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# WINTER CONFERENCE

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# **Volunteer Programs that Work for Organizations and Volunteers: Practical Strategies for Literacy Agencies**

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# Learning Objectives

In this session, participants will:

- ✓ Explore the alignment between **Program** Needs and Capacities and **Volunteer** Needs and Capacities
- ✓ Learn what motivates volunteers
- ✓ Gain awareness of what programs can do to increase volunteer retention
- ✓ Evaluate their own program's practices that impact retention

# “Why don’t you just get a volunteer?”

Volunteers *can* make a big difference – when you make the investment.

	Needs?	Capacities?
<b>Program</b>	✓	✓
<b>Volunteers</b>	✓	✓

# *Can we use volunteers effectively?*



## Program Needs

- Where do we need help?
- How independent is the role?
- Are special skills needed?
- Are there confidentiality/privacy concerns in the role?
- When and for how long?
- Who will be in charge?
- Options other than tutoring or instruction?
- Can we accommodate different schedules for volunteers?



## Management Capacities

- Policies and procedures
- Volunteer selection criteria, interviewing, references, vetting
- Publicity and recruitment
- Orientation and training
- Supervision, evaluation, and feedback
- Record keeping, volunteer hours, forms and waivers
- Ongoing communication and support
- Recognition and appreciation
- Assurance of privacy, safety, security

# Volunteers aren't free!

- Staff time to manage the program, handle communication, etc.
- Finding the right volunteers for your program
- Vacations and illnesses, last minute absences
- May leave after completing practicum or service hours
- Difficult to let them go if they don't work out
- Personalities
- Require training and supervision

***Are they worth your investment?***



# Maybe.... If they stay!

Retaining effective volunteers helps programs:

- Build a **strong reputation** among learners and instructors
- Cultivate **trust**, return students, and word of mouth referrals
- Grow in quality, **resilience** and size
- Increase **efficiency**
- Build their reputation and **impact**



**High turnover undermines student engagement** through reliance on substitutes, untrained staff, canceled classes, and larger class sizes.

# Challenges outside of our control



## Program managers and administrators

- Limited funds, staff, and time
- Little opportunity for professional development on this topic
- Lack of experience - fell into the role, or inherited a system

## Volunteers

- Family or health issues
- Financial pressures – need to work
- Schedule conflicts
- Retirement, moves, life



# Why do people volunteer?

- Love to teach
- Enjoy getting to know people from different cultures
- Appreciate language learning
- Want to give back
- Want to teach overseas someday
- Career exploration
- Build resume for career change
- Need service learning hours
- Lonely
- Practicum hours for certificate program
- College student seeking experience
- Complement their day job

## In their shoes...

**Imagine you are Marie, a recently retired teacher, excited to start volunteering.**

- How quickly do you hear from the literacy agency? How personal was the response?
- Is there someone you can ask questions?
- How soon can you get started?
- Will they provide training?

**Imagine you are Tony, a reliable tutor who has volunteered for 6 months**

- When's the last time you heard from the literacy agency other than an e-blast?
- How does the agency help you learn new techniques to help your student?
- How does the agency help you feel connected to them and to other tutors?
- How quickly do they respond to your questions?

*How does this make you feel?*



# Finding The Right Fit

## How will they work with learners?

- Love of teaching
- Cultural competency/humility
- Appreciation of immigrant experience
- Empathy and patience

## How will they work with you?

- Willingness to learn new techniques
- Availability and reliability
- Communication and responsiveness

# How can we keep them coming?

Studies of K-12 and adult education reveal that these factors can impact retention:

- Induction/orientation
- Mentoring, collaboration
- Professional development
- Belonging and community
- Acknowledgement
- Professional respect
- Opportunities to contribute to policy
- Administrative support
- Feeling of self efficacy
- Collective efficacy

# What instructors told me

Volunteers can often feel somewhat isolated from an organization's professional staff, but never have I felt anything less than an integral part of The Center

The trust you place in me

Balanced approach of providing guidance and direction

Collaborative leadership

You made it possible for us to grow and touch the lives of so many



# A Model for Volunteer Retention

Volunteers who feel....



And are more likely to stay with your program!

# Proven Practices

- ▶ Frequent meaningful, 2-way communication
- ▶ Welcoming environment and community building
- ▶ Orientation
- ▶ Requests for feedback



- ▶ Invitations to present, train, or guide policy
- ▶ Teacher meetings with opportunities to share lessons learned
- ▶ Recognition and Appreciation
- ▶ Staff debriefings

# The Three Keys to Retention

For volunteers to feel	Administrators will:
<b>Respected...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Maintain standards of quality</li><li>2. Give them autonomy</li><li>3. Invite their input</li><li>4. Acknowledge their contributions</li></ol>
<b>Capable and supported...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provide detailed orientation and on-boarding</li><li>2. Clearly define roles</li><li>3. Handle logistics smoothly</li><li>4. Offer professional development opportunities</li></ol>
<b>Part of a community...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Share the mission</li><li>2. Maintain an “open door,” communicating frequently and responsively</li><li>3. Build connections among instructors via team teaching or mentoring</li><li>4. Hold regular gatherings</li></ol>



# You can improve retention in your program

For instructors to feel:	Administrators will:	Self Evaluation Questions	_____ 's Ideas (your name here)
<b>Respected...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain standards of quality</li> <li>Give them autonomy in the classroom</li> <li>Invite their input</li> <li>Acknowledge their contributions</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do we maintain the quality of our programs? Do instructors feel comfortable coming to leadership with concerns about quality?</li> <li>How much freedom do we offer our instructors in lesson planning?</li> <li>How often do we ask instructors for their input about policies, procedures, curriculum, or professional development?</li> <li>Are instructors invited to share their techniques with other instructors?</li> <li>How do we express appreciation to our instructors? How often do we acknowledge them?</li> </ul>	
<b>Capable and supported...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide detailed orientation and on-boarding</li> <li>Clearly define instructor roles</li> <li>Handle logistics smoothly</li> <li>Offer professional development opportunities</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do we welcome new instructors? How are policies and procedures conveyed?</li> <li>How do instructors know what they are responsible for? How well do they understand how registration, attendance, and other logistics are handled?</li> <li>How smoothly are logistics handled? How does that impact instructors? Do instructors know our staff?</li> <li>How often do we offer <u>trainings</u>? How often do we encourage instructors to attend free professional development opportunities?</li> <li>What guides or other materials do we provide?</li> </ul>	
<b>Part of a community...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share the mission</li> <li>Maintain an "open door," communicating frequently and responsively</li> <li>Build connections among instructors via team teaching or mentoring</li> <li>Provide opportunities to connect</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are instructors able to articulate our organization's mission and goals?</li> <li>How frequently do we touch base with instructors?</li> <li>How long does it take us to respond to their queries?</li> <li>Are instructors comfortable reaching out to us?</li> <li>What opportunities do our instructors have to get to know each other, collaborate, or learn from each other?</li> <li>How often do we gather as a team in person or virtually?</li> <li>What are some new ways we could facilitate connection?</li> </ul>	

✓ Reflect individually on the self evaluation questions.

✓ Note a few ideas for improvement in your program

✓ Discuss your ideas in groups

# Make it happen!

- ✓ Select up to three ideas and turn over your worksheet.
- ✓ Jot down some notes about how you could proceed
- ✓ Get out your phone or planner
- ✓ Schedule time on your calendar:
  - Solo time to think or research
  - Meeting with colleague
  - Meeting with another program administrator

Steps to Improving Teacher Retention at \_\_\_\_\_

Improvement Ideas	Who do I need to meet with?	What information do I need?	Tentative Plan and Schedule

Anna M. DeNicolo March 11, 2024

# Questions?

Please contact me!

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