

So You Want to Bring Your Volunteers Back: Things to Consider

As the vaccine rollout continues, many institutions are beginning to reopen, albeit at a limited capacity. This begs the question of what to do with front-facing volunteers. Some are eager to the point of breaking down the doors, others are more cautious, hanging back and waiting to see how the next few months play out. There are a lot of moving pieces, so we've compiled a list of questions to ask yourself, to help make sure nothing falls through the cracks.

Preliminaries

- Make sure you're communicating with other departments
 - Do they have volunteer opportunities that might be applicable?
 - What are the institutional health and safety regulations you will need to abide by?
- Reassess volunteer roles.
 - Are the old roles still applicable?
 - Some volunteer roles may no longer be possible
 - Some volunteer roles may have been reassigned due to staffing changes
 - What about scheduling?
 - Do you have the staff to provide the necessary supervision?
 - Do you have sufficient visitors to justify that level of volunteer presence?
- Reach out to your volunteers and see how they're feeling.
 - Are they eager to come back?
 - Do they have concerns? If so, what are they? How can you address them?

Health and Safety

- Once you've determined which volunteer roles are still applicable, ask yourself how they fit in with existing health and safety protocols that staff and visitors will be asked to follow.
 - Will they need personal protective equipment(masks, face shields, safety goggles, etc)?
 - Are you providing this equipment? If not, do you have standards that you would like them to adhere to?
 - Where do volunteers enter the site? Will that need to change?
 - Will volunteer posts need to be reconsidered, to account for social distancing concerns?
 - What about breaks?
 - Do you have space where people will be able to sit/eat safely?
 - Will you need to stagger breaks or alter the scheduling in some way to ensure that the breakroom doesn't become overcrowded?

Training

- It's been over a year, in some cases, since the volunteers were able to fill these roles on-site. They may require a refresher on content. The role may have changed-- they may need new training.
 - How are you going to deliver this training? Can it be safely done in person? Can it be done virtually?
 - If you're doing it virtually, how are your volunteers' technical skills? Do they have the necessary equipment?
 - Might volunteers be offended at the implication that they need to be retrained on old content? How can you introduce this to avoid ruffled feathers?
 - Perhaps avoid the phrase "training" and refer to it as a "review" or "refresher" instead.
- Will you need to enact some sort of evaluation before volunteers return onsite?
 - Will such an evaluation be done in person or virtually?
- Are there new exhibitions/galleries?
 - Plan for training of new content and themes.

Who Else Needs to Know?

- Again, make sure that you're communicating with other departments.
 - Do you have a security team? Make sure they know who is coming in and when.
 - Do ID's need to be reactivated?
 - How much lead time will they need to accomplish this before volunteers return?

Keep Your Options Open

It's been a weird year, and things are still in flux. You may accomplish everything on this list and then have circumstances change again! Manage expectations, and acknowledge that we are reacting to changing events as best we can.