

# Foundations of Volunteer Engagement

## *BLC Case Studies*

### **Case Study 1: Strategic vs. Transactional Engagement**

*Topic: Systems Design & Responsibility*

A mid-sized community nonprofit relies heavily on volunteers to deliver weekly programming. Volunteer roles are loosely defined, and most coordination happens reactively, things like filling shifts, responding to no-shows, and managing last-minute changes. The organization experiences frequent volunteer turnover, but leadership attributes this to “low commitment” from volunteers. The volunteer coordinator feels overwhelmed and unsupported, and there is little involvement from program managers or leadership in volunteer engagement decisions.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- *What signals of transactional engagement are present in this scenario?*
- *Where is responsibility for volunteer engagement held, how might it be improved?*
- *What system-level changes would shift this toward mission-driven strategic engagement?*
- *How changes could be made that might positively impact equity and inclusion?*

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### **Case Study 2: Equity-Centred Recruitment**

*Topic: Access & Inclusion*

A music and entertainment nonprofit is proud of its long-standing volunteer base, many of whom have been involved for years. However, leadership notices that volunteers are overwhelmingly from similar demographic backgrounds. Recruitment relies on word-of-mouth, weekday daytime availability, and unpaid training sessions. When asked about diversity, staff say, “We’d love more diverse volunteers, but they just don’t apply.”

#### **Discussion Questions**

- *What structural barriers are present in this recruitment model that prevent equity-deserving groups from applying?*
- *How do current practices privilege certain groups?*
- *Where is the organization confusing outreach with access?*
- *What would equity-centred redesign look like here?*

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### **Case Study 3: Orientation & Early Experience**

*Topic: Onboarding, Belonging & Retention*

A health services organization runs a mandatory 3-hour volunteer orientation session covering policies, procedures, and organizational history. Volunteers report feeling overwhelmed and unsure of their roles afterward. There is no follow-up or check-in after onboarding. Within the first three months, nearly 40% of new volunteers stop showing up without notice.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- *What aspects of this orientation model may be contributing to early attrition?*
- *Where is the organization prioritizing information over experience?*
- *What role does belonging and relationship-building play here?*
- *How could orientation be redesigned to support retention through equity and belonging?*

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### **Case Study 4: Supervision & Feedback**

*Topic: Support Systems & Accountability*

At a large arts organization, volunteers report to different staff members depending on the event. Some managers or coordinators provide clear direction and feedback, while others have little time to engage with volunteers. When issues arise, staff often avoid difficult conversations, fearing volunteers will leave. Over time, performance inconsistencies increase (no shows, volunteers leaving early), and some volunteers express frustration about unclear expectations.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What are the ripple effects of inconsistent supervision of volunteers across the organization?
- How does avoidance of feedback impact volunteer experience and performance?
- What practices or systems are missing to support supervisors and volunteers?
- How does this situation affect equity and belonging?

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### **Case Study 5: Measuring Impact & Learning**

*Topic: Evaluation & Continuous Improvement*

A national nonprofit tracks volunteer hours, number of volunteers, and event attendance for reporting purposes. While these metrics are shared in annual reports, staff rarely use the data to inform program decisions. Volunteers are not asked for feedback, and leadership struggles to articulate how volunteers contribute to mission outcomes beyond “helping out.”

### **Discussion Questions**

- What is the organization currently measuring and what is missing?
- How does this approach limit learning and decision-making?
- Where could volunteer voice be integrated?
- What would learning-oriented evaluation of the volunteer program look like?