



## VolunTOLDs: Assessing, Planning, and Making the Case for Engaging Required Volunteers



### Why This Matters

Across communities, more individuals are engaging in volunteer service because it is required—whether through courts, schools, workforce programs, or public benefits policies. As these requirements increase, organizations are often asked to respond quickly.

But engaging “required” volunteers is not simply a logistical decision—it is a **strategic one**.

Done well, it can:

- Expand organizational capacity
- Strengthen community partnerships
- Support workforce development and access

Done poorly, it can:

- Strain staff capacity
- Introduce risk
- Undermine program quality and volunteer experience

**Your role is to lead this decision—not just respond to it.**

### Part I: Assessing Readiness

Assess readiness and make informed decisions in 7 steps:

1. Clarify Who You’re Engaging
2. Assess Organizational Needs
3. Map Existing Assets
4. Consider Ethics, Risk, and Capacity
5. Review Policies and Practices
6. Plan for a Pilot
7. Make a Strategic Decision

### Part II: Making the Case

Communicate your decision to leadership and staff with this practical guide.

## Part I: Assessing Readiness

### Step 1: Clarify Who You're Considering Engaging

Required volunteers are not a single group. Understanding who you are working with shapes expectations, roles, and support structures.

Common categories include:

- Court-ordered community service
- School-based service requirements
- Internships or service learning
- Workforce readiness or rehabilitation programs
- Public benefits-related requirements (e.g., SNAP or Medicaid)

#### Reflection

Which of these groups are most relevant to your organization now or in the near future?

### Step 2: Needs Assessment – Where Could These Volunteers Contribute?

Before engaging required volunteers, clarify what your organization actually needs—not just where people *could* be placed.

Consider both:

- Existing gaps (roles that are understaffed or under-resourced)
- New opportunities (roles designed for short-term, task-based, or skill-building contributions)

#### Reflection

What roles or functions need support?

What new or redesigned roles could align with this population?

- We are primarily adapting existing roles
- We are open to designing new roles intentionally

### Step 3: Asset Mapping – What Do You Already Have?

Engaging required volunteers is easier—and more effective—when you build from existing assets.

#### Partnerships

Existing

Potential

#### Community Infrastructure

- Volunteer clearinghouse or referral system exists
- Partner agencies help place volunteers
- Limited infrastructure currently

#### Internal Readiness

Supportive staff/teams

Hesitations/concerns

#### Potential Recruitment Pool

Who might already be connected to your organization?

### Step 4: Key Considerations – Ethics, Risk, and Capacity

#### Ethics

- Required service should still be meaningful and respectful
- Roles provide value to both the organization and the individual
- Volunteers are treated with dignity and inclusion

Notes

#### Risk Management

Apply the same rigor as with any volunteer role.

- Screening practices are defined
- Supervision is clear and consistent
- Hours and participation are tracked appropriately

(Align with standards from the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration)

Gaps

### Clientele as Volunteers

Some organizations consider engaging program participants as volunteers.

- Not applicable
- Potential benefits outweigh risks
- Requires further exploration

Notes

### Capacity Check

Space

- Adequate  Limited  None

Staffing

- Adequate  Stretched  Insufficient

Technology

- Adequate  Needs improvement  Insufficient

Biggest Constraint

### Step 5: Policy & Practice Alignment

Strong infrastructure supports consistency and reduces risk.

Do you have clear policies for:

- Screening
- Training
- Placement
- Supervision
- Staff communication

Priority gaps to address

### Step 6: Pilot Before You Scale

Rather than launching broadly, start with a defined pilot.

Pilot Design

Timeframe

Target population

Roles included

How will you measure success?

- Volunteer experience
- Staff satisfaction
- Program outcomes

### Step 7: Final Decision Reflection

Before moving forward, pause and assess:

**Are we ready to engage required volunteers well—not just quickly?**

- Yes
- Not yet
- Unsure

**What must be true before we proceed?**

Engaging required volunteers is not simply about compliance or capacity—it is about **intentional experience design**.

The goal is not just to host volunteers, but to create opportunities that:

- Work for your organization
- Respect the individuals serving
- Contribute meaningfully to your mission

**Part II: Making the Case: A Practical Guide for Conversations with Leadership and Staff**

**Purpose**

You've assessed readiness and made a decision.  
Now your role is to communicate that decision clearly, credibly, and strategically.  
Use this guide to prepare for conversations with leadership and staff.

**1. Core Message (Start Here)**

In 1–2 sentences, what are you recommending—and what do you want leadership to decide or support?

**2. Supporting Message Points**

Use 2–3 concise points to reinforce your recommendation.

Why This Matters Now  
(What's driving urgency or relevance?)

Strategic Alignment  
(How this supports mission, priorities, or community needs)

What This Will Require  
(High-level—not every detail)

What Success Will Look Like  
(Especially if piloting)

### 3. Anticipate Questions & Resistance

Strong communication includes preparing for pushback.

Likely Concerns (e.g., capacity, risk, staff impact, quality)

Your Response

(How will you address those concerns?)

### 4. Guide the Conversation

Use these questions to engage leadership in decision-making:

- What level of risk are we comfortable taking?
- What outcomes would make this worthwhile?
- What resources are we willing to invest to do this well?
- What would success look like in 6–12 months?
- What would make us pause, adjust, or stop?

Notes

### 5. Final Reflection

Before you present:

- Is my message clear and specific?
- Am I naming both opportunity *and* reality?
- Am I inviting a decision—or just sharing information?

### Closing Thought

Effective volunteer engagement isn't just about designing programs—it's about leading conversations that shape decisions.

Required volunteers are not a single group. Understanding who you are working with shapes expectations.