



# RESTORE

## strategies

### **Five Ways to Evaluate Your Volunteer Program** **By: Garrett Clawson**

Nonprofits want to make sure that they're leveraging the donated service of their supporters as well as possible to ensure that the greatest amount of community restoration is achieved. However, determining the impact that volunteers are really making can be difficult, particularly when the organization has goals and objectives that transcend material objectives (e.g., discipleship or spiritual growth). In *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources of the Community*, McCurley and Lynch suggest that there are five main ways that volunteer programs can be evaluated:

- **Mission-Based Evaluation** ensures that volunteers are actually being utilized in a way that furthers the stated mission and purpose of the organization. Over time, volunteers may be assigned to tasks loosely tied to the organization's core mission, and the individual's contribution may not be being leveraged as well as possible.
  - Strategies: Staff members should reevaluate the explicit descriptions for each volunteer posting and determine whether the activity (as written) aligns with the organization's targeted goals. To do a thorough evaluation, volunteers should be asked what kinds of tasks are actually performed and how they feel the activity helps the organization accomplish its stated mission.
- **Output-Based Evaluation** helps the nonprofit leader get a better pulse on what activities volunteers are conducting, the extent to which these activities are taking place, and the number of beneficiaries (or number of the relevant unit of analysis) that are receiving the good/service. While this approach doesn't determine the larger impact being made by the activities, it can provide a better picture of how volunteers are spending their time and create solid quantitative metrics on volunteer performance for the administrative team.

- Metrics for this type of evaluation often include the following kinds of statistics:
  - Number of volunteers involved over X amount of time
  - Number of hours contributed
  - Number of clients assisted by volunteers
  - Number of outreach events held by volunteers
  - Number of community members engaged by volunteers
- Strategies: In order to calculate the metrics you want, you'll need volunteers and staff members to report data to you for aggregation and analysis. Producing forms for them to use to make this collection as easy as possible will increase compliance and create less resentment. Metrics should be determined before staff and volunteers are asked to comply.
- **Customer-Based Evaluation** gives your team a way to collect feedback and insight from those that receive goods or services from your organization. In addition to learning more about how customers see the organization's effectiveness overall, this is a great way to see how volunteers in various parts of the nonprofit are performing from the eyes of those the agency seeks to ultimately help. Furthermore, this form of evaluation gives leaders access to perspectives from another stakeholder that may view the work being done distinctly different from volunteers and staff members.
  - Strategies: Nonprofit leaders should talk to clients one on one for more exhaustive feedback and put together focus groups to get more diverse perspectives. Both paper and digital forms should have spaces for comments and concerns to be submitted as well. Ensure that clients and beneficiaries feel that their opinions and perspectives matter and are valuable as you seek to make the nonprofit a better agent for restoration.
- **Standards-Based Evaluation** involves comparing your organization's performance against standards determined by external organizations like governments or large organizations and volunteer groups. Countries such as Australia and Canada, as well as groups like Points of Light, have put together standards on topics such as leadership, organizational culture, and mission and vision.

- Strategies: Volunteer coordinators should look to government agencies or other organizations in their field for the most relevant volunteer standards. Religious nonprofits may find it especially helpful by looking to organizations that share their faith background.
- **Outcome-Based Evaluation** demonstrates how volunteers are actually helping the organization accomplish its stated goal(s). While output evaluations give leaders a sense of the impact being made on the community by determining what kinds and to what extent activities are taking place, only outcome evaluations will show whether the actual conditions of clients and their communities are getting better due to the contributions of volunteers. This form of evaluation is often the most time and resource-intensive but can be of enormous benefit to nonprofit leaders when they approach donors, governments, and prospective volunteers for greater investment.
  - Strategies: Because of the complex nature of this evaluation type, a combination of all the strategies listed above must be taken into account. Most organizations conducting these assessments will want to see whether material standards are improving as well as attitudes and other non-tangibles, meaning that both qualitative and quantitative measurements must be taken.

Evaluating volunteers may be daunting, but doing this well can greatly enhance your ability to convince donors, volunteers, policymakers, and other community leaders that your organization is committed to the cause and moving the needle. Learn more about evaluation at [www.restorestrategies.org/nonprofit](http://www.restorestrategies.org/nonprofit).