



Webinar for VISTA

Now that you've got 'em, what comes next?

Sustaining Volunteer Involvement over Time

To join the audio portion, please dial:

1-888-831-8981

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This session will begin shortly.

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Especially for leaders of volunteers

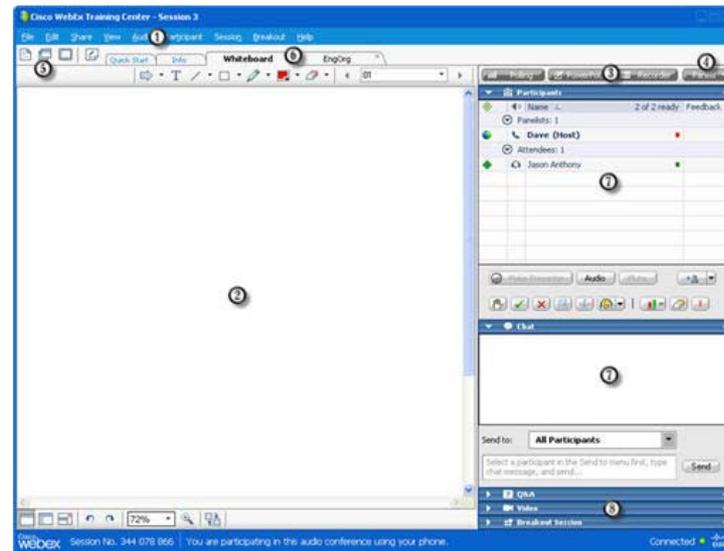
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Tips for Participating

- Submit questions to the presenter at any time using the Q & A feature.
- Share tips, resources, and ideas with other attendees using the Chat feature.
- The phone line will be open later in the presentation for Questions and Answers.



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Webinar for VISTA

Welcome

to

*Now that you've got 'em,
what comes next?*

**Sustaining Volunteer Involvement
over Time**

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Especially for leaders of volunteers

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Today's Team...



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Project Specialist
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Today's Presenter



Susan J. Ellis

President

Energize, Inc.

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of today's webinar, you will be able to:

- Define “retention” of volunteers realistically for *your* program
- Generate feelings of positive connection at every stage of a volunteer's involvement with you
- Create a communication/feedback loop that sustains enthusiasm



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Today's Agenda

1. Defining “retention” of volunteers and its underlying issues ; related trends in volunteering today
2. Building ongoing relationships with volunteers that sustain enthusiasm
3. Maintaining a positive communication loop

Q&A after each section

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Your Perspective

- You are a VISTA member tasked with coordinating/managing volunteers
 - Just a few or many
 - You may or may not have recruited them
 - You may be on your own or part of a larger volunteer involvement strategy
- You may be starting from scratch (brand new volunteer effort) or have inherited a project already underway
- What are you experiencing right now?

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Poll



Go to right-hand
column

Which best describes your situation now?

- No or very few volunteers yet
- Can't find new volunteers who will commit to more than short-term roles
- Volunteers who joined before I arrived are dropping off
- New volunteers I brought on board are not staying around as expected
- Volunteers are generally remaining in place

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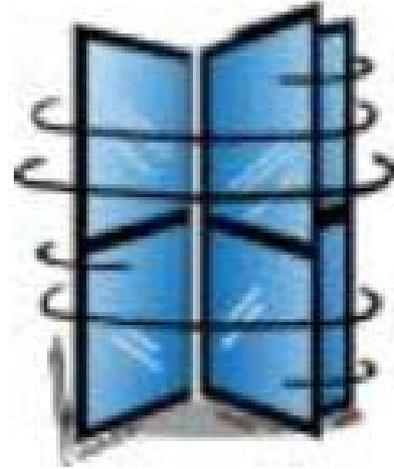
Defining “Retention” and Your Expectations

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Longevity of Current Volunteers

- Do you have a revolving door where you lose volunteers as fast as you recruit new ones?
- Are the volunteers who stay the best or worst?
 - Newest or veterans?
- How do *you* define “retention” for your program?
 - Based on what?



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How Long Should a Volunteer Stay?

- There is no external retention “standard”
- Retention can only be defined *in relation* to the commitment made by each volunteer at the start of service
 - What you need will vary with each volunteer role
 - Turnover is natural – what you want is to limit *unexpected* departures

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Retention Is an *Outcome*, Not a Task

- You can't "do" retention or schedule an hour to "retain" volunteers
- When you look after all the other elements of volunteer management, and volunteers feel good about their participation, the *result* will be ongoing contributions
- Losing a lot of volunteers is an indicator that something operational needs attention
 - The challenge is diagnosing what that is



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In the Chat Box...



Go to right-hand
column

**Please share what you think are the
main reasons why volunteers leave
before their commitment is over
(a few key words)**

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Many Reasons

- Some of the reasons are personal and involve family, paid work, and other outside demands
- Others indicate that there was simply not a good match between the volunteer and the role:
 - Or the role has changed
- Could be things that snowballed over time, leading to frustration, burnout, boredom
- The volunteer may be right in wanting to leave!
- Some things just come to an end

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Trends in Volunteering Everywhere

- Few people make commitments today of any sort
 - Our bad reputation as a bottomless pit of work
- Volunteers do not necessarily want to fill a “job” slot
 - They want a role with a clear beginning, middle and end – and meaningful results
 - Projects rather than shifts
- Popularity of single days of service
 - Even *micro* volunteering



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Be Realistic

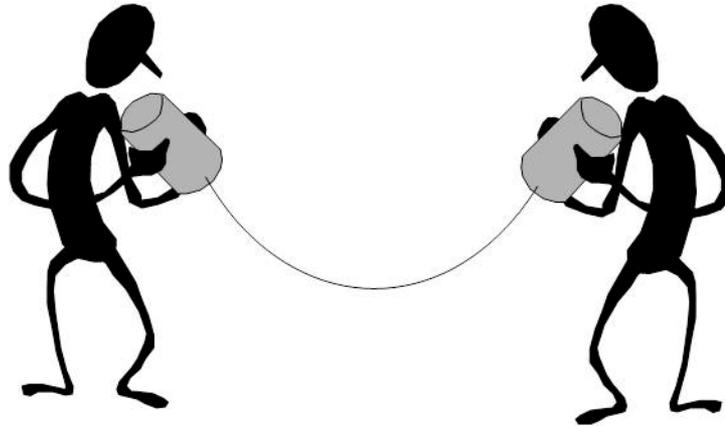


- No matter how good you are, you can't keep everyone forever
- There will always be factors outside your control – “life” happens
- While your project is a priority in your life, for other volunteers it is one of many things they have on their to-do list
- The pace of life and change really is speeding up for everyone and sometimes something has to go

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Q & A



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Building Ongoing Relationships with Volunteers

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The Volunteer Life Cycle

- Examine what a volunteer experiences over time
 - Do a mental walk-through and anticipate highs and lows
 - Where are the milestones?
 - What tools and information will be needed?
 - When is the volunteer alone? Have contact with a supervisor or you?
 - What feedback does s/he get and in what ways?
- When is someone most likely to leave?



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Awareness at All Stages

- Volunteers need attention all through their time with you – from recruitment to leaving
 - You are working on retention from day 1
- Empathy helps: How would *you* feel at each stage of the mental walk-through we just discussed?
- Today volunteers *evolve* their commitment over time, with incremental good experiences



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It Starts at Recruitment

- Assess how you recruit new volunteers
 - Do you offer a range of assignment options?
 - With varying time commitments (not open-ended?)
 - Can you be more flexible?
 - Focus on short-term projects to introduce you to each other
- Tell the truth during recruitment – don't minimize the work or the time needed

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From the Beginning

- Talk about initial and ongoing commitment in the interview, orientation, and training
- Pay attention to how a volunteer is greeted and put to work on day 1
 - Also interact when the day *ends*
 - Many organizations fall down on **day 2**
- Volunteers who drop out early are telling you that the reality of their experience is not what they expected when they signed on



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Supervision

- Whether paid or volunteer, every worker needs someone as a contact point and coach
- Not always a hierarchy, but always a partnership
- The dynamics of this relationship are critical to whether or not a volunteer feels good about her or his role
 - But you cannot assume everyone knows *how* to supervise a volunteer!
- The organization has a right (even an obligation) to monitor all work done for its clients

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What Does the Volunteer Need?

- Information of all sorts, including good instructions
- An advisor and coach
- Equipment and supplies
- Appreciation for the effort and for reaching milestones as well as end goals
- Context and continuity – to see the bigger picture and where s/he fits in it
- An environment that is upbeat, even fun
- Feedback and opportunities to grow



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Your Response Is Key

- Keep aware of how volunteers are feeling, especially if there are challenges
 - Pep talks work!
 - Offer breaks and temporary leaves
 - Consider re-assignment
 - Raise or lower level responsibility
 - Deal with problematic behavior
- Make it possible to leave graciously



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Connection to Retention

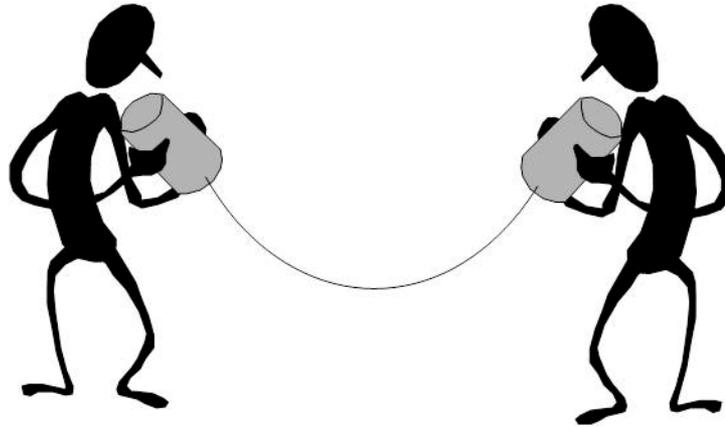
- If volunteers feel connected to an individual they trust, they are less likely to simply “drop off”
 - Make them comfortable in discussing changes in their lives and interests
- You may not personally supervise all volunteers
 - Puts you in the position of liaison and third-party negotiator
 - You can monitor whether there is teamwork or tension



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Q & A



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Maintaining a Positive Communication Loop

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Communication Loops

- The larger your program, the more important communication becomes
- Communication happens all the time and throughout the volunteer life cycle
 - Intentional, implied, accidental messages
- The question is: Are your messages received in the way you intended?
 - Welcome **two-way** communication

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Communications TO or WITH?

- Some things are really not open to discussion
 - Factual information such as rules, laws, facts, instructions
 - News/updates on progress
- But can someone ask a question? Share an idea?
- Pay attention to *tone*
 - Sharing or commanding?
 - Friendly or officious?
 - Implied heirarchy



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Connection to Retention

- No one wants to be left in the dark
 - Especially if a small group of “insiders” seem to know more
- Being told information after decisions are made leaves no opportunity for input
 - Volunteers are more willing to do work that they have helped to plan
- You want to surface possible tension, concerns, or changes while something might still be done about them

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Poll



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column

How do you share information now?

(select as many as apply)

- Regular newsletter or blast e-mail
- Regular group meetings
- Periodic group meetings when needed
- Signs/notices posted at volunteer work sites
- Monthly reports
- One-to-one conversations

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Choose the Right Method

- There are many ways to communicate and you may need to use more than one
- What needs to be shared, but not necessarily discussed
 - Provide correct information promptly
 - Try to reach as many volunteers as possible
 - Offer to answer questions or clarify
- If there is room for input
 - Be clear on how to give it
 - Then report on how the input was considered



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Why?

- The whole point is to allow volunteers to feel part of the process and welcome to participate



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Require Individual Reports

- Not asking what a volunteer is doing sends the message that it doesn't matter
- Create a short, standard form and make it easy to submit (can report orally, if necessary)
 - Follow up if you do not get a report
 - Ask what was accomplished in the period
 - ...What is planned next
 - ...If there are questions or concerns
- Acknowledge and respond

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Recognition Is More than Thanks

- Incorporate volunteers into the team
- Monitor accomplishments, not hours served
- Take and use photographs all the time
- Keep a testimonial and comment log
- Ongoing, daily appreciation – and smiling – really have an effect
- Share what success means to all stakeholders
- Give credit to volunteers by name
- Handwritten notes are very appreciated



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To Summarize

- Volunteers hate having their time wasted – they want to see that their efforts make a difference
- By definition, volunteers work on a part-time basis – which affects what they are willing to do (or not)
- They will stay engaged if all the elements of good volunteer management are in place
 - Place the right person in the right role
 - Keep communication constant and open



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Volunteers Remain Committed If:

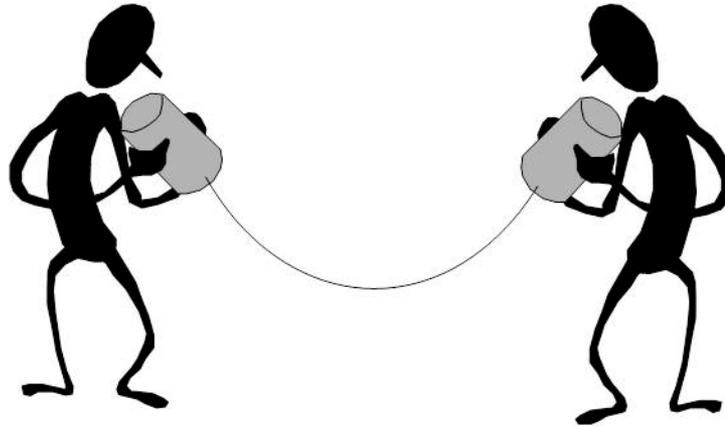
- The work they are doing is visibly meaningful
- They feel appreciated for their service
- They continue to learn and grow
- They enjoy it

(And if circumstances they cannot control do not interfere with their ability to continue volunteering)

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Q & A



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Next Steps

1. Review your statistics on what is really happening now and analyze them

For example:

- How many volunteers have left unexpectedly?
 - At what point in their time with you?
 - Why?
 - Which roles have the least turnover and why?
2. Develop entry assignments that allow new volunteers to test the water with you before making a longer commitment

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Next Steps

3. Pledge to respond promptly to volunteer questions and comments
4. Develop a reminder system so you can acknowledge volunteers at milestones in their life cycle
5. Train those responsible for partnering with volunteers *how to do it right*

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Resources

- Handout packet
- Browse the Energize Online Volunteer Management Library at <http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html>

On the VISTA Campus...

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Evaluation

Please take a few moments to share your feedback. How can we improve these sessions? What topics should we include in future webinars?

Thank you very much for your time and participation!

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THANK YOU
for your participation!

If you have further questions or for more
information, contact us:

VISTAWebinars@cns.gov

Living on the Living Allowance
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Visit the Ongoing Learning page on the VISTA
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