



## Friends of the Market Toolkit: Volunteer Management: The ISOTURE Model

Once you have a Friends of the Market organization, you will need to seamlessly incorporate these volunteers into your market operation. This can be very rewarding for helping the market move forward with new programs and services, as well as getting the basic work of the market adequately covered. But it can also be a dilemma. Volunteers need effective management to ensure that tasks are properly completed, and for the volunteer experience to be a positive one.

The basic key to volunteer management is communication. The more you communicate and the clearer your message, the more effective your volunteers will be at getting the job done and achieving internal satisfaction with the work.

Milton Boyce, former National Program Leader with USDA developed a system for volunteer development and management, ISOTURE, which has proven very effective. The model has been adopted by Cooperative Extension as a means of managing the many volunteers utilized in the Extension Service. The model, ISOTURE, is a seven step process to recruit, manage, engage and evaluate volunteers:

Identification  
Selection  
Orientation  
Training  
Utilization  
Recognition  
Evaluation

You can find the document at <http://od.tamu.edu/files/2010/06/Isoture-model-for-volunteer-management-E-457.pdf>, but we will attempt to summarize here and provide farmers market specific examples.

### **Identification**

The first step in ISOTURE is to identify the right people for the positions that need to be filled. Before you can identify the right person, you need to understand exactly what the needs of the program are and what the volunteer will do to fulfill those needs. In other words, you need to create a document that can be shared with prospective volunteers that identifies who you are, what your market goals are, what programs you operate and how volunteers will fit into the overall operation. Once you know who you are and what you are looking for, then develop a job description that outlines the duties and responsibilities for each volunteer position you need to help you achieve your goals. Knowing what you need to accomplish will help you identify what the "right" person will look like.

For example, if you are looking for a volunteer to staff a booth at the market to greet consumers, distribute agriculture based information and nutrition materials, and to guide consumers to the farmers and vendors in the market, then you know you are looking for a cheerful, enthusiastic, people-person.

This position does not need a high degree of skill, but it is important that the person handling this important job, give consumers a good first impression of the market.

A Volunteer Interest Form can be used to understand each volunteer's interests, skills and availability. Comparing the answers on this form to your volunteer job descriptions can help you match the right person to the right job.

Part of the identification step is also marketing your needs. You'll need to find your volunteers through recruitment efforts. If you have positions that require specific talents, for example, if you are looking for a graphic artist to create some marketing pieces for your market, then you will need to target audiences that possess the skills you are seeking. In this example, is there a sales and marketing association in your community that you can reach out to? Give them your market document that you created in this step. Other professional associations may also provide you with access to the skill sets you are seeking.

If you are looking for general volunteers that will do tasks that do not require a specific skill, and you will be providing training, then you can do more general outreach. Build a recruitment message that will let people know what kind of person you are seeking, what kinds of things they will be doing, how this work will benefit the market and market community, and how it will benefit the volunteer. This message can be distributed through traditional marketing channels, to community organizations that may help you find volunteers or in your own networking at other community events. Don't forget to use your market's own audience. Recruit for volunteers at your market booth and on your market's social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

### **Selection**

Once you have identified your volunteer needs and have made some contacts, you will need to select your volunteers. Again, the Volunteer Interest Form is very helpful, but you should conduct interviews with your volunteer applicants. These interviews will help you to articulate the needs of the program, understand the needs and interests of your volunteers, discuss the duties and responsibilities of the position and make the appropriate choices of volunteer.

The interview should be a two-way conversation. You need to communicate your market's operations, mission and goals, programs and services and community ties. The more a volunteer knows and understands about your market, the more effective they can be in representing your market, completing their tasks and maintaining motivation to continue with you by feeling they are a vital part of the whole operation. In addition, you must be very clear on what the volunteer position will be. Give the position a title, focusing on what the accomplishment will be rather than on the pay scale. In other words, the position would be the EBT Coordinator, if operating the EBT terminal in the market, not the EBT Volunteer. A title injects respect to the position. Also be clear about how this position impacts the overall program or operation of the market. This also gives the volunteer a sense of being an important part of the whole. Finally, be sure to discuss the skills or qualifications required, the time commitment required and any training that would be provided.

Once you have covered these pieces, let your volunteer applicant talk. You want to know more about the person, what is important to them, why they want to volunteer with you and what their past experiences have been. If you can understand their motivations, you will better understand what positions are appropriate, how much supervision they will need and what they hope to get out of their volunteer experience.

---

*Achievement is one motivator. This is the person that welcomes a challenge and takes satisfaction in getting the job done. They are results-oriented and very effective if given a task to do and clear instructions on what the outcome needs to be.*

*Affiliation is another motivation for volunteers. These are the people that see volunteering as relationship-building. They work well with others, are sensitive to the needs of others and work well as a team. They may focus more on the relationships than on the goal, so need clear guidelines and deadlines, as well as encouragement and positive reinforcement.*

*Recognition is the third kind of motivation. This is the person who is looking for personal growth. They will continue to seek new projects and tasks and take satisfaction, not just in doing a good job, but in learning new skills and ideas.<sup>1</sup>*

---

## **Orientation**

Once you have hired your volunteers and given them the positions that match their talent, interests and time commitment, you need to familiarize them with your market operations and their job duties. The orientation should include the market operations, the people involved in the market, i.e. market manager, other staff members and volunteers. Be sure the volunteers understand the mission or goal of the market and how their job will further the mission.

Next you will provide the volunteer with a written description of the job they will be doing. The description should be very clearly written to eliminate any ambiguities. Also, let your volunteers know who will be their supervisor and where they can go for answers to their questions. Finally, let them know what kind of training they will receive or what resources are available to help them complete their tasks.

Don't forget the little things too. Make sure your volunteers know where the bathrooms are, where they can park their car or where they can take a break. Remember, they are your staff members and they need the same information your paid staff members need.

---

<sup>1</sup> University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension resources,  
[http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001203\\_Rep1540.pdf](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001203_Rep1540.pdf)

Orientation does not need to be a formal process, but it is important as this gives the volunteer the information they need to do the jobs they are being assigned and, once again, helps them to feel a vital part of the market operation. This is a key motivation for volunteers and helps to ensure their continued participation in your market.

### **Training**

Volunteers do not come into your market operation already understanding the roles that farmers markets play for farmers, consumers and communities. They also do not come into the operation knowing how to perform the tasks they are being asked to do. Your responsibility is to provide the training necessary to allow your volunteers to develop the skills they will need to successfully perform the job they are doing for your market. Training can take a variety of forms, including one-on-one or small group discussions, providing written materials, or having a new volunteer “shadow” an experienced person.

Training should help the volunteer to learn the job they will be doing. The training you provide should also help the volunteer to develop skills that will translate to other aspects of their lives. It might be a better understanding of what farmers go through to provide the foods that we sometimes take for granted. It might be learning people management skills that will help them in their paid jobs or learning the people-skills used at the market’s welcome booth, to help them be a more skilled salesperson in their professional life.

In addition to training, provide the volunteer with the resources they will need to accomplish their job or better understand the market and their role in making the market a success. Having your volunteers participate in statewide EBT training or downloading market resource materials from the Farmers Market Federation of NY website, [www.nyfarmersmarket.com](http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com) or from the Farmers Market Coalition Resource Library at [www.farmersmarketcoalition.org](http://www.farmersmarketcoalition.org), will help them get a better understanding of their job duties, market operations and agriculture.

### **Utilization**

Now that you have trained your new volunteers, it’s time to put them to work, utilizing their skills, talents and enthusiasm in ways that will benefit your farmers market. While they are performing their duties, you, or a designated supervisor, will be on hand to provide guidance and supervision. You will want to provide them with whatever is necessary to ensure a positive outcome, whether it is to provide additional training or resources or to delegate additional responsibilities and duties as the volunteer advances their skills and interest level. Keep in mind that their success is dependent on you and their continuation as a volunteer with your market is largely dependent on their success.

### **Recognition**

Everyone needs validation, whether for the job they do, the things they accomplish or the values they hold dear. Recognition is the step that provides that validation for your volunteers. It is both acknowledgement and reward.

Acknowledgement is the recognition that they are doing a valued job, they are doing a good job and that you appreciate their work and the time they are providing your market. This acknowledgement is an ongoing recognition. Don't wait until the market season is over and then say thanks. Let your volunteers know that you are thankful all market season long. It is a kind word; it is a cup of coffee brought to your volunteer sitting at the EBT booth on a cold market morning. It is the pleasant conversation you initiate each market day or the simple thank-you, or follow up email or phone call that you offer throughout the market season.

Rewarding your volunteers can further validate their contributions to your market. Honor them at your season-end market dinner with your vendors. Let everyone show their appreciation. For some, being rewarded with a plaque or certificate that is a lasting recognition for their work and dedication to your market is appreciated. For others, a simple thank-you is sufficient. During the season you can mention your volunteers in your press releases and news articles about your market.

The validation you offer your volunteers encourages them to continue volunteering with your market for upcoming projects and market seasons.

### **Evaluation**

As you would do with any employee, you will want to evaluate your volunteers. The evaluation helps you to assess the outcome and quality of the work performed, determine whether the volunteer is in the right job and to provide feedback to your volunteer. It is also an opportunity to get feedback from your volunteers on your efforts to provide a valuable experience for the volunteers.

And just as with an employee, sometimes a volunteer is not a good match for a position, or is unable to carry out their task adequately. In that case, an evaluation plan can provide the information needed for decision making, whether that be for additional training, identification of a different volunteer position, or termination.

According to the ISOTURE method, the evaluation consists of five steps to be effective in reviewing job performance:

1. Know what you are trying to evaluate. Be prepared with questions that will get at the kinds of information you are trying to measure.
  - a. Process evaluation: evaluate the volunteer's experience
  - b. Outcome evaluation: measuring the changes that have taken place as a result of the volunteer's work
  - c. Economic impact: measuring the monetary value of the volunteers work. This can be especially important if you are using a volunteer's time as a match for grant funds.
2. Plan the evaluation method. Know ahead how you plan to approach the evaluation and be prepared before you begin.
3. Meet with the volunteers to discuss their progress.
4. Prepare an evaluation report that documents their progress and results.

## 5. Share the evaluation report.<sup>2</sup>

The ISOTURE method provides clear instruction for managing your volunteers. But what it all boils down to is clear communications – know what you need, articulate it well and follow up with well-defined job descriptions that outline job duties and responsibilities, training and supervision accompanied with clearly communicated feedback. This may seem a bit daunting, especially to market managers who may be volunteers themselves, but it can help ensure that the volunteer experience will be a positive one – for you, for your volunteer and especially for your market.

### **Retaining your Volunteers**

So now that you have volunteers on hand who are actively doing the varied jobs you have assigned to them, you need to understand what it will take to ensure they continue with your market. Your market depends on a volunteer workforce and you appreciate your volunteers and you want to keep the same people coming back, reducing some of the training and orientation you need to do each season.

We have to understand that there will always be some level of turnover. People move away, their job and family commitments change, and their interests may change. We have to accept these facts. But we can work toward maintaining the volunteer relationships with the remainder.

First and foremost, you must meet the needs of your volunteers. Each has volunteered for a different reason and if you can meet these needs and expectations, you will have greater success retaining your volunteers from year to year.

Here are a few more tips on maintaining your market volunteers:

1. Some volunteers want to make a difference. They want to know that what they are putting their time and efforts into makes a difference. You will need to communicate the value of their contribution. If your volunteer is staffing your EBT terminal and helping to facilitate food stamp (SNAP) sales for your market customers, let them know how many customers they reach each week, month and season. Tell them how these numbers compare across time. Has the number of food stamp consumers increased from last year, by what percent; or increased from the beginning of the season, again, by what percent.
2. Some volunteers use their volunteer work to build relationships, to feel a part of a bigger whole. To maximize their experience, have these volunteers work in groups or work collaboratively with other organizations to benefit your market.
3. Other volunteers will use their volunteer experiences to build their skills, knowledge and relationships within the community. They may want to be able to bring these new skills and

---

<sup>2</sup> Dodd, Courtney, Extension Program Specialist, Volunteerism, and Boleman, Chris, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, "Volunteer Administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: ISOTURE: A Model for Volunteer Management". AgriLife Communications, The Texas A&M System.

relationships to their paid job or to find a better job. Provide new tasks and challenges, along with continued training to help these volunteers reach their individual goals.

4. Many volunteers just want to belong. They have long envied the market you have created. The vendors are happy, the consumers look forward to each market day, and the community respects the contribution the market makes to the lives of their residents. A volunteer may just want to be a part of such a great organization and community event. Be sure that you are welcoming to your volunteers, treat them as a vital part of the market organization and include them in discussions, meetings, and the general camaraderie of the market.
5. Volunteers should be respected. Listen to their comments, their ideas and discuss them. They bring a new perspective to the market and to the task they are performing. Their ideas should be given respect and consideration.
6. Involve volunteers in decision making processes, especially in the decision on what jobs and tasks they will perform. Make them feel an important part of the team.
7. Be clear in your communications with your volunteers. You cannot expect them to perform to yours or their satisfaction if they are not clear on what the expectations are. <sup>3</sup>

### **Prevent Volunteer Burnout**

We always hope to retain our volunteers. We've come to depend on the work they do for us and we've built relationships with them. While we can't help to lose a few who will move on to other opportunities, we also need to be careful that we do not overuse or "burnout" our volunteers. When this occurs, volunteers will lose their enthusiasm and drive. How do we prevent burnout?

1. When setting a goal for your volunteers, be certain that it is realistic and achievable. If you are using volunteers to do community outreach with the goal to increase customer traffic in your market, be sure that you do not set a goal so high that they struggle to reach it.
2. Keep the workload manageable. Be cognizant of the time constraints of volunteers and do not give them more work to do than can be achieved in the time they have. When we overload our volunteers we risk volunteer burnout. If the work load is that significant, assign it to a group of volunteers who can work together and share the load.
3. Give your volunteers a break. While that may mean to give them a coffee break during the market day, it may also mean to give them a break from the job they are doing. Have them set it aside for awhile and work on something else. The change can re-energize your volunteer and can help them focus again when they return to the original task.
4. There are times when you may need to suggest that someone take a vacation. Volunteers are no different than paid employees, they need to take vacations to recharge themselves.
5. Don't waste your volunteer's time. Be prepared for them so that they can do their job without wasting time. Have all the tools, resources and clear instructions available and be on hand for questions.

---

<sup>3</sup> "Hands for Nature: A Volunteer Management Handbook". The Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2003.

6. Praise your volunteers. Everyone needs to know that what they are doing is important and valued. Be sure your volunteers know that they are valued. Don't forget to say "Thank you".<sup>4</sup>

**Resources:**

Dodd, Courtney, Extension Program Specialist, Volunteerism, and Boleman, Chris, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, *"Volunteer Administration in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century: ISOTURE: A Model for Volunteer Management"*. AgriLife Communications, The Texas A&M System.

"Hands for Nature: A Volunteer Management Handbook". The Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2003.

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension resources,  
[http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001203\\_Rep1540.pdf](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001203_Rep1540.pdf)

---

<sup>4</sup> "Hands for Nature: A Volunteer Management Handbook". The Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2003.