



Volunteer Toronto

Advanced

Short-Term Volunteers

Resource Guide & Workbook

Compiled by Engaging Organizations Department

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Using this Resource Guide & Workbook

The Short-Term Volunteers resource guide & workbook has been compiled by Volunteer Toronto to help community groups, non-profits and charitable organizations with the basic tools to effectively engage short-term event and seasonal volunteers. Each resource has been selected to give you an idea of the straightforward needs of each step of the process. It is important to remember that these are guidelines informed by best practices; you can adapt them to your situation as needed.

Using this Resource Guide & Workbook

“Short-term volunteers” could have different meanings based on your organization and your work. In most cases, short-term volunteers are those with a set end date to their commitment, usually no more than a few months. They often revolve around a specific timeframe (season or academic year, for instance), or a time-limited event or festival.

This workbook will go in depth into planning and preparing for short-term volunteer roles. From trends to challenges and training to transitions, there is a lot to be aware of if you are creating new short-term roles or updating and refreshing the roles you have. This workbook also includes greater detail about seasonal and event volunteering. Here are the contents of the workbook:

- What are Short-Term Volunteers? *Page 2*
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Short-Term Volunteers

Volunteers with a short-term commitment are often involved in some kind of time-limited project or program. These range in type, length and format, such as:

- **One-day events** – community events, arts and culture days, fundraisers/foundation events, elections
- **Multi-day events** – festivals, sporting events, campaigns
- **Disaster response** – “immediate need” volunteers, short-term capacity increase
- **Seasonal** – sports seasons, academic year, summer, march break
- **Project-Based** – time-limited programs, grant projects, pilots, one-off projects

In all cases of short-term volunteering, the work of volunteers is “episodic” in nature – they may only be available for a single instance, or can contribute in short-term availability from time to time. Episodic volunteers look for opportunities that appeal to their time availability and either a cause-based or skills-based intention. For more information about cause-based and skills-based recruiting, check out our workbook on [Volunteer Recruitment](#).

Cause-based short-term volunteering

Examples: annual fundraising run/walk, packing first aid kits for disaster relief, cleaning up a community park, raising the profile of arts through an annual festival

Volunteer characteristics: volunteers support the cause because it resonates with them, can be an opportunity for volunteers to learn more about the organization, may see opportunity as “quick and easy” way to impact specific community (even if this is not the case), attracted to the opportunity based on prestige or community status, generally expect a well-planned and managed event/opportunity

Volunteer management considerations: significant pre-planning of event/opportunity and all necessary tasks & roles, extra volunteer supervisors (staff or volunteers) to share coordination and support for volunteers, delegation skills to ensure all volunteers’ needs are met, cause or impact-related recognition/appreciation for volunteers

Skills-based short-term volunteering

Examples: athletes leading youth sports league, professionals offering skills towards festival planning and implementation, high-skilled volunteers supporting pilot projects

Volunteer characteristics: looking for high-impact, time-limited projects that utilize their skills, may suggest their own role in a project/event, looking to be treated as equal to staff, often looking for a role to maximize impact in the broader project/event opportunity, might be a “one-time thing” for some volunteers

Volunteer management considerations: targeted recruiting for skills-based short-term volunteers, flexibility and expectations of changing priorities and availability for these volunteers, providing recognition/appreciation that highlights the impact of the volunteers’ work relative to the skill contributed

Rehnborg, Sarah Jane & Moore, Meg (2012) Maximizing Volunteer Engagement. In Tracy Daniel Connors (Ed.), *Volunteer Management Handbook* (pp. 105-111). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons

General volunteer management considerations

Screen every volunteer – even if the volunteer is short-term and may be contributing 6 hours on only one day, you must always find a way to screen your volunteers to make sure it's a good fit – get help from existing or program volunteers to conduct phone interviews or better review applications

Example: If your program runs during the school year, don't wait until Labour Day weekend to get applications; you could close your applications a few weeks before school starts to properly review resumes, interview/screen candidates and ensure all volunteers have the appropriate paperwork in order to get started – for programs that run throughout the school year, it might make sense to have the entire recruitment, selection, orientation and training process happen during the summer

Train every volunteer – while not every volunteer will be available for an in-person orientation, have all materials available to every volunteer through a handbook or website; you need to make sure your volunteers know and follow your basic rules and procedures and know enough about your organization and who they serve to be a good ambassador

Example: Run multiple orientation events if possible, or consider a pre-recorded online orientation for volunteers to view (including a quiz to make sure they watched the whole thing!) to get everyone up to speed quickly and easily

Supervise every volunteer – if your event or activity has more than a handful of volunteers, it could be very difficult to provide supervision for all of them; make sure you have senior volunteers, staff, board members and/or others you can rely on to supervise and oversee volunteer operations

Example: In large single day events, returning volunteers are often given leadership or oversight roles to supervise new and other volunteers – make sure ahead of time you have enough potential leadership volunteers for this capacity!

Understanding time frames & limits

This workbook will explore specific time frames and types of short-term volunteers in more detail, but be aware of a couple important notes:

- Just because a volunteer is only committed for a few days, it doesn't mean they can work 12 hour shifts back to back
- Volunteers need a break whether in a short-term or longer-term commitment, spread out shifts to ensure they can adequately rest and, in the case of some festivals and sport events, give them an opportunity to be a spectator and community member as well
- Time frames for short-term volunteering can be anywhere from 1 day to 1 year, as long as you set the parameters ahead of time (for project length, for instance), so that volunteers can know what they're getting into

Challenges & Realities

The feedback we receive from volunteer managers throughout Toronto points out a few challenges and realities for managing short-term volunteers. Take a look at the chart below and add in the ways you might be able to deal with each challenge for your event, activity or opportunity.

Challenge	Potential Solution
It's easier to recruit volunteers for short-term events, but often they don't really understand the realities of the role	
We have dozens/hundreds/thousands of volunteer candidates, so there's no way to properly review applications, interview and screen candidates	
We have dozens/hundreds/thousands of volunteers – and some are starting at different times – so we can't run a single orientation or on-boarding training event	
All of the volunteers are looking for a reference letter or acknowledgement, but some only worked a 4 hour shift	
We have so many volunteers at different times, there's no way to possibly recognize and show our appreciation for them all	
Since our event/activity/opportunity is so time-limited, there's no way to keep volunteers engaged and returning shift-after-shift	
Our volunteers keep dropping out mid-shift and mid-event, there's no way to replace them so we're stuck expanding shifts or sending staff to replace them	

Tips for Training Short-Term Volunteers

For your short-term event, activity or opportunity, you may have a very large number of volunteers – it's integral that all of your volunteers receive training of some kind so that they can:

1. Know how to do their role properly
2. Know more about your organization to ensure it is a good fit
3. Know about emergency protocol, rules, policies & procedures

Since you may not have as much time to work with or the ability to bring in all of your volunteers for a face-to-face orientation, make sure you focus on the essentials for the volunteer. You can start planning this with the three items above and with thinking about answers to some questions: what will the volunteer do? How will the volunteer support your work and make an impact? What will your volunteer say if asked about your organization? What will your volunteer do in the case of an emergency? Who does your volunteer report to?

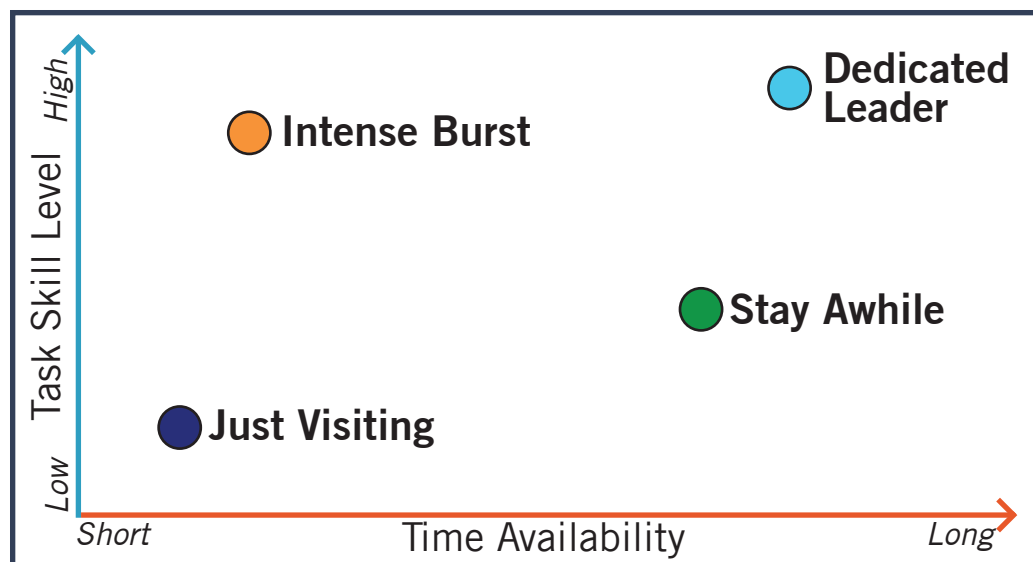
This will make it easier to plan and frame the orientation and training for these volunteers. There are a few methods you can use, including live or pre-recorded online webinars, “drop-in” rotating orientation, a volunteer handbook, or even day-of-event orientation at the start of your activity. No matter which method you use, you should **prioritize the mission** and talk about the **value and impact** of the project the volunteers are a part of.

Using this chart, think about the necessary topics and elements of orientation and training that should be included for all of your short-term volunteers, and the method you'll use to cover each area.

Topic	Method
Learning about the event/activity	
Learning about the organization	
Meeting supervisors/understanding reporting structure	
Understanding boundaries & rules	
Getting to know event facility/space	

Short-Term Volunteering Trends

Your volunteers may come to your organization with many different reasons and motivations to volunteer. Take a look at the matrix below and see where your short-term and episodic volunteers fit:



Just Visiting

Your volunteers may have an external motivation (such as reaching 40 hours or working toward a designation) and often have a lower time availability due to being busy or having a changing lifestyle (professionals & students). In a lot of cases, while they may have a high level of skill and knowledge in some areas, because of their limited availability and likely shorter time-commitment, the skill use in the activity or event may be lower. You might plot a “Just Visiting” volunteer with high skill level and knowledge but still low time commitment as well – those would likely be “Intense Burst” volunteers.

Intense Burst

As with “Just Visiting” volunteers, these volunteers may not have a lot of time to offer, but they may come with a wealth of knowledge, ability, skills, and/or desire to help out and be a leader with your organization for a program, task, event or activity. Some “Intense Burst” volunteers may assist with training, or work with your organization for part of an event or activity to pass on their knowledge or lead a certain portion or task. While they may have limited time, they can offer a lot to your organization.

Stay Awhile

These volunteers may be able to commit longer and put in more time, but still may not have a lot of skills or knowledge specific to the task, activity or your organization. These tend to be more committed roles that can see a project through to completion or stay within a seasonal timeframe. You can invest in training “Stay Awhile” volunteers so that they can improve and grow, especially developing their skills moreso. This is likely the most common short-term volunteer, as they often return to your organization to continue their engagement and skills development.

Dedicated Leader

These volunteers are high-skilled and can commit longer to projects. Often, they will participate in committees, sit on Boards or manage projects on their own. As leaders, they can pass on their knowledge and expertise to new volunteers while ensuring that projects and programs continue to be successful. As with “Stay Awhile” volunteers, your “Dedicated Leaders” are likely to return to your organization for high-level, high-skills involvement in short-term projects and programs.

So where do your volunteers fit? Remember that, for this matrix, the skill level is related to the task, event or activity and not necessarily the volunteers' other skills and knowledge. Plot your volunteers, or the volunteers you often get for your short-term activities, and answer these questions:

- Am I making the best use of the skills my volunteers have to offer?
- Am I offering roles to volunteers that have more time availability?
- Are there roles and tasks that can be maximized by “Just Visiting” volunteer types?

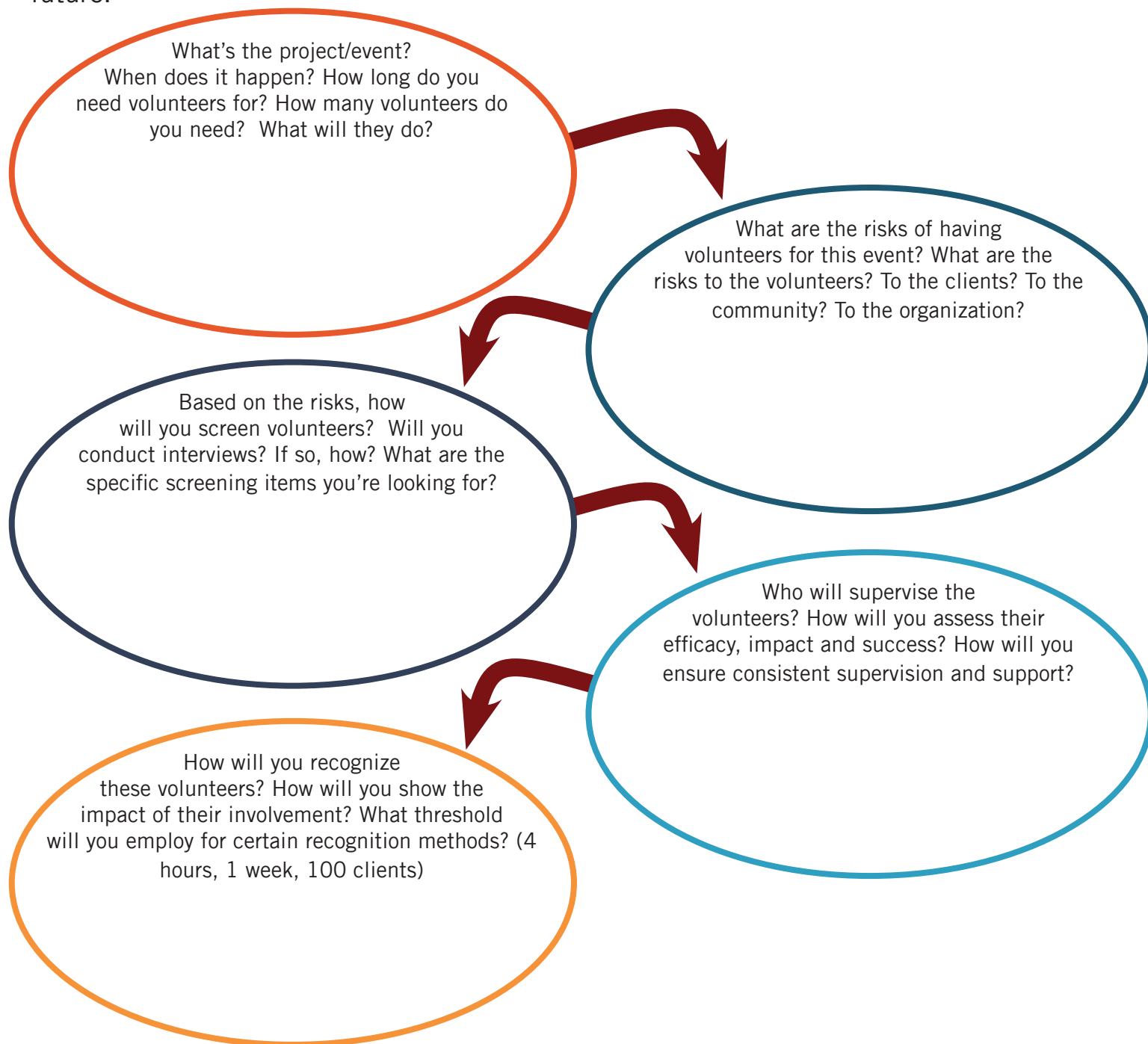
If the plot points of your volunteers are pretty far away from any of the three examples, then you may have a unique short-term volunteer experience to take advantage of – try to examine what part of your program, activity or event(s) attracts high-skilled volunteers for longer time commitments or more of one type of volunteer over another.

As short-term volunteering has grown in popularity and functionality in recent years, there have been a number of significant trends affecting non-profit organizations throughout Toronto. Take a look at the list of trends below and consider how you would prepare your existing events, tasks and activities to prepare for growing short-term volunteer involvement.

Short-Term Volunteering Trend	How would you prepare?
Volunteers looking for hours or days only	
Project-focused mentality with high-impact outcomes	
Self-focused volunteers (“what’s in it for me”)	
Looking for small, personal acts that make a big difference	
Multiple other engagements (with yours and other organizations)	
Rotating leadership of projects and events	

Planning Short Term Volunteer Roles

You can use this process worksheet to help you plan the process of recruiting, screening, preparing and supervising your short-term volunteers. Even if you already work with short-term volunteers, or have a recurring event or activity, this can help you rethink aspects of your short-term volunteering program to be better prepared for these volunteers in the future.



Seasonal Volunteers

Seasonal volunteers are short-term volunteers with a limited commitment that could be as short as a few days or as long as a few months, depending on the timeframe. Even with such a long commitment, these would still be considered short-term volunteers as they are often volunteering within a specific seasonal timeframe. These include:

- School Year – September-June for K-12, September-April for Post-Secondary
- School Year Breaks – Winter Break, March Break, Reading Weeks, Summer Break
- Season-Dependent – Winter, Spring, Fall & Summer programs and sessions
- Sports Seasons – multi-week leagues, year-long programs, championships

Use this chart to better understand each type of seasonal volunteer and where that might fit into your program. We've filled in the first row and a few examples to get you started:

Seasonal Volunteer Type	Volunteer Audience	Motivations	Example Roles
School year	Students, teacher candidates, parents	Helping youth in schools, improving capacity of schools	Tutoring, after school programs, extra-curriculars, breakfast programs
School year breaks			Camps, recreation programs, trips, sports clinics
Season-Dependent			
Sports Seasons		Improving skills and keeping people active	

Here are a few best practices in engaging seasonal volunteers:

- Volunteers can't sign contracts, so make sure you have a way for volunteers to commit to your organization for the time frame expected in the program or activity – remember that volunteers can still end their engagement early, but you are welcome to include completion “perks” such as a reference letter
- Some seasonal volunteers may have chosen your organization because of the time availability, perhaps over the cause or skills recruiting – make sure the role is a good fit for the volunteer when they are in the screening process to ensure a good match for your program
- Planning recurring programs around a seasonal timeframe could help you recruit more volunteers to see a project through to completion as it follows their availability (such as summer break programs while students are available, or more virtual volunteering during poor weather months in winter)
- Don't rely on the same kinds of volunteers being available for each season role – for example, you may often have volunteers to run your sports programs while their children are in the program, but may not be interested once their children have moved on from the program

SPORTS VOLUNTEERING

Sports volunteers make up a significant number of volunteers, nearly 20% of Canadian volunteers in recent surveys. Motivations are similar to most volunteers – to help or offer assistance. Volunteers helping with leagues and sport seasons, sometimes their children are involved or they have specific sport-related skills to pass on or develop. Sports volunteering is a focus area as it can connect older and younger individuals with a passion for the same sport or sports together. Be mindful of motivations and interests for sports volunteers, as well as their availability due to volunteers' own activities, jobs or other use of time.



Seasonal Volunteers - Case Studies

FitSpirit

About: FitSpirit encourages young women in high schools to become more active. The organization recruits teachers to run the program September to May with regional 5k and 10k runs in May. Apart from the teachers from 70 schools, more than 100 volunteers are required for race day events.

Recruitment	Recruitment of teachers is conducted through registered schools, while event volunteers are recruited primarily through for-profit organizations that support FitSpirit and the 60% returning volunteer rate (as well as referrals from returning volunteers).
Screening	The screening process is informal - teachers already have their own processes for working with students and event volunteers are never alone with participating youth so there are no vulnerable sector concerns. In the interview, volunteers are asked why they care about fitness for girls, how the opportunity is a good fit for them, and what they'd bring to the organization and meeting its mission.
Training	Teachers get orientation from FitSpirit for running their group. Some event volunteers serve as "Leads" and receive a Skype orientation before the event. They then train other event volunteers on the day of the race.
Recognition	All volunteers receive t-shirts for their involvement, as well as a sense of supporting the community and working toward a goal. FitSpirits touts the benefits of being involved in something volunteers believe in and practice in their own lives.

Seasonal Volunteers - Case Studies

Malvern Family Resource Centre

About: Malvern Family Resource Centre (MFRC) runs many programs for all ages. Their Multi-Sport Recreation program runs seasonally (December-January, January-April, etc.) for ages 13-19. Volunteers help run sports including basketball, soccer and volleyball.

Recruitment	Volunteers recruited through Volunteer Toronto website, Charity Village, and at post-secondary campuses. Word of mouth is the most effective method, utilizing volunteer and colleague networks. MFRC also considers corporate volunteer portals.
Screening	Pre-orientation/information sessions are held twice monthly and one Saturday per quarter. Prospective volunteers call to register for information session. At session, review policies and procedures and showcase open volunteer opportunities. Candidates sign-up for a one-on-one interview and MFRC determine skills & interests to assign best fit.
Training	Pre-orientation/information session helps provide initial orientation requirements. After selection, volunteers receive specific role training as needed.
Recognition	Numerous opportunities for leadership and gaining experience. Annual appreciation dinner during National Volunteer Week. Departments nominate a volunteer each for special recognition. Volunteers assigned to the best fitting roles tend to excel - volunteer more, seek new responsibilities, further develop skills & interests.

Seasonal Volunteers - Timeline Planning

Planning your timelines for volunteer involvement with short-term volunteers, even if their engagement will be longer than a month, requires a lot of thinking ahead. Use this template to help you determine how much time you'll need to get volunteers for your upcoming camp program, sports league or other seasonal volunteer program.

Planning Starts!

Plan/Update Volunteer Roles

1

3 months before program

Create Position Descriptions & Promote Roles

2

2 months before program

Screen Volunteer Candidates

3

1 month before program

Train & Orient New Volunteers

4

1 week before program

Program Starts!

Support & Supervise Volunteers

5

A few sessions into program

Check In on Progress

6

Midway through program

Recognize & Appreciate
Volunteers

7

Anytime!

Assess Outcomes & Impact

8

At/near end of program

Events, Festivals & Emergency Response

When looking at shorter time-frames for volunteer needs, you'll likely need short-term volunteers for anywhere from a couple of hours to longer shifts over a few days. These are the most episodic kinds of volunteer involvement, and volunteers may return for the same event or activity every time it takes place, or you may need to recruit many volunteers for each iteration. These volunteer opportunities can be grouped into three main categories:

- One-Day Event – gala, production/show, sports game, single-day festival
- Multi-Day Event – arts/culture festival, community fair/festival, multi-sports games, conference
- Emergency Response – local disaster response & aid provision, foreign disaster response & aid provision

Here are a few best practices in engaging single-day, multi-day and emergency response volunteers:

- Make your screening requirements very clear; some volunteers may be surprised that a certain level of screening is required for a shorter role, so if they know ahead of time they won't be caught off guard
- Shift scheduling can be the biggest challenge for any event or activity requiring multiple volunteers – no matter how short or long the event is, make sure you build adequate breaks in shifts; don't have a volunteer finish a 10-hour shift at 10pm and be expected the next morning at 6am for another 10-hour shift if you can avoid it
- Take note of your volunteer leaders and provide extra training if possible to prepare them to move into leadership and supervisory roles where needed – you never know the gaps in supervision and support you may need filled in the middle of your event or activity
- Shorter the time-frames and greater numbers of clients and community members involved can create increased tension and stress – find ways to de-stress during the activity and enlist volunteers to help mitigate and manage stressful situations to avoid potentially damaging interactions with volunteers and community members

ARTS & CULTURE VOLUNTEERING

In 2013, 6% of all Canadian volunteers were arts & culture volunteers – more than 760,000 volunteers, which is more than double the number of volunteers in arts & culture in 2000. Many arts & culture organizations rely on events and festivals for the majority of their work bringing the arts to Canadians, and a large number of short-term volunteer roles support these activities. While 6% may seem like a small number, in Toronto the impact is significant as a large number of Torontonians support the large arts, media and culture festivals every year in the city.

There are a number of different unique needs depending on the type of activity and associated volunteer. This chart provides more information about the varying volunteer issues you may face with these events and functions:

	One-Day Event	Multi-Day Event	Emergency Response
Examples	Street festival, fundraising run, gala production, community league game	Arts festival, thought leadership conference, community fair, regional games	Blackout/ice storm response, aid for embattled nations, natural disaster relief
Planning roles	Shift for full day or part of day; when to provide orientation; supervision structure & number of volunteers	How many shifts and how long; assessing skill level and matching roles; ensuring adequate breaks/rest and food	Jumping into action at any time; having back-up plans in case of different eventualities; ready for sudden influx of help
Recruitment	How much time to spend on recruiting; where to promote based on event topic or activities	Longer-term recruitment process; acknowledging shift needs ahead of time; seeking leadership roles	Ongoing recruitment for “reserve” need; having recruitment infrastructure for sudden influx
Screening	Effectively screening large group in short time; how much is needed based on needs of role and scale of event	Ensuring a good match for whole event/festival; interviewing or connecting with multiple volunteers in short time	Matching skills and abilities quickly to meet disaster relief or emergency response needs
Recognition			
Supervision			

Events & Festivals - Case Studies

Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF)

About: TIFF is a charitable organization dedicated to the celebration of film through various programs, but whose primary focus (and volunteer need) is the annual 10-day film festival each September. TIFF requires 3200 volunteers for the annual festival, usually getting around 1600 returning and needing to recruit 1600 new volunteers.

Recruitment	Recruitment begins in May and all roles are filled by the end of July. They target similar organizations (other film and culture festivals) as well as newcomers, seniors and students. To volunteer for TIFF's other year-round programs, volunteers must first participate in the festival.
Screening	TIFF employs an online application process that asks for candidate information and a resume. Applications are reviewed by the system and interviews will only take place for new potential volunteers, while returning volunteers (from year-round or the previous festival) will not be interviewed.
Training	For the festival, about 30 training sessions are held for a variety of roles, and only certain roles have mandatory training. Training materials are sent out to all volunteers and have featured videos in the past.
Recognition	Volunteers receive vouchers for film screenings during the festival and at TIFF's Lightbox facility after the festival. Some films have special preview screenings just for volunteers before the festival. Excellent volunteers will receive a special thank you letter, and all volunteers are invited to the annual closing party.

Events & Festivals - Case Studies

YWCA Toronto

About: YWCA is a charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of girls and women across the city through a variety of programs and services. Their annual Women of Distinction Dinner is an event that always requires the help of many volunteers.

Recruitment	YWCA looks to its volunteer database and contacts past volunteers from this event first, then other volunteers, then externally through Volunteer Toronto and Charity Village. They also keep an ongoing volunteer interest form on their website. The Women of Distinction Dinner sees about a 50% return rate of volunteers.
Screening	Due to the low risk of single-day event and volunteer roles, very little screening is required. A small group of returning volunteers handle cash transactions while others have little to no risk in their role. YWCA's longer-term volunteers are screened by the specific program staff managing them.
Training	Orientation is held at the YWCA office with a presentation and information package sent ahead of time to all volunteers. The training covers AODA requirements and position descriptions, then volunteers break off into teams by role to meet with their team captains and cover specific duties for the event.
Recognition	For the Women of Distinction Dinner, all volunteers are given dinner and receive leftover participant gift bags. Occasionally, some volunteers can sit and observe the festivities. The awards portion is recorded for volunteers to watch afterward. All volunteers receive a survey after the event to ask for suggestions on improvements.

Short-Term Events - Planning Worksheet

You may have one feature event per year, or run multiple single-day/multi-day activities throughout the year. Being prepared for each event requires you to plan ahead and anticipate your needs. Copy this chart to make it easy to plan ahead for every event, no matter the lengths and volunteer needs. Your recruitment, screening and training needs may be different every time, so be prepared!

Name of event	
Style of event	
Date(s) & length	
# of Volunteers	
Start recruiting by	

Recruitment process	
Application process	
Screening process	
Training process	
Recognition	
Follow-up	

Volunteer Transitions

While this workbook has focused on short-term volunteers, how to maximize their engagement and exploring ways to improve your short-term volunteer engagements, you should also consider ways to nurture those volunteers who would like to explore a longer-term or ongoing commitment with your organization. Fostering volunteer transitions requires you to have potential pathways for growth for your volunteers and encourage them to expand their engagement with your organization.

Best practices for encouraging short-term to long-term transitions:

1. Develop a quality volunteer experience
 - Meeting and exceeding volunteer's expectations throughout short engagement
 - Provide appropriate supervision, support and recognition
 - Give volunteers respect & provide meaningful work
2. Creating the "buy in" for continued engagement
 - Communicate the impact of the volunteer's engagement and how it has improved the community
 - "Impact + value of contribution = passion + connection to community"
 - Short-term volunteers can learn about the value of a longer-term commitment and its impact on the community
 - Their short-term engagement could come from altruistic reasons while their greater commitment becomes an intrinsic (personal value) motivation
3. Providing organizational support
 - Showcase the ongoing impact of programs, activities and events in training & orientation
 - Ensure volunteers and teams are well supervised and supported
 - Match short-term volunteers with some ongoing/long-term volunteers to allow for communication and asking questions
 - Follow-up with volunteers on their experience
4. Ensuring the volunteer 'gets more than they give'
 - Nurturing their intrinsic and personal motivations
 - Allows volunteers to see their own growth and contribution to the "big picture"
 - Ensure recognition of volunteers is meaningful, appropriate and personalized when possible
 - Showcase results of program evaluations and outcomes of their short-term engagements (impact of event or activity) so they can see where the "ends" of their volunteering goes

Volunteer Toronto

Short-Term Volunteers Resource Guide & Workbook

Next Steps

To continue your volunteer management journey, there are a number of other workbooks created by Volunteer Toronto to assist you every step of the way:

Basic

- Planning, Recruiting & Selecting
- Training, Supervising & Supporting
- Evaluating, Retaining & Developing
- Engaging Group Volunteers
- Professional Development for Managers of Volunteers

Intermediate

- Planning for Volunteer Involvement
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteer Selection
- Training & Orientation
- Volunteer Retention & Recognition

Advanced

- Accessibility and the AODA
- Giving Volunteers Feedback

Check out our **Online Learning Centre** for a variety of courses to further enhance your learning and improve your practice - go to volunteertoronto.ca/?page=OnlineLearning

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