

# Volunteer Burnout

Volunteers are special people who give their time and energy without receiving money in return. But without a paycheck to keep someone coming to meetings time after time, there must be other enticements. Volunteers remain active with organizations they feel are contributing positively to the community. But volunteers also remain active when they are recognized for the effort they make within that organization.

To prevent volunteer burnout, the positive feeling one has must remain high in spite of the many hours devoted to the work involved. This is especially true in neighborhood organizations, which often demand great commitment from their workers. Here are some insight into the causes of volunteer burnout and ways to prevent your organization members from succumbing.

## 1. Why do people burn out?

- The organization is lacking in clear goals and direction.
- There is too much work to be done. People are afraid to say “no,” thinking that it won’t get done otherwise.
- There is a popular notion that if your work for a public interest organization (such as your neighborhood organization); you have to give selflessly for the cause. People see it as a measure of their worth.
- There are often few rewards or recognition for a job well done in volunteer organizations.
- All work and no play makes everyone tired and burned out!
- Too few people are involved.

## 2. Tips for burnout prevention

- Set realistic objectives that meet the organization’s purpose and goals. It helps to have job descriptions or task outlines so people know what they are getting themselves into and what is expected of them.
- Different people are able to handle different amounts and types of work. Recognize different abilities and tolerance levels in handling out work assignments. Don’t let one person take on everything and then burn out. Get new members involved.
- Remind people that the quality of their work is what’s important, not the quantity.
- Recognize people for a job well done. You can verbally give thanks to people at meetings or develop an award system. This could be a certificate of appreciation, a gift given to a member who has worked hard for the group or a yearly award potluck where members are publicly recognized. Nominate volunteers for recognition by the community.
- Organize fun events for your members. Creating a social network of friends and neighbors can provide support and also give people an opportunity to have a good time together.

### 3. Do's and Don'ts of working with volunteers

#### Do's

- Involve each member in each step or organizing.
- Invite all residents within the boundaries to be part of the group.
- Be realistic about what the neighborhood organization can do.
  - ❖ How much time is needed?
  - ❖ How many people are needed for this project?
  - ❖ What other projects are underway? Is it feasible to take on a new responsibility?
- Bring all activities to discussion and vote before the full membership commits to a new project.

#### Don'ts

- Have one person or small groups make decisions for the entire group.
- Try to do everything yourself. The leadership of the neighborhood organization is not the neighborhood organization.
- Drop projects without a good reason. Make sure everyone knows why the project is being dropped.
- Scare off new members by asking them to volunteer for life. Start small.