

# The Volunteer Experience: Your Organization's Journey with Community



# Volunteerism in Your Online Community

## Choose Your Own Volunteer Adventure

The importance of volunteerism is helping your members build their own volunteer adventures. Shape the journey with our volunteer adventure sections below - just as a volunteer's journey is never linear, feel free to pick and read sections in whatever order makes sense to you.

### Start the Journey:



#### Organizations with Great Volunteer Programs

Hear from the organizations already making headway in the realm of volunteerism and community.



#### Choose Your Volunteer Characters

Read up on our volunteer adventure characters to learn more about tasks, points and creating your own.



#### Volunteers For Every Type and Task

Where do your volunteers fit? Learn more about volunteer types and tasks.



#### Volunteer Rewards and Recognition

Figure out the best engagement rewards and recognition tactics to implement for your volunteer program.



#### Filling Up the Volunteer Pool

Find out how to attract an active group of volunteers through your own community.



#### Prove Value with Volunteer Scorecards

What is your organization trying to accomplish for its volunteer program? Creating a scorecard may help.



#### Advantages to Creating Your Own Volunteer Commitment Curve

Focus on your volunteer system and goals with help from our Volunteer Commitment Curve.

## Volunteerism For Your Organization's Success

Volunteers are integral to any organization's success. Every volunteer program's goal should include various opportunity types and simpler processes for engaging volunteers. The lifecycle of an avid, ideal volunteer starts with small tasks and virtual participation, working all the way up to committees and leadership positions.

**ASAE's research report, *10 Lessons for Cultivating Member Commitment*, found one simple volunteer role shifted a member's value perception 6 points (from 38 to 44 percent in the Net Promoter Score).**

This isn't to say the process of commitment is the same for every volunteer. The demand and desire to volunteer is already present in most associations—members want to give back and stay connected. Organizations would do well to provide options and flexibility, along with the structure and feedback of a reliable program, to ultimately bring a constant flow of enthusiastic volunteers.

It's time to embrace different types of volunteerism, so your organization can become more inclusive, improve member satisfaction and ultimately build a greater sense of community.

### Volunteers Choose Their Own Adventures

Volunteering is an ongoing process. Your organization may have multiple volunteer programs running for task-based projects, events and conferences, board appointments and committees on a variety of industry issues and interests. Or quite the opposite, you may have a small organization that musters up volunteers at the last minute, for things like social outreach and event coordination.

It doesn't matter how mature your volunteer activities are right now—an organization's top volunteer priority is making sure the right opportunities are available at the right time, to the members who want to volunteer.

Higher Logic's Volunteer Commitment Curve is a great resource for any volunteer adventure. Remember: these are members who already have a myriad of responsibilities, and they want to contribute in a way that both benefits the organization and plays to their strengths. Use the Commitment Curve as a foundation for the revitalization and building of your volunteer program.

Once you've established your organization's curve, start communicating with members, who already want to build their own volunteer adventures.

## Organizations Already Succeeding At Volunteerism



Successful volunteer programs often have support from active leadership and a reliable system for tasks and opportunities. An organization's online community can serve as a great starting point for galvanizing a greater volunteer audience. The two organizations below employ both online communities and volunteer management systems to bolster their volunteering efforts.

### *The American Society of Association Executives*

ASAE manages volunteer leaders, committees, councils and ad hoc projects through its Volunteer Town Square portal, where members can find new volunteer opportunities, browse volunteer categories and commitments, and set up project alerts.

“Using Volunteer Manager for our Volunteer Town Square portal has been an asset for us from the start. It's incredibly well thought out software that fits in well with the large, active volunteer community we manage for a variety of ASAE events and projects.”

~ Wanda Little-Coffey, MBA CAE  
Senior Director, Volunteer Relations  
ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership

### *Society of Petroleum Engineers*

The Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) is the largest individual member organization that serves managers, engineers, scientists and other professionals worldwide in the upstream segment of the oil and gas industry. With more than 143,000 members in 147 countries, SPE manages a colossal group of members and volunteers, boasting 199 sections and 337 university chapters. It's currently beta testing Higher Logic's Volunteer Manager module for its online community, SPE Connect.

“We know that the majority of volunteering happens at the component level. Implementing Volunteer Manager is going to be an excellent way to understand, track, manage and report these activities. We hope to use what we learn to better train our volunteers and create new opportunities for members to be involved. Being able to tie together our online community, our volunteer programs and our recognition of members will be a big step forward for our overall engagement efforts.”

~ Andrea Holovach  
Senior Regions, Sections and  
Student Chapters Manager at  
Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE)

## What Type of Volunteers Are Your Members?



Your organization might have members lining up for volunteering opportunities, with event positions always overbooked for help and community discussions and blogs bursting at the seams. But if you are like the average organization, you struggle to gather and redirect your members into volunteer buckets that best suit individual needs and skill sets.

First, let's delineate the term "volunteer," because it goes beyond charity walks and traditional association committees.

Here are the top three ways to categorize your member volunteers:

### **Term Based**

Volunteer performs a service for the organization that is based on a time commitment.

*Example: committee participation or chapter leadership have one-year terms.*

### **Task Based**

Volunteer works on a project that is typically a short-term role, focused on specific outcomes and aligned with a volunteer's skill set.

*Example: event coordinator from a member organization plans a community meet up during the annual conference.*

### **Virtual**

Volunteer completes tasks remotely and online, which can be both active and passive.

*Example: a passive task might be adding a blog post to the community site.*

## Applying Micro-Volunteering to Term, Task and Virtual Volunteers

What about the more dynamic and unstructured volunteer opportunities occurring all the time and rarely counted as volunteering? The nonprofit sector first identified micro-volunteering and pushed to embrace it. Like small financial gifts that add up, the small gift of time spent has the same impact if pooled. The explosion of micro-jobs created an expectation for members to seek out the same. These also become examples for organizations to model.

Start by taking an inventory of all areas where members have contributed. Use your online community platform and tally the activity. How many members have ever posted a message? Who responded to the “call for action” by writing a letter to their senators in support of your organization’s position? Engage with members who have completed an industry focused benchmarking survey. Do we add members who submitted session suggestions for an annual conference? All of these examples could be considered volunteers—they collectively create value for the membership and the organization as a whole.

## Tracking Offline Volunteer Engagement

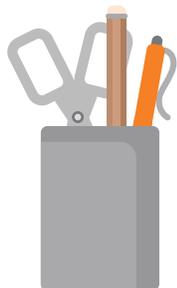
**Looking for a volunteer platform?  
Read more about Higher Logic’s  
Volunteer Manager on page 13**

How does your organization capture the amazing volunteer moments your members participate in and complete outside of your program or community? As we’ve said before, the desire for volunteering opportunities is already there, and members want to give back. Compile both online and offline engagement at

three levels: organization, component and industry. These levels ensure you’re covering enough ground to create a complete volunteer picture of every member. Volunteer profiles can become more robust and detailed, and your program can cater opportunities depending on the members’ tendencies towards term, task or virtual volunteering.

The platform for your volunteer program also should have open fields for volunteers to enter information about industry volunteer work done outside of the organization or online community, at any time. You can’t capture it all—putting some of that into the hands of members will help.

## Jump into the Volunteer Pool and Start Your Own Adventure



A basic question for any volunteer program: do you have a master list of your volunteers and their contact information? You'd be surprised how many organizations can't answer this. If you decided to host a pool party but didn't compile a guest list, who would show up? Even if you got lucky and a few attendees arrived through word-of-mouth, how would you know how to best meet their party needs without knowing who would be there?

Your volunteer program needs a pool of volunteers, a basic list of members who agree to be volunteers for the organization. Volunteers in the pool should be searchable, so the program can send emails when new opportunities are created that fit their skills, interests, locations and spot on the commitment curve.

**Check out page 8 for more details on developing your specific volunteer commitment curve.**

Are you already lucky enough to have a community platform that includes a volunteer program? Here are three easy ways to help your members join the "pool party":

1. Provide an opt-in button or checkbox on your online community. Starting the volunteer process is literally one click. Hopefully the community system is integrated with your database and already has profile data from the members.
2. Offer a more detailed form to fill out, such as creating a volunteer profile if members want to personalize information about themselves to better match with future opportunities.
3. Sign up for a specific opportunity that's featured for all members on the community's home page or in popular discussions and groups. Your opt-in buttons or volunteer profiles wouldn't be required for these larger, more popular opportunities. Members will be automatically added to the volunteer pool after this.

## The Volunteer Commitment Curve: Achieving Balance For Your Member Volunteers



Any volunteer program or system should be easy to use for staff and volunteers alike, whether it's creating or joining a variety of opportunities.

A Commitment Curve is an organizational concept used in development and change management for decades. It's always beneficial to chart the progress of individuals through a change. For community management, it's a way to

measure community members' progress in their level of commitment, but also serves as a roadmap to move members to greater levels of engagement. A Volunteer Commitment Curve applies the same trajectory, but focuses on the volunteer manager system and goals.

Check out the section on volunteer types for a refresher on how your members can pick and choose the volunteer projects that are right for them.



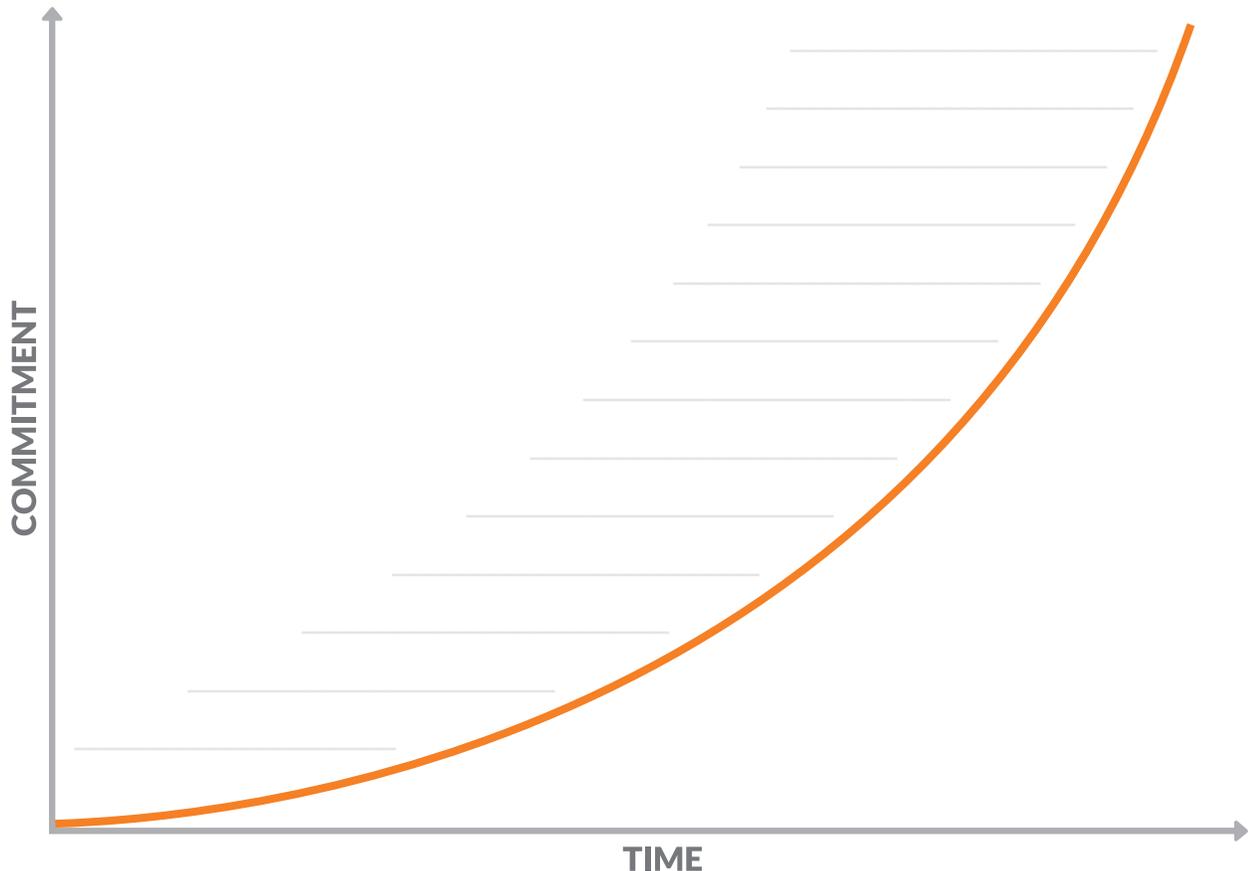
## Goals For Your Organization and Individual Members

Use this Volunteer Commitment Curve on two levels: for your organization's programming and your individual members' planning for their future opportunities.

Personalize all opportunities by matching a volunteer's skills, interests, location and position with a category on the volunteer commitment curve, which can be tailored to his or her specific volunteer journey. Also, remember the automation of manual tasks is designed to save staff time and improve processes that will help to optimize volunteer benefits. This automation can originate from your online community and its connected volunteer system. If you're just starting out with a program and are working without an online platform, it can be as easy as launching a survey tool for sign-up's and scheduling emails to send throughout a volunteer's journey.

### Build Your Own Commitment Curve

*Fill in your fields below:*



## Choose Where Your Members Will Go Next: Pick Your Volunteer Characters



Now that your organization is equipped with the tools to take volunteer programs to the next level, it's time to figure out where your members are on the scale. Just as your members represent a vast array of interests and skill sets, the Volunteer Commitment Scale represents a journey with many different starting points and directions.

### Where Do Your Members Fit In?

Meet Brian the Blogger, Committee Courtney and Bill the Board Member, the characters in our own Volunteer Adventure. You might share one or all of these volunteer characters within your own organization, or you recognize common character traits among the three, which you can apply to creating your own Volunteer Adventure characters for your programs.

#### Use a Volunteer Point System

Tasks and projects can vary greatly for volunteers—it can help to use a points system for opportunities, time spent and overall engagement. Assign different points to different volunteer characters. Here's a system we think works well:

**Time-based:** values based on time it takes to perform the task. Example: If shortest opportunity/activity takes 15 minutes to complete, 1 point = 15 minutes.

**Experience multiplier:** time-based points multiplied by an experience multiplier to scale the difference between a simple, unqualified task and one that requires skills or previous experience.



#### Brian the Blogger

- Member for 5 years
- Part of organization's young professionals network
- Recent volunteer activity:

Published 3 blogs on community site (3 hours + 2.0 skill multiplier = 24 points)

**What's next:** Has Brian met Committee Courtney yet? Perhaps he would be interested in getting more involved in the organization's online community, or even writing more for the industry. Courtney could pitch the idea of writing a three-part blog series on a relevant topic for their communications committee.



### Committee Courtney

- Member for 10 years
- Beta tester for the organization's community launch a few years ago
- Joined and now serves on communications committee
- Recent volunteer activity:
  - Volunteered to help publish a white paper for a social media committee (10 hours + 4.0 skill multiplier = 160 points)

**What's next:** Courtney has caught Bill the Board Member's attention with her newly published white paper, and he thinks she'd be perfect as a representative and session speaker for an upcoming industry conference. She could expand on some of her ideas for the organization's social media strategy and network with both new and veteran members looking to get more involved.



### Bill the Board Member

- Member for 20 years
- Served on two committees for industry policy and government relations
- Integral in helping to build up and manage an annual fly-in day for members' Hill meetings
- Serves on the board of directors
- Recent volunteer activity:
  - Has served on the board for one year (includes meetings, project reviews and research—100 hours + 5.0 multiplier = 2,000 points)

**What's next:** Bill is a busy board member who loves traveling and interacting with members and key stakeholders. He has made connections with a lot of industry experts, and the organization hopes he will consider becoming an active thought leader and speaker once his term on the board is complete.

Your volunteer characters are outlines of your member personas—the most common features found in your loyal volunteer advocates. Use these Volunteer Adventure characters as a basis for creating your own unique volunteer story.

## Rewards, Ratings and Member Participation



Recognize and reward volunteers for their time and efforts, whether it's through gamification or classic rewards like thank you's and gifts. Also make ratings available to track volunteer performance on opportunities, and inform whether or not volunteers should be selected for future opportunities (ratings don't need to be public or displayed to volunteers).

Using your online community as a volunteer program home base, try out some of these most popular rewards and recognition tactics:

- Report and reward volunteer points to your top-tier volunteers—volunteers should be able to see and track their progress on their main profiles
- Give out digital badges and ribbons based on volunteer point accumulation (this can be done through your system's automation rules, can be controlled by the system administrator(s) and a standard set of rules is delivered with the community system)
- Populate a Volunteer Leaderboard for the community, tracked by a given year or lifetime of volunteers
- Generate a report listing volunteers and points over a given period; use information for offline recognition like event announcements, thank you letters or gifts based on point levels

## Set Up a Volunteer Program Scorecard Using Higher Logic's Volunteer Manager



The limitation is always staff time and resources. And the best-case scenario is being able to track how individuals' volunteering efforts and the volunteer program overall impacts your organization.

Higher Logic's Volunteer Manager is a system that includes comprehensive tracking and performance dashboards. Compare volunteer types and activities using a volunteer scorecard, where functions such as time, experience level, and dollar rate/value per opportunity can be adjusted to show value levels for different volunteers and programs. This type of volunteer program tracking will prove ROI produced for your programs.

Volunteer Manager's core features include:

- **Automate processes:** easy to create, find and fill volunteer opportunities for all parties involved
- **Track engagement:** time and experience-based points system measures offline engagement driven by industry, organization and component volunteering
- **Prove value:** extensive reporting and executive dashboards reveal member participation at all levels, including ROI calculation for true dollar value of volunteer activities
- **Reward and recognize:** report and award volunteer points, badges and ribbons, including a featured volunteer leaderboard

There is already widespread demand and desire from association members to give back—Volunteer Manager makes it easy to connect, join opportunities and track how programs perform. The value in volunteering also means increased ROI for your organization.

### Higher Logic's Volunteer Manager

Encourage volunteerism at all levels using an intuitive system that makes it easy to find, track and reward member engagement.

[LEARN MORE](#)