

Standards for Organizational Volunteer Engagement



INTRODUCTION

The Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) is a national membership organization for volunteer engagement professionals. ALIVE strives to enhance and sustain the spirit of volunteerism in America by fostering collaboration and networking, promoting professional development, and providing advocacy for leaders in community engagement.

In fulfilling this mission, ALIVE encourages adherence to a set of *Standards* which reflect effective practice for engaging and leading volunteers within organizational settings. These *Standards* have been shown to deliver value to both the organization and individual volunteers – the desired work gets accomplished, and volunteers have a positive, transformative experience.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

These *Standards* reflect the philosophy that volunteers are a human resource that is integral to the successful achievement of an organization's mission. When volunteers are strategically engaged throughout the organization, including governance, direct service, advocacy, and administrative support, the organization's capacity to sustain itself, be adaptive and resilient, and achieve its mission are greatly enhanced. ALIVE promotes these *Standards* as a tool for building organizational capacity to mobilize and manage "volunteer resources" for maximum impact and value.

An organization has many resources to apply toward its mission: money, physical space, employees and volunteers, in-kind donations, equipment and technology. It is the responsibility of a dedicated volunteer engagement professional to apply available resources appropriately throughout the organization in order to effectively address current goals and objectives.

Yours in Service,

ALIVE Programs & Advocacy Committee – Standards Taskforce

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ALIVE STANDARDS & TERMINOLOGY

These *Standards* are based on a functional model of managed volunteer engagement. The standards are basic and essential for strategic and successful volunteer involvement in an organization. They are generic enough to be applicable to any industry (human service, education, government, museum, animal welfare, etc.) and organizational structure (grassroots, nonprofit, all-volunteer, etc.). The application is going to look different for each organization and each community. The standards are written to reflect the importance of:

- Diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of volunteer engagement.
- Adaptability and resiliency to changing and current situations.
- Leadership and management of volunteer engagement by knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated volunteer engagement professionals.

TERMINOLOGY

Throughout these *Standards* we use the following terminology:

- Volunteer engagement - volunteer involvement throughout the entire organizational infrastructure.
- Volunteer management - leading, managing, and developing volunteer engagement
- Volunteer program or volunteer department - within some organization structures, a specific program that is responsible for all administrative, managerial, and leadership functions having to do with volunteer engagement.
- Volunteer Engagement Professional (VEP) - the individual who is responsible for managing and leading volunteers. Depending on the organization, this individual might be called the Volunteer Director, Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, or another similar title. Managing and leading volunteers may be their entire job or part of it. They may be paid or volunteer.
- DEAI - Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion

HOW TO USE THESE STANDARDS

These *Standards* are written to be both inspirational and aspirational. They can be used by VEPs who are new to the field as well as those who have been involved in volunteer resource management and leadership for some time. For veteran VEPs, these *Standards* can be used to assess and evaluate the extent to which volunteer engagement in their organizations is strategic and successful. For new VEPs, these *Standards* can be used as a guide for developing effective volunteer engagement.

STANDARD #1: ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND STRATEGY

You've achieved this Standard when volunteer engagement and management of volunteers are integrated into your organizational culture through mission and vision statements, program assessment, strategic plan, organizational structure, risk assessment for volunteers and community, and policies and procedures.

Sample Action Steps:

- Mission/vision statements make note of the organization's involvement in, and commitment to, volunteerism.
- Issues related to volunteer engagement receive regular attention and oversight at the Board level.
- The volunteer experience, impact, and voice are considered during strategic planning - with careful thought given to the dual role of volunteers as both stakeholders and team members.
- Risk assessments are regularly performed and risk management is implemented for the security, safety, and wellbeing of the organization, volunteers, and recipients of services.
- Policies and procedures provide a framework and environment which defines and supports the engagement of volunteers. Those policies and procedures are regularly updated and are accessible to all staff and volunteers to reference.
- Roles for volunteers are clearly defined through written position descriptions, and are based on the needs and priorities of the organization and the individuals/communities served.
- All aspects of the volunteer engagement strategy, including position development, reflect an awareness of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.
- Staff are prepared to work with volunteers in an atmosphere of mutual respect and commitment to excellence. This includes staff who do not directly supervise volunteers but may engage with them within the organization.

STANDARD #2: PROFESSIONAL VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

You've achieved this Standard when your organization has volunteer engagement professionals dedicated to managing and leading all of the organization's volunteers and it provides continuous professional development for all staff.

Sample Action Steps:

- Volunteers are led and managed by trained volunteer engagement professionals. Considerations should be made for the percentage of time a particular staff member devotes to volunteer management; make clear whether this is their primary role or only a portion of their responsibilities.
- Board and executive leadership recognize and support – culturally and financially – volunteer engagement staff.
- Volunteer engagement staff stay up to date with best practices in the field with the organization providing dedicated paid time to pursue professional development including professional certifications and/or credentialing, training, and networking.
- Volunteer management staff job descriptions are regularly reviewed to make sure they reflect the scope and scale of work with commensurate compensation which is equitable in pay and position with other organization staff.

STANDARD #3: RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING

You've achieved this Standard when your organization has developed and deployed a recruitment strategy which is tied to the needs of the organization and the community that is being served, reflects target volunteer motivations, and builds appropriate diversity in the volunteer corps. It is also achieved when the organization consistently uses appropriate language and processes, such as interviewing and background checks, that mitigate risk to the organization and volunteers and effectively match volunteers to assignments.

Sample Action Steps:

- Effective recruitment appeals and messages are realistic and clear. They accurately reflect the organization and its needs and sound a “call to action” to the community-service or civic engagement minded.
- Ensure that onboarding documents, including applications, do not include exclusionary language.
- There is intentionality in creating spaces where volunteers representing a diversity of thought and lived experience are encouraged to apply and feel welcome to participate. Specific active recruitment avenues have been identified to target the recruitment of volunteers with demographics matching the communities and stakeholders served by the organization. Barriers that these communities face in becoming volunteers with the organization have been identified, and efforts have been made to mitigate these barriers when feasible.
- Appropriate screening procedures are in place to ensure that goals are met, services are delivered, and that the organization and its clients are protected. Also, taking into account volunteers’ and service recipients’ physical and mental health and wellbeing when evaluating placement.
- Screening protocols are based on the requirements and potential risks of each volunteer role, and then established as policy by the organization’s leadership. This process is applied consistently to all potential volunteers. Criminal background checks are used judiciously, taking into account criminal offenses that are relevant to the agency’s risk management policy.
- Work towards ensuring that volunteers do not have to pay any expenses towards their volunteer onboarding, as this will exclude potential volunteers. Financial obligations are a documented barrier for creating a diverse and inclusive volunteer pool.

STANDARD #4: ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

You've achieved this Standard when your organization provides every volunteer with a comprehensive orientation which affirms each volunteer's commitment to the organization and to their volunteer role. It is also met when your organization has implemented a regular, ongoing, and comprehensive training program designed to provide volunteers with the information and skills required to do their jobs with ease.

Sample Action Steps:

- Every volunteer receives a structured and consistent orientation to the organization to prepare for a successful relationship.
- Orientation content includes: the history, mission and structure of the organization; volunteer policies; organizational values and ethics; rights and responsibilities of volunteers; introductions to key staff; overview of how volunteers are engaged in the work of the organization; and how the organization has committed to DEAI efforts.
- Training is job-specific and equips volunteers to successfully – and safely – perform the role they have accepted.
- Training content and process is provided appropriately as needed, depending on the complexity of the role and the level of skill possessed by the volunteer.
- Training ensures the volunteer and the organization are efficient and professional and is also a tool for continuous volunteer development and engagement.

STANDARD #5: SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

You've achieved this Standard when your organization provides volunteers with adequate supervision for the role they are performing and ongoing support while encouraging appropriate and effective two-way communication. Supervision increases the motivation of volunteers, helps ensure the organization's mission is met, and gives volunteers a sense of engagement and belonging within the organization.

Sample Action Steps:

- Assess, promote and support the health and wellbeing of volunteers, before, during and after placement. Volunteers have a clear understanding of who they can go to for guidance, support, and feedback.
- Volunteers are provided with information for reporting discrimination, harassment, or bullying, and these issues are properly addressed by the organization in a timely manner.
- Supervisors and volunteers meet when initially placed, and communicate regularly to exchange information, assess progress, and address any problems.
- Volunteer supervisors provide an appropriate model of supervision based on the needs of the volunteer, their position, and the organization.
- Staff supervisors who are not managing volunteers as their primary role within the organization are also coached to make sure they are effective leaders who are capable of supervising, supporting, and evaluating volunteers in their areas.
- Volunteer records are maintained in a secure manner, including volunteer contact information, length of service, training received, hours worked, feedback and performance documentation.

STANDARD #6: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

You've achieved this Standard when your organization embraces and commits resources to active and year-round volunteer recognition and appreciation efforts. Every volunteer feels appreciated for their contribution to the organization's mission. Volunteers of all backgrounds have their identities respected and honored.

Sample Action Steps:

- The organization's leadership acknowledges volunteers on a regular and consistent basis, providing feedback and recognition that builds loyalty and reinforces a sense of teamwork.
- The importance of volunteer engagement is highlighted both internally and externally, including but not limited to organization newsletters and social media channels, locally and nationally, when appropriate.
- Benefits, both tangible and intangible, are provided that are appropriate to the role, volunteer, and organization, and are communicated to staff and volunteers.
- Volunteer voices are represented, with volunteers encouraged to share their own personal stories.

STANDARD #7: DRIVING METRICS AND IMPACT

You've achieved this Standard when results-oriented measurement tools are developed and applied to continually evaluate volunteer performance and assess program effectiveness.

Sample Action Steps:

- The organization consciously assesses the effectiveness of volunteer involvement and documents the tangible and intangible value of this involvement.
- Volunteer activity is tracked in terms of impact and results. Data collected and reported should be both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative data could include total number of volunteers, total number of volunteer hours, FTE equivalency, retention rate, etc. Qualitative data includes volunteer stories, volunteers' impact on a community problem or issue, etc. The type of data that is reported will vary by organization and the VEP should choose the data which best represents volunteer engagement at their organization.
- VEP should document and report the impact and value of volunteers internally (senior leadership, the board of directors, and others within the organization) and externally (volunteers and other public stakeholders).
- Impact and data should be reported consistently and often to provide a tool for benchmarking and to show development within volunteer engagement.
- Similarly, individual volunteers are provided with feedback about their performance so they have the opportunity to learn and improve.
- Volunteers, when appropriate, can work towards increased responsibilities for continued engagement, including leadership development in the volunteer program and at the organizational level.

We hope the *Standards* presented above will help you assess and develop your volunteer engagement program. A Self Evaluation Tool has also been provided as part of these *Standards*.

Additional resources are available at [ALIVE Resources - Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement \(volunteeralive.org\)](http://volunteeralive.org) and [Resources - Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement \(volunteeralive.org\)](http://volunteeralive.org).

SELF EVALUATION TOOL

STANDARD #1: Organizational Readiness and Strategy				
You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
Volunteer engagement and management of volunteers are integrated into your organizational culture through mission and vision statements, program assessment, strategic plan, organizational structure, risk assessment for volunteers and community, and policies and procedures.	Mission/vision statements make note of the organization's involvement in, and commitment to, volunteerism. Issues related to volunteer engagement receive regular attention and oversight at the Board level.			
	The volunteer experience, impact, and voice are considered during strategic planning - with careful thought given to the dual role of volunteers as both stakeholders and team members.			
	Risk assessments are regularly performed and risk management is implemented for the security, safety, and wellbeing of the organization, volunteers, and recipients of services.			
	Policies and procedures provide a framework and environment which defines and supports the engagement of volunteers. Those policies and procedures are regularly updated and are accessible to all staff and volunteers to reference.			
	All aspects of the volunteer engagement strategy, including position development, reflect an awareness of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #2: Professional Volunteer Management and Professional Development

You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
Your organization has volunteer engagement professionals dedicated to managing and leading all of the organization's volunteers and it provides continuous professional development for all staff.	Volunteers are led and managed by trained volunteer engagement professionals. Considerations should be made for the percentage of time a particular staff member devotes to volunteer management; make clear whether this is their primary role or only a portion of their responsibilities.			
	Board and executive leadership recognize and support – culturally and financially – volunteer engagement staff.			
	Volunteer engagement staff stay up to date with best practices in the field with the organization providing dedicated paid time to pursue professional development including professional certifications and/or credentialing, training, and networking.			
	Volunteer management staff job descriptions are regularly reviewed to make sure they reflect the scope and scale of work with commensurate compensation which is equitable in pay and position with other organization staff.			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #3: Recruitment and Screening				
You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
<p>Your organization has developed and deployed a recruitment strategy which is tied to the needs of the organization and the community that is being served, reflects target volunteer motivations, and builds appropriate diversity in the volunteer corps. It is also achieved when the organization consistently uses appropriate language and processes, such as interviewing and background checks, that mitigate risk to the organization and volunteers and effectively match volunteers to assignments.</p>	<p>Effective recruitment appeals and messages are realistic and clear. They accurately reflect the organization and its needs and sound a “call to action” to the community-service or civic engagement minded.</p>			
	<p>There is intentionality in creating spaces, targeted recruitment, and barrier removal where volunteers representing a diversity of thought and lived experience are encouraged to apply and feel welcome to participate. Ensure that onboarding documents, including applications, do not include exclusionary language.</p>			
	<p>Appropriate screening procedures are in place to ensure that goals are met, services are delivered, and that the organization and its clients are protected. Also, taking into account volunteers’ and service recipients’ physical and mental health and wellbeing when evaluating placement. Criminal background checks are used judiciously, taking into account criminal offenses that are relevant to the agency’s risk management policy. This process is applied consistently to all potential volunteers.</p>			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #4: Orientation and Training				
You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
Your organization provides every volunteer with a comprehensive orientation which affirms each volunteer's commitment to the organization and to their volunteer role. It is also met when your organization has implemented a regular, ongoing, and comprehensive training program designed to provide volunteers with the information and skills required to do their jobs with ease.	Every volunteer receives a structured and consistent orientation to the organization to prepare for a successful relationship. Orientation content includes: the history, mission and structure of the organization; volunteer policies; organizational values and ethics; rights and responsibilities of volunteers; introductions to key staff; overview of how volunteers are engaged in the work of the organization; and how the organization has committed to DEAI efforts.			
	Training is job-specific and equips volunteers to successfully – and safely – perform the role they have accepted.			
	Ongoing training ensures the volunteer and the organization are efficient and professional and is also a tool for continuous volunteer development and engagement.			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #5: Supervision and Support

You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
<p>Your organization provides volunteers with adequate supervision for the role they are performing and ongoing support while encouraging appropriate and effective two-way communication. Supervision increases the motivation of volunteers, helps ensure the organization's mission is met, and gives volunteers a sense of engagement and belonging within the organization.</p>	Assess, promote and support the health and wellbeing of volunteers, before, during and after placement. Volunteers have a clear understanding of who they can go to for guidance, support, and feedback.			
	Supervisors and volunteers meet when initially placed, and communicate regularly to exchange information, assess progress, and address any problems.			
	Volunteers are provided with information for reporting discrimination, harassment, or bullying, and these issues are properly addressed by the organization in a timely manner.			
	Staff supervisors who are not managing volunteers as their primary role within the organization are also coached to make sure they are effective leaders who are capable of supervising, supporting, and evaluating volunteers in their areas.			
	Volunteer records are maintained in a secure manner, including volunteer contact information, length of service, training received, hours worked, feedback and performance documentation.			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #6: Acknowledgement				
You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
Your organization embraces and commits resources to active and year-round volunteer recognition and appreciation efforts. Every volunteer feels appreciated for their contribution to the organization's mission. Volunteers of all backgrounds have their identities respected and honored.	The organization's leadership acknowledges volunteers on a regular and consistent basis, providing feedback and recognition that builds loyalty and reinforces a sense of teamwork.			
	The importance of volunteer engagement is highlighted both internally and externally, including but not limited to organization newsletters and social media channels, locally and nationally, when appropriate.			
	Benefits, both tangible and intangible, are provided that are appropriate to the role, volunteer, and organization, and are communicated to staff and volunteers.			
	Volunteer voices are represented, with volunteers encouraged to share their own personal stories.			

Your Action Plan:

STANDARD #7: Continuous Improvement				
You've achieved this Standard when:	Action Steps	Currently In Place to a Large Degree	Currently In Place to Some Degree	Not Currently In Place
Results-oriented measurement tools are developed and applied to continually evaluate volunteer performance and assess program effectiveness.	The organization consciously assesses the effectiveness of volunteer involvement and documents the tangible and intangible value of this involvement and report the impact and value of volunteers internally and externally.			
	Volunteer activity is tracked in terms of impact and results. Data collected and reported should be both qualitative and quantitative.			
	Impact and data should be reported consistently and often to provide a tool for benchmarking and to show development within volunteer engagement.			
	Individual volunteers are provided with feedback about their performance so they have the opportunity to learn and improve.			
	Volunteers, when appropriate, can work towards increased responsibilities for continued engagement, including leadership development in the volunteer program and at the organizational level.			

Your Action Plan: