

# Steps for Sharing Your Volunteerism History: *Look Back to Look Ahead* Project

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A wonderful way to recognize your volunteers and show the public the value of volunteering is to celebrate volunteers *today* by showcasing them as the current step in a continuum of volunteer action from the past and therefore the next step to future service. The concept can work for individual organizations and also for community-wide projects. [You can also read the original inspiration for these pages in Susan's ["Hot Topic" introducing this idea](#) and see what colleagues said in reply.]

## **Step 1: Rediscover History**

Research the history of volunteer accomplishments in your setting: Who founded your organization and assured its continuation? (Hint: these will be the first volunteers.) What things have volunteers done through the years as the organization added paid staff and grew in other ways? Rescue, label and preserve materials now in musty closets--old volunteer recognition party invitations, badges, photos, and other memorabilia that make an archive worth maintaining. Audiotape older or long-term volunteers who still remember earlier days.

## **Step 2: Share What You Learned**

Produce a report, scrapbook, lobby display, videotape, skit, YouTube video -- anything that will draw attention to the role volunteers have played in founding and expanding your organization. Concentrate on highlighting accomplishments and goals reached, not just on who did what. Make sure current volunteers are fully involved in the final product.

## **Step 3: Envision the Future**

Then convene a "where do we intend to go from here?" think tank. Invite a wide range of volunteers, employees, administrators, community members, volunteerism colleagues – anyone with a stake in your success – to discuss (and debate) why it is still important to involve volunteers in your work and what that involvement should be in the new century. This is your chance to acknowledge, honor, and then break the mold of the past!

## **Step 4: Act Collectively**

If every organization identifies its history and articulates its desired direction, you can then go "public." Each DOVIA or each community can designate a special day for sharing the results of each agency's examination process, collectively celebrating the historic impact of volunteers and committing to achieving future goals. Maybe there will be a public library or town hall exhibits.

Maybe videotapes and books of old and new photographs will be produced. All this is news and the media will cover it.

## **Step 5: Tell the World**

Energize is committed to capturing and sharing the work of colleagues who share their history. [Read what others have done](#) and [share your projects](#). Find as many variations as you can and make it work for you. You are welcome to download, print out, and disseminate all the information we give you on the site.

**Why are we encouraging everyone to carry out this project?** Here are a few of many good reasons:

1. Comparatively simple and straightforward to accomplish.
2. Low cost, but with a tangible product at the end.
3. Doable by small and large organizations of all kinds.
4. Meaningful to the organizations that engage in it but can be linked to the results of similar projects in one community and in ever-widening circles.
5. A way to educate others about the value and contributions of volunteers.
6. Ideal for involving volunteers themselves in the activity, so it's done with and not "for" volunteers (or, even worse, "to" them!).
7. Adaptable to any country and language.

Found at the Energize, Inc. website at <http://www.energizeinc.com/back/about.html>.