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Companion Toolkit

Transformative Volunteering



“Transformative volunteering” is an approach to volunteering that can be used in almost any type of project and helps participants find meaning beyond project tasks and logistics by focusing on people and human connection — it helps root action in our shared humanity. To take this transformative approach, we use three keystone behaviours:



The Brief

When you hold a **brief** at the start of a project, it invites volunteers to consider shifting their focus **from tasks and logistics to people and purpose** — the real meaning behind the work they’re about to complete. The brief gently adjusts focus from how well and how quickly we can get tasks done to **the people and communities we’re supporting**.

When you’re planning your project, you can ask some key questions to help you build your story. Your goal is to walk away with answers to these three questions:

▶ **“Can I describe the issues that affect the people or communities the non-profit supports?”**

This question invites us to practice doing the work of articulating the issue we’re addressing. So, being conscious that your perspective is limited to your own experiences, consider how, in your brief, you would describe the issue or issues to a broad group of volunteers.

▶ **“Do I understand my non-profit partner’s mission and cause focus areas?”**

What about this non-profit or cause catches your attention in a way that you’re likely to talk about later? An achievement? The size of the issue? Something you didn’t know before? Something profound?

▶ **“Why are REALTORS® a good fit for this project?”**

Answering this question helps you connect this volunteering activity to your member’s purpose and values by connecting the goals of your non-profit partner with the unique skills your participants bring to the issue.



Guiding Volunteers

Volunteer team members typically have different needs and varying levels of experience with volunteering. **Recognizing where people are in their volunteer journey is key to meeting participants at their highest level of contribution.** Meeting volunteers where they are creates an environment where they have their needs met, have a great experience, and where they can choose to keep developing as a volunteer.

The three stages of the volunteer journey should be used as a helpful framework — we don't want to categorize people or limit them by making assumptions about what stage they're in. Use this framework to remind yourself that the best way to give participants a great experience is to meet them where they are.

Stage 1: Tourists

Tourists want to discover and fall in love with the idea of volunteering. Stage one people have either never participated before, or they may have done some light volunteering or fundraisers once or twice in their lives. Volunteering isn't something they necessarily see as a personal priority, and they have a ton of other priorities that seem more important to them. If they do commit to participating, it's important to make sure they have a good experience during the project.

Stage 2: Travelers

Travelers have started to internalize their motivation for getting involved — they're in a place of meaningful discovery. They're now starting to feel really connected to where they are and who they're with. People at this level are beginning to emotionally connect and own the experience for themselves; they'll let you know by the way they act that they're ready to take on higher levels of responsibility and tasks that require increased commitment.

Stage 3: Guides

Guides are motivated to take part in volunteering because of personal, intrinsic reasons. This is a stage of intentional alignment. Guides can be trusted to run activities when you're not around to facilitate and they naturally help others find their way. They understand that when they give their own time and energy, they're receiving something in return — they know volunteering helps them connect more deeply with the cause, the non-profit, the community, and their fellow volunteers.



The Debrief

The **debrief** gives volunteers the opportunity to critically reflect on their experience, and how the work on the project may have changed them. This is the point where some people begin to make sense of what they've learned about themselves through volunteerism.

To facilitate the debrief, ask everyone to stay for 15 minutes after the project session and gather everyone in a circle.

People tend to walk away and evaluate the project, rather than stop to think about who they were in the moment. It's your job to conduct the debrief in a way that encourages critical reflection.

To invite people to put themselves in the story — of who they were or became during the project — as opposed to simply evaluating the experience, ask two simple questions to start:

1. What did you experience?

2. Was it what you expected?

Not everyone has to answer. The “awkward silences” that can go along with this may seem a little long but hold out — give people time to think. The point is just to invite this type of reflection, so after a few people share, you can thank everyone for coming, ask them to consider the questions, and send them on their way.

The feelings that come up during reflection can range from joyful and happy to discomfort, even shame sometimes. As people reflect, they're orienting to their experience and with that comes some processing. You don't have to dive deep into these feelings with people, but you can listen quietly and respectfully and help make people feel safe to share. Remain curious, kind, and compassionate, and give them permission to be candid — or to stop sharing, if they're feeling uncomfortable. No feeling is wrong, and every feeling is a stepping off point for exploration.



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