Increasing the Volunteer Retention Rate at Community-Based Literacy Organizations

Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle

Ellen Moore Osborne, Executive Director
Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle
A Time of Extraordinary Growth
FY12 to FY17

- **Students served**: 98% increase
  From 239 to 463 students

- **Volunteers in program**: 105% increase
  From 191 to 391 tutors

- **Annual income**: 134% increase
  From $203k to $475k
Extraordinary Growth
FY12 to FY17

- Students Served
- Tutors in Program
Extraordinary Growth
FY12 to FY17

Income

$500k
$350k
$200k
$50k

FY12 FY13 FY14 FY15 FY16 FY17
Tutor Retention Rate %

FY12  FY13  FY14  FY15  FY16  FY17

Retention rate fluctuates over the years, peaking in FY14 and dropping significantly in FY15.
Problem:

LVCA costs to recruit and train volunteers each year = $70,000

Current turnover rate = 36% ($25,200 waste)!
GOAL:
Increase retention rate from 64% to 70%.
Best Practices in Volunteer Retention

- Recognition ✅
- Training & Development ✅
- Screening & Matching ✅

(Hager and Brudney, 2004)
Retention Rates at other Community-Based Literacy Organizations

More research is needed.
Volunteer Function Inventory

What function does volunteering serve for the individual?

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Values

“It is important to help others”
“It is a cause that’s important to me”

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Understanding

“gain a new perspective”
“hands-on experience”
“glimpse of other cultures”

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Enhancement/Esteem

“makes me feel better about myself”
“makes me feel needed”
“personally enriched”

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Career

“explore different career options”
“will look good on my résumé”

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Social

“My friends volunteer”
“Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service”
“I can meet new people”

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Volunteer Function Inventory

Protective

“Pay it forward”
(“Protective” of ego: Reduces guilt over one’s lot in life)

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
Figure out why someone originally volunteered for the organization.

Meet that need.  
*Continue* to meet that need.

(Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Ridge, R., 1992)
GOAL:
Improve retention rate from 64% to 70%

Survey tutors about motivation
(Survey done! See update!)
Improvements we can make:

- More recognition
- More staff contact
- More learning development opportunities
- Better recruitment message
Costs of NEW interventions = $12,000
Benefits of improving the retention rate from 64% to 70%  
(keeping 24 additional volunteers per year)

Adds $69,000 in value
Value of volunteer labor retained\(^1\) = $57,500
Elimination of wasted training dollars\(^2\) = $9,500
Projected financial donations of retained volunteers\(^3\) = $2,000

\[\text{\$69,000}\]

1 (The Independent Sector, 2018)
2 (LVCA Budget, 2017)
3 (Osborne, 2018)
Return on Investment

\[
\text{ROI} = \frac{\$69,000 - \$12,000}{\$12,000} = \frac{\$57,000}{\$12,000} = 4.75 \times 100 = 475\%
\]

475% ROI looks good, right?!
LVCA Survey

102 responses

Summary

How long have you been volunteering at LVCA?

- Less than one year: 36 (35.3%)
- 1-3 years: 42 (41.2%)
- 3-5 years: 11 (10.8%)
- More than 5 years: 13 (12.7%)
LVCA Survey Questions

Rank six motivations from most relevant to least relevant-- 6 options:

“I find this experience enriches me personally”
(Enhancement/Esteem function)

“I am very fortunate; I want to ‘pay it forward’”
(Protective function)
LVCA Survey Questions

“This experience may help me in my career.”
(Career function)

“I like to help other people”
(Values function)
LVCA Survey Questions

“I like to meet new people”
(Social function)

“I like learning about other cultures”
(Understanding function)
Primary Motivations, All Respondents

- Help other people: 27%
- Meet new people: 0%
- Learning about other cultures: 4%
- Will help my career: 11%
- Enriches me personally: 34%
- Pay it forward: 24%
Primary motivations of those who intend to continue volunteering
Primary motivations based on time with LVCA:

Less than one year:
- Pay it forward: 46%
- Help other people: 8%
- Meet new people: 4%
- Learning about other cultures: 0%
- Enriches me personally: 25%
- Will help my career: 17%

1-3 years:
- Pay it forward: 22%
- Help other people: 6%
- Meet new people: 3%
- Learning about other cultures: 0%
- Enriches me personally: 38%
- Will help my career: 31%

3-5 years:
- Pay it forward: 11%
- Help other people: 15%
- Enriches me personally: 89%

5+ years:
- Pay it forward: 15%
- Help other people: 15%
- Enriches me personally: 39%
- Will help my career: 31%
I volunteer with LVCA in part because I am well supported by the agency -- i.e., have competent and supportive staff to encourage me. I knew this before I volunteered. I have not been let down.
Comments

It is inspirational seeing how strong students are in their daily lives. It helps me keep my own life in perspective. I often feel I learn as much from them as they do from me.
I find that volunteering with LVCA during this "age of trump" is a way that I can make a difference and do something good to help my country maintain some of its dignity and some of the qualities that make us a great nation.
My specific motivation when I started was to do something direct and personal, in the wake of the 2016 election, to make my part of the world a better place, and to actively show immigrants that many Americans welcome them, respect their incredible efforts, and want to help them on their journey.
I find the relationships built in the process are “gold.”
Comments

My volunteer experience is also enhanced by the amount of motivation shown by my student. When my student is motivated I'm energized by that motivation.
Uses of this research:

- Grant writing
- Establishing “best practices”
- Guide program improvement
My belief:

Volunteer experience can be as meaningful for the tutor as the learning experience is successful for the student.
What questions do you have?

Resources:
Literacyforall.org/news-and-publications