Supporting Your Community Through Effective Partnerships & Volunteer Engagement

NYC Service 2022
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Select tools adapted from Civic Service Design Tools + Tactics

Designed by: Diane Zhou
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section One: Understand Your Community And Assess Your Ability To Meet Its Needs</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand Your Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Community Needs and Challenges</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Assess Community Needs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map Community Assets</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Community Asset Mapping</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess Yourself and Make a Plan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect On How To Address Community Needs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Reflection On Organizational Needs And Assets</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envision The Path Forward</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Our Vision For Serving The Community</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan To Increase Organizational Capacity</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Plan And Ideate With “How Might We?”</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section Two: Increase Your Capacity For Impact Through Partnerships And Volunteers</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build Partnerships</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: Academy Of Medical &amp; Public Health Services (AMPHS)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Potential Partners</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Potential Partner Checklist</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Long Term</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know What You Bring To The Table</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Articulate Your Unique Value Proposition</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Yourself</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Meeting</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: First Meeting Checklist</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustain And Maintain Strong Partnerships</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen With Intention</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead With Transparency</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Collaboration Through Open Communication</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage Volunteers</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Volunteer Projects With Purpose</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage Volunteer Skills And Talents</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Your Volunteers Up For Success</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Journey Mapping</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study (continued)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onboard Your Volunteers</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool: Checklist For Onboarding Volunteers</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

At NYC Service, we strive to equip resilient and engaged neighborhoods with the knowledge, access, and support they need to meet pressing community needs. This toolkit aims to provide community organizations with the tools and resources needed to increase their positive impact.

The toolkit is organized into three main sections:

1. Understand your community and assess your ability to meet its needs
2. Increase capacity for impact through partnerships and volunteers
3. Evaluate, evolve, and share your stories

While Section 1 guides you in a community and organizational landscape analysis that will help assess how to move forward and Section 3 enables you to reflect and evaluate partnerships and amplify them through storytelling, Section 2 is the heart of this toolkit. It focuses, specifically, on how you can increase your positive impact by forming mutually beneficial partnerships for change with organizations and volunteers.

The familiar expression “Many hands make light work” dates to the 1300s—and, for good reason, it has stood the test of time. It is common knowledge that communities succeed when they act as a team with the common good as their goal. Partnerships lie at the foundation of any thriving community, and this toolkit will help you identify the best partners for your organization to achieve its goals.

Whether your organization uses this toolkit to forge new partnerships with other community-based organizations, corporations, and/or to develop new sources of volunteers, strategic partnerships will bring new resources, contacts, experience, and capabilities to the table that can increase your organization’s impact. The expanded point of view that - inevitably - accompanies new partnerships can ensure that your collective approach is genuinely inclusive, appropriate, and effective for your targeted audience. Partnerships also generate a broader sense of ownership, collaboration, and trust, leading to more creative and efficient solutions to shared challenges. Finally, partnerships, along with storytelling, can bring all partners access to new audiences that increase each organization’s visibility, credibility, and impact. These are all positive outcomes for changemakers who want to meet pressing community needs.

We encourage you to use this toolkit in its entirety, but you can also dip into the various sections that meet your current needs. Each narrative section is followed by valuable tools and exercises that translate each section’s ideas into concrete actions so you can hone your organization’s ability to drive positive and lasting change in your community. However you use this toolkit, we trust it helps forward your important work to support the many communities that make New York the unique and amazing city that it undoubtedly is.
Note: Links to other resources are being provided as a convenience and for informational purposes only. They do not necessarily constitute an endorsement or approval of the corporation, organization, or individual’s products, services, or opinions. Please contact the external site for answers to questions regarding its content or permission to use the material for your own purposes.
Section One: Understand Your Community And Assess Your Ability To Meet Its Needs

Understand Your Community

Tools:

- Assess community needs
- Map community assets

Key takeaways:

- Surface community needs and challenges
- Map community assets

When thinking about how best to support your community, it is critical to understand the current landscape. Each community is unique and has its own history, culture, dynamics, assets, and challenges. You need to understand these factors to ensure your efforts meet community needs and are both appropriate and effective.

To learn more about current needs in a community or neighborhood, involving community members in all conversations is critical. Their perspective will give you the best insight into the community’s most pressing needs. While you may have access to more aggregated information at the city or borough level, understanding a community at the neighborhood level can help clarify critical issues and disparities for that population, allowing you to target your support.

Surface Community Needs and Challenges

There is no substitute for connecting with community members and listening to their experiences, frustrations, and stories to truly understand any neighborhood’s needs. Reflect upon the focal issues for your organization and what knowledge gaps you may have concerning the community’s previous and current experiences of those issues.

To fill those gaps, consider a combination of methods to gather reliable insights. While surveys allow broad stakeholder input that is possibly more candid if responses are anonymous or confidential, listening sessions with smaller gatherings of community members allow for a deeper and more nuanced discussion and understanding of needs and the challenges and opportunities to meet them. For both surveys and listening sessions, solicit feedback from a range of relevant stakeholders, including community leaders, individuals that benefit from your organization’s services, local community groups, volunteers, community activists, and local businesses.
To determine how extensive a needs assessment to undertake, consider your organization’s depth of knowledge of the community, the relationships you have, and how much you already know based on ongoing dialogue, the urgency of the moment, and whether there is time to pause. For example, during the first wave of COVID-19 response, many organizations had to dive in to help their neighborhoods with whatever immediate needs emerged each day. These organizations were on the front lines of action from distributing food and PPE, sharing the latest information on safety protocols, or checking in on seniors and other homebound residents most at risk of becoming infected. As time went on, however, some organizations were able to gather input to guide their efforts as they planned for the next response phase.

To ensure you are getting authentic input:

- Invite candid feedback on what needs are being met and where there are gaps.
- Be open to both praise and criticism of your organization’s work.
- Make it clear you are there to listen with an intent to respond and best serve the community.
- Have a strong facilitator who understands the community and some dynamics and can help ensure a productive discussion.

**Tool: Assess Community Needs**

Use these questions as a starting point for structuring your discussion with key community members and stakeholders. Reflect on where there may be gaps in your organization’s knowledge of the community and add relevant questions to the list.

- Which needs of the community are met well? Who is meeting them and how?
- What community needs are not being met sufficiently?
- What resources are already available locally to help meet these needs?
- Are community members aware of all the essential local resources that could help meet their needs?
- What barriers prevent these needs from being met? Are there other local resources that help address these barriers?
- Are there particular groups or populations that are not receiving sufficient support? If so, what is preventing them from receiving the support they need?
- Are there other neighborhoods that better meet these needs? How do they do it? Which organizations are most effective?
**Map Community Assets**

While understanding the needs and deficits in a community is critical to planning, it is equally important to identify the strengths and assets that a community can harness to meet those needs. Including community members in this exercise will generate valuable insights. It can also be rewarding and empowering for community members to name and acknowledge their unique strengths and abilities.

An **assets-based approach** views the community through a positive lens that reveals the resources available at hand and where there are gaps between needs and existing resources. It encourages the community to look internally for solutions first and consider a range of areas, from formal organizations to informal community groups, from physical space available to the time, skills, and expertise of local leaders, groups, and individuals.

Asset mapping allows a community to deepen its self-awareness. This new understanding can, in turn, guide community organizations to tap into existing neighborhood assets to meet needs more effectively. The process can also provide clarity on the areas organizations can further develop to expand their capacity.

**Tool: Community Asset Mapping**

**Objective:** The purpose of this activity is to list existing assets or resources in the neighborhood and facilitate connections between organizations working to build on those assets.

**Step 1:** Define the geographical (or other) boundaries of the neighborhood you plan to serve and the focal issue or issues your organization plans to address.

**Step 2:** Create a list of organizations and key individuals in the community that might help achieve your mission and address the outstanding needs that were identified.

**Step 3:** Choose your priority assets from each column and list them below. Identify potential partners to connect you with these community assets (columns 2 and 3).

**Step 4:** Clarify what the partner could do to help support or complement your work and how a partnership with your organization might forward the potential partner’s work (columns 4 and 5).

When this table is complete you now have a list of potential partners with key talking points for an introductory conversation.
Our organization will work with __________________________ on _____________________________.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Issues</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Governmental</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Local Groups/Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consider resident skills and talents. Are there any individual leaders or relevant subject matter experts in my community? (e.g. block and tenant association leaders, college and university community engagement offices, etc.)</td>
<td>Are there any local institutions that may be able to provide social, physical resources and/or access to volunteers? (e.g. local YMCA, social service organizations, etc.)</td>
<td>Are there any current government initiatives in the neighborhood? Who are our elected officials that could be a resource? (e.g. local council/assembly member district offices, New York City agencies, community boards, etc.)</td>
<td>Does my neighborhood have any historic landmarks, museums, other institutions that could provide physical space, social and learning resources, etc.? (e.g. houses of worship, community centers, CBOs, etc.)</td>
<td>What are the grassroots and local groups (including virtual groups) that are active in my neighborhood that may have access to broader networks and unique resources? (e.g. mutual aid and “buy nothing” groups, etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Sample Community Asset Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Category</th>
<th>Priority Asset</th>
<th>Potential Partners to Contact</th>
<th>How a Partnership Could Forward the Work of My Organization</th>
<th>How a Partnership Could Forward the Potential Partners’ Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>1. Local community activists</td>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>Amplify message, access to new networks</td>
<td>Our organization could partner on addressing issues that align</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>1. Local hospital</td>
<td>Good Samaritan Hospital</td>
<td>Leverage facility and staff to amplify messaging and deliver services</td>
<td>Partner on communications for volunteer activities or messaging about public health advisories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental</td>
<td>1. Local elected officials</td>
<td>Names of local elected officials</td>
<td>Amplify message, facilitate new partnerships and opportunities</td>
<td>Our organization could help address critical needs in the community identified by elected officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>1. Local Church</td>
<td>Reverend John Doe</td>
<td>Church has a reliable volunteer base</td>
<td>Activities through our organization would provide an opportunity for congregants to bond with one another, while getting to know and giving back to the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Local Arts Collective</td>
<td>Volunteer coordinator</td>
<td>Potential to partner on or cross-promote volunteer activities</td>
<td>Our organization could provide capacity for a mural project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Civic Associations</td>
<td>1. Neighborhood Beautification Group</td>
<td>Jackson Heights Beautification Groups</td>
<td>Access to networks, potential to identify projects to further both organizations’ goals</td>
<td>Access to new and different volunteers; opportunity to gain visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Local Open Streets Group</td>
<td>Open Streets NYC</td>
<td>Co-hosting of events to maximize awareness and participation; access to new networks</td>
<td>Co-hosting of events to maximize awareness and participation; access to new networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset Category</td>
<td>Priority Asset</td>
<td>Potential Partners to Contact</td>
<td>How a Partnership Could Forward the Work of My Organization</td>
<td>How a Partnership Could Forward the Potential Partners’ Work</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governmental</td>
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<td>Cultural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Civic Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assess Yourself and Make a Plan

Tools:

• Reflection on organizational needs and assets
• Our vision for serving the community
• Plan and ideate

Key Takeaways:

• Reflect on how to address community needs
• Envision your path forward
• Plan to increase organizational capacity

Reflect On How To Address Community Needs

Once you have clearly identified the community’s needs and accurately assessed existing assets and resources to help address those needs, your organization will want to hone in on the unmet needs and outstanding gaps that your organization could potentially meet. Understanding the greatest needs and how your organization is uniquely positioned to support your community will help maximize your impact.

Tool: Reflection On Organizational Needs And Assets

Use these questions to reflect on the state of your organization now, which beneficial systems are in place, and areas where it could improve.

• What has our organization done really well to address some of the community’s articulated needs?
• What are some vital organizational strengths that we can lean on and build on to address those needs?
• What challenges can prevent our organization from delivering on our mission and supporting our community?
• What have we tried that hasn’t worked well? What have we learned that could serve us well going forward?
• What are our organization’s core competencies that we are uniquely poised to offer the community?
• What community needs are we ill-equipped to meet? Are there gaps in our organization’s capacity that we need to address?
• Could we meet those needs through partnerships with other organizations or volunteers with different skills, experiences, or resources?
**Envision The Path Forward**

As you rethink how your organization could best serve the community, consider what you may need to change, build, or grow to deliver on your mission. You will want to develop or hone a clear vision of what you want to accomplish for any transition. A clear vision will focus your efforts and can guide you to be successful.

Once you have envisioned your organization’s future state and understand what steps you need to take to get there, you will be on track to achieve your desired community impact. In conjunction with the reflection questions above, the visioning activity below offers a simple way to **conduct an honest review of your organizational efficiency** and effectiveness.

**Tool: Our Vision For Serving The Community**

**Objective:** The activity will help identify gaps between how your organization currently operates and where it wants to be in its future state.

**Step 1:** Invite key stakeholders from your organization (with a range of perspectives - leaders, frontline staff, program managers, volunteer managers, etc.) to work individually to complete the table below.

### Sample Visioning Tool (Step One)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Current State:</strong></th>
<th><strong>One Year From Now:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about your own knowledge and experience, as well as what you’ve heard from the community and other stakeholders, write down TEN HONEST WORDS to describe our organization’s current approach to address community needs. Think about it from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) and the types of words they might use (the good and the bad) to describe how we work.</td>
<td>Write down TEN WORDS you would like this same range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) to use to describe our organization’s approach to serving the community A YEAR FROM NOW. What would you LIKE them to say about our organization and the way we address community needs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Reactive
- Under-resourced
- Isolated
- Client-focused
- Passionate
- Tireless
- ...

- Intentional
- Data-driven
- Feedback seeking
- Fundraising
- Partnership-seeking
- Passionate
- Client-focused
- ...

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12 Supporting Your Community Through Effective Partnerships & Volunteer Engagement
### Visioning Tool Template (Step One)

#### Current State:
Thinking about your own knowledge and experience, as well as what you’ve heard from the community and other stakeholders, write down TEN HONEST WORDS to describe our organization’s current approach to address community needs. Think about it from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) and the types of words they might use (the good and the bad) to describe how we work.

#### One Year From Now:
Write down TEN WORDS you would like this same range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) to use to describe our organization’s approach to serving the community A YEAR FROM NOW. What would you LIKE them to say about our organization and the way we address community needs?
**Step 2:** Come together and share your words from the first column and write down common themes and outliers. Then share your words from the second column and note the common themes and the outliers. Compare notes to see if you align on organizational strengths and gaps and how you would like the organization to evolve in one year. This exercise can help surface some initial thoughts to help guide discussion about organizational vision.

In case you need help getting started:

- What is the theme that came up the most for folks?
- What are some issues that affect everyone in the group?

### Sample Visioning Tool (Step Two)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current State</th>
<th>One Year From Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Well intended but lack of time to plan</td>
<td>- Forward thinking with plans to scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Focusing on immediate needs &gt; planning for the future</td>
<td>- Aim to be more intentional in staff/volunteer assignments to ensure efficient use of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Inefficient use of resources</td>
<td>- Intake systems developed and streamlined to ease staff capacity, exploring options for future funding/increased staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of capacity/under-funded</td>
<td>- N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTLIERS:</strong></td>
<td><strong>OUTLIERS:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Well known in the community</td>
<td>- N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Visioning Tool Template (Step Two)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current State</th>
<th>One Year From Now</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>THEMES:</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Step 3:** Reflect on the results and discuss as a group. What are the key differences you see between the current state and desired future state? Are there clear indications of where to focus your work to achieve your desired future state? What are some of the words or ideas that showed up as outliers? Different perspectives help paint a more accurate picture of how stakeholders perceive your organization, which can guide your plan to evolve.

**Plan To Increase Organizational Capacity**

Your reflections on community needs and assets, along with your learnings from the visioning activity, will help clarify the next steps for your organization. However, before you jump into action, it’s essential to pause, create a plan, and prepare your organization to evolve.

**Tool: Plan And Ideate With “How Might We?”**

Use “How Might We” questions to guide ideation and brainstorming and create actionable ideas. Rather than simply ask how an issue could be resolved, you will create more opportunities for solutions if you frame the question more openly. The How Might We format encourages you to expand your thinking to generate more ideas and actionable next steps.

Reflect with colleagues and stakeholders on your knowledge of the community’s needs and assets, as well as the themes that emerged from the visioning activity. Ask yourselves the following two questions and brainstorm your answers:

- How might we better leverage our strengths to increase our community impact?
- How might we fill some of the gaps the community and our organization have identified to fulfill our mission?

Now consider some more specific challenges you wish to address and frame additional How Might We questions to brainstorm solutions,

**How to craft a “How Might We” question:**

- **Too broad:** How might we get volunteers to return?
- **Too narrow:** How might we provide food for volunteers at project sites so they will be encouraged to participate again?
- **Just right:** How might we create a welcoming environment that will encourage volunteers to return? Or: How might we build incentives for volunteers to return?

For each of your questions, write out potential solutions that your organization could explore. Discuss which ideas seem most impactful and which are most feasible.
### Sample Planning Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How Might We?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Potential Ideas/Solutions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How might we</strong> better leverage our strengths to increase our community impact?</td>
<td>Organization has a strong base of support – could formalize that support by developing a volunteer program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How might we</strong> fill some of the gaps we and the community have identified to fulfill our mission?</td>
<td>Organization could partner with organizations outside the neighborhood that have successfully tackled these or similar issues to learn their processes ⭐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How might we</strong> create more projects and tasks to utilize our current volunteer capacity?</td>
<td>Organization could have internal meetings to figure out which tasks are needed and how volunteers might be able to do them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How might we</strong> create systems to effectively recruit more volunteers?</td>
<td>Organization could post on volunteer platforms or hold regular volunteer information sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Might We?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Potential Ideas/Solutions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How might we...</em></td>
<td><em>Star the ideas that feel most impactful and highlight the ideas that feel most feasible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How might we...</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>How might we...</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>How might we...</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once you have a list of ideas to explore and consider, you will need to consider how to take action. To address unmet community needs and fill the gaps between your organization’s current state and how you want to serve your community, you will likely need to increase your organization’s capacity in some areas. Some key ways to build organizational ability to increase impact are:

- **Partnerships:** Well-chosen strategic partners bring new experience, resources, and capabilities to increase your community impact.

- **Volunteers:** Community and corporate volunteers offer a relatively low-cost way to bring new skills to your organization without adding headcount.

- **Other Avenues:** Strategic board seats, external perspectives through advisors and subject matter experts, and other well-chosen sources of input can build and broaden organizational capacity.
Section Two: Increase Your Capacity For Impact Through Partnerships And Volunteers

Build Partnerships

Tools:

• Potential partner checklist
• Articulate your unique value proposition
• First meeting checklist

Key Takeaways:

• Know what you bring to the table
• Listen with intention and lead with transparency
• Foster collaboration through open communication

Once you have a clear understanding of the community needs that you want to address, the community and organizational assets you can leverage, and any existing gaps, you can identify potential partner organizations that support you in addressing real needs and increase both your organization’s capacity and its impact.

Partnerships built strategically and grounded in a shared sense of purpose are likely to be the most successful. Seek out partner organizations to create shared value and expand your approach to meet your organization’s mission and goals.

As you seek out potential partnerships, you might also consider how you can have the most profound impact in your community by building a shared infrastructure that sustains neighborhood engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, underscored the necessity to build community organization alliances that could efficiently address our communities’ greatest needs. “The whole is worth more than the sum of its parts” is an expression that definitely can apply to well-chosen partnerships. Potential sources of strategic partners could include local, grassroots, and smaller community-based organizations (CBOs), often run by community leaders and the organization’s clients.

If you take the time to explore and find the right partners for your organization, you will have a better chance to build long-term relationships, which can benefit both parties.
Case Study: Academy Of Medical & Public Health Services (AMPHS)

The Academy of Medical & Public Health Services is a not-for-profit health service organization that aims to make care more accessible to immigrants in New York. Located in Sunset Park, AMPHS has historically served predominantly Latinx and Chinese community members.

In response to COVID-19, AMPHS began to host regular distribution events where food and PPE were provided to residents out of their offices located in Sunset Park. Around the same time, another community-based organization that operated out of a mosque next door to AMPHS, Muslims Giving Back, began distributing fresh halal meals to members of the Sunset Park community out of their Hunger Truck. While AMPHS had not worked with Muslims Giving Back in the past, the two organizations soon realized they could combine their efforts to expand their community reach. Rather than going to two separate locations to receive food, families could now wait in a single line to obtain groceries and a cooked meal.

As AMPHS would come to realize, developing a partnership with their next-door neighbors would prove to be a mutually beneficial undertaking. In addition to allowing both organizations to increase their capacity by pooling physical resources and volunteers, both nonprofit organizations were able to reach previously untapped communities within Sunset Park: Muslims Giving Back was able to increase their visibility and promote cultural understanding among non-Muslim populations they hadn’t traditionally served, while AMPHS was able to expand their reach beyond Spanish and Chinese speaking communities in Sunset Park, connecting Arabic speakers in the community to COVID-19 resources and other vital health services.

According to AMPHS Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff Mon Yuck Yu:

“The partnership we’ve developed with Muslims Giving Back has been a win-win – both from a programmatic perspective as well as a strategic one. The partnership has benefitted both parties from a programmatic standpoint in that we are constantly providing each other with mutual support: if we’re short on tables, or need assistance communicating with an Arabic speaking client, we can now always go to Muslims Giving Back for guidance. This partnership has also been strategic; it has helped us think about the possibilities that exist for community building here in Sunset Park. Early on in the pandemic, we didn’t really have any plans to continue food distribution beyond a couple months. After partnering with Muslims Giving Back, however, and being exposed to a larger segment of the community than those we traditionally served, it became clear that food scarcity is a huge need in our community, and we’ve since reinforced our commitment to continuing to provide food to residents. Perhaps even more meaningful, the partnership with Muslims Giving Back has allowed our organizations and the residents we serve to transcend cultural boundaries through food: providing opportunities for clients to learn about each other and ultimately decreasing xenophobia in our community. As our partnership continues to grow, we’re beginning to think about how we can work together and serve the community in ways beyond food – we’re looking into how to share information on public health, COVID-19 and vaccinations, and are exploring the possibility of collaborating on outreach for vaccination clinics.”¹
Identify Potential Partners

It can be daunting to think about finding the right partner. Still, **if you invest the time and embark on a thoughtful process, a solid partnership could allow your organization to have a more significant impact in your community.** To find a partner that is a good fit might also mean that you need to travel outside your comfort zone (both literally and figuratively). For the right partnership, that can be very rewarding.

**Tool: Potential Partner Checklist**

Does my partner have most of the things on this list? [Fill in your priorities for a potential partner to customize this checklist]:

- Demonstrated knowledge of the relevant issue area and/or community
- Strong reputation for working with the community to meet critical needs
- Gaps in service that my organization is well-positioned to help fill
- Leaders and points of contact that are passionate and candid about the organization’s needs, strengths, and limitations
- Complementary skills, knowledge, and competencies to my organization
- Goals and values that align with or complement my organization’s goals and values
- An approach to work or method of working that aligns with my organization’s work style
- Connections to communities and contacts that are of interest to my organization
- The capacity to invest in a new partnership
- Willingness to collaborate and some degree of flexibility in planning

Think Long Term

**Long-term partnerships** are generally more efficient and more effective for a few reasons. First, you don’t have to build a new partnership every time you want to start a new project; and second, you also have greater potential to deepen community impact and affect lasting change if you work together over time.

Sometimes, it takes time to build up to long-term partnerships. Brand new or smaller organizations might not currently offer the infrastructure or resources required to sustain such relationships. For now, new or small organizations may work best for short-term or even one-time pilot partnerships. **Leverage these partnerships to increase volunteer engagement** and then ramp up to navigate a longer-term alliance or coalition in the future.
Know What You Bring To The Table

Every organization has unique assets and resources to share with the community and with its partners. In sections two and three, there are activities to identify organizational strengths and assets and articulate your vision for best serving the community. Understanding what sets your organization apart and what you are uniquely positioned to bring to a partnership will help maximize your company’s community impact. Before you meet with a potential partner, know what you have to offer to have a productive first conversation. It will also be helpful to think about how an organization might benefit from a partnership with you.

What Partner Organizations Want From Each Other

- Shared values
- High community impact
- Visibility, reach, and access to new and relevant audiences, including communities, funders, other partners, etc.
- Credibility with a new community or in an issue area
- Cost-sharing and efficiency
- Opportunities to engage employees and community members

Resources to Help Find the Right Partner!

- Visit nyc.gov/service to navigate the city’s most critical needs, identify neighborhoods that need the most support, and connect with possible partner organizations located and working in the 33 NYC neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 and impacted by long-standing health and economic inequities.
- Leverage personal networks and LinkedIn.
- Attend virtual or in-person neighborhood/community meetings.
- Attend and work virtual convenings to expand your network.
- Ask current funders, partners, community members/leaders, or colleagues to make introductions.

Tool: Articulate Your Unique Value Proposition

Being able to articulate your organization’s approach, the unique value you bring to your community, and what you’re looking for in a potential partner is essential when embarking on finding the right partner. Use this tool to reflect and then start crafting a pitch to a potential partner. If you did the Community Asset Mapping exercise earlier in this toolkit, refer back to look at potential partners and craft your pitch with one of those preferred partners in mind.
**Your Organization’s Unique Value Proposition**  
(Sample)

**Organization Name:** Brighter Bites

**Organization Description:** Brighter Bites is a national nonprofit with various chapters across the country, including NYC, that delivers fresh fruits and vegetables directly into the hands of students and families. The mission of Brighter Bites is to create communities of health through fresh food, and it accomplishes this mission through a three-step program of produce distribution, nutrition education and a fun food experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My organization’s overall mission is:</th>
<th>To create communities of health through fresh food. This is done by operating a theory-driven, evidence-based intervention program that delivers fresh produce directly to families via schools and other partnerships.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My organization is really good at:</td>
<td>Partnering with schools to provide nutrition education and distribute fresh produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes our approach unique:</td>
<td>We pair food distribution with nutrition education. We also provide recipes and tip sheets for recipients to learn more about their produce, and explore new ways of enjoying them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key needs in our community (in our space) that are not being sufficiently met are:</td>
<td>Lack of education surrounding nutrition; lack of access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are we currently doing/thinking about doing to address these needs?</td>
<td>Currently distribute food based on partnerships with schools. Thinking about how to expand our reach to schools in other boroughs and high need communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would your ideal partner bring to the table? (e.g. connections to the community, work in a specific issue area, specific types of projects, employee skills)</td>
<td>Partner capable of donating food, and/or providing transportation of food to our partner sites. An ideal partner may operate in the food and/or delivery space, and understand the importance of nutrition – especially within underserved communities. Could be a food bank, pantry etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Your Organization's Unique Value Proposition**  
(Template)

**Organization Name:** __________________________

**Organization Description:**

My organization's overall mission is:

My organization is really good at:

What makes our approach unique:

Key needs in our community (in our space) that are not being sufficiently met are:

What are we currently doing/thinking about doing to address these needs?

What would your ideal partner bring to the table? (e.g. connections to the community, work in a specific issue area, specific types of projects, employee skills)
Sample Pitch

This is just a starting point. Revise, add, delete to make it your own.

Our organization works to **create healthy communities through fresh food by operating**

**a theory-driven, evidence-based intervention program that delivers fresh produce**

**(mission/vision/goals)**

**directly to families via schools and other partnerships.** We are equipped to make an impact in our community because of our **partnerships with schools to provide nutrition**

**(strengths and assets that are relevant to pitch to your partner)**

**education and distribute fresh produce** and our track record of **providing children with**

**the nutrition and education needed to live long, healthy lives.** Some of the critical needs in our community that aren’t sufficiently being met are **education surrounding**

**nutrition and access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.** To address these needs, we are currently **distributing food based on partnerships with schools**

**(note specific actions, campaigns or initiatives you are driving to meet these needs)**

interested in exploring **how we might expand our reach to schools in other boroughs**

**(note specific actions or tactics that could amplify your impact)**

**and high need communities.** A partnership with **Foodbank X** would allow us to **reach**

**more communities and provide culturally responsive cuisine** and we might be able to **support you in recruiting reliable volunteers for your prep and packing work.** Together **we can amplify each other’s community impact and expand our reach in underserved communities.**

**(note specific impacts you would like to have through partnership)**

**communities.**
Pitch Template

This is just a starting point. Revise, add, delete to make it your own.

Our organization works to ________________________________ (mission/vision/goals)
______________________________. We are equipped to make an impact in our community because of our ________________________________ (strengths and assets that are relevant to pitch to your partner)

______________________________

and our track record of ________________________________ (note concrete positive impacts of your community work)

______________________________

Some of the critical needs in our community that aren’t sufficiently being met are ________________________________

______________________________

To address these needs, we are currently ________________________________ (note specific actions, campaigns or initiatives you are driving to meet these needs)

______________________________

and are interested in exploring ________________________________. (note specific actions or tactics that could amplify your impact)

A partnership with ______________________________ would allow us to ________________________________

______________________________ and we might be able to support you in ________________________________ (be as specific as possible and describe how your can help forward the potential partner’s work)

Together we can amplify each other’s community impact and ________________________________ (note specific impacts you would like to have through partnership)

______________________________.
**Prepare Yourself**

Before you meet with a new potential partner, research and learn about the organization’s mission, work, capacity, and how it operates. **Take the time to understand the potential partner organization** and the communities it serves as much as possible. Look at its website, search news stories, and explore any studies, articles, or collaborative thought-leadership projects that involve the potential partner.

After taking these steps, don’t assume you know all there is to know. Let your potential partner know what you have learned about their work but that it is no substitute for hearing the information directly from the partner itself. **Invite potential partners to educate you** on their clients, communities, and the specific opportunities and challenges they face.

**The First Meeting**

The tone for your relationship with a potential partner will be set the first time you meet. For that reason, it is vital to **emphasize relationship building** in this first conversation. This is a time for you and your potential partner to get to know one another, not to jump immediately into plans and details. Consider visiting your potential partner at their location so you can get the first-hand experience of their community and work environment.

Enter the conversation with a willingness to **explore different ways to collaborate to address community needs**. During this first meeting, the most important thing you can do is listen well to the other organization and learn about its needs, immediate gaps, and how you might help. Follow up with questions and ideas based on what you learned to demonstrate your engagement and show that you clearly understand what the potential partner has shared.

During the conversation, showcase your own organization’s assets and skills, and hone in on how you can **create shared value together**. Share high-level thinking of what a partnership might look like, and ask your partner to share their goals for a partnership.

Before jumping into a partnership, **understand that your partner may not have the same ideas, expectations, or context as you do**. Ask your partner about their expectations of collaboration and how they like to work with partners. Listen closely to what they have to say and share your own perspective. After engaging in this kind of dialogue, both parties will have the information needed to recognize a match.

**At the end of the meeting, define the next steps and plan to stay in touch.** Partnerships do not form overnight; you may need to follow up multiple times before creating something solid. That is okay! The key is to be patient and persistent.
Tool: First Meeting Checklist

Before you confirm an official partnership, it is essential to understand the many aspects of the potential partner’s work. Ask about:

- The organization’s history, its work, and approach, and its immediate and long-term needs.
- The community the organization serves and any relevant history, dynamics, or important information.
- Staffing, structure, and organizational capacity, particularly around the execution of volunteer activities.
- What has or hasn’t worked before with previous partnerships and how that might inform the way they would like to work with your organization.
- Volunteer projects that have worked well for the organization in the past and new ideas they may want to explore.
- The organization’s level of interest, enthusiasm, commitment, and any obstacles to its participation.
- Costs for project coordination and other organizational resources.
- Other priorities the organization may have or want to discuss with you.
- Contacts from previous partners, which you can call as a reference.

Sustain And Maintain Strong Partnerships

Once you have established a partnership with another organization, continue implementing best practices as you communicate and engage with your new partner.

Keep in mind that a partnership is more than a transactional agreement. It is a relationship that requires give and take, authentic sharing, listening, learning, and keeping the health of the partnership top of mind as you craft a plan to work together. Remember that how you engage with your partner is just as important as the outcomes of your partnership.

Each partnership is unique, and you should approach it accordingly. Always be respectful of your partner’s knowledge, expertise, work, and impact. Remind your partner that you are equal partners and always welcome honest and direct feedback and input.

Healthy partnerships can grow to be longer-term and deeper relationships that lead to more significant community impact, richer communications and storytelling, and greater efficiency in operations and implementation.
**Listen With Intention**

Your new partner has a wealth of knowledge and expertise concerning their community and clients. Your partner also knows what types and modes of engagement will best meet the community’s needs. You also have extensive expertise in these areas. Being a thoughtful partner will require both parties to listen to each other’s needs and learn how to best support each other’s work. Together, you can build a plan for a partnership that will meet both your needs.

**To be a good partner, you don’t have to say yes to everything a partner suggests.** Listen to their perspective and share yours. Open and equal communication is critical to the success of all partnerships, regardless of the size or scale.

**Lead With Transparency**

**Transparency is critical for any successful partnership.** Sharing motivations and expectations upfront—and questions and concerns along the way—are keys to laying the groundwork for a lasting partnership that adds value for all partners.

This applies to all aspects of the partnership, especially financial needs and support, which can be challenging to discuss openly.

**Tips for Being a Good Listener**

- Always ask the partner what is best for them. Don’t assume.
- Ask your partner about past collaborations with other organizations and what worked and didn’t about those partnerships.
- Invite your partner to be candid and open about expectations and reservations so you can respond, share your thoughts, and have a productive discussion.

**Foster Collaboration Through Open Communication**

A strong partnership requires ongoing thoughtful dialogue and parties that are willing to engage collaboratively. When you take the time to cultivate and steward a partnership, you build the mutual trust and respect each partner needs to reach shared goals more effectively.
Set the tone: Remember that you aim to forge a partnership where both parties have something to offer and something to gain. Frame the potential collaboration in this way. Everyone in the partnership should understand and acknowledge what each partner brings and aims to take from the partnership.

Craft a shared vision: Work coming out of partnerships should be co-created. Bring all relevant leaders to the table, including employees and community members, to create a clear shared vision for the partnership. Map out goals and objectives.

Adapt and be flexible: While it is helpful for both parties to approach an initial planning conversation with a sense of what they seek from a partnership, remaining open and flexible helps develop a relationship that works well for all parties and results in maximum impact on the community.

Clearly assign roles and responsibilities: Everyone who is a part of the partnership should clearly understand their role and responsibilities and how to collaborate with other people in the partnership.

Share leadership and decision making: Early on, align on how decisions will be made. Ensure the decision-making process considers views from all sides of the partnership. Full consensus may not always be realistic or efficient, but identify the decision-makers on both sides and ensure that all critical decisions flow through them.

Set a cadence for staying connected: You will want to stay connected throughout the partnership and be in touch regularly to discuss progress, questions, decisions, and opportunities that arise. Checking in regularly also provides an opportunity to ensure everyone is aligned and to surface any concerns or issues that may need to be addressed. While each partner can make themselves available for spontaneous conversations, a regular cadence with consolidated points of contact will help keep the partnership on track. It will ensure any concerns are addressed promptly.
Document the partnership: Having a document that outlines the basic terms of the agreement is an important starting point for any partnership. Once the partner organizations agree upon working together, document the details to ensure both sides are clear on expectations, deliverables, and timelines. To protect all parties, acknowledge that unforeseeable circumstances require adjustments in the original document/agreement. Note that any proposed changes will be discussed and decided with the consent of all parties. To ensure clarity and understanding, many organizations create a Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement (MOA or MOU). Don’t limit this practice to framing the partnership alone. Document your plans for an event and who is responsible for what. This will serve you well as a guiding document with assigned accountability for all deliverables.

Tips for Communication Success!

- **Model open communication**: Be candid and actively invite your partner’s feedback.
- **Red signals**: If your partner seems hesitant or doubtful, check in with them to learn what concerns them. Work with your partner to find appropriate solutions.
- **Be proactive**: Don’t wait for a misunderstanding to happen. Circumstances can change. Proactively check in with your partner at every scheduled conversation to ensure any potential challenges are addressed sooner rather than later.
Engage Volunteers

Tools:

- Journey mapping
- Checklists to onboard and manage volunteers

Key Takeaways:

- Design volunteer projects with purpose
- Leverage skills and talents of volunteers
- Set volunteers up for success

Volunteers are a great asset that can help community organizations, neighborhoods, and their residents thrive. **Volunteers can significantly increase the capacity and positive impact of your organization.** While they further your work, volunteers can also develop new leadership skills and enhance their own sense of personal fulfillment. Volunteerism can be beneficial for both parties if the organization is intentional in cultivating, supporting, and managing volunteers. This section offers best practices on engaging volunteers effectively to ensure maximum value for both the organization(s) and the volunteers.

**Design Volunteer Projects With Purpose**

Because volunteers are essential assets that can be instrumental in the success of your organization’s work, it is in your best interest to be both intentional and thoughtful about how you structure your volunteer opportunities.

1. **Assess your organization’s needs:** Identify critical organizational goals and needs that could benefit from volunteer support. Refer back to your community and organizational assessments to surface the needs that volunteers can best meet. Consider unmet needs that volunteers can help address and capacity-building activities such as administrative and professional support.

2. **Determine which needs to address with volunteer support:** Weigh which needs are most urgent and might benefit from volunteer support. Consider which opportunities will build organizational capacity, add the most value, and be feasible for the organization in terms of planning, coordination, and management of the volunteer activity.

3. **Think through logistics:** Details are important. Think through all aspects of a project or initiative and consider the following questions and any others you may need to address:

   - Is this a one-time or ongoing engagement?
   - What will the start and end times, or ongoing schedule, be?
   - Who is the target audience for volunteers - what skills, experience, and interests would be the ideal fit?
• What training will volunteers need?
• Who internally will manage volunteers for this initiative - what skills and experience will they need to have?
• What materials, supplies, and tools will volunteers need to complete their tasks successfully?
• Will volunteers need designated space, and if so, is that readily available?
• What is the total project budget, and is that feasible for your organization? If looking for budget approval, remember to include the value volunteers will be adding to your organization.

4. Develop clear volunteer role descriptions: Prospective volunteers should clearly understand the task(s) they will complete and/or the role they will play at your organization. Create a description that outlines all of the key information a volunteer would need to determine if they are a good fit: volunteer role and responsibilities, project timeline, required skills and experience, and key expectations. Make the description compelling and include the expected impact and how this role connects to the organization's mission. If there are skills or leadership development opportunities, or if transportation and refreshments will be provided, be sure to include that as well.

5. Establish success metrics: Consider what success looks like and determine how outcomes will be tracked and the initiative will be evaluated. Set a cadence for regular program evaluation, especially early on, so adjustments can be made as needed.

Leverage Volunteer Skills And Talents

While more conventional volunteer projects and larger scale team events generate value by providing labor for specific projects, offering visibility for your organization and its partners, and creating team-building opportunities for volunteers, skills-based volunteer (SBV) activities leverage volunteers' professional skills and talents to address critical needs and build organizational capacity.

Skills-based volunteers often generate the most value and satisfaction for both the organization and the volunteer. As you begin to define your volunteer program, consider leveraging the skills and talents of those in your community. Be aware that skills-based initiatives require careful planning and management from the organization to get maximum value and ensure a positive experience for the volunteer.
Top Practices for Managing Skills-Based Volunteers (SBV):

- Be specific about the need you are looking to address and **clearly define the parameters of the task or project** the volunteer (or team of volunteers) will take on; estimate the overall time commitment or schedule, so volunteers know what to expect.

- Identify a staff member to be the **primary point of contact** for the volunteer. This person will be responsible for answering questions, providing all relevant materials and information, consolidating approvals/edits/input on deliverables from across the organization, etc.

- **Set clear expectations for both the volunteer and the organization**, including timelines for key milestones, cadence for check-ins, number of rounds of approvals/edits for more extensive deliverables, etc.

- **Promote opportunities** to organization’s existing volunteer base first to see if current volunteers or their networks have the necessary skills for the role.

- **Start small** (for organizations new to SBV) - pilot with one discrete opportunity for the organization to learn best practices firsthand and build on early successes.

- **Invite feedback from volunteers** and ask for input on how to improve the structure of SBV at your organization.

- **Share the impact of the work with volunteers and with colleagues** to demonstrate the value of SBV and build support for this type of volunteer engagement.

- For additional resources on managing SBV, Please see “Skills-Based Volunteerism Resources” in Appendix A.
Recruiting Volunteers

Identifying volunteers that are a strong fit for your organization is critical. Think deeply about who makes up your community and how you can best understand them and tailor your outreach to raise awareness and interest in volunteerism with your organization. Consider potential volunteers’ professional backgrounds and motivations for volunteering, as well as any obstacles that may prevent them from volunteering.

Taking the time to understand your community may uncover new ideas or opportunities that are win-win. For example, suppose many of your potential volunteers have kids and require childcare to volunteer. In that case, your organization may be inspired to explore creating family-friendly opportunities to address the barrier of childcare.

Some other practices to keep in mind when recruiting volunteers:

- **Ensure your information is easily accessible to your target audiences.** For instance, if you work in a multilingual community, ensure that your volunteer recruitment materials are distributed in different languages.
- **Identify relevant networks for your community and your cause**, and coordinate with them to promote and publicize your volunteer opportunities.
- **Spread the word through your organization’s existing online networks**, including social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
• **Engage community stakeholders to help get the word out:** current volunteers, community leaders, local businesses and nonprofits, etc.

• **Keep volunteer intake brief and straightforward.** Ask only for what you really need (skills, interests, availability, etc.) - and be sure to respond to interested volunteers promptly to let them know about the next steps. Save data on skills and interests for future rounds of recruiting.

**Online resources for posting volunteer opportunities to recruit volunteers:**

• [NYC Service Website]:
  - Register as an organization to post volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers.

• [New York Cares]:
  - Submit a project request to receive volunteer support to help your organization deliver critical services.

• [VolunteerMatch]:
  - Claim your organization’s profile to post volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers.

• [Idealist]:
  - Create an account to register your organizations and post volunteer listings.

• [Humbler]:
  - Sign up as an organization to post volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers.

---

**Set Your Volunteers Up For Success**

To engage and retain volunteers and ensure your organization is getting maximum value from volunteer engagement, you will want to ensure your organization is setting your volunteers up for success. This starts with solid volunteer opportunities that are meeting critical needs. The section above on designing volunteer projects provides a roadmap for ensuring that volunteer activities are well planned and adequately resourced with staff and budget. That approach must continue when volunteers walk in the door (or log in to the virtual space!).

The way you bring volunteers into your organization and manage them during their time with you is a critical component of setting them up for a successful engagement that creates value for the organization and the volunteer.
**Tool: Journey Mapping**

Journey mapping will help you to create a framework to refine your volunteer management strategies. Through this exercise, you will visualize the journey a volunteer takes from when they first hear about the opportunity, to when they sign up, to their first day with your organization, and everything in between. Visualizing this journey from both the volunteer perspective and the organization’s view will help you anticipate potential hurdles and plan in advance for volunteers to have the best experience possible, and for your organization to have a streamlined process.

**Step 1:** Keep your target volunteer audience in mind and map a typical volunteer’s journey in the volunteer section as they engage with your organization and their volunteer task.

**Step 2:** In the organization section, list the organization’s role at each stage of a volunteer’s journey and potential opportunities and challenges your staff might encounter.

**Step 3:** This exercise may have surfaced some gaps or weak spots in your processes. To address these gaps, reference the checklists below for some ideas on onboarding and managing regular volunteers. Also, see Appendix A “Day-of Checklist” for additional guidance on volunteer engagements.

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**Case Study: NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)**

The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) is New York City’s municipal preservation agency. It is responsible for protecting New York City’s architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings and sites by granting them landmark or historic district status and regulating them after designation.

As a small City Agency with limited staff capacity, the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) found themselves needing additional assistance when they decided to update their repository of current images and photography related to New York City landmarks. After registering their agency on the NYC Service website, LPC was able to post a listing for volunteer photographers to take photographs of select New York City Landmarks. After getting 28 volunteer sign-ups, a staff member from LPC set up follow-up calls with each individual to describe the assignment in more detail, including the quality of images being sought, the requested vantage point that photos should be taken from, and other information. Following these meetings, five volunteers followed the instructions listed on the NYC Service volunteer posting. They submitted their photos to LPC, and they were later evaluated by LPC staff before being added to their repository for use in agency publications and other media.
For example: If one of your solutions to maintain volunteer retention for corporate volunteers is to create a welcoming environment, your journey map may look something like this:
## Worksheet: Journey Mapping
*(Sample)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entice:</th>
<th>How do people hear about this and what will get them interested in checking it further?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enter:</td>
<td>What is the experience like when they first enter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage:</td>
<td>What are all of the steps of engaging with the service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit:</td>
<td>Once they are done, what will it feel like for them to leave this experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend:</td>
<td>How might they share their experience or tell others about it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Volunteer Journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entice</td>
<td>Volunteers find out through social media (Instagram, LinkedIn) or org website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter</td>
<td>Volunteers are greeted and asked to sign-in. They receive a name tag for orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage</td>
<td>Volunteers complete their tasks and grow in their role with support from the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit</td>
<td>They are made aware of the impact their work made and thanked for their service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>Share their volunteer story on social media or tell their network.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Organization's Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entice</td>
<td>Organizational posts corporate volunteer opportunities listing on social media and website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter</td>
<td>Prepares to welcome volunteers with sign in sheets and other materials. Hosts an orientation to explain how they will be contributing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage</td>
<td>Answer volunteer questions and provide support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit</td>
<td>Explain the impact volunteers made, take group pictures, and thank volunteers for their service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend</td>
<td>Follow up with a thank you email and send additional volunteer opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet: Journey Mapping
(Template)

| Entice: How do people hear about this and what will get them interested in checking it further? |
| Enter: What is the experience like when they first enter? |
| Engage: What are all of the steps of engaging with the service? |
| Exit: Once they are done, what will it feel like for them to leave this experience? |
| Extend: How might they share their experience or tell others about it? |

Volunteer Journey

Organization's Role

Adapted from NYC Civic Service Design Journey Mapping template¹⁰
Onboard Your Volunteers

Your organization only has one opportunity to make a first impression on its volunteers. When new volunteers start with your organization, adequately welcoming and orienting them sets the tone for the relationship. Whether it is a short- or long-term engagement, every volunteer wants to feel welcomed and prepared when they first arrive. See below for some guidance on how to onboard new volunteers that are making a longer-term commitment.

Tool: Checklist For Onboarding Volunteers

- Block time on calendars to welcome new volunteers on their first day.
- Get to know new volunteers: Ask them some questions about their background, personal interests, motivation for volunteering. Have volunteer managers share a bit about themselves as well (e.g., how long you’ve been with the organization, what your role entails, etc.).
- Make them a part of the team: Introduce them to other staff and volunteers they may be working with or sitting near; have a senior leader welcome them; send around an email announcement to colleagues.
- Give them a tour: Show them the pantry, restroom, and other amenities they may need while on-site (for virtual volunteers, it may be helpful to ensure they know how to connect with team members when they need to).
- Orient volunteers to their workspace, which should have all of the tools and materials they need to perform their role (for virtual volunteers, review any necessary access and technology).
- Educate on organizational culture: Share relevant details about the organization’s culture that would be helpful for volunteers to be aware of (e.g., dress code, leadership or team dynamics, etc.).
- Review role description: Explain why their work is essential and how it fits with the organization’s mission and your department’s goals; provide clear direction to make sure they understand responsibilities and expectations and have the opportunity to ask questions.
- Inform them of any training opportunities or other resources they will need to perform their role.
- Set up regular check-ins: At the start, check in frequently with volunteers and invite them to come to you with questions, concerns, and ideas.
Manage Your Volunteers

In addition to bringing volunteers into the organization thoughtfully and intentionally, you will want to continue that level of care throughout a volunteer’s journey with your organization. **Engaging volunteers and inspiring them to make longer-term commitments to your organization will require creating and sustaining an environment that fosters open communication and connection.** See below for some guidance on how to manage your volunteers.

**Tool: Checklist For Managing Volunteers**

- **Provide clear direction:** Ensure volunteers understand what they need to do and have the resources to perform the role; set clear expectations.

- **Communicate regularly:** Even after a volunteer is comfortable in their role, continue to meet with them regularly to maintain open lines of communication, surface any issues, and identify opportunities to evolve or expand their role.

- **Provide feedback:** Positive feedback motivates volunteers, and constructive feedback is essential in ensuring that volunteers fulfill the organization’s needs.

- **Make your volunteers a part of the team:** If appropriate, invite them to relevant meetings and informal staff gatherings (e.g., birthday celebrations, holiday gatherings, etc.); include them on communications re: events/fundraisers as they may be willing to leverage their networks. You may also consider assigning titles to your volunteers, such as “community engagement specialists,” or creating a “senior” volunteer program for dependable volunteers. This way, you can recognize their contribution to your organization’s efforts and allow them to take on leadership positions within your programming.

- **Build trust with volunteers:** After onboarding and training, when they have demonstrated that they can do the job, give volunteers some ownership of their responsibilities while remaining available for questions and assistance.

- **Listen to your volunteers:** Ask your volunteers questions and be open to their feedback and suggestions; they are likely to have valuable insights and observations that may benefit the organization or additional skills and talents they may be willing to share.

- **Recognize your volunteers:** Acknowledge and thank volunteers regularly; find organization-wide, visible recognition opportunities but remember that small gestures (e.g., a note calling out the impact of their work, a morning coffee, a sincere thank you) are also meaningful and have a significant impact.
Build Community and Connection

- Build moments of connection into each volunteer activity from quick icebreakers to kick off more significant events or opportunities for a deeper connection for longer-term volunteers.

- Host weekly or monthly happy hours or trivia nights (virtual and/or in-person) for volunteers to network and get to know each other.

- Hold virtual “office hours” for volunteers to connect with staff, ask questions, and share ideas.

- Create channels for volunteers to communicate with each other, e.g., WhatsApp, Slack, Facebook, etc.

- Build awareness and educate volunteers on relevant issues with guest speakers.

- Acknowledge and celebrate volunteers, post “shout-out” comments in newsletters and on online forums, send recognition notes from senior leaders, and share tokens of appreciation (e.g., gift cards for coffee, organization branded swag, etc.).

- Ask volunteers to share stories about their experiences via blogs, videos, social media, etc. as both a way to elevate and recognize their work as well as a way to showcase volunteerism to other key stakeholders and potential volunteers.

Strive For Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, And Accessibility (DEIA) In Your Partnerships And In Your Management Of Volunteers

One particularly important piece that’s worth considering: through your volunteer programs and partnerships, you may serve neighborhoods and communities with different cultures, perspectives and experiences than your own. Integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) into your work will not only ensure that you are more welcoming and accommodating of your volunteers, but doing so will also help you to better fulfill your service to your community.

When you engage with organizations to cultivate partnerships and recruit volunteers to serve a particular community, it is important to be aware of local and cultural context. Before you can begin adopting DEIA into your volunteer programming, however, it will be important to first ensure you establish organizationally agreed-upon language for DEIA, familiarize yourself with some foundational frameworks of DEIA, and think strategically about how to integrate DEIA across all levels of your volunteer program. To learn more about how to integrate DEIA in your volunteer programming, please refer to Appendix B.

A Note on DEIA

While we hope our discussion of DEIA in Appendix B is helpful to your organization, please know that DEIA work does not begin and end with only the frameworks and definitions listed. As with the rest of this toolkit, we hope you will use these components as guides and build upon them in ways that best serve your organization, its volunteers, and the residents you serve.
Section Three: Evaluate, Evolve And Share Your Stories

Evaluate And Evolve

Tool:

- Reflection Questions To Evaluate Your Partnership

Key Takeaways:

- Build in evaluation early
- Be selective about what to measure
- Reflect and evolve
- Share your best stories

You can’t measure impact unless you have a clear sense of what success looks like. Begin with the end in mind and use metrics that will help you identify whether you have achieved your partnership’s goals.

Evaluation is vital for any organization to gauge its own effectiveness. Similarly, evaluation is core to any partnership—as are the details of the partnership itself. As you deepen community impact and increase neighborhood and volunteer engagement through carefully forged partnerships, you will need to determine the best ways to measure the partnership’s impact on your organization, your partners, and the communities you serve. When you evaluate your partnerships, you can catch issues that could impact partnership relations and goals, take steps to improve the collaboration, and keep partners excited and engaged.

Create Space For Evaluation From The Start

As you cultivate your partnership, make a plan early on to measure whether the partnership creates shared value and meets its goals. It is much easier to build evaluation methods into your partnership plan pre-launch than determining effective ways to measure impact once the partnership is underway. Evaluation is even more critical for longer-term partnerships to ensure continuous program improvement and maximize impact over time.

Take the following steps to build in evaluation from the beginning of your partnership:

- Determine how you will measure the success of your partnership, its objectives, and its volunteer activities.
- Align on key milestones and the timing of regular reviews.
• Evaluate your impact on an ongoing basis to make sure plans, processes, and outcomes remain on target.

• Work with stakeholders to ensure you capture, evaluate, and report metrics to gauge your success.

• Align on a cadence for reporting and what type of information you want to receive from your partner, volunteers, and the community. Capture both data and anecdotes to facilitate external storytelling for both your organization and your partner.

• Consider building informal evaluation points through your partnership, such as checking in during your regular partner meetings. Have open discussions that cover things like ways each organization could help the partnership be more impactful.

Be Selective About What To Measure

Measurement and evaluation are essential undertakings that require planning and resources. Because most evaluation methods require time from organizational leads, partner organizations, and volunteers, be selective about what you measure. Keep it simple and hone in on the key indicators of success.

Consider the questions you will need to answer to evaluate program outcomes and impact. **What will your program leaders and other key stakeholders want to know?** Frame evaluation questions to solicit informative answers. Offer statements and invite respondents to indicate if they strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, or not applicable. Also, be sure to offer opportunities for survey respondents to submit their comments with the survey to gather additional insights.

**A combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics will provide data points and stories to complement each other and convey a sense of accomplishment.** Prioritize which metrics are the most important to your organization and your partner and focus your measurement efforts on those.

Useful Evaluation Tools

Create feedback mechanisms for your partner organization and volunteers to share and surface any issues, challenges, concerns, suggestions, or success stories.

Potential mechanisms include:

• **A Partner Questionnaire:** While you hope your partners will feel comfortable discussing concerns directly with you, a survey provides one more avenue for feedback that may deliver helpful insights.

• **A Volunteer Survey:** Get feedback from volunteers. Survey volunteers on the activity itself and the experience leading up to it to identify how you can improve the experience of future volunteers.
Tool: Points Of Reflection To Evaluate Your Partnership

Partner Relations:
• We know our key point of contact at our partner organization.
• Our key point of contact responds quickly to our questions/needs.
• Our partner organization openly communicates partnership updates and impacts with us.
• Our partner organization respects our point of view.
• Both organizations have learned from each other.

Partner Infrastructure:
• The goals of our partnership are clear and measurable.
• Each organization is clear on its role and responsibilities to the partnership.
• We understand how decisions that impact our partnership are made.

Community Impact:
• We can articulate the measurable impact our partnership has/had on our community.
• We are satisfied with the positive impact our collaboration had on the community.

Volunteer Engagement and Experience:
• Volunteers felt their work had an impact.
• Our volunteer activity was well organized.
• Volunteers had the tools and information needed to complete tasks.
• Volunteers plan to return and recommend this organization to friends who want to volunteer.

Reflect And Evolve
Data collected through surveys only benefits those who take the time to analyze the findings and reflect on how they can improve your partnership and its impact. Build internal conversations with key stakeholders and reflection sessions with your partner organization into your annual calendar. Review data and feedback regularly and consider changes you can make to ensure your partnership is effective, efficient, and delivers value to all key stakeholders.
Share Your Best Stories

Storytelling amplifies the impact of your organization’s work in many ways. **Great stories that you share externally can increase your organization’s visibility, build more support, and potentially attract more funders.** Success stories are also important to share with your team. By sharing stories internally, you recognize your team’s contributions, reinforce a positive organizational culture of recognition and pride, and fuel employee morale and retention.

Don’t save your stories for an annual report. Tell them in real-time! That way, your audience feels more connected with your current efforts to make a difference.
Tips for Effective Storytelling:

- **Use great images:** Stories with pictures get more attention than those that don’t. Also, studies show that photos with subjects who make eye contact with the camera get a higher click-through rate and readership than those that don’t.

- **Invest in training a team member to take great photos:** It is worth it!

- **Keep your stories to less than 500 words:** People are often pressed for time and have short attention spans.

- **Front-load your stories with key details:** Convey the important points early for people who just read the beginning before moving onto something else.

- **Use quotes to personalize your stories:** Collect quotes from volunteers, clients, community, and team members that can add more depth and a personal perspective to enrich the facts. Don’t shy away from including emotional or personal quotes. They will resonate with your audience.

- **Leverage social media:** A captioned photo can be a powerful storytelling tool on your social media channels. You can then link the posts back to longer format stories on your website. Even if you don’t have the capacity for longer-format stories, keep your social media channels up to date. Potential partners often explore your recent posts to learn more about your organization before they make contact.

- **Use stories to strengthen your partnerships and volunteer programs:** Share any photos and/or written stories with your partners. They can re-post them and/or share them with their internal teams. Also, make sure to share stories with your volunteers. The more they understand their volunteer impact, the more likely they will volunteer for your organization again. Stories can help volunteers connect the dots between the tasks they accomplished individually and the effect of the larger team overall.

- **Post slideshows of recent events and accomplishments on screens in your lobby or around your building:** If you don’t have screens, post choice photos with captions on physical messaging space in your office. The ideal location would be near the entrance so the images can be seen by clients, guests, and employees alike. Don’t underestimate the powerful value visuals can have on building work culture and fostering a stronger sense of “team” within your organization.

- **Don’t wait to change the world to tell your story:** Little steps you take, small wins, and lessons learned are all worth sharing.

- **Challenge yourself to tell at least one story a month:** Whether a photo or a longer-form piece, your story will show the world you are in action and bringing your mission to life.
Conclusion

We trust this toolkit has served you well and will continue to be a valued resource. Whether you used the guide in its entirety or focused on the sections that addressed your organization’s particular needs, we hope that the tools and resources provided help you achieve your unique goals for your organization and for the communities you serve.

Lasting change doesn’t happen overnight and it can’t happen without engaging key stakeholders in your efforts. **Change requires vision, dedication, and hard work. It also requires leaders, advocates, champions, staff, clients, organizational partners, volunteers and more—those who share that vision and your drive to make things better.** To bring those key players into the fold requires thoughtful planning and strategic connection and this toolkit aims to inspire and equip you to identify, forge, nurture, sustain, and amplify those partnerships and relationships.

NYC Service’s mission is to deepen and expand civic engagement through volunteer and service programs to create sustainable change for our city’s greatest needs. This toolkit is just one of the resources we offer to help nonprofits leverage the resources in their communities to address critical needs.

**We thank you for your commitment and dedication to supporting your community.** It is community champions like you who inspire us to do more. We are grateful for the work you do and wish you every success.
Appendix A

Best Practices For A Volunteer Event

Tool: Sample Day-Of Checklist

Key Takeaways:

- Prepare Your Volunteers
- Continue Thoughtful Engagement

Prepare Your Volunteers

Even for one day or short term volunteer engagements, connection and communication with volunteers is critical to success. The better prepared both the organizations and volunteers are, increases the chances of a smooth and impactful volunteer activity.

To enrich your volunteers’ experience at the event, be prepared to provide some context for volunteers regarding your organization(s), the partnership, the community need(s) volunteers will address, and what this activity hopes to achieve. Leverage websites and/or videos of your work as resources for volunteers to watch before event day to understand what to expect.

Decide with your partner organization whether volunteer training in advance of the project might be relevant or useful based on the activity. If needed, work with your partner to build the content and format. If the project will involve client contact, ensure volunteers are aware of what to expect and how to prepare.

If you have volunteers that need to travel a long distance to a community or neighborhood for the project, take the following steps to help facilitate a smooth experience:

1. If the event is in a community you and/or your partner organization serve, share how this event presents a unique opportunity for volunteers to make a meaningful impact addressing critical needs in a neighborhood. If the event is in a different community than you typically work in, articulate the connection between the communities—there might be similar needs or deeper ones; the work that volunteers do in this community might have a positive impact or serve as a model for other places as well.

2. Arrange group meeting points or alternative transportation, and consider providing MetroCards or reimbursing for travel to make the trip easier for volunteers.

3. If it is within your budget or there is a funder willing to cover costs, consider chartering buses and use the time en route as a relationship-building, awareness building or networking opportunity.
4. If you are working in hard-to-reach communities, explore adding **virtual volunteer activities** provided those align with your partnership goals and identified community needs, and your organizational capacity.

The day before the event, send a reminder email to all staff and volunteers. This email should include logistics, schedule for the day, weather forecast and a rain plan (if needed). Add information on what to wear, what to bring (water bottles, rain gear, gloves, etc.), what will be provided (lunch, sunscreen, work gloves, etc.) so everyone can prepare themselves for a great day. Ensure volunteers have contact information to reach out with any last-minute questions.

**Continue Thoughtful Engagement**

Good organizational partners establish strong partnership practices in the introductory and planning phases for a volunteer event. Great partners carry through those respectful and thoughtful practices to the end, and maintain a can-do attitude during the height of activity and even in the midst of any last-minute challenges that may occur on the day of the event.

**Stick to the Plan:** Respect the agreements made with your partner during the planning phase and stay in frequent communication. If you each prepared for a certain number of volunteers in terms of COVID safety, supplies, staffing, client participation, and budget, keep to those agreements. Sometimes, circumstances arise that force a change of plans. If that happens, give your partner as much notice as possible and problem solve with them. Understand that if you can’t fulfill your stated commitment to your partner, you should discuss alternatives and explore alternatives to complete the work.

**Don’t Steal the Spotlight:** Prior to the event, especially in the planning phases, discuss with your partner if any senior leaders, funders, board members, or others plan to attend and/or make remarks. Make a plan for this together, agree on the format, and ensure that you do not overshadow your partner. At the event, minimize speeches and focus more on showcasing your organizations’ work and the volunteer contributions. Prepare guests and speakers in advance and share with them the plan for the day. If you expect press at your event, ensure that your partner has agreed to the plan and that the press elements do not become the focus of the activity and distract volunteers or drain staffing resources.

**Respect Guidelines:** In advance of the event, confirm media guidelines with your partner. Ask before taking pre- and post-event photos, particularly if clients/minors are in the shot. Ensure all volunteers and/or anyone who appears in a photo has signed a waiver. Talk with the partner organization about how they want to be positioned in social media and, if appropriate, share a template with volunteers to ensure respectful posting, particularly if the project serves a vulnerable population.

**Be Gracious:** Check in with staff, your lead contact at the partner organization and volunteers throughout the event and be willing to pitch in where needed. If something goes awry, don’t place blame - work with the partner to resolve the situation in the best way
possible. If necessary, be candid with volunteers to say you’ve encountered a challenge or delay and you appreciate their patience and understanding. At the end of the event, thank your partner, staff, any clients or community members, and your volunteers for everyone’s participation.

**Tool: Sample Day-Of Checklist (For In-Person, Traditional Activities)**

- Arrive early to help your partner organization with any last minute set up and to verify that all materials are ready and tasks are prepped.
- Bring extras of things like photo waivers or other necessary documents that were sent in advance.
- Set up a station with water, sunblock, refreshments, etc.
- Have representatives from both partner organizations welcome the group and talk about organization missions, the partnership, how this project addresses critical needs - as well as a brief overview of the schedule and tasks for the day.
- Throughout the day, motivate and manage volunteers; be informed about project details so you can help answer questions.
- At midway point, check in with staff and partner organization on progress and help steer volunteers to priority tasks so critical ones get completed.
Capture the day with photos and videos.
- If your organizations have a photo or media waiver, be sure to comply with anyone who has declined to sign.
- Coordinate with your partner organization on any photos of staff or clients.
- Record any available impact stats that you may want to report.
- Consider ending the day with a reflection depending on group size (e.g. anything that surprised volunteers or what they enjoyed most).
- Thank volunteers and your partner organization. If both partners are able to share the impact of the work completed so volunteers understand the value of their service.
- Post-event:
  - Debrief internally as a team to discuss how things went and capture the key takeaways you want to share with the partner organization.
  - Schedule time to debrief with your partner organization and reflect on what went well and what you may want to adjust for future projects.
  - Send a thank you email to all volunteers who participated, consider attaching a photo or recapping the impact of the event.

**Helpful Links**

**Volunteer Program 101**
- [Basic Range of Volunteer Activities](#)¹¹
- [Checklist: Best Practices for Engaging Volunteers](#)¹²
- [Checklist: Best Practices for Virtual Volunteerism](#)¹³

**Skills-Based Volunteerism Resources**
- [Non-Profit Skills-Based Volunteering Toolkit](#) – by Common Impact¹⁴
- [The Great Volunteer Management System Book: Skills-Based Volunteers](#) – by NYC Service & New York Cares¹⁵
- [One-Stop Shop for Skills-Based Volunteerism](#) - by Capacity Commons¹⁶
Appendix B

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, And Accessibility (DEIA): What It Is and How To Incorporate It Into Your Partnerships and Volunteer Programs

Establishing Baseline Language

DEIA is the acronym for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. The following definitions are adapted by NYC Service & Nonprofit Coordinated Committee of New York from the D5 Coalition, a group dedicated to advancing DEIA in philanthropy.

**Diversity:** The word “diversity” can mean different things to different people. We’ve defined it broadly to encompass the demographic mix of a specific collection of people, taking into account elements of human difference, but focusing particularly on:

- Racial and ethnic groups
- LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) populations
- People with disabilities
- Gender
- Age

**Equity:** To promote justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

**Inclusion:** Refers to the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group. While a truly “inclusive” group is necessarily diverse, a “diverse” group may or may not be “inclusive.”

**Accessibility:** The degree to which an environment, service, product, or program eliminates barriers to participation for diverse and underrepresented groups.

While the definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility employed by an organization may differ based on a variety of factors (populations being served, services offered, etc.), it is important to keep these concepts front of mind when it comes to the development of your volunteer programs, and when assessing which partnerships to pursue.
Important Foundational Frameworks For DEIA

While having definitions relevant to your organization is an important start, you should take time with your Senior Leadership and staff to understand how DEIA factors into larger systemic concepts and behaviors, and orient around those. Doing so will ensure that everyone is equipped with the foundational frameworks and language that will both allow you to speak effectively about DEIA and what it means to your organization, and enable you to **examine your individual and institutional behaviors through a DEIA lens**. Weaving these frameworks into your everyday engagement with volunteers will ensure that your DEIA-based recruitment efforts are not undermined over time by poor retention.

Individual Biases

Everyone experiences **cultural conditioning** that teaches us what our society deems acceptable or unacceptable and therefore informs our behavior. In and of itself, cultural conditioning is not right or wrong, but over the course of our lives we pick up **biases** that cause blind spots in our judgment. Though some biases are **explicit/conscious**, or require conscious reinforcement, most are **implicit/unconscious**, and require more effort to correct because we’re usually not even aware that we have them.¹⁸

**Remember:** our implicit biases take a long time to unlearn, and nobody is asking for perfection overnight! If you make assumptions about others/a group, it’s crucial that you take the time to examine your initial reactions and correct them before they become biased action steps.

Consider the following:

- An organization has a program for youth in foster care. Their volunteer manager Marie suggests recruiting mainly women and mothers as volunteers, saying that they’d be great for working with children and that she’s had success with similar programs before. What kind of bias is Marie exhibiting?

  - **Confirmation bias** occurs when we already have an assumption about an individual/a group and seek or interpret new information that confirms that assumption, while also ignoring information that might conflict with it. Historically recruiting volunteers a certain way might have led to success, but we have to be careful not to get stuck in stereotypes.

- Due to COVID restrictions, volunteer coordinator Tashawn is only able to put one volunteer on a project, but receives two applications. Both applicants seem equally qualified, until he notices that one volunteer went to UCLA, Tashawn’s alma mater, and puts that volunteer on the schedule. What kind of bias is he exhibiting?

  - **Affinity/Affiliation bias** makes us more drawn to people that we have things in common with or who make us feel comfortable. It’s natural to get along easily with people you are similar to, but this can severely undermine attempts at diversity and inclusion.
• Volunteer coordinator Jordan speaks only English, and hesitates to onboard volunteers who speak English as a second language or have a thick accent because they assume that those volunteers will be less capable of understanding the tasks assigned to them. What kind of bias are they exhibiting?

  • **Stereotype bias** is a preconceived notion that attributes certain characteristics to all members of a certain group. This term often carries a negative connotation when referring to an oversimplified, exaggerated, or demeaning assumption.

• A neighborhood organization has a street cleanup coming up. The team member doing volunteer recruitment discourages older volunteers from participating because the street cleanup is physically demanding, and suggests other events that they can participate in instead. Are they exhibiting bias?

  • **Performance bias** causes us to assume one’s capability based on stereotypes about the group they belong to (or that we perceive them to belong to). Asking someone about what they are able to do will lead to greater output across the board than potentially over- or under-estimating their ability.¹⁹

### Intersectionality

Lawyer and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined **intersectionality** to describe how individuals and groups can experience many institutional forces at one time on the basis of their race, gender, class, sexuality, and more. For example, a Black woman experiences both anti-Black racism and misogyny, and that intersection (sometimes called **misogynoir**) makes her lived experience unique. Acknowledging the subtleties that create the diversity of human experience will make your organization more flexible when it comes to dealing with challenges, and will allow you to integrate these DEIA frameworks into your program more effectively.

Unlearning habits and assumptions that have been conditioned into us takes time and continued re-assessment and reinforcement. Take the time to understand your partners and the communities they serve. Ask questions and be open to learning as you go. Keep the following in mind:

  • Elevate diverse perspectives.
  • Foster an inclusive environment.
  • Embrace an equity-centered approach.

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**Institutional Biases**

When those individual biases go unchallenged and start to inform organizational policy, they become **institutional**. Codifying institutional biases into a volunteer recruitment or management strategy can lead to long-lasting issues that can alienate potential volunteers or make them feel under-valued.
Adopting DEIA To Your Volunteer Program

Now that we understand what DEIA is and the important foundational frameworks, it is time to adapt them to your volunteer program. This requires (1) establishing your DEIA posture clearly as well as (2) detail the behaviors aligned with DEIA values and those that do not.

Your DEIA posture requires developing specific definitions for DEIA acronyms tailored to your organization. To create your DEIA posture, you should consider factors like:

- Purpose of your organization
- Target audiences + communities
- Unique issues facing the industry your organization is in
- Unique to addressing DEIA issues

Additionally, detail the behaviors that align with your DEIA values and those that do not. Essentially, create a Code of Conduct / Volunteer Pact. This sets a clear expectation of how to engage in the work and behave inline with the organization’s values. The Code / Pact should include:

- Organization’s Mission/Vision Statement
- Organizational values (including DEIA principles)
- Expected Behaviors
  - Engaging with the organization and its staff
  - Engaging with the community
  - Engaging with other volunteers
- Reporting Misconduct
- Disciplinary actions for misconduct

Your organization’s DEIA posture and Code of Conduct/Volunteer Pact should be well-known within your organization and among your volunteers. Consider adding both to your volunteer onboarding and schedule regular meetings with your staff to review or revise.

Volunteer Topics For Critical Consideration

When applying DEIA principles to your organization’s volunteer program, there are four critical considerations to take into account:

1. Recruitment and Tokenism
2. Onboarding and Establishing Expectations
3. Management and Retention
4. Volunteer Exiting
1. Recruitment & Tokenism

In recruiting for your volunteer program, it is important to reach out to underrepresented and often, underserved groups. Effective recruitment tools that bolster diversity in your volunteer programming increase access to these opportunities by identifying and solving for the barriers that exist for people to volunteer (i.e. technology, geography, socioeconomic). Examples include:

- **Prioritizing in-person volunteer recruitment** in communities with limited internet access (rural areas).
- Providing **metro cards/car-ride vouchers** to allow potential volunteers in communities disconnected from sufficient public transportation to participate.
- Ensure that your website (or any volunteer recruitment services you use) are **accessibly formatted** and have an easy-to-navigate **mobile site**.²¹

Work to recognize and remove other potential barriers to folks being able to volunteer. In spending time to understand the communities from which you serve and seek to attract volunteers from, **reflect on your volunteer screening practices** and adjust depending on the community. Some examples of barriers include:

**Background checks**

- Disproportionate experiences and interactions with the criminal justice system for Black and brown people lead to lifelong records.
- Organizations should ensure that those who have paid their debt to society are offered the **same opportunities as anyone else to serve their communities**.²²
- Explain in your volunteer application or recruitment why you need to screen and what will be done with their information. This is also a good opportunity to re-evaluate for which volunteer positions screening is necessary!

**Time commitments**

- Potential volunteers from underrepresented communities may not have the privilege of ample free time to volunteer, or have other competing priorities. Consider ways to **de-privilege volunteering** (i.e. expand who can afford to volunteer in terms of time and the need to earn a living).
- Provide **flexibility** for volunteers who can’t stay for full volunteer shifts or need other accommodations.
- Create volunteer opportunities (and onboarding/orientation) **outside of the traditional work day** and offer **childcare** for volunteers with children.

**Skills**

- Commit to training volunteers in skills they may not have.
  - If, for example, your organization uses technology to check-in service recipients, avoid prioritizing the recruitment of volunteers with prior experience...
with that technology. Volunteers appreciate learning new skills and feeling like you are investing in them!

- Review preferred and required skills on volunteer recruitment materials on whether they create high barriers to entry for underrepresented communities. You could also list transferable skills from various ranges of experience.

**Communication**

- Communicate with potential volunteers in **culturally appropriate ways**.  

- Prioritize inclusivity by being considerate in the way you communicate with intended communities. This includes the type of language used and avoiding industry-specific jargon that can be exclusionary as well as utilizing visual references when possible.

- Lean on your relationships with community leaders as a resource to review communication to ensure that it will be effective and well-received.

- Build relationships within the communities from which you seek to attract volunteers.
  
  - This includes community partnerships and collaborations with community-based organizations.
  
  - This might also mean utilizing language other than “volunteer” - in some cultural contexts, people may relate more to being a helpful neighbor or community member.

You should consistently seek guidance from past and current volunteers to help recruit from their network and communities. By reaching out to them for feedback, you can better understand how to recruit and retain committed volunteers and account for barriers. **Remember:** they are your best champions.

**Tokenism**

It is imperative that efforts must be made to avoid tokenism in creating a diverse program, as that runs counter to the initial purpose of DEIA and volunteerism. According to Merriam Webster, tokenism is “the practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.” This includes using the volunteer program as the concentration of diverse representation within your organization and/or event.

**Ask yourself:** "Is there a significant difference between the demographic makeup of my staff vs. the community our organization serves? Is my staff majority white and English-speaking while I lean on people of color to volunteer?" If so, you may consider applying the volunteer recruitment guidelines above to your own staff recruitment strategies, or build a stronger volunteer to staff pipeline that will allow DEIA to thrive at all levels of your organization."
2. Onboarding (Establishing Expectations)
Now that you have your widely represented volunteer cohort, onboarding is an opportunity to establish expectations from the organization to the volunteers.

Volunteer Orientation
This is an opportune time to articulate your tailored DEIA values and how it fits within the organization’s mission, vision and values. You can manage expectations from the outset by expressing your organization’s Code of Conduct or Volunteer Pact that requires volunteers to adhere to and model DEIA values.

Training
Be prepared to provide comprehensive training to volunteers. This includes understanding your organization’s systems and protocols, but should also include getting to know staff so that they (at minimum) understand who their points of contact in your organization are.

3. Management & Retention
You now have a diverse cohort who are thoroughly onboarded and trained. How do you manage them in a way that ensures they stay with you for the long haul? Look over the following suggestions and examples. This is by no means a complete list - think through the opportunities and challenges for your unique organization and build upon our suggestions!

Define what volunteer recognition looks like
- Volunteers provide time, talent and resources to the organization through their human capital. Think about how your organization can recognize and show appreciation for volunteers.
- Practice equity in your appreciation of volunteers - be cognizant of the way that you might be recognizing the hard work of some volunteers more than others.

Ensure you have provided a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment for volunteers from underserved and underrepresented groups
- Regularly check-in with volunteers and welcome feedback on how to be more inclusive and welcoming.
- Work to educate everyone within your organization about the importance of engaging volunteers of diverse backgrounds and experiences, along with why it is a priority.
- Create a code of conduct that specifically addresses all forms of harassment and racism, including clear reporting protocols for volunteers (including anonymous options).

Learn about your volunteers
- Identify their skills, time availability, and interests.
- What has motivated them to volunteer? Demonstrate a commitment to providing meaningful experiences for them.
Ongoing support including training and mentoring

- Provide opportunities for your volunteers to develop their skills through training and/or mentoring programs. These programs can be run by full-time staff or external consultants depending on your organization’s capacity and funding arrangement.

Provide them with as many perks as possible

- Free access to any programming you provide.
- Meals & coffee and/or other beverages (make sure to offer a variety to accommodate different cultural or personal dietary restrictions!)
- Gear with your organization’s logo, e.g. clothes, water bottles.
  - You can use these perks to build relationships with community businesses. Partner with a local restaurant for snacks after a big volunteer-led event!

4. Volunteer Offboarding

For volunteers whose time with organization has to come to an end, this is an important opportunity to retain them as thought partners and advisors. As mentioned under the recruitment section, championing past volunteers in the ongoing cultivation of your program is a wonderful tool to recruit from their network and communities as well as receive pivotal insight about the program.

Remember: having amicable relationships with volunteers who are exiting the cohort allows organizations to retain an insightful resource in future work.

- Consider creating an exit interview or form to gain insight from volunteers about why they are leaving and how you can improve.
- Thank them for their service. If you have a record of projects they worked on or hours served (or even if you don’t), you can send them a “thank you” letter, card, or email that details their impact on the community. Include links or information for how they can get back in touch if they want to, as well as information to send to people in their network who might be interested in getting involved.

Resources to Help Integrate DEIA into your Volunteer Programs

- 8 Strategies for Creating a More Inclusive Volunteer Program by VolunteerMatch Blog
- Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Base of Volunteers/Helpers by The Denver Foundation
- Building Bridges to Better Volunteer Diversity & Inclusion by VolunteerPro
Endnotes

1 Mon Yuck Yu, Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff, Academy of Medical and Public Health Services.

2 NYC Service. https://www.nycservice.org/


5 NYC Service. Register. https://www.nycservice.org/register


7 VolunteerMatch. Recruit Volunteers. https://www.volunteermatch.org/recruit-volunteers

8 Idealist. https://www.idealist.org/login

9 Humbler. https://humbler.co/


11 NYC Service. Tool: Basic Range of Volunteer Activities https://drive.google.com/file/d/1B7RTo-zMYyz3E0TjHG4jPZYiTwijQIss/view


13 NYC Service. Tool: Best Practices for Virtual Volunteerism. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gTKPOKvB_GTwB2l1rXghzkeDRYFSyLIEUKiiz5eVBs/edit


16 Capacity Commons. One-Stop Shop for Skills-Based Volunteerism. https://www.capacitycommons.org/

17 Adapted from “A Roadmap for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility in Volunteer Programs” prepared in consultation with Evolv. https://evolvculture.com/

19 Anne Loehr. This Type of Bias is Happening at Your Organization Right Now. https://www.anneloehr.com/2016/12/01/this-type-of-bias-is-happening-at-your-organization-right-now/


