

Resource Guide: Engaging Seniors and Older Adults as Volunteers

Ideas for Improvement

(Re-)Engaging Senior Volunteers

Senior and older adult volunteers are an important part of any volunteer program. The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges and barriers to engaging older volunteers, while also informing new opportunities for involvement. The tips in this resource come from current and former senior volunteers along with volunteer managers across the sector working with a range of volunteers.

Note: “Senior volunteers” refer to older individuals who volunteer with your organization. The definition of “senior volunteers” varies, and could include retirees or people who are 55+.

Seniors Getting Involved

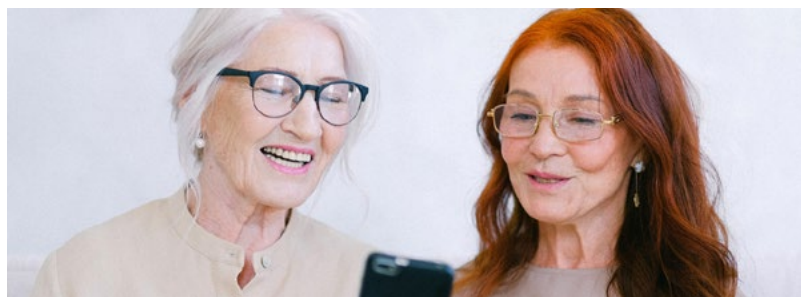
Even as organizations have begun to offer more in-person roles, seniors increasingly are considering both virtual and in-person opportunities to engage. They want to be involved, challenged and learn new things, and are willing to adapt to new approaches with the right training to support them. Many seniors are looking for a social element, so in-person gatherings are an attractive recruitment tool. Get a sense of what motivates seniors to volunteer and plan your engagement accordingly.

Motivating Factors

Today’s senior and older adult volunteers are motivated by a variety of factors, including: opportunities to help others and make a difference, feeling appreciated and useful, achieving self-satisfaction, volunteering in a welcoming and friendly environment, and/or sharing knowledge or learning.

Shifting Priorities

These volunteers may also have concerns preventing them from getting involved, including: new demands on time like caregiving or travel, changes to health that impact their feeling of safety in a role, a lack of communication from organization about new roles or restarted programs, and/or finding compatible roles.



Plan for a variety of roles that utilize different skills, allow for autonomy, offer shorter shifts and are close to where seniors live



Improve processes like simple applications, frequent training sessions/refreshers, and clear and consistent communication



Create opportunities to connect through virtual workshops, in-person events and a focus on roles that make an impact



Create a safe environment that is scent-free and takes COVID-19 safety seriously for both volunteers and staff



Respect the time and effort volunteers offer, inform them of organizational changes and encourage friendly interactions



Make recognition personal and conveyed with intention, offer travel reimbursement, and include senior staff in recognition

Opportunities

With many senior and older adult volunteers eager to continue volunteering, it's important to remember the different realities of this audience. Here are some opportunities to reach out and engage older volunteers:

- ▶ Remember the background knowledge and potential capacity seniors can offer, while being mindful of potential limitations (time, location, access)
- ▶ Be flexible with roles, as volunteers may miss shifts for appointments or other demands; make it easy to take time off when needed
- ▶ Provide regular updates to your community about volunteer role availability, changes and health and safety
- ▶ Be thoughtful when changing roles to be more technology-based or virtual; ask your volunteers what they think and provide space for people to learn
- ▶ Learn about what recognition seniors prefer (some may enjoy virtual, while others prefer in-person); and stay in regular contact with your volunteers
- ▶ Manage (and clarify) expectations of seniors who want to volunteer and provide many ways for them to give you feedback and seek support



What's Next?

Consider the tips in this resource guide to carefully expand opportunities to senior and older adult volunteers. Remember to provide support and patience, consistent communication and clear benefits and you'll be on your way to successful senior volunteer engagement! Check out the extra resources below for more:

- ▶ [Planning for Engagement Resource](#)
- ▶ [Short-Term Volunteers Resource Guide](#)
- ▶ [Virtually Onboarding Volunteers Video](#)
- ▶ [Volunteer Canada Resources](#)
- ▶ [Tips from VolunteerHub](#)

Recruitment Tips

- ▶ Promote the social opportunities of volunteering and how seniors can become a part of your community
- ▶ Emphasize in-person training when applicable and share what flexibility is available in the role (such as missing shifts for appointments or seasonal changes to availability)
- ▶ Openly communicate the process for applying and screening, like online interviews and simple application forms (if using)
- ▶ Clarify what is in-person and what isn't in the onboarding and volunteering process, including use of personal protective equipment
- ▶ Consider offering short-term opportunities without long commitments to increase access to volunteering