

# THE SAFE STEP

*Your connection to protecting those who improve your community*



## MANAGING RETURNING VOLUNTEERS ("BOOMERANGS")

Welcoming back former volunteers is often called "boomerang volunteers" it can be a strategic advantage for nonprofit organizations. These individuals bring familiarity, renewed enthusiasm and often, new skills. However, their return should be managed with care to ensure alignment with current practices and safety standards.

### WHY BOOMERANGS MATTER

- 1. Faster Onboarding:** Returning volunteers already understand your mission, values, and basic operations. This familiarity reduces the time and resources needed for onboarding, allowing them to contribute more quickly and effectively.
- 2. Stronger Commitment:** Boomerang volunteers often return with a deeper appreciation for your organization. They know what they're signing up for and are less likely to leave prematurely, having already compared your environment to others.
- 3. Built-in Ambassadors:** Volunteers who have had a positive experience are likely to share their stories with others - potentially attracting new volunteers and donors. Their return can also inspire current team members and reinforce a culture of loyalty.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR RE-ONBOARDING

- 1. Don't Skimp on Safety:** Even if a volunteer has previously completed safety training, it's essential to revisit key protocols. Emphasize what has changed since their last service period and why those changes matter. This reinforces a culture of safety and respect.
- 2. Recognize New Skills:** Boomerangs may return with fresh perspectives or new competencies. Ask about their experiences since they last volunteered and consider how those skills can be applied in new or expanded roles.
- 3. Invite Storytelling:** Encourage returning volunteers to share why they came back. Their stories can be featured in newsletters, social media or during orientation sessions to inspire others and build community.
- 4. Stay Connected:** Maintain relationships with former volunteers even after they leave. Simple gestures—like invitations to events or periodic check-ins—can keep the door open for future engagement and support.
- 5. Use Gentle Candor:** Not every former volunteer will be a good fit to return. Be honest and respectful when a return isn't possible, and consider alternative ways they can support your mission, such as through donations or advocacy.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR VOLUNTEER RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

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1. **Make Volunteer Experiences Meaningful:** Assign tasks that are directly tied to your mission and match volunteers with roles based on their interests and skills. Volunteers who see the impact of their work are more likely to stay engaged.
2. **Communicate Thoughtfully:** Consistent communication before, during, and after volunteer shifts builds trust. Personalized thank-you messages and clear instructions help volunteers feel valued.
3. **Track Engagement:** Use volunteer management systems to track participation history, recognize milestones, and tailor re-engagement efforts.
4. **Gather Feedback and Act On It:** Send short surveys after shifts and act on the feedback received. Volunteers feel more invested when they see their input leads to improvements.
5. **Celebrate and Appreciate:** Recognition doesn't have to be extravagant—spotlights in newsletters, appreciation events, and thank-you notes go a long way.

## RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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- [Boomerang Volunteers: Back Atcha | Nonprofit Risk Management Center](#)