



# 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.<sup>2</sup>

<b>62.6</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>\$ 173</b>	<b>\$ 26.34</b>
Million American volunteers	Billion volunteer hours	Billion worth of services	Value per Volunteer Hour in CA

(Figures and statistics for 2013<sup>3</sup>)

**THE PROBLEM:** This talent pool (of volunteers) remain overlooked and under valued<sup>4</sup>. 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

### Objectives

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'.

The goal of the research is to examine intern motivations in committing to an internship with UG, specifically how the following factors impact their desire for continued involvement with UG:

1. the volunteer recruitment process,
2. the notion of 'best fit' with respect to the assigned task(s) and LDOs ,
3. job satisfaction in terms of perceived support and recognition from the leadership.

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 projects based on goals set by volunteers.

### 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.

#### Electronic Survey

- Administered via Google Forms
- Shared on Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn

**60** Current & Former Interns

**33%** Response rate

#### Expert Interviews

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

**5** Former Interns

**3** Practitioners

#### 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

### Recommendations



#### Manage Expectations Of Interns

Tool: Institute an Intern Agreement

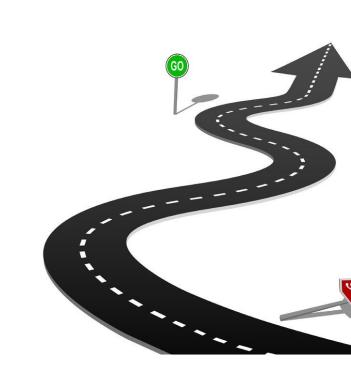
It sets clear expectations about the roles volunteers are expected to perform in their respective assignments and serves as a written commitment of the duration of each volunteer assignment. Additionally, this volunteer agreement can be used to replace the practice of a \$200 deposit that has proven to be an ineffective and unpopular method of retention.



#### Improve Accessibility Of Leadership

Tool: Administer Intern Motivation Questionnaire

Leadership can make use of an Intern Motivation Questionnaire that would provide an overview behind each volunteer's motivations in accepting an internship with UG. This would be a helpful tool to build rapport with volunteers. This questionnaire should be administered online using tools that are available for free, to avoid straining already limited human and financial resources. As such, an electronic reproduction of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI)<sup>5</sup> has been created and can be accessed online. It can be further customized to the organization's need.



#### Provide A Structured & Consistent Internship Program

Tool: Implement Intern Roadmap

The Intern Roadmap is a strategic plan that is completed by the intern and his/her mentor at the start of the internship, and revisited again at the completion of the assignment. It is a visual exercise that provides clarity about the roles expected of the intern, helps both the intern and the manager keep track of the work being done, and helps the manager to plan professional development opportunities appropriate to each intern's skill sets.

### References

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