



FAQs - Skills Based Volunteer Engagement

What is it?

All volunteer effort is important and all volunteer effort requires skill but there is a specific skills-based approach to some volunteer engagement.

Skills-based volunteering can be defined as, “service to non-profit organizations by individuals or groups that capitalizes on personal talents or core business or professional skills, experience or education, for the purpose of building organizational strength and increasing capacity. An organization that develops a skill- based volunteer strategy focuses on identifying the skills required to compete specific projects or tasks derived from the organization’s mission and then seeks to recruit individuals with these specific skills, talents or areas of expertise.” (Adapted from [Points of Light](#))

How does it differ from traditional volunteer engagement?

In many ways skills-based volunteering could be much the same as traditional volunteering but today's skills based volunteer may be largely motivated to volunteer based on skills they wish to utilize or build upon. The recruitment message, to which they respond, is for a specific set of skills required for a specific volunteer opportunity. Some skills-based volunteers may contact an organization directly with a resume outlining their skills and inquire about volunteer opportunities that would be engaging and satisfying for them.

How is it similar to Pro-Bono work or ESVI?

[ESVI](#) is an employer supported volunteer initiative. As employers become more socially aware and accountable, they may demonstrate their support for volunteerism in a number of ways. They may develop policies that permit staff to take time-off, grant sabbaticals or paid leave to volunteer or donate to charities and organizations where staff volunteer. They also may provide information about skills-based volunteering to employees as an opportunity for them to use or expand their existing skills. [The Corporate Council on Volunteering](#) provides a platform for the collected best practices of the members and non profits across the country.

Pro-Bono Volunteers have a very similar profile to skills-based volunteers. They are often high-skilled professionals from the corporate and business world who donate their time to non-profit organizations with formalized outcomes and focused agreements. Their commitment is usually very time-limited and may be corporately facilitated.

Is the skills-based focus just a passing trend?

Where a skills-based approach to volunteer engagement has been used over a period of time, it becomes organic - an intentional and integrated approach for most volunteer engagement. Developing positions with skill sets in mind, for both paid and unpaid staff, and then recruiting and matching individuals to those positions, is a winning strategy for the whole organization.

How will it build capacity for my organization?

The addition of a skills-based approach will help the organization to meet and to expand its mission. The specialized skills and expertise that volunteers bring will add not only to the volunteer base but also to the knowledge and skill base of the whole organization. The increased visibility within the organization and the community, builds capacity and the impact of new volunteer involvement keeps an organization growing and changing.

What are the implications for my organization in introducing a more intentional skill based approach?

It is important for the senior leadership person or team or Board of Directors to fully support the introduction of a skills-based strategy. Careful planning with existing staff and volunteers will assist both in the support needed and the development of new opportunities for growth. Initially, this will involve change and create additional work but over time the benefits should far outweigh the challenges. Often, skills-based volunteers are involved for a shorter time period of time but often return again the following year or for another project. In an organization where both paid and unpaid staff are involved, an integrated [Human Resource Strategy](#) is the ideal approach.

How do I begin to implement a skills-based approach?

If you have used the Volunteer Development Cycle for creating volunteer positions before, you will find the Skills Based Cycle similar. The Skills-Based Cycle involves six steps with collaborative assessment and planning playing a larger role in the creation of new opportunities within the organization. You can visit the Skills-based cycle [here](#).