



School & Community Garden Volunteer Toolkit

Committed volunteers are the pillar of a successful garden program. Volunteers contribute a wealth of experience and enthusiasm, along with unique skills, fresh ideas, and extra hands to help with garden activities. Effective volunteer management and retention includes a good understanding of each volunteer's needs and motivations. This not only helps cultivate a productive relationship, it helps strengthen your program and support a dedicated, robust volunteer community. Use the last page (9) of this document to outline an effective Volunteer Management Plan.

A sustainable successful volunteer program takes thoughtful planning. The I.S.O.T.U.R.E. model illustrates the basic components for development and management of a volunteer program. Whatever their reason for becoming involved, these are the major components of I.S.O.T.U.R.E., which will ensure success of your volunteers:

- **Identify** and recruit people with the competence and attitudes essential to accomplishing the goals of the program. A needs assessment will help identify what jobs need to get done. They might include:
 - Education – peer to peer, specific audience...
 - Planning, technical, or clerical support...
 - Development of resources or programs...
 - Supervision, leadership...

What type of person is needed to fill that job. For example:

- Paid staff member or unpaid volunteer.
- Any specific knowledge, skills, and attitude.
- Any constraint on availability – occasional, once?

Job descriptions are essential for every position no matter size. Include:

- Position Title
- Length of Commitment
- Time and Place
- General Purpose
- Specific Responsibilities
- Qualifications
- Training
- Supervision
- Benefits

Explore what others (such as R.S.V.P.) in your area are trying and find volunteer recruitment resources at www.energizeinc.com.

Create a Volunteer Handbook that outlines policies and guideline that fits your Organization. See the sample title page and table of contents on pages 7-8.

- **Select** and place volunteers in roles that meet their needs, and yours. Though recruiting might be as simple as asking, sometimes connecting with the individuals who might be the best match for the jobs available can be challenging.

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- Depending on the organization, especially if on school property and engaging with youth, risk management and human resource policies might require a screening process including interviews and background checks.
 - Use the Volunteer Roles & Responsibilities chart on page 6.
- **Orient** volunteers to the goals of the project and the role that they will play. The focus here is to prepare volunteer for relationship with your organization.
- What should every volunteer know?
 - Do you have a paid staff orientation inclusive of organizational structure as well as mission and goals that might be appropriate or modified for volunteers?
 - Take time to familiarize volunteer with specific expectations and responsibilities.
 - Consider orientation not as a one-time event at the start of a volunteer experience but rather an ongoing opportunity for relationship between volunteers and the organization.
 - See the Volunteer Orientation Checklist on page 5.
- **Train** volunteers in the specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for them to successfully accomplish their tasks.
- Pre-service training aims to prepare volunteers to execute the duties in their job description.
 - Use a job description to determine the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed.
 - Fold in other organizational goals such as a desire to develop a cohort or community of volunteers as a team.
 - Often people are motivated to volunteer out of desire to help others and to continue their own life-long learning. Continuing training / professional development opportunities for volunteers can serve to improve or change effort and is a reward that sustains their commitment.
 - Engaging volunteers in identifying ongoing training needs is one way to build in two-way communication with volunteers.
- **Utilize** volunteers' time and skills and delegate effectively.
- Thoughtfully place volunteers for success.
 - Let go of certain responsibilities to facilitate the empowerment of your volunteers.
 - Cultivate two-way communication.

Consider the different types of volunteers your organization, program or project might use for the jobs you have identified. An effective and efficient use of your time and volunteers' is to tailor the implementation of I.S.O.T.U.R.E. to types of volunteers.

- **Key volunteers to help manage** – Engaging volunteers to organizing other volunteers can further extend reach but there is a special need to have a well-documented plan.
- **Occasional** – If a volunteer has committed to coming occasionally to help possibly with an event, both the organization and the volunteer are likely not interested in extensive orientation and training. The focus could be on a simple job that can be picked up or dropped on a moment such as the perpetual need for weeding.

- **Stipend** – AmeriCorps volunteers are an example of individuals who receive a small amount of pay for their work. A stipend might provide extra motivation but also extra tracking of specific effort.
 - **Teen or College Age** – Discovering what is motivating interest is critical to proper placement for maximum success. Do they seek leadership experience, service learning?
 - **Families** – What jobs can be done by people of all ages?
 - **Seniors** – Special attention to communication style and approaches can be essential even down to the details of font size on instruction sheets.
 - **Individuals with a disability** – Clear job description will help volunteers know if something is beyond their limits. Two-way communication helps volunteers express their interest and talents and program leaders to make the best matches.
 - **Unemployed** – Though these volunteers might be short-lived, they can commit considerable time especially if the focus is on gaining marketable skills and experience.
 - **Virtual** – Increasingly popular.
- **Recognize** and appreciate volunteers' contributions, Recognition is critical to motivation and retention of volunteers as well as an opportunity to promote positive feelings about the program, raise awareness about efforts and recruit new volunteers. Consider what is most important to recognize in volunteers' efforts. Is it participation, progress towards goals, achieving standards of excellence, cooperation, or another aspect? Here are some additional keys to success in volunteer recognition:
- Emphasize success.
 - Consider public recognition though not appropriate or welcomed by all volunteers.
 - Do in a personal and honest manner.
 - Make it timely.
 - Clearly connect accomplishment and recognition.
 - Recognize in proportion to achievement.
 - Tailor recognition to volunteers.
 - Look for additional recognition ideas by exploring what others (such as R.S.V.P) in your area are trying and find volunteer recognition resources at www.energizeinc.com
- **Evaluate** volunteers' performance and provide useful feedback and help volunteers reach their desired goals within the project.
- First consideration is what to evaluate?
 - What information is needed for success in volunteer engagement?
 - Who will use the results?
 - Will the contributions of volunteers be in an organizational report detailing hours and types of service?
 - Will program planners use it to optimize retention and recruitment and or provide feedback to individual volunteers on performance?
 - Is it valuable to know what volunteers think of their experience in the program and how they are supervised?
 - Will volunteers be engaged in evaluating the program activities with target audience?

- Learn more about evaluation guidelines, surveys, interviews, observation, creative expression and more at Cornell's GBL pages on evaluation. Be sure to click on the different links on these pages to see sample tools you can adapt for your program.
- <https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/program-tools/evaluation-toolkit/>

Adapted from Getting Started with Garden-Based Learning, An Introductory Guide for Program Leaders/Educators, Cornell University Cooperative Extension and the Dept. of Horticulture

Volunteer Orientation Checklist

Depending on the size and scope of your project and the degree of interest from volunteers, you may find you need to provide this orientation several times throughout the year.

- Orient them to the program, the neighborhood, and the school (if applicable).
- Remind them of your expectations, as you noted in your publicity and/or job descriptions.
- Brief them on policies.
 - Where to park
 - Where to sign in
 - If there are procedures for screening.
- Provide the group with a tour of the garden.
 - Show locations of bathrooms, where tools are stored, water sources, etc.
- Inform them of the volunteer log sheet to track the hours they spend helping the program. Logging hours is very important as they can be documented as “in-kind” donation for grant purposes and demonstrate documented community investment in the project.
- Provide them with a volunteer binder.
- If at a school setting, be sure to introduce regular volunteers to key school personnel like the principal and office secretaries since they will be a regular face around the school.
- Include any other important information that is unique to your garden project setting.
- Include plenty of time for questions.

Volunteer Binder

In addition to in-person orientation and preparation, make a simple Volunteer Binder that includes all the information volunteers need to know in writing for later reference. Some ideas of what you may want to include in the binder are:

- Contact information – garden leaders, regular volunteers, school principal, custodian
- Who to call if there is an emergency – 911
- Pertinent health information about any regular volunteers or participating youth
- Volunteer hours log-sheet
- Codes for any locks needed for garden program
- Blank volunteer application forms
- Postcards with garden program information
- Planting/harvest log-sheets

For more information: <https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/lessons/program-tools/planning-organizing/engaging-volunteers/>

Volunteer Roles & Responsibilities

Commitment level of volunteers	Role or Project	Approx. number needed	Time of year	Frequency
Longer Term, Ongoing Commitment				
Core Committee				
School staff				
Garden manager				
Garden administrator				
Seasonal: March-November				
Watering				
Weeding				
Path Maintenance				
Garden manager				
Educators for tours, workshops etc				
Volunteer coordinator				
One -Time				
Sheet mulch new site				
Fence construction				
Raised bed construction				
Raised bed filling				
Mulching				
Fall cleanup				
Bulb planting				
Tree/shrub planting				

Volunteer Handbook

(Name of your program)

Add logo

Mission Statement:

Approved by _____, date _____

Volunteer Handbook

Table of Contents

- I. About the Garden
 - a. Mission, Vision, and Values
 - b. Garden Goals
 - c. History & The Land
 - d. Funding, Acknowledgments and Affiliates
 - e. Hours of Operation
 - f. Contact Information
- II. Getting Started Volunteering
 - a. Volunteer Scheduling
 - b. Time Commitment, Reporting Hours, Letter of Intent
 - c. Recognition and Benefits
 - d. Training
- III. Volunteer Opportunities and Events
 - a. General Volunteer Position Description
 - b. Volunteer Committees, Roles, and Responsibilities
 - c. Events
- IV. Policies
 - a. Equal Opportunity
 - b. Code of Conduct, Ethics, Ground Rules
 - c. Solicitation, harassment, smoke and drug free environment
 - d. Confidentiality and Social Media
 - e. Background Screening (if needed)
 - f. Safety and Emergency Procedures
 - g. Changes in Status
 - h. Definition of Terms, Active and Inactive Volunteer Status

Volunteer Management Plan

Based on the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. module, use this as a guide to outline a plan for volunteers who are involved in your school or youth garden program.

- **Identify** and recruit volunteers:
 - Who?
 - How will you advertise? Will you have an application/ interview process?
 - Will you create a volunteer description and handbook? (see pages 7-8)
- **Select** and match volunteers in roles that meet their needs, skills, and your needs.
 - Use the Volunteer Roles & Responsibilities chart on page 6.
- **Orient** volunteers to the goals of the project and the role that they will play.
 - See the Volunteer Orientation Checklist on page 5.
- **Train** volunteers in the specific skills and knowledge necessary for them to successfully accomplish their tasks.
 - What pre-service training will they have? When? How?
 - What continuing training/ development opportunities will you offer?
- **Utilize** volunteers' time and skills and delegate effectively.
 - Expand on the Volunteer Roles & Responsibilities chart on page 6 to best mobilize volunteers.
 - How will you maintain open communication with volunteers and have them sign up for duties?
 - Which type of volunteer will be involved?
 - Key volunteers to help manage, lead committees?
 - Occasional, stipend
 - Teen or College, Families, Seniors
 - Others?
- **Recognize** and appreciate volunteers' contributions.
 - How will you recognize volunteers?
 - When? How Often?
 - How will you connect accomplishment and recognition, recognize in proportion to achievement?
- **Evaluate** volunteers' performance and provide useful feedback
 - How will you evaluate?
 - How will you help volunteers reach their desired goals?
 - What information is needed for success in volunteer engagement?
 - Will volunteers be engaged in evaluating the program activities?
 - Who will use the results?