
Managing Challenging Volunteers with Confidence

Practical strategies to overcome obstacles and build stronger relationships

August 2025

AGENDA

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Introductions

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Why conflict happens—even in good programs

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Strategies for handling volunteer conflict

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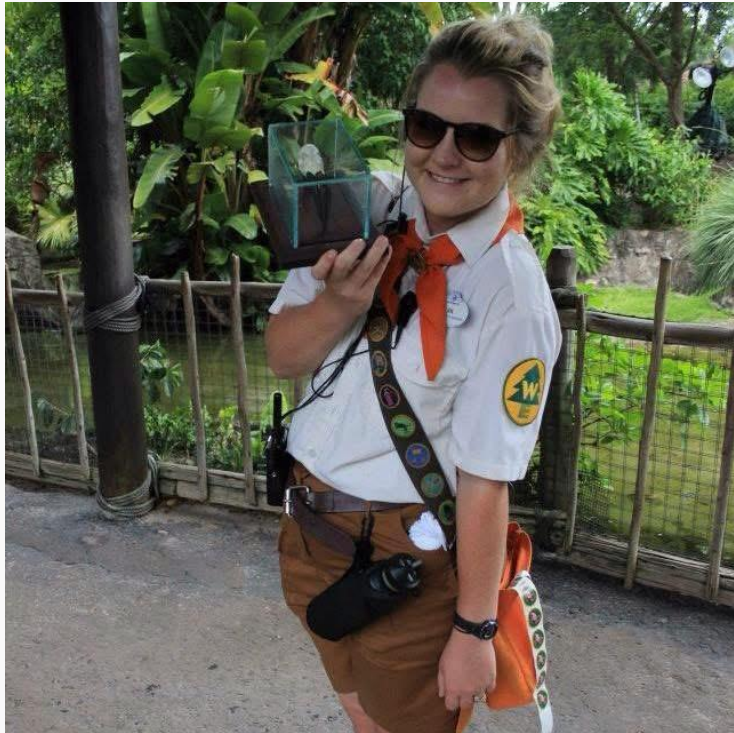
Resources and takeaways for your team

Framing our Conversation

Conflict is a normal part of working with passionate people—this session is about building tools to navigate it with care and clarity

This is not a one-size-fits-all approach, it's about real tools for real people.

Hi! I'm AK



- 📍 Based near St. Louis in Southern Illinois
- Community Specialist for Galaxy Digital, a volunteer management software provider for many partners in your area!
- 🎨 Former Disney cast member (trained in conflict resolution with heart)
- 🙌 10+ years working directly in nonprofits & community engagement
- 🤝 Committed to building positive, people-first environments

The Role of a Volunteer Coordinator

Strong
Communication
Skills

Organizational
Abilities

Empathy
and
Interpersonal
Skills

Recruitment
Expertise

Leadership
and Motivation

Problem-Solving
Abilities

Training and
Orientation Skills

Team Player
Attitude

Flexibility and
Open-Mindedness

Attention
to Detail

Technology
Proficiency

Passion for
the Cause

Conflict
Resolution Skills

Evaluation
and Feedback

BREAKOUT SESSION

Write down or discuss at tables
one real or hypothetical conflict
you've faced working with
volunteers

As a group place the conflict in
one of the following categories :

- Miscommunication
- Boundary issues
- Cultural or generational clashes
- Burnout or disengagement
- Other



Recognizing Volunteer-Related Issues



Pay Attention to the Clues

Subtle behaviors often signal deeper issues among volunteers.

- 🕒 Drop in participation
- 😬 Tension or avoidance
- 💬 Complaints or gossip
- 🙅 Refusal to collaborate
- ⚠️ Defensive to feedback



Strategy : Prevention through Clarity

Most conflicts stem from
assumptions

Clear roles, expectations,
and training prevent tension

Communicate expectations
before, during, and after
shifts

Use written guidelines +
friendly reminders

Remember why they might
have chosen to sign up!



When motivations clash with reality, frustration can arise:
Tasks don't match expectations

They feel unappreciated or underutilized

Boundaries may feel confusing

Strategy : Tapping into Volunteer Motivations

Strategy : Tapping into Volunteer Motivations

Understanding motivation helps you:

- Prevent misunderstandings
- Match volunteers with the right roles
- Address concerns with empathy



When roles align with...

- Interests
- Skills
- Availability

- ✓ Volunteers feel valued
- ✗ Poor matches = tension, no-shows, burnout

Strategy : Matching
Volunteers with the
right Opportunities

Strategy : Matching Volunteers with the right roles

Quick Tips:

- Ask about preferences during onboarding
- Check in after their first shift
- Be open to moving volunteers into better-fit roles

 ***“Let’s make sure this is the right fit for you.”***

Three Step Approach : Spot, Say, Solve It!



- Spot potential conflicts quickly
- Say something to address the issue
- Solve problems collaboratively and respectfully

Revisit the scenarios from the first breakout session and review a solution using the three step approach

Ex : "Hey [Volunteer Name], I noticed [specific behavior]. I wanted to check in because it's affecting [the team/the program]. Can we talk about it?"

BREAKOUT SESSION



Create & Follow a Process



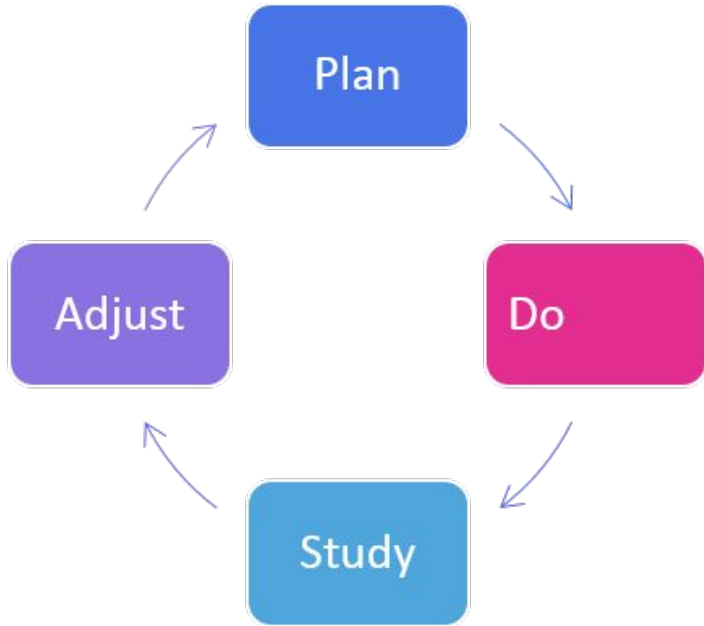
- Every program needs a documented grievance process.
- This ensures ethical and fair volunteer treatment.
- Outline complaint handling and disciplinary protocols. SOP
- Include steps for immediate dismissal.
- Define consequences for uncorrected behavior.

Talk With Your Volunteer



- Assess the problem and reference protocol first
- Choose a neutral, semi-private place for discussion
- List specific issues or behaviors to address
- Calmly explain how the behavior is impacting the experience & others
- Listen to the volunteer's point of view

Reflect and Improve



- Reflect on organizational contributions to conflict
- Ensure proper volunteer-role matching occurred
- Review accuracy of opportunity descriptions
- Assess if the volunteer role is too demanding
- Evaluate volunteer burnout or time commitment

Make it Work



- Set clear expectations and goals.
- Provide additional training and support.
- Revise the volunteer's role if needed.
- Express sincere appreciation and recognition.



Writing Effective Volunteer Opportunity Descriptions

Volunteer opportunity descriptions set the stage for what volunteers can expect from their experience volunteering with your program.

An **effective description** can act as a solid foundation for recruitment practices and communications throughout the volunteer lifecycle.

Aligning the volunteer's experience during their shift with the description allows your program to build trust with your volunteer base and community.

Volunteer Description Example



Weed Wrangler -Callery Pear Removal

Wednesday, August 27th, 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

LRWP Office, 8315 W Jefferson Blvd, Fort Wayne, IN 46804

Join us to learn why and how to identify the invasive species Callery Pear, then hike with us to remove as many of these as we can! Removing invasive species is crucial to preserving biodiversity, and we can't do it without you. Come make an impact on your community! Please dress for the weather and bring plenty of water. We will provide instruction, hand tools and gloves.

[RSVPs appreciated.](#) Walk-ins welcome.

At your table, discuss the following:

🧩 Do you currently have a plan or procedure for handling volunteer-related conflict?

If yes: What has worked well?
What would you improve?

If no: What might a clear, supportive process look like for your team?

💬 Bonus prompt:
What role should staff, volunteer leaders, or even volunteers themselves play in resolving low-level conflict?



BREAKOUT SESSION



When to Lean In—and When to Let Go



- Not all conflict can be solved 1:1
- Know when to **document and escalate**
- Bring in leadership or HR when needed
- Stay calm and protect your mission + team

Know the Difference

When to Lean In

- Open to honest dialogue
- Rooted in misunderstanding
- Respect is still present
- Both parties want resolution
- Issue feels specific and solvable

When to Let Go

- Communication is harmful or manipulative
- No willingness to own mistakes
- Repeated efforts haven't helped
- Core values are in conflict
- Your wellbeing is at risk

BREAKOUT SESSION

What support do
you need?

What supports or
policies would help
you manage conflict
more confidently?





BONUS

Take Action + Q&A



Conflict is normal



Clear expectations prevent most issues



Address early, kindly, and directly

*Support is available—lean on tools, teams,
and peer community*



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July 23, 2025 | by [Annelise Ferry](#)

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