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Pictures, Pictures, Pictures

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

September
2015

Almost forever I've urged leaders of volunteers to always carry a camera and to capture images of volunteering in action. Today there is no excuse to miss great photographs, since the ubiquitous smartphone is also a high-quality digital camera, video camera, photo editor, and immediate transmitter/poster of anything we shoot. But even this powerful tool cannot produce pictures unless we remember to take it out and press the button.



Not that long ago, creating a collection of multi-purpose photographs required all manner of camera equipment and a budget for developing and printing the shots. While it still takes creative skill to snap a great image or expressive portrait, everyone can gather a large library of photographs and videos for many purposes.

What Purposes?

Recruitment

It's trite but true that a picture is worth a thousand words. Apart from making sure that you show diverse volunteers in terms of gender, age, race, and other characteristics, help a prospective volunteer to actually "picture" him- or herself in your setting. Take real photographs of volunteers at work, not obviously staged promotional shots. Show the office, recreation hall, patient room, or playing field where the service happens. Of course you won't show client faces, but that doesn't mean you can't include the backs of people in a circle or someone's hands.

An archive of many different images – kept current – provides you with choices for what to print in a brochure, post to the volunteer pages of your organization's Web site, include with a press release, or add to any slide show for different purposes and audiences.

Recognition

Forgo the usual "certificate" of appreciation and instead give each person a framed photograph of her- or himself doing the volunteer work for which you are giving thanks. What better way to show

that “we see you”? Matte the photos with a printed message such as “you fit right in” or “thanks for all you’ve contributed here this year.” Bet those pictures go on display in volunteers’ homes, too, so be sure to include your organization’s logo!

Even more useful are self-running slide shows at recognition events that offer the year-in-review, projected either as people gather for the party or during the event. Real pictures of real happenings with real volunteers and paid staff working together. Everyone gets excited to see whom they know in the shots and the cumulative effect is to educate all viewers (include the executives who attend the event) about the range of activities accomplished by volunteers during the last year.

Hint: Record the voices of the *beneficiaries* of volunteer service (clients, staff, visitors, etc.) making comments about the volunteers who helped them, and use those audio clips as background to the slide show.

One more idea: Catch people doing something right or good! Include the photo in a thank you note right after you witnessed the positive moment. Definitely do this for staff as well as for volunteers.

Orientation and Training

This is the purpose for which videos shine. Here’s a starter set of ideas for what videos you might record and then post to your Web site or to a YouTube channel you create for volunteers:

- Walk-through tours of your facility, with separate videos for more in-depth explanation of certain areas where many volunteers work.
- Recordings of greetings from senior managers and any other “meet this person” types of interviews. These do not have to be longer than a minute or two, but new volunteers and those transferring assignments can feel some familiarity with the people they will work with right away. Of course, include such quick profiles of leadership volunteers as well.
- How-to videos of the steps of any routine task that new volunteers need to learn, such as: how to use the online volunteer sign-in system; the proper way to pack hot meals into containers; good ways to start a tour of the exhibition; how to put away the sports equipment after the game. You can build a huge library of such clips for access at will both by volunteers and employees - even long-time folks can refresh their memories of the steps to follow in a key task.

Building a Volunteer Community

Be creative and welcome some fun. Many volunteer initiatives now have Facebook pages and other online communities for sharing ideas and stories. Selfies often appear there, which can be a great way to build team spirit.

Years ago Andy Fryar started taking copies of the Lyell McEwin Volunteer Association newsletter along when he traveled around and outside of Australia, taking photographs of people far and wide reading the latest edition and printing them as a recurring column (I once turned up in a shot). Today that idea has expanded into “Volly the Travel Bear” who has his own Facebook page. He is introduced as “visiting far flung places all around the globe with the Lyell McEwin Volunteer team – you never know where he will pop up next!!!” Any staff member or volunteer may take Volly out for a day or longer, as long as a photo ends up on Facebook. Here he is in Washington, DC.



This type of idea can also be practical or serious. For example, ask volunteers to keep an eye out for anything you want to study, such as examples of creative volunteer recruitment messages they see anywhere (I started doing this on a board on [Energize's Pinterest site](#)). You can challenge them to find something pretty or hopeful even in a polluted stream or to record *problems* that should be made visible, such as abandoned cars you want the city to remove.

Special Events

It's become common at weddings and other events to scatter disposable cameras on dinner tables and encourage the guests to capture whatever images they think are fun, moving, or special in some way. Yes, there may still be a professional photographer taking formal pictures, but these spontaneous shots can save wonderful memories. Even without encouragement, these days it's impossible to *stop* guests from snapping photos on their phones...and almost immediately posting them to Facebook, Instagram, or some other picture-sharing platform. Use this to your organization's advantage and encourage such photography at any special event you sponsor.

Perhaps the most well-organized videotaping in our field is that of [Volunteering Queensland TV](#) on YouTube. Most of the many videos there are planned and produced by skilled volunteers.

Develop Guidelines and Policies

Naturally you want to do all of this properly and legally, especially regarding people's confidentiality. Create policies and systems to deal with questions such as:

- Will you need release forms to show the faces of volunteers and employees, not only of clients?
- What types of images are appropriate or inappropriate?
- What needs approval prior to posting (and by whom)?
- Will a credit line appear to show the volunteer photographer's name?
- Will published images be copyrighted by the organization?
- Who owns the photographs or videos and what rights might a volunteer have to further use of them (such as multiple images your organization does not select but are still on the volunteer's

camera)?

Relax. These issues may sound complex, but quite obviously there are people out there who have already created workable systems. Do the research and then focus on being creative!

Recruit and Train Volunteer Photographers

You do not have to be the one taking the pictures! Recruit volunteers onto a photography team. Some may want this to be their primary assignment, others may be willing to be on call for scheduled photo opps.

Although you want the team to capture candid photos, this does not mean they should be of poor quality! Before you add a volunteer to the photography team, do the same sort of screening as with any other volunteer position and make sure to ask to see samples of the applicant's pictures.

If, after viewing these portfolios, you feel additional training is needed, schedule some with a professional photographer (another volunteer?) who can give your new team some basic "tricks of the trade." Also, if your communications department has branding guidelines for organizational images, share these with your photographers. The goal is to have candid, quality photos that anyone would enjoy viewing!

- How have you used photographs and videos in your work with volunteers? *Feel free to include the URL of any site where your images are posted! Or, if you prefer, e-mail a sample image with your comment to info@energizeinc.com. See some photos Hot Topic readers have shared with all of us!*
- What advice do you want to give other site visitors about success in using pictures?

Related Topics: [Online Community](#) | [Recognition](#) | [Recruitment](#) | [Training](#)

Comments from Readers

Submitted on September 2nd, 2015

[Tony Goodrow](#), CEO, Better Impact Inc, Hamilton Ontario, Canada

Last night I attended a swearing in ceremony for a group of new police officers in our community. Although the event was quite formal and ceremonial, people were ENCOURAGED to come forward and get right up close to snap away with their phones as the new officer they were there to see was presented with their badge.

Given the formality of such an occasion and how I have heard of so many nonprofits fearing any participation in social media, I wondered what went on at the police department that changed the approach for the event from "please wait until the end of the ceremony to take any pictures" to "please come up and join in the ceremony by taking pictures as we go along".

What it took for that to happen, I thought it was brilliant! Like other organizations, a police department has to think about how its brand is perceived in the community. With all the pictures added to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc last night, the sense of community that is an important part of the police department's branding was broadcast out in a way that could never happen if they didn't look past their fears and try something new.

Submitted on September 3rd, 2015

Susan J Ellis, Energize, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, USA

Thanks for sharing this experience, Tony. It raises a whole new reason for taking photographs, too. When there is some controversy, or a problem about which people may feel concerned, pictures of real people put "a face" on the issue, making it harder to demonize or stereotype the parties involved. And it emphasizes the connection of community, as you said.

Submitted on September 2nd, 2015

Kate, Brampton, Ontario, Canada

I really appreciate the Hot Topic - Pictures, Pictures, Pictures. I'm going to use a few of these ideas for recognition. Very helpful.

Submitted on September 3rd, 2015

Susan J Ellis, Energize, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, USA

Hooray! Hope you have fun taking the pictures and that everyone enjoys seeing them.

Submitted on September 2nd, 2015

[Laura Kinder](#), Director of Volunteer and Spiritual Care Services, Longmont United Hospital, Longmont, USA

During National Volunteer Week I had one month before ask volunteers to write write down why they are a Longmont United Hospital Volunteer. I had them take a selfie or ask someone else to take their photo with them holding their sign. The response was overwhelming and so very inspirational! I posted the photos on our Facebook page, made posters and included them in our



newsletters. [[See more of the photos Laura shared with us.](#)] Check out them out on Facebook: Longmont United Hospital: Volunteer Services. Our volunteers love seeing each other on our Facebook Page! <https://www.facebook.com/LongmontUnitedHospitalVolunteerServices>

Submitted on September 3rd, 2015

Susan J Ellis, Energize, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, USA

Great idea, Laura -- and thanks so much for sharing [more of the selfies!](#)

- Susan

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