Building A Loyal Volunteer Corps: Gleanings From The Internship Program At UniversalGiving™
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Introduction

"Volunteers contribute to organizations by filling supplementary roles, thus enabling paid staff to concentrate on central tasks."

Voluntary action is at the core of social capital and reinforces most social action in civil society. In North America, as much as 85 percent of all charitable nonprofits have no paid staff and are run entirely by volunteers.1

THE PROBLEM: This talent pool (of volunteers) remain overlooked and undervalued.2 While many nonprofits view volunteer retention as a goal, few realize volunteer retention is a process, not a task.

• Volunteer Turnover = 10 times that of paid, nonprofit staff
• 1/3 of those who volunteer do not donate their time the next year at any nonprofit
• This translates to an estimated $38 billion in lost labor

The findings from this research will be used to develop a toolkit for UG’s use in the management of its internship program. The toolkit would offer a basket of tools, namely, a volunteer agreement, an intern/volunteer questionnaire to ascertain motivations of each volunteer, and an intern/volunteer development plan that would facilitate the assignment of each volunteer assignment. Additionally, this volunteer agreement can be used to replace the practice of a $200 deposit that has proven to be an ineffective and unpopular method of retention.

The goal of the research is to examine intern motivations in committing to an internship with UniversalGiving’s™ (UG) Internship Program. It should be noted that the term, ‘interns’ and ‘volunteers’ are used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper for two reasons: both positions are unpaid - interns do not receive school credit unless requested. Secondly, UG interns view themselves as volunteers but refer to themselves as interns as they associate the title of ‘intern’ with a higher prestige than ‘volunteer’.

The purpose of this evaluation is to improve the retention of volunteers in UniversalGiving’s™ (UG) Internship Program. It should be noted that the term, ‘interns’ and ‘volunteers’ are used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper for two reasons: both positions are unpaid - interns do not receive school credit unless requested. Secondly, UG interns view themselves as volunteers but refer to themselves as interns as they associate the title of ‘intern’ with a higher prestige than ‘volunteer’.

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Methods

This research method implements a program evaluation of UG’s Internship Program. UG is a 501(c)3, founded in 2002, based in San Francisco, California. It has engaged over 250 volunteers to date and works with 40-60 volunteers each year. To date, only 7% have converted to UG Ambassadors, referring to individuals who continue their involvement with UG. The goal of the research is to examine intern motivations in committing to an internship with UniversalGiving’s™ (UG) Internship Program. It should be noted that the term, ‘interns’ and ‘volunteers’ are used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper for two reasons: both positions are unpaid - interns do not receive school credit unless requested. Secondly, UG interns view themselves as volunteers but refer to themselves as interns as they associate the title of ‘intern’ with a higher prestige than ‘volunteer’.

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Electronic Survey
• Administered via Google Forms
• Shared on Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn

Expert Interviews
• Conducted in-person or over Skype
• Average duration: 45 minutes

Literature review
• Primary Sources: UG Job Descriptions posted on website, UG Internship Training Manual, UG Recruiting Manual
• Secondary Sources: Online reviews of UG, literature on the subject of volunteer retention

Findings

TOP MOTIVATORS

VALUES
Internship as a way to express one’s altruistic and humanitarian values

UNDERSTANDING
Internship as a way to gain knowledge, skills and abilities

CAREER
Internship as a way to improve career prospects

BEST PRACTICES

1. Have clear policies and job descriptions for volunteer involvement
2. Practice regular supervision and communication with volunteers
3. Conduct recognition activities
4. Offer adequate training for volunteers

References