5 Ways to Energize & Promote Volunteer Team Productivity by VolunteerPro

Whether you're working with a volunteer-led advisory group, a task force, an event planning committee, or a governing board, it's important that you ensure that volunteer teams are set for success.

Investing in team capacity building now can help you not only offer opportunities to new leaders but also sustain the growth of your leadership over the long run. Team results create a self-perpetuating cycle — the more successful volunteer teams are, the more likely they will want to help out next time. And, each time volunteers are involved in teams, the better they get at it.

5 Volunteer Team Productivity Accelerators

In her book, Smart Tribes: How Teams Become Brilliant Together, leadership expert Christine Comaford outlines five key elements that help build trust and propel teams toward success. These approaches can also help your volunteer teams succeed and work more independently.

1. **Maintain Focus**
    Encourage everyone to be fully present during their designated time together. Ask questions versus making statements to foster mindfulness. Set up regular rituals that kick off the meeting and help the team transition to the business at hand.

    Eliminate distractions by setting ground rules (e.g. no checking smart phones during meeting) and encourage candid conversations about what's really happening, without wishful thinking.
    Finally, help the team hone in on the most important work by offering a method for prioritizing tasks.

2. **Reinforce Clarity in Communications**
    Encourage teams to be as clear as possible in both their communications and their intentions. One way to create a safe space for candid discussions is to set up ground rules and by "walking the talk" as a leader. Practice compassionate, transparent dialog and don't shy away from problems when they arise.

    Share a compelling vision and co-produce a plan with the team. Answer the questions — where are we now? Where are we headed? How will we get there? Describe the ultimate goal and allow volunteers to create the roadmap and choose the route.

3. **Set-Up Accountability Systems**
    In addition to sharing a vision, be sure to clearly define and communicate the expectations for the team. What does success look like? What specific "deliverables" will be produced by the team? These might be improved processes, digital assets, a report, or any end product or result the team will generate. If there is a specific outcome goal, offer it as a range (e.g., increase customer satisfaction scores by 20%, at minimum by 10%, 30% would be a stellar achievement).

    Make sure volunteer teams have agreed using a project charter or "owners' agreement" that everyone signs. Research shows that signing a document has real impacts on future behaviour

    Finally, set up a regular reporting schedule and conduct "pulse checks" to stay informed on progress and concerns. These meetings don't have to be long and drawn out — you can conduct them quickly, even while standing up.

4. **Increase Your Influence through Rapport**
    Build rapport with the team by mirroring the positive behaviours they demonstrate. This shows that you are cued in and understand the team's culture and dynamics.

    Also, be ready to step outside your comfort zone. Judiciously increase your self-disclosure and don't be afraid to admit mistakes or failures, current or past. This makes you appear more approachable and will lead to greater trust and influence.

5.   **Set Everyone Up to Generate Sustainable Results**

Make sure your requests of volunteer teams are realistic, given their current expressed level of commitment. You can no longer ethically self-sacrifice or ask volunteers to follow suit. Burnout is real and should be prevented.

Also, ask volunteers to commit to only one project at a time, rather than overburdening the most productive people with too many tasks. Encourage volunteers to take smart breaks to bond, rest the brain, and refocus energy.

Also, help volunteer teams become more efficient by providing templates for all project-related documents and suggest other time-saving tools and processes that might help.

Many hands make light work, and multi-talented volunteers, working in collaboration, are simply unstoppable. If you've suffered from lacklustre results from volunteer teams, take a step back and assess whether or not you've set the table for success. If not, try some of the recommendations above and watch your projects gain momentum and soar.

Resource: VolunteerPro https://volpro.net/volunteer-management-training/