



Engaging Our Volunteers

Volunteering can be one of the most rewarding experiences or one of the most frustrating. Here are some ways to ensure that all participants gain the most from their volunteer activities.

One of my biggest passions in life is volunteering. I've been fortunate to find so many wonderful opportunities to volunteer for causes I believe in, and one of those, of course, is IMA®.

As IMA Chair, I've especially enjoyed the privilege of working with volunteers who give their time and expertise on a regular basis through involvement in our numerous communities—chapters, councils, advisory committees, ad hoc committees, task forces, and more. These volunteers—which number in the thousands—always inspire me with their commitment to our profession and their desire to make it the best it can be. Our volunteers give their time to assist with initiatives related to certification, continuing education, leadership development, job placement, and networking, among others. All these activities make such a difference in the lives of other professionals. In many ways, IMA has been shaped by the passionate volunteers who have given years of service.

Yes, there are many volunteers, but we always have room for more. In all my years of service with IMA and other professional organizations, I've never heard, "Help! We have too many volunteers!" Rather, at nearly every chapter or council meeting I attend, I'm asked, "Can you give us advice on attracting new volunteers or board members?" This is a very real—and pressing—challenge for any professional organization. Yet with the right type of engagement strategy, I believe it's possible to find a place for every volunteer.

In my experience serving IMA and other nonprofits, I've observed a number of ways that can help with volunteer engagement, motivation, and retention. Here are a few of those ideas:

1. Match volunteers with their strengths. It's so important that volunteers do something they're good at and that they enjoy.
2. Let volunteers have a "trial period" before they make a long-term commitment.
3. Provide clear volunteer position descriptions. This can help clarify expectations and reduce uncertainty. This includes being as precise as possible about the time commitment required for

the position.

4. Establish term limits for all volunteer roles. Make sure it doesn't appear that volunteers serve for an indefinite amount of time.

5. Recognize the contributions of volunteers. Everyone wants to feel appreciated and valued. Make sure you recognize people's contributions in a variety of ways, such as in front of their professional peers, on your website, or with a thoughtful note. A little recognition goes a long way.

6. Ask for feedback from your volunteers. Even a three- to five-question survey on a periodic basis can generate useful feedback on the overall volunteer experience. Just asking for feedback demonstrates that you care. The results can then be used to troubleshoot and address any concerns for current and future volunteers. A word of caution, though: Be sure to follow up on your findings.

7. If your volunteer resources allow, assign a volunteer coordinator to help monitor the above suggestions.

Whether you serve as a volunteer in one of our IMA communities or in another organization, I hope you find these ideas useful.

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Perspectives

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Volunteers are a special kind of resource—and, with the right type of engagement, the benefits are immeasurable to everyone!

I welcome your thoughts. Please share them at srichtermeier@imanet.org. **SF**