



# Volunteer Management and Retention at DCP Theatre, A Volunteer Operated Nonprofit

La Salle University, Nonprofit Leadership Program, Capstone Project

**By: Cassandra  
Bonner**

# External Research- Key Takeaways

The Literature Review of scholarly research and Best Practice recommendations provided many helpful insights into Volunteer recruitment, management and retention factors:

## Key Factor #1

Volunteer motivations and goals are complex and should be taken into consideration when starting with a nonprofit. It is important to match a new volunteer with a role that is suited to their individual goals.

*Example: A person interested in volunteering for social/relationship building goals will be unsatisfied in a role that does not allow for interaction with plenty of other volunteers.*

(Bussell & Forbes 2002) and  
(Garner & Garner 2011)

## Key Factor #2

Leaders and managers within an organization matter. Inspirational leaders have a positive impact on volunteer satisfaction and retention.

*Example: A Board Member who has poor communication skills, does not take time to thank or get to know volunteers working under them will likely result in those volunteers feeling alienated and unsatisfied. This may cause volunteers to leave the organization.*

(Dwyer et al. 2013) and (De Clerck et al. 2021)

## Key Factor #3

Volunteers should be shown appreciation and recognized in a way that is personally meaningful to each individual.

*Example: Some volunteers are embarrassed by highly public awards or similar recognition efforts. An unwelcome style of recognition could harm the relationship with a volunteer instead of making them feel valued. A thoughtful, handwritten note may have a greater positive impact.*

(Garner & Garner 2011)

## Key Factor #4

Clear and thorough training, communication, and written processes and policies are important for developing engaged, competent, volunteers.

*Example: Taking the time to provide a volunteer with a handbook and detailed training not only gives them the important information they need to succeed in their role, but it also communicates to the volunteer that they are respected and valued.*

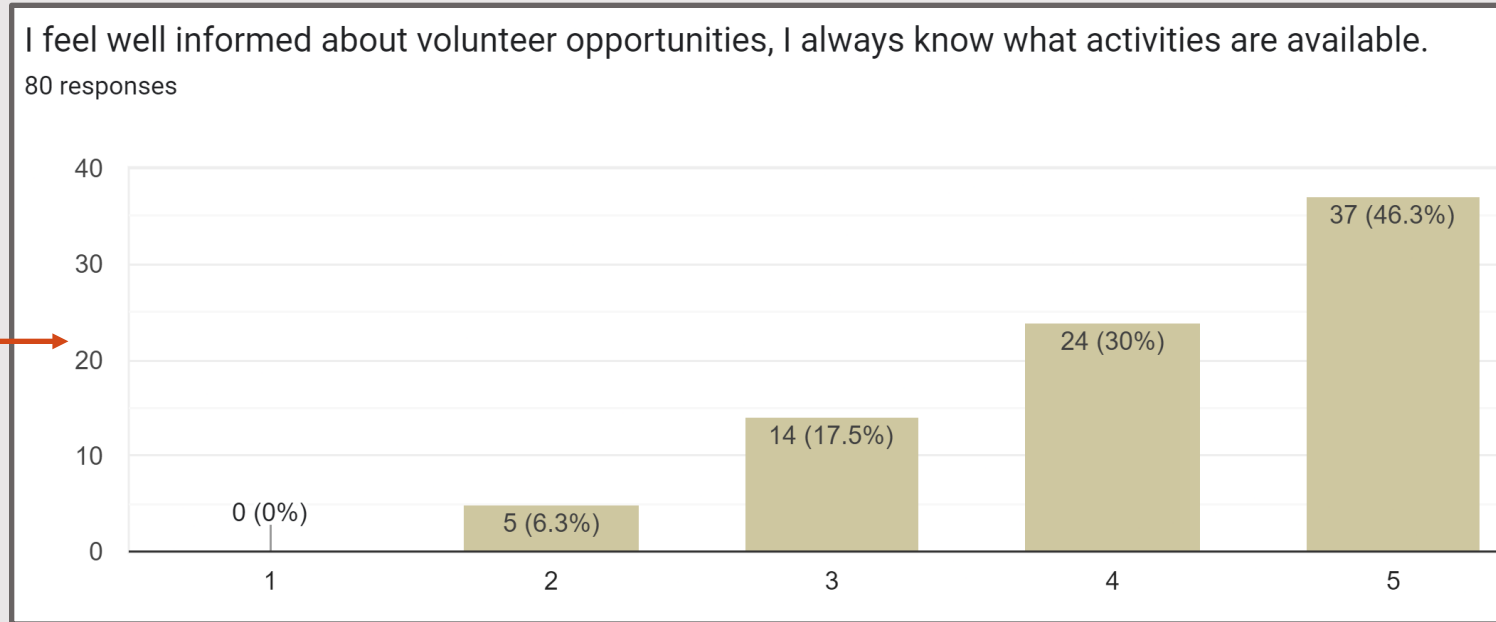
(Studer 2015)

# Positive Results- Areas of Strength for DCP

Respondents rated DCP the highest in good communication practices.

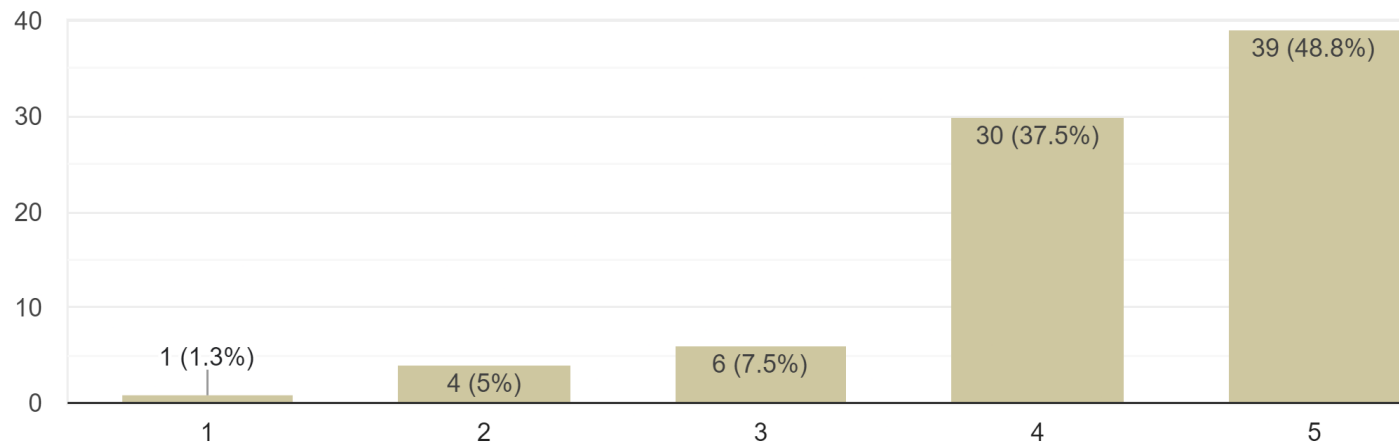
- 76.3% selected a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale

*Note: 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” & 5 represents “Strongly Agree” in both of these questions*



DCP clearly communicates updates regarding policies, processes, and volunteer expectations.

80 responses



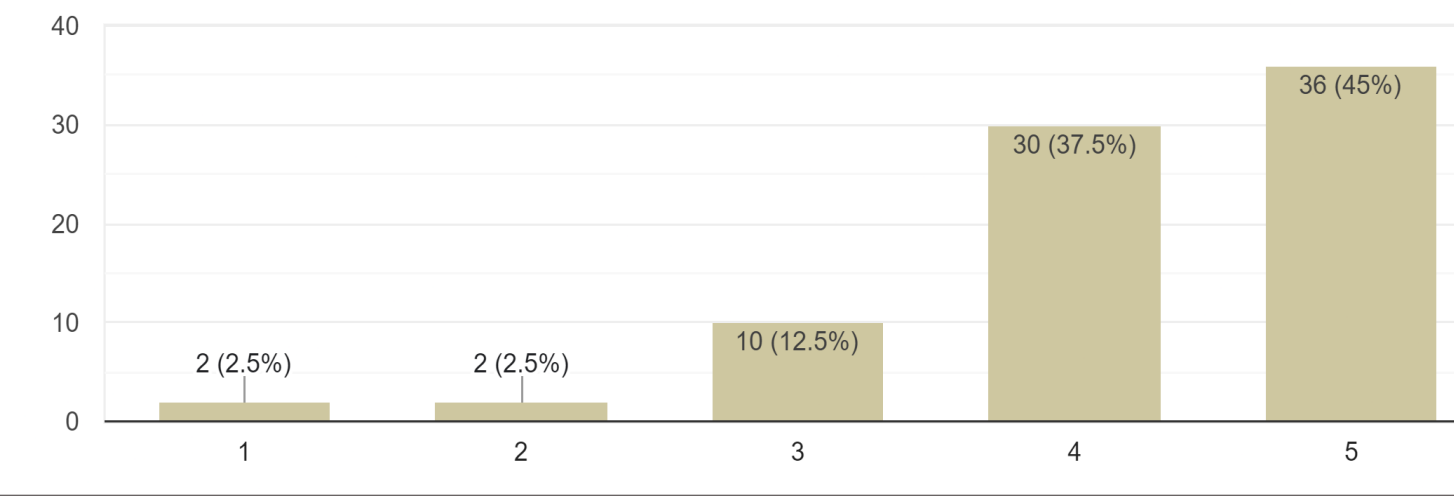
Clear communication is crucial to managing volunteers well and continuing to keep them engaged. The survey results indicate that DCP has strong communication structures in place, and they are effectively disseminating important information to volunteers.

86.3% selected a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale

# Positive Results- Areas of Strength for DCP

I feel my work at DCP is significant and impactful.

80 responses



These two questions were intentionally correlated, and it is a good sign that they had identical results. The responses strongly indicate that a solid majority of volunteers believe their work at DCP matters and they are experiencing a positive benefit. These kinds of feelings are vital to a volunteer staying engaged with an organization.

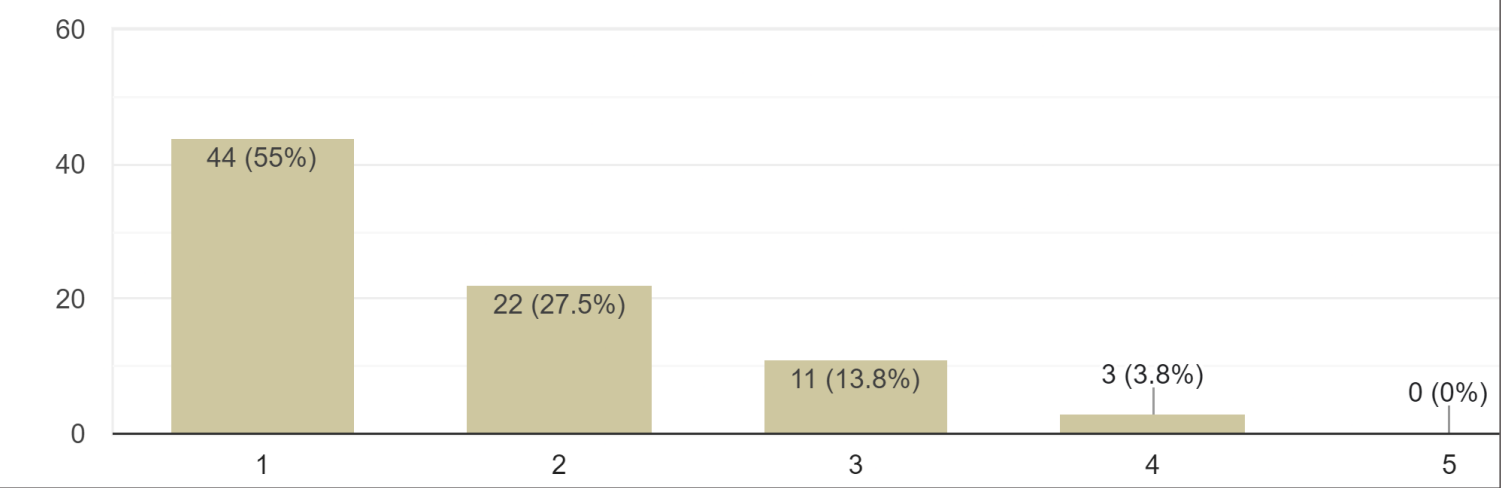
82.5% selected a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale

Note: 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” & 5 represents “Strongly Agree” in both of these questions

82.5% selected a 1 or 2 on the Likert scale

I don't see any results or positive benefit from the time I give to DCP.

80 responses



# Areas of Improvement for DCP

## **First Section Lowest Scores:**

**Question 6:** *I frequently feel confused about who is in charge, I don't know who to contact with questions or concerns. (56.2% chose 1 or 2 on the “Disagree” end of the scale)*

**Question 9:** *I know how to access important documents, forms, and information related to my volunteer work. (41.3% chose a 4 or 5 on the “Agree” end of the scale)*

*Confusion about where to look for information or who to speak with about a question can indicate a lack of clear organizational structure, or at the very least, poor communication about the structure or chain of command. These issues may be related to inadequate HR practices at DCP.*

## **Second Section Lowest Scores:**

**Question 4:** *I feel connected socially/emotionally to other DCP members and volunteers. (68.8% chose 4 or 5 on the “Agree” end of the scale)*

**Question 9:** *I cannot give the time or energy to DCP that I would like to. (27.5% chose 1 or 2 on the “Disagree” end of the scale)*

*Results indicate that there is room for DCP to improve building relationships between volunteers and fostering a teamwork/collaborative culture.*

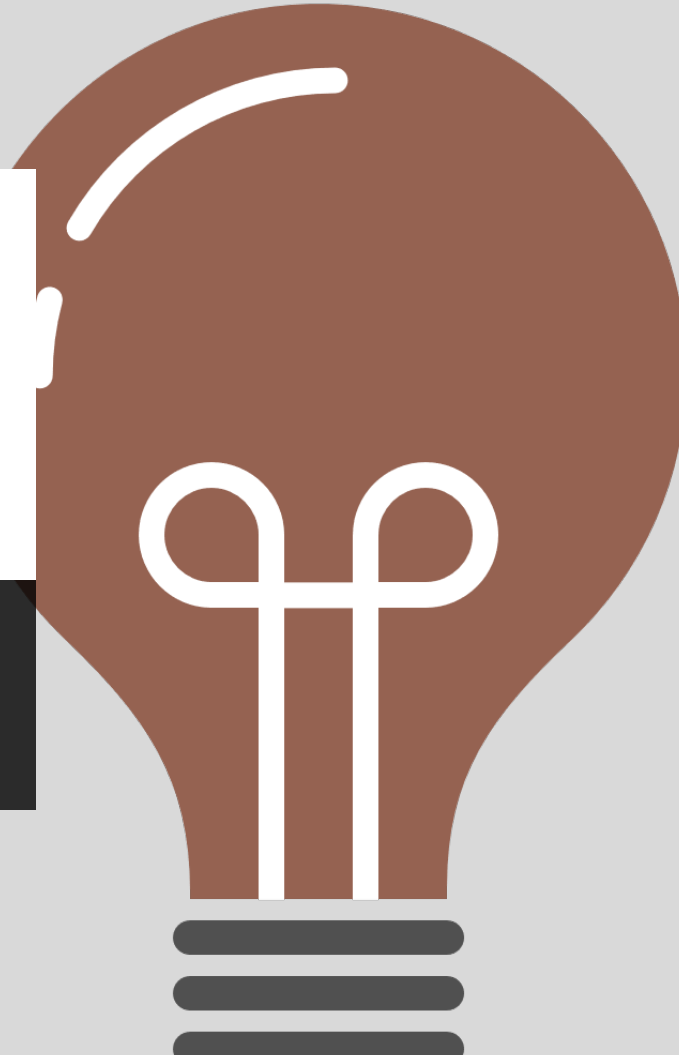
**Third Section Results:** *This section had 2 optional questions asking volunteers for feedback on future changes & suggestions they may have for DCP.*

1. **“I Wish DCP Would...”:** Top answer was “Provide more training/education opportunities” (44.9% of responses)
  - Second highest answer: “Host more special events/social opportunities exclusively for volunteers/members” (33.3% of responses)
2. **“If there was one thing I could change or improve at DCP it would be:** (50 write-in responses were received) These responses fell into 3 primary categories:
  - Expressing concern/displeasure with certain rules and policies. Most notably the Covid-19 policies and the required Child Abuse Clearances.
  - A desire to see more cooperation, better communication, and equal treatment between groups along with greater social connection.
  - Improve training and education opportunities while encouraging new, lapsed, or inactive volunteers to engage.



# Recommendations to the Board

Suggestions for improving volunteer management,  
processes, and policies at DCP Theatre



# Recommendations to the DCP Theatre Board of Directors

## Recommendation #1: Volunteer Recruitment

### **Incentivize and encourage current DCP members and volunteers to invite a friend to participate.**

- A potential new volunteer is far more likely to get involved with a nonprofit if they already know someone within the organization and they receive a personal invitation to join (Bussell & Forbes 2002).
- Designate 1 or 2 monthly member meetings per year to be “Bring a Friend Night”. Incentivize current volunteers to invite one person to come with them to the meeting. Adapt the structure of those meetings to optimize engagement of visitors.

### **Engage with the wider community to establish a consistent presence and foster greater awareness of the theatre.**

- DCP is in a remote area not part of a downtown cultural district. An important part of recruiting new volunteers involves raising awareness and building trust with the community at large.
- DCP should consider attending area community events (like First Fridays and Festivals) to gain more of a presence in the community and directly meet members of the public.
- Many of these events are free to nonprofits to reserve a table at, or there is a small fee. Strategically select 2-3 events per year, this does not need to be a large time commitment.
- Recruiting new volunteers was a concern raised in the survey data. Several write-in comments suggested this be a priority.

## Recommendation #2: Onboarding New Volunteers

- Right now, there is no single person or committee who is responsible for reaching out to new volunteers, keeping them engaged, answering questions, or providing guidance through the onboarding process.

### **Establish a new committee specifically charged with overseeing all aspects of onboarding new volunteers.**

- A centralized committee focused on creating a welcoming experience, information hub, and orientation process for new volunteers could help less people slip through the cracks and ensure a greater level of engagement in the coming years.
- Could fall under the responsibility umbrella of the Vice President’s role as they already oversee Membership. Members are volunteers.

### **Create an accessible digital hub for volunteer information and submission of forms.**

- Create a simple digital form using Microsoft Forms to imbed directly on the website for easy, seamless, submission by interested potential new volunteers who want to learn more.
- Expand the password-protected portion of the website and turn it into an information hub for all volunteers- not just members.
- Remove as many “barriers to entry” as possible for new volunteers to onboard and train within DCP.

# Recommendations to the DCP Theatre Board of Directors

## Recommendation #3: Ongoing, Daily Management

*Survey results show a trend of volunteers being satisfied with the availability of events and opportunities for them to volunteer, but not being as satisfied with the training, education, or structure within those opportunities.*

### **Increase training and education focused opportunities.**

- “Provide more education and training opportunities” was the top selected option (44.9%) in the final section of the survey. 33.8% did not feel they received thorough training for a role/job that was new to them.
- Set aside time at monthly meetings or set building days to devote to education activities.

### **Reconsider the number of activities within a year.**

- The survey revealed that volunteers are concerned about how busy the DCP calendar is and that it may be verging on unsustainable. “Reduce the amount of events within a “Season” & plan more break periods” received 29% of the responses to the first question in the last section of the survey. This was within the top five answers for that question.
- The DCP Board very recently established an ad-hoc committee to look at these issues and consider reducing or changing the annual production schedule and the number of performances that are produced.
- Reducing the amount of performance activities could free up time and volunteer capacity for other important tasks such as building repairs, training and skill building workshops, and social connection events.

### **Reevaluate the number of restrictive policies/rules.**

- There was an overwhelming amount of write-in comments in the survey data expressing concern/displeasure with certain Covid and Clearance related policies.

## Recommendation #4: Volunteer Appreciation &

### Social Relationships

*This topic may be one of the most complex, but important issues that DCP needs to address. 28.8% of survey respondents were not feeling strongly valued or appreciated at DCP. 31.3% did not feel they received enough recognition for their work. 31.4% did not feel socially or emotionally connected to other volunteers and members.*

### **Implement new methods of recognizing volunteers:**

- DCP does not formally recognize volunteer or member longevity outside of Lifetime Membership and the “Lifetime Achievement Award” given on an annual basis. Consider adding additional milestone awards for 5, 10, or 15 year volunteers.
- There may also be other awards that could be added to the ARTE presentations every year to recognize significant contributions to the good of the theatre or positive, remarkable behaviors. Giving an award is an opportunity to showcase the values of DCP and the type of people and character traits the organization seeks to nurture.

### **Build intentional moments for volunteer appreciation and social connection into monthly member meetings:**

- During the pandemic, Zoom Monthly Member meetings became solely about getting through the agenda and discussing business only, there were very few moments of personal connection with fellow volunteers.
- Returning to in-person meetings provides a new opportunity to restructure the meeting format and add relationship building items into the meeting agenda. Ask volunteers to catch each other doing or behaving in a positive way and share those stories each month at the meeting.
- Survey data and write-in comments showed many volunteers are looking for greater social/relationship connection at DCP.





# Thank You!

DCP is poised to recover from the pandemic over the next few years. Simple changes to volunteer management practices now, along with a renewed focus on recruitment will set the theatre up for healthy growth.



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