

Developing a Volunteer Engagement Guide for Staff: Getting Beyond the Policy Handbook



Volunteer Strategies

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...because effective and consistent volunteer engagement relies on staff who have the information and skills to engage, support, and recognize volunteers.

Volunteer Engagement Guide for Staff

Whether or not an organization has a dedicated volunteer engagement manager on staff, engaging and supporting volunteers is never the sole responsibility of just one person or department. Program staff, fund development team members, operational support people, and many others not only interact with volunteers but also actively support them.

Creating positive and impactful experiences for volunteers and staff means that ALL staff members – regardless of department or title – have access to information about how volunteer roles are developed and how to partner with the volunteer engagement leads to recruit, select, onboard, train, support, and recognize volunteers.

This mini-toolkit is designed to help you develop a guide so staff have the information they need to effectively engage and support volunteers. Ensuring all staff have access to and understand this guide builds consistency and efficiency, which enhances the volunteer experience and impact.

Inside You Will Find:

- A brief case study of how one organization leveraged a volunteer engagement guide for greater capacity and efficiency
- A sample outline for a volunteer engagement guide
- Steps to developing a volunteer engagement guide for staff

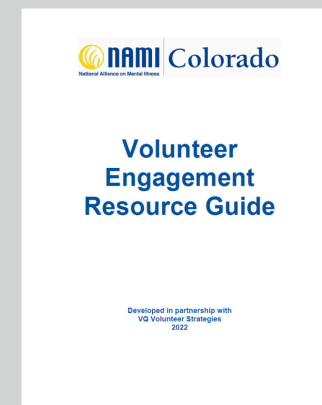
Why develop a volunteer engagement guide for staff?

A clear and comprehensive resource for staff on how to engage and support volunteers, including the processes and tools needed to do so, will:

- Create more consistency for both staff and volunteers across the organization
- Increase efficiency
- Enhance the professional development of staff who will gain valuable experience by supporting unpaid members of the team (managing volunteers is a skill that can be transferred to other areas of their work or future roles)
- Ultimately, increase organizational impact.

NAMI Colorado: Equipping Affiliate Leaders for Success

NAMI Colorado works to build communities of recovery and hope by educating, supporting, and advocating for individuals affected by mental illness and their families. The organization supports more than a dozen local affiliates across the state, each working to provide programs and resources to support and educate people affected by mental illness. Affiliates range in size from small, volunteer-led groups in more rural areas to large, metropolitan-based agencies with multiple full-time staff, though they all rely on a cadre of volunteers to deliver programs and advocacy. While volunteers are the common thread throughout these diverse affiliates, no standard procedures existed across NAMI Colorado. Furthermore, when affiliate leadership shifted – especially in the smaller regions – history and practices were often lost because the procedures were not documented.

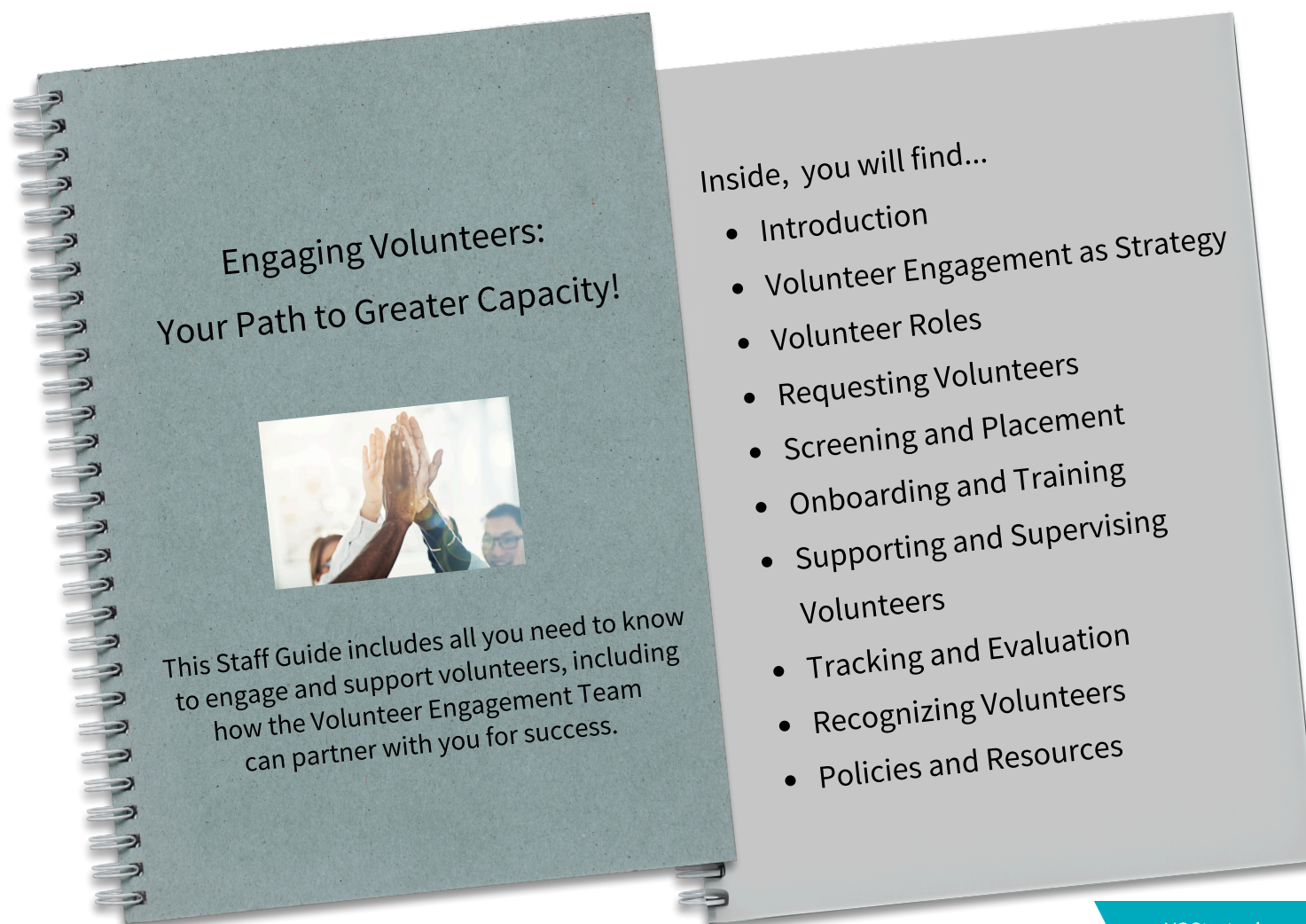


To address these challenges and increase efficiency and impact overall, leadership and VQ Volunteer Strategies set out to develop an easy-to-use guide on how to engage volunteers, from the development of new roles to writing position descriptions, training and supporting volunteers, recognizing them, and more. After surveying and interviewing staff and volunteer leaders across the state, gathering resources that worked well for some, and identifying challenges among others, the NAMI Colorado Volunteer Engagement Resource Guide was developed. Affiliate leaders were invited to webinars that introduced the guide, presented common examples of when and how to use the guide, and walked through the contents.

Today, NAMI Colorado affiliate leaders have a consistent tool to use as they continue to navigate the changing landscape of volunteer recruitment, retention, and management. Ongoing training on volunteer strategies occurs year-round. During monthly facilitated conversations, leaders share updates and challenges, discuss best practices, and collaborate on issues common to all. “We have also been able to share our Volunteer Engagement Resource Guide with NAMI leaders across the country,” explains Wendy Giebink, Special Programs Director for NAMI Colorado, “as it is included in the national Affiliate Operations Handbook distributed to over 650 local NAMI affiliates.”

Sample Staff Guide Outline

Volunteer engagement guides can include a wide range of information, yet concise and clear guides will likely be more user-friendly and appealing to staff. This suggested outline serves as a starting point. Naturally, adjust the topics and level of detail based on your organization's mission, structure, and practices.



What's Included in Each Section?

As previously noted, adjust the topics and level of detail based on your organization's mission, structure, and practices.

- Introduction
 - How and why are volunteers important to the mission? What is the organization's commitment to a highly engaged volunteer corps?
- Volunteer Engagement as a Strategy
 - How does engaging volunteers align with the organization's strategic plan? Who is on the Volunteer Engagement Team? Where do volunteers fit within the overall organizational chart?
- Volunteer Roles
 - What types of roles do volunteers fill? In which departments or programs do they engage? Do all roles have clear position descriptions?
- Requesting Volunteers
 - What is the process for acquiring volunteer support? How can the Volunteer Engagement team support needs assessments and feasibility reviews?
- Screening and Placement
 - How are volunteers screened for all positions? What roles do staff play and how do Volunteer Engagement team members help to prescreen and place volunteers?
- Onboarding and Training
 - How are new volunteers oriented and trained? How can staff ensure volunteers in their area have the information they need to be successful?
- Supporting and Supervising Volunteers
 - How can staff members ensure success by providing feedback and nurturing accountability? In what ways can the Volunteer Engagement Team support staff in this effort?
- Tracking and Evaluation
 - How is volunteer involvement tracked? What are staff and volunteers expectations around a volunteer management system and record-keeping?
- Recognizing Volunteers
 - Is there an organization-wide recognition strategy? How can staff show appreciation on a daily basis?
- Policies and Resources
 - How can staff and volunteers access engagement policies? What steps can be taken if policies are not followed and how can the Volunteer Engagement Team provide support?

Where to Start: Steps to Developing a Volunteer Engagement Guide for Staff

While it may seem daunting to develop this guide, you likely already have most of what you need in place. The key is to compile it in a clear, accessible, and logical manner so you can then direct colleagues to easily find the information.



1. Audit the tools you already use for creating position descriptions, recruitment, volunteer applications, training outlines, recognition efforts and your policies. Put copies of these in one folder to add to your guide as you develop it.
2. Research and adapt templates for those resources you may not yet have. VQ Volunteer Strategies Tools and Templates (vqstrategies.com/tools-and-templates) offers many templates to use as a reference.
3. Draft the guide. Recruit support from the marketing team or a volunteer with relevant skills. Then, ask colleagues to review it and provide feedback.
4. Share the guide with staff. Develop and implement a rollout plan to inform and train your colleagues on this resource and how to best use it.