CSS Shared Resources, Ontario East

Development Trainings 2026/ 2027
Volunteer Webinar
Session #3






LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Creating Volunteer Programs That Thrive

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Sustainable programs don't happen by chance. They are designed, one stage of the volunteer engagement cycle at a time.



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What you will take away

Foundations

Understand the core foundations of sustainable volunteer management.

Assessment

Assess strengths and gaps within a volunteer program.

The cycle

Apply the volunteer management cycle to improve engagement.

Retention and capacity

Identify strategies that increase retention and organizational capacity.

Improvement

Develop systems that support continuous improvement.

Action

Create an action plan to strengthen the volunteer program.

Sustainable by design, not by chance

Organizational goals

Volunteer roles are tied directly to what the organization is trying to achieve.

Volunteer experience

People find meaning, connection and growth, so they choose to stay.

Long-term impact

Strong systems keep the program running through staff and leadership change.

The question to hold today: if key people left tomorrow, would your program keep going?

Six foundations of volunteer management

Purpose

A clear link between volunteer work and the mission.

Defined roles

Written descriptions with expectations and time commitments.

Policies

Fair, simple guidelines and safeguards everyone understands.

Leadership

Dedicated coordination and visible support from leaders.

Resources

Budget, tools and staff time set aside for volunteers.

Evaluation

Regular review of what is working and what is not.

Align volunteers with organizational goals

If the goal is...	Then volunteer roles may be...	And you track...
Reach more clients	Outreach and intake volunteers	Number of people served
Run better events	Event teams with trained leads	Volunteer and guest feedback
Build future leaders	Mentors and project owners	Volunteers moving into leadership
Raise awareness	Community ambassadors	Reach and new volunteer sign-ups

Activity: rate your program (1 to 5)

Area	Key question	Score
Roles	Does every role have a clear description?	
Recruitment	Do we recruit for specific needs, through several channels?	
Onboarding	Do new volunteers feel prepared in the first month?	
Support	Do volunteers have a go-to person and regular check-ins?	
Recognition	Is appreciation timely and personal?	
Evaluation	Do we collect and use data and feedback?	

Turn gaps into priorities

1 Rate
Score each area honestly, ideally with a volunteer's view.

2 Spot gaps
Circle the two lowest scores.

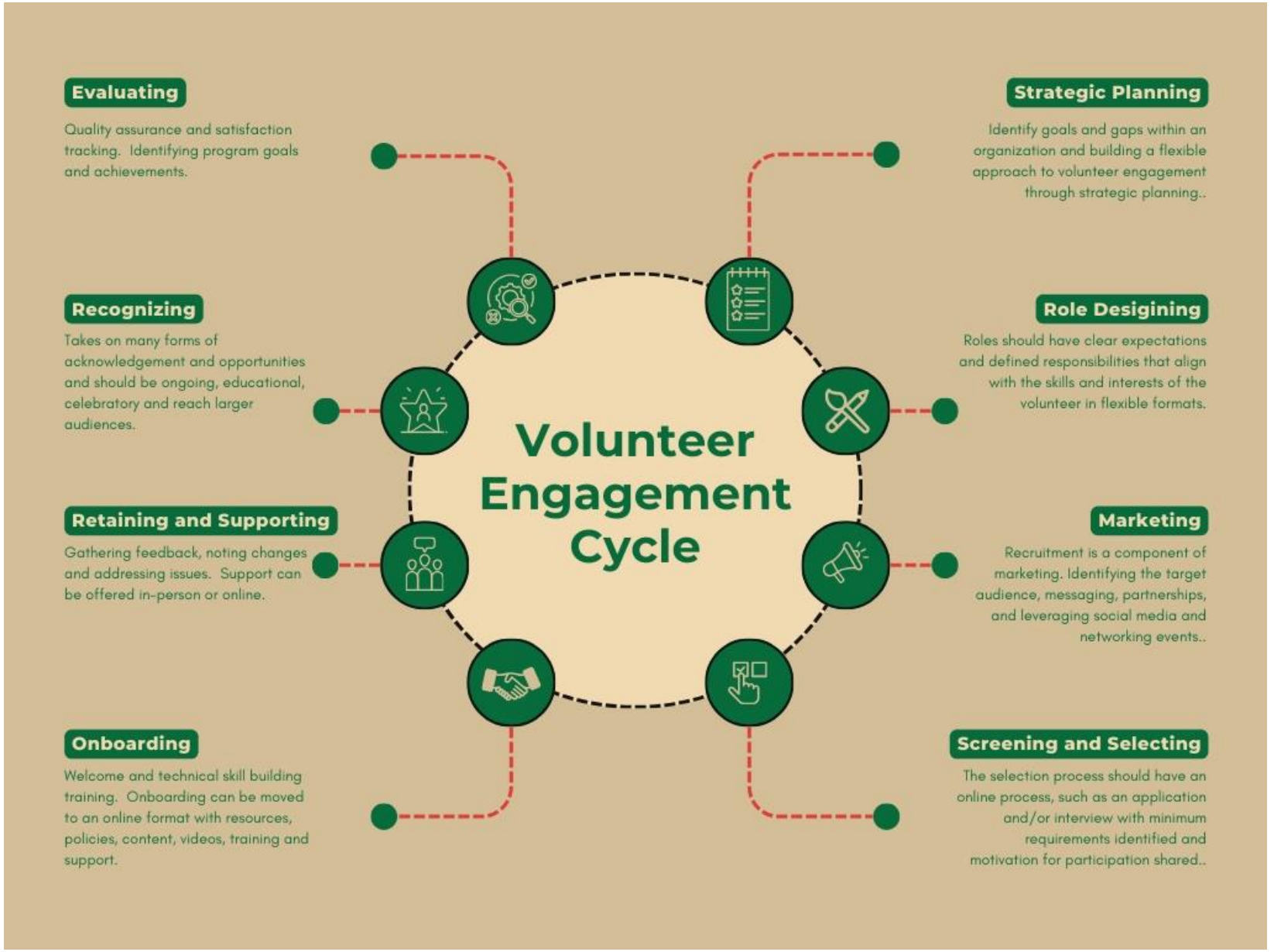
3 Pick a win
Choose one change you can make this month.

THE CYCLE

Strengthen every stage of the volunteer engagement cycle

Recruitment, retention, leadership development and long-term impact all depend on how well each stage is designed.

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Change Management Principles

- Involve people within the system
- Understand where you/the organization is at this moment
- Understand where you want to be, when why and how you can get there
- Plan development towards where you want to be
- Communicate, involve, enable and facilitate others

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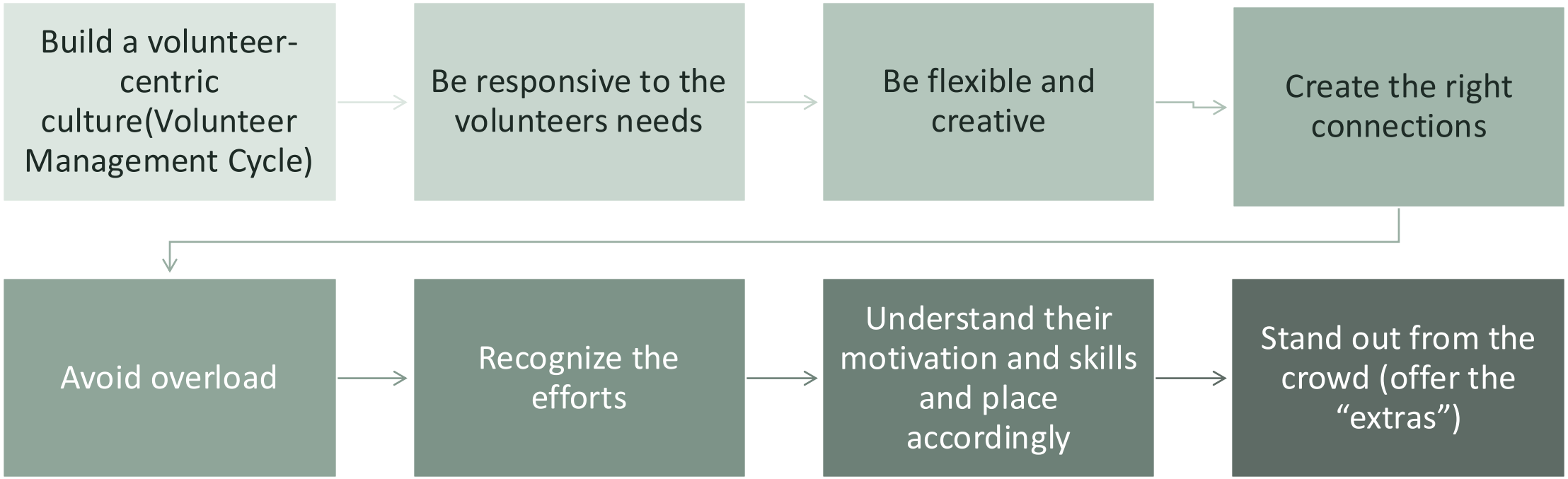
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Pivot

- Re-Think
- Re-Purpose
- Innovate
- Listen
- Build on success
- Ask people
- Pick a new goal
- Do it soon

Engage Others



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Plan

Identify real needs, write clear role descriptions and set goals for what volunteers will achieve.

Marketing

Recruit for specific roles, use more than one channel, and make it easy to say yes.

Ask: which roles are hardest to fill, and is the role itself the reason?

Screen and welcome

Fair, consistent screening followed by a warm welcome and a clear first-week plan.

Orient and train

Teach the role, the culture and the why. Pair newcomers with an experienced buddy.

Set expectations

Agree on time, tasks and how to ask for help from the start.

Support

Regular check-ins, a go-to contact and honest feedback in both directions.

Recognize

Specific, timely and personal appreciation that volunteers can feel.

Evaluate

Gather feedback and data, then change something and tell volunteers what changed.

Develop leaders from within

1 Volunteer
Strong start and steady contribution.

2 Team lead
Guides a small group.

3 Trainer
Teaches new volunteers.

4 Program leader
Helps shape strategy.

Leadership pathways give committed volunteers a reason to grow, and give you capacity.

Retention strategies that work

Strategy	What it looks like	Why it works
Meaningful roles	Clear purpose and visible impact	People see why they matter
Flexibility	Short-term and self-scheduled options	Fits real lives
Personal connection	Buddies, teams and regular check-ins	Belonging keeps people
Growth	Training and leadership pathways	People build skills
Appreciation	Specific and timely thanks	People feel valued





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What to consider?

- What is volunteering?
- Why involve volunteers?
- What is an appropriate volunteer role?
- What is it that you are looking for volunteers help with?
- How will meeting this need add value to the service you provide?
- Are you replacing a paid job in the organisation through this volunteer role?
- Is it the kind of thing that a volunteer would want to do?
- Would you do it?
- What are the risks, or health and safety issues?
- How often is a volunteer needed and who will be their point of contact?
- What are the benefits to the volunteer?
- Do you have the correct resources in place to support this volunteer role?
- Do you offer support, training and out of pocket expenses.

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Building organizational capacity

Staff buy-in

Share volunteer results so the whole team values the program.

Volunteer leaders

Distribute coordination so it does not rest on one person.

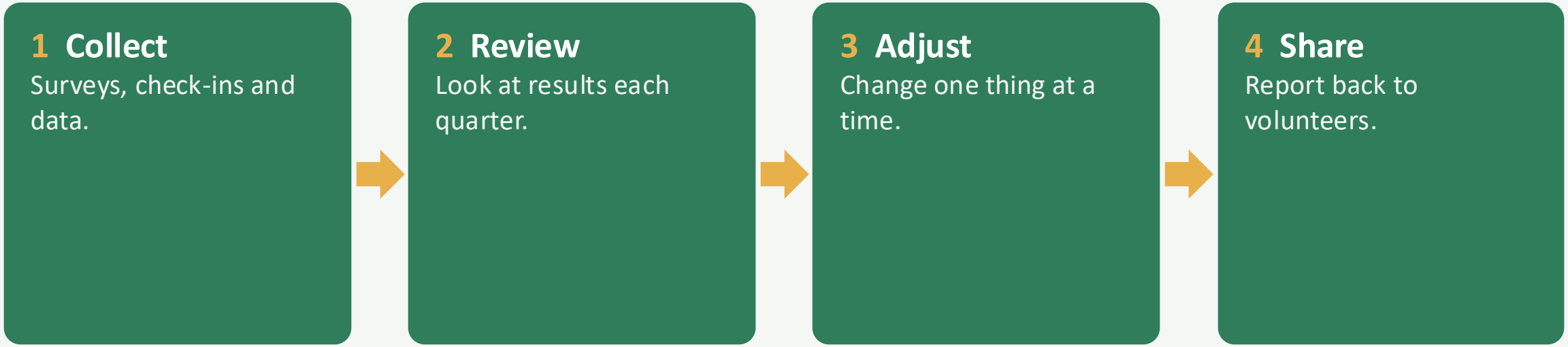
Tools and systems

Simple tracking, scheduling and communication tools.

Partnerships

Link with schools, businesses and community groups.

Systems that support continuous improvement



Improvement is a habit built into the calendar, not a one-time project.

Metrics that matter

Measure	What it tells you
Retention rate	Whether volunteers stay beyond the first year
Time to fill a role	How well recruitment is working
Volunteer satisfaction	How the experience feels from the inside
Hours and reach	How much capacity volunteers provide
Leadership pipeline	How many volunteers are growing into new roles
Impact outcomes	What changed for the people you serve

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Use technology for…

Market/recruit

Support

Training

Communication

Volunteer work



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Volunteer support is key

- Online training
- Communicate strategically
- Mentorship and coaching
- Regular check ins
- Ask for ideas
- Redesign roles



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Engage Others

Be	Be responsive to the volunteers needs
Be	Be flexible and creative
Create	Create the right connections
Avoid	Avoid overload
Recognize	Recognize the efforts
Understand	Understand their motivation and skills and place accordingly
Stand out	Stand out from the crowd (offer the “extras”)

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Be Inclusive



WHO HAS DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES?



WHO EXPANDS YOUR WAYS OF KNOWING OR DOING?



WHO IS NOT CURRENTLY AT THE TABLE?



WHO EXPANDS THE REACH AND RELEVANCY AS AN ORGANIZATION?

Activity: build your action plan

Priority	Action	Owner	By when	How we will know
1				
2				
3				

Start from your two lowest scores. Choose actions that are small, specific and owned.

Your next 90 days

First 30 days: Start with one quick win from your gaps.

By day 60: Put one improvement system in place.

By day 90: Review results and share them with volunteers.

Questions and discussion

GENERAL FEEDBACK

PLEASE COMPLETE SURVEY:

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!



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