

## Fundraising Volunteers:

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### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### *Q: Why are volunteers essential in fundraising?*

**A:** When volunteers are engaged, fundraising is more successful. Why? Because people are more likely to support your cause when they see their peers involved in a meaningful way. That means volunteers do more than “lend their name.” They perform the hard work of identifying, cultivating, and soliciting prospective donors. They open doors that your organization can’t access; they add personal thanks to your formal gift acknowledgement. All this is especially true when working with individual donors (who, after all, represent 85% of all charitable giving); it is also relevant when a gift is sought from an institutional funder.

#### *Q: What is the role of volunteers?*

**A:** First and foremost, all volunteers helping to raise funds must be donors to the organization, and the magnitude of their gifts must set a standard of generosity. Next, they need to be informed and enthusiastic advocates—even unabashed cheerleaders. Beyond that, fundraising tactics define responsibilities. The development committee needs patience and persistence; a capital campaign requires fearless solicitors; donor societies call for social acumen; and digital strategy needs social media gurus. Whatever role volunteers are asked to fulfill, it should be clearly spelled out in a written “job description” and given to the volunteer before their commitment to serve is affirmed.

#### *Q: Where can we find good volunteers?*

**A:** Volunteer leadership begins with the board. Every board member should lend something to the fundraising effort (beyond personal financial support). The development committee organizes the efforts of individual board members; its membership might be complemented with a few non-board members. Great volunteers usually are already involved: a long-time member of the donor society, a committed program volunteer, or someone who frequently engages with your social media. Some community organizations and corporations have leadership development programs that prepare high-potential managers to become skilled civic leaders.

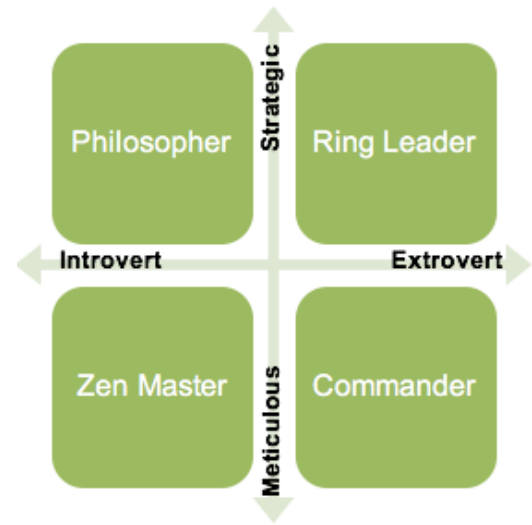
We’ve seen organizations build a strong volunteer pipeline by creating intergenerational teams, pairing a young up-and-comer with a long-serving and influential current or former board member. Each party gains. The Gen X or Y volunteer receives mentoring and widens her/his network among influentials, and the elder has the satisfaction of handing the baton to the next generation.

**Q: How do I manage volunteers?**

**A:** In our experience, volunteers differ widely and require different management styles at different times. Some are exceptional and need only gentle guidance. Others are “high maintenance” and require constant care. Since our fundraising efforts warrant the best volunteers we can find, their strengths and challenges are often magnified.

Remember that volunteers are subordinate to management when they support fundraising efforts, versus board members who have ultimate authority when they govern.

We’ve found it helpful to think about volunteers’ qualities based on their level of detail orientation (are they strategic at 40,000 feet or meticulously in the weeds?) and personality (a charismatic extrovert or a thoughtful introvert?). Each brings strengths and challenges.



Type	Strengths	Challenges	Management Tool
<b>Philosopher</b>	Trustworthy and committed	Become disengaged easily, seen as too independent	Frequent personal communication
<b>Ring Leader</b>	Charismatic and confident	Overwhelm others, avoid accountability	Structure
<b>Zen Master</b>	Persistence of vision, collaborative	Reluctant to act, indecisive	Deadlines
<b>Commander</b>	Accurate and efficient	Can be overbearing, interfere with staff	Clear responsibilities and objectives

Of course, every individual blends several of these types or may behave differently under varying circumstances. A strong team such as a campaign steering committee will be comprised of all of these strengths—and unfortunately weaknesses. That’s why the best management utilizes all the tools at their disposal.

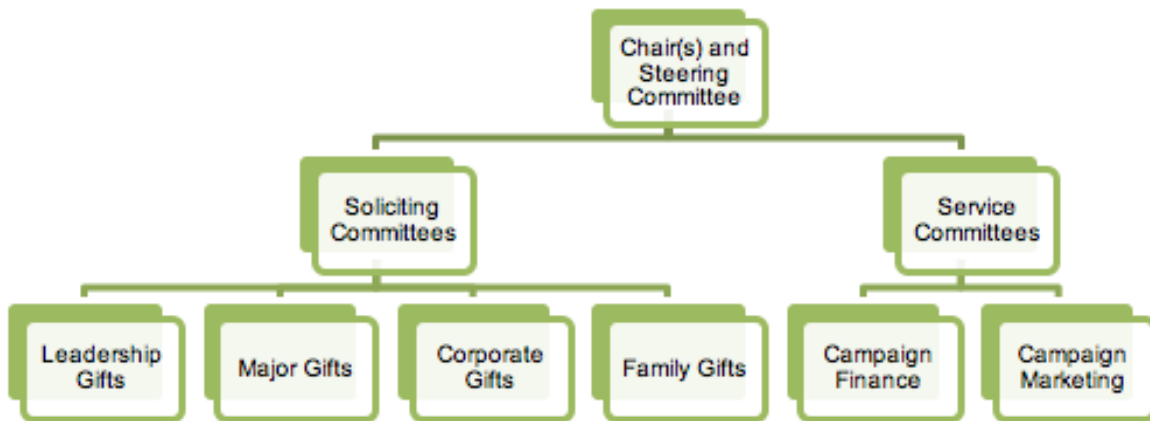
**Q: Yikes, my volunteers are misbehaving or MIA. What can I do?**

**A:** There’s a fear that volunteer corps will create more work than their contributions merit. Some sectors have virtually given up on the authentic engagement of volunteers and hired an army of major gift officers instead. For most organizations, it is neither strategic nor affordable to relegate volunteers to a symbolic role. The best strategy is to avoid problems through the constant, gentle application of management tools. When even your best efforts fail to corral volunteers, try peer pressure. Ask the board chair, committee chair, or another influential leader

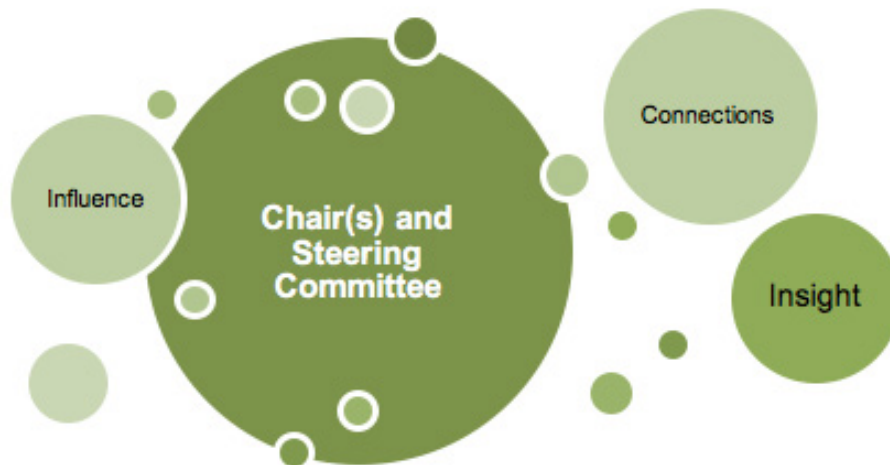
to meet privately with the troublemaker to get to the root of the problem and redirect him or her. Or pair him/her with a high-performing volunteer. If all else fails, it may be necessary to ask the volunteer to step aside—or, better yet, to step into an ‘honorific’ role that may better fit their temperament or availability.

**Q: What’s the best way to structure our volunteer corps?**

**A:** Again, the best answer needs to take into consideration volunteer roles and personalities. Let’s consider a campaign steering committee, for example. A tight-knit committee with a strong “commander” type chair may respond well to a traditional, hierarchical structure.



More and more often, the campaign committee needs to be flexible and adapt to the informal style of today’s volunteers. A small, strong central steering committee assumes the principal responsibilities. They cultivate an “outer orbit” of ambassadors who can be called upon strategically to offer connections, influence, or insight as needed. While the steering committee meets frequently (at least monthly) the corps of ambassadors is called together infrequently (quarterly or semi-annually) to refresh their understanding of and commitment to the initiative.



## *Q: How can we sustain our volunteers' effectiveness?*

**A:** Like a garden, a volunteer corps must be tended if it is to remain fruitful.

The ingredients for success include:

- **Support:** Provide easy-to-follow instructions and easy-to-use tools such as campaign marketing materials. Utilize technology when it's helpful, but don't rely on an email when a personal phone call is more likely to get the job done.
- **Refresh:** Add new members and allow others to take a break. This is especially important for any standing committee such as the development committee of the board. For campaign committees, we've seen this take the form of rotating leadership, where different leaders step into the campaign chair's role at intervals.
- **Train:** Present regular opportunities to build the skills and knowledge of volunteers, and treat them like the 'insiders' you want them to be.
- **Motivate:** Beyond the achievement of fundraising goals, your volunteers are inspired by the cause and need to be reminded of the impact of their contributions. Invite them on tours, especially hard-hat tours of a construction project. Invite a client or audience member to your next meeting to tell their story.
- **Thank:** Even the most high-powered individual wants to feel appreciated. Send thank you notes frequently (the more personalized the better). Acknowledge their efforts in publications and during public presentations. Give them credit for successes and shield them from blame when something doesn't work out.

As you tend your volunteer corps, you invest time and care in one of your organization's most valuable assets. The better you tend, the greater the benefits to all.

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Benefactor Group is happy to discuss your specific situation and help you maximize the role of volunteers in your fundraising program. Just contact us at 1-877-437-3700 or [info@benefactorgroup.com](mailto:info@benefactorgroup.com) to begin the conversation.