to do God's will and not a desire for reward or recognition. The preeminent source for this ideal is found in Pirkei Avot (1:3), which tells us to serve God like servants who do not anticipate a reward.

In an ideal world, volunteers would always serve for selfless reasons. While this ideal is worth remembering, the fact of the matter is that we must give our volunteers recognition and honor if we expect their involvement. We spend a lot of time and energy thinking and worrying about what to do for volunteers. We feed them at special events and shower them with specialty mugs, pins, and certificates.

But who needs another reason to eat flavorless chicken when we could be home with our families? Special events are costly and rarely do more than 20 percent of the volunteers show up. Everyone has enough mugs to last a lifetime, people rarely wear the pins, and the certificates end up in the circular file.

Who needs another reason to eat flavorless chicken when we could be home with our families?

Most volunteers say that they don't volunteer for recognition. They appreciate a thank-you along the way and the knowledge that what they do makes a difference at the synagogue. It is simple wisdom that is often ignored. Volunteers typically remember small, thoughtful things, such as a glue stick with a note saying "thanks for being the glue that holds us together," or a handwritten thank you note. You can make these small efforts immediately as opposed to waiting for an annual event which might be months away.

We have to get away from only rewarding long-term service or significant volunteer hours. By only recognizing length of service and significant hours contributed by volunteers, we send the signal that the contributions of short-term volunteers are not as significant or important to the synagogue. Short-term volunteers need to feel that they are valued for what they do as well. Conversely, we must remember not to ignore our long-term volunteers.

We should routinely check in with them and give them the opportunity to talk about their experience. Are they still satisfied, do they want to take a break, or do they want to do something else or something more?

2do:

Complete Activity 2, page 8

Activity 2

Gathering Information from Veteran Volunteers

Rethinking Recognition

Conduct a focus group or survey of your long-term volunteers to gather information about their experiences and suggestions. You can use the questions here as a starting point.

Use these questions, or create your own, to gather information.

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your experiences as a volunteer?
- What makes you feel valued as a volunteer?
- What's been your best volunteer experience to date?
- How would you improve the volunteer experience at our synagogue?
- What do you most enjoy about volunteering at our synagogue?
- What are your goals as a volunteer? What do you see as your "career path"?
- What steps would you like to take to move towards those goals?
- What skills would you like to learn as a volunteer?
- What resources do you need to be as successful as possible as a volunteer?

Make Your Benefits "Good Fits"

Rethinking Recognition

Most volunteers don't expect recognition, but that doesn't mean we should forget to give it to them. When recognizing volunteers, we need to be very thoughtful about what is appropriate and affordable, as well as what is personal and meaningful.

The Torah and subsequent collections of Jewish law tell us that it is not enough to merely give to the needy. Rather, we must match our gift to the needs of the recipient. The same principle is true when it comes to recognizing our volunteers. We should be thoughtful about the kind of recognition that will have personal meaning to them.

Recognition is generational; what is okay for the older volunteer is often inappropriate for the younger. Recognition should relate to the volunteer assignment. For example, if you have volunteer researchers, you might pay for their internet service provider fees after they have been with you for a while. Your senior office volunteer might get cab vouchers. Your social action chairs might appreciate a donation to their favorite charities.

You would make a different gesture for a short-term volunteer than you would for a veteran volunteer. For example, the Purim Carnival volunteer might get a plate of hamentaschen to take home while the committee chair might get a gift certificate to the synagogue gift shop.

Brainstorm inexpensive ideas for volunteer recognition.

- Miniature flash light with a note, "thanks to a bright light!"
- A package of tea with a note, "since you became a volunteer things are really brewing around here!"
- Fill a wine glass with candy with a note, "a toast to a job well done!"
- Fill gift bag with chocolate kisses and hugs with a note saying, "hugs and kisses for the great job that you did."
- Create a survival kit and distribute before an event, include things that will help the volunteers survive such as an aspirin, disposable camera, energy bar, etc.
- Have the volunteer make a presentation to the board.
- Have the volunteer write an article on the project for the newsletter.
- Have the volunteers represent you at meetings.
- Mini bottles of champagne, "to toast our success."
- Create humorous awards such as, "Best attendance in committee meetings, most outrageous idea, and best food at a meeting."
- Create a photo album with pictures of the volunteer activity, program, or event.

Make Your Benefits “Good Fits” (continued)

Rethinking Recognition

Benefits should be given to volunteers for completing an assignment or passing a service benchmark of months or years. This way you can see if the volunteers will be high performers before you give them benefits. As a result, the benefit becomes a reward for being a high-performing volunteer.

Whether young or old, volunteers seek ongoing education and perceive the benefit of training as a rewarding aspect of volunteering. Many volunteers want to enhance their skills or learn new ones. Prospective committee chairs can attend leadership training sessions. Office volunteers can take classes in computer technology using equipment they might not normally have access to. Other volunteers can learn from outside experts about fundraising strategies. Often training is relatively inexpensive. Every community has secular education available in subjects that volunteers can take advantage of at relatively low cost. Check with your local volunteer center, your state nonprofit organization, or your federation for resources.

Who are honored?
Those who honor others.
—**Pirkei Avot (4:1)**

2 do:

Complete Activity 3, page 11

Activity 3

Matching Benefits to Volunteers—The Best Recognition There Is

Rethinking Recognition

Look at the position descriptions that you have designed (for information on creating position descriptions, please refer to **The Engaged Congregation Guide to Volunteer Cultivation**).

Describe the target volunteer for each position. What will this person be like? What will this person want from volunteering? What would be the best benefit plan that we could give this individual?

Design a personalized benefit plan.

For example:

Position Description for Chair of the Volunteer Engagement Task Force Benefits:

- Training on volunteer engagement at the local volunteer center
- After the initial report and recommendations: treat the task force to lunch
- After the implementation of the volunteer program: a bottle of fine kosher wine

Volunteer Position Description:

The ideal person for this position is/has the following characteristics:

Benefits of this position:

Sustaining Satisfaction

At one point in the Torah, Yitro, the father-in-law of Moses, expresses a desire to relinquish his "volunteer" job as desert guide to the Israelites and return to his native land of Midian. In response, Moses heaps praise on Yitro, pleading with him for his continued help. One wonders whether Yitro would have wanted to abandon his role in the first place had Moses praised him and made him feel valuable sooner.

The lesson for synagogues is clear: In order to sustain our volunteers' satisfaction and retain their talent, we must make them feel valued.

Most every synagogue has a wonderful sense of community. This sense of community has a big impact on volunteers. It fosters team-building, solidifies commitment and increases volunteer retention. When volunteers step through the door of the synagogue, they know that someone cares about them and the work that they do. They get notes when they are ill, calls when there is a death in the family, birthday greetings, and funny notes for no reason at all.

What can you do to increase the sense of community among your volunteers? How can you help your volunteers to bond and form a team?

Marking Milestones

Once a volunteer starts working with you, there will be particular milestones along the way that you will want to acknowledge. The nature of the volunteer's work and their tenure will determine which milestones to mark. For example, volunteers working on a one-time project need acknowledgement when they finish; new volunteers need steady reinforcement during their first weeks and months. Having an overall strategy that supports you in marking these milestones will help you retain volunteers and attract new ones as well.

What can you do to increase the sense of community among your volunteers? How can you help your volunteers to bond and form a team?

Recognize your volunteers:

- **When they agree to volunteer:** Send a personal letter from the rabbi and board chair, make introductions to key players on the staff and board, create a welcoming ritual or ceremony, provide the volunteers with a workspace, grant volunteers e-mail access, and invite them to attend meetings.
- **After three months:** Write a note that tells volunteers what you value about them, send them a tea bag with a note that says "you deserve a break for all you have done for us, sit back and have a cuppa on us!" or send them an animated e-mail greeting. (Most volunteers who volunteer an average of three hours weekly will have volunteered a full week, or 40 hours, by the end of three months).

Sustaining Satisfaction

- **Annually:** Send them for more training, create a care package for them during one of the holidays with items that they can use, spotlight them in the newsletter, or take them out to coffee.
- **At the completion of a project or program:** Say thank you at the event, do a Web site profile, send flowers, buy a prayer book in their honor, invite them to evaluate the project or program.
- **When they recruit other volunteers:** Send a handwritten thank-you note, put their picture on a special bulletin board.
- **When they retire:** Acknowledge long-term volunteers by giving them lifetime volunteer status. Have a lifetime volunteer column in the newsletter or feature them on the Web site.
- **Special occasions in the volunteer's life:** Send birthday, graduation, or other greeting cards.

Communicating Clearly

Clear communication between volunteers and staff helps volunteers feel less isolated and more connected to the heart of their work. Volunteers will leave an organization when their experience isn't satisfying, their input isn't respected or they don't have the support that they need to do their work. Communication strategies should include:

- Making sure that supervisors keep their volunteers informed and up to date

- Insuring that volunteers have a voice in decisions that impact them
- Celebrations of success along the way
- A request that volunteers not withhold critical information from board or staff
- Helping the volunteer to communicate with the organization
- An exit interview that affirms what they have done and seeks volunteers advice on program improvement.
- Being careful about the overtones as well as the content of communication
- Ways to listen to the concerns and issues of the volunteers
- Ways to elevate the volunteers beyond the view that they have low status and low authority
- Clear expectations of the volunteer's roles and responsibilities to the board, staff, and congregation
- A plan to describe the results, impact, and outcome of the volunteers' work to the congregation

When volunteers step through the door of the synagogue, they know that someone cares about them and the work that they do. They get notes when they are ill, calls when there is a death in the family, and birthday greetings and funny notes for no reason at all.

Lack of planning can drive away volunteers, as we see in this midrash: Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta once came before Rabbi Akiva who said to him, "Stand up and read the portion of the week." Rabbi Yohanan replied, "But I have not yet prepared it." The sages said that he was right to refuse.

—Sh'mot Rabbah (40:1)

2do:

Complete Activity 4, page 14

Activity 4

Communication Plan for Volunteer Retention

Sustaining Satisfaction

Successful organizations in volunteer engagement spend a lot of time thinking about how their volunteers are treated. They understand that communication is critical to helping volunteers feel included and respected. What is your communication plan for your volunteers? Use this brainstorming guide to get started.

In what ways do we, or can we, use communication tools to recognize our volunteers?

Tool	Currently Used to Recognize Volunteers...	Could be Used to Recognize Volunteers...
Print newsletter		
Web site		
E-mail updates		
Facebook		
Twitter or other social media		
New member materials		
Membership renewal materials		
Program brochures		
Congregational directory		
Other		

Activity 4

Communication Plan for Volunteer Retention (continued)

Sustaining Satisfaction

In what ways do we, or can we, use communication tools to inform our volunteers?

Tool	Currently Used to Inform Volunteers...	Could be Used to Inform Volunteers...
Print newsletter		
Web site		
E-mail updates		
New member materials		
Facebook		
Twitter or other social media		
Membership renewal materials		
Program brochures		
Congregational directory		
Other		

Conclusion

Building a Foundation for Success

By giving time and thought to building the right foundation for volunteer success and enjoyment, you can create an environment where congregants feel respected, willingly share their skills and talents, and help further the synagogue's mission. Your foundation will be made up of many elements, including the ideas laid out in this Engaged Congregation guide: meaningful recognition strategies and benefits, information gathering from veteran volunteers about their experience, and communication tools that keep volunteers informed and celebrate their successes.

"Our masters taught: The pious men of yore used to spend an hour in meditation, then pray for an hour, and then meditate again for an hour."

—B. Berakhot (32b)

Just as our ancestors meditated and engaged in deep thought in preparation for their daily prayers, we must invest time and thought in preparing for volunteer recruitment and success.

Additional Resources

Further reading and resources in assessment and reflection:

- *Boomer Volunteer Engagement: Collaborate Today, Thrive Tomorrow*, by Jill Friedman Fixler and Sandie Eichberg, with Gail Lorenz. VolunteerMatch. Book and webinars.
- *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, by Marlene Wilson
- *A Guide to Retention*, by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch
- *Motivation and Organizational Climate*, by David C. McClelland and John W. Atkinson
- *The Volunteer Development Toolbox Tools and Techniques to Enhance Volunteer and Staff Effectiveness*, by Marilyn MacKenzie and Gail Moore
- *Volunteer Management Mobilizing all the Resources of the Community*, by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch