

## Set Internships Up for Success

By Amber Erickson Gabbey

Global Seed Savers (Denver, CO), an educational and advocacy organization supporting organic farmers and environmental conservation programs throughout the Philippines, uses interns to help the two-person staff do the work.

Sherry Manning, founder and executive director at Global Seed Savers (formerly Friends of ENCA Farm), likes the longer-term and project-focused possibility of interns. Internships at the Denver headquarters focus on operational tasks such as data entry, research and grants and on social media, event marketing and communications. Manning generally has two interns and aims to have each for a minimum of four months. While internships are not paid, they do work with universities on course credit.

While interns are typically undergraduates in the Denver area, Manning says their internships are open to anyone. (They once had a motivated middle school student and also are open to graduate students.) Being a small organization, they offer flexibility to ensure they get help they need while simultaneously helping the interns meet their individual goals.

One potential challenge for a small organization is keeping the internships focused. Manning offers three bits of advice:

1. **Have job descriptions.** Even though interns may have to get their hands dirty in a variety of tasks (because that's what happens in nonprofits), it's important that they have clear goals/timelines to keep them focused.
2. **Be available.** It's our responsibility to ensure the intern knows his or her role impacts the mission, says Manning. Even more tedious tasks — like data entry — are important for a bigger reason. Share that and continually look to re-inspire interns.
3. **Find the balance of bigger picture and project-specific.** Most interns are there because they have an interest in the mission or field of study. Help them see the bigger picture of what it takes to run a nonprofit, but don't let them lose sight of the project they were brought on to do. Internships are meant to be a learning experience for the intern and an opportunity to get work done for the organization. Both sides must be satisfied.

Source: Sherry Manning, Founder and Executive Director, Global Seed Savers, Denver, CO. Phone (425) 698-5808. E-mail: [sherry@encaorganicfarm.com](mailto:sherry@encaorganicfarm.com). Website: [www.encaorganicfarm.com](http://www.encaorganicfarm.com)

## Prepare Your Organization for Virtual Volunteers

Recruiting virtual volunteers is a great way to broaden your organization's volunteer base, but before you take the leap, be sure you and your organization are ready for this endeavor.

To begin, Temi Adewumi, principal of TAGb Consulting (Toronto, Ontario, Canada), stresses the importance of evaluating your organization. Is it ready for the world of virtual volunteering? Is it willing and able to experiment and learn from its mistakes?

If the answers are, "Yes," you'll want to start by providing the proper resources for your virtual volunteer. That begins with training. Adewumi says it's crucial to explain your organization's overall expectations, as well as parameters surrounding the project itself. For instance, the volunteer needs to know the goal of the project, what a successful project looks like and what the milestones are.

Virtual volunteers also need training on the software and/or skills necessary for successfully completing the job. Investing in the volunteer by sending him to a training course typically proves to be quite motivational.

Additionally, Adewumi says it's important for these volunteers to know they have the organization's support and that you'll be checking in on a regular basis.

Once the virtual volunteer has the required resources, what's next?

"For large, complex projects, start with a project management plan which outlines action items, tasks, responsibilities and milestones," Adewumi says. "A project manager should be assigned to ensure each part of the project is being achieved.

"The volunteer should send in updates for each milestone point and should be in touch sooner with team members or the project manager if they face any issues. Communication can be as easy as making a quick phone call or sending an e-mail. For more complex projects, I would also recommend that the team conduct face-to-face meetings, either via video or in person."

Because these volunteers work off-site, Adewumi says the lack of physical presence is a challenge. Volunteers want to know they are not working alone. They need to know they are connected to the organization and are helping achieve its mission. So, in addition to regular communication about the project itself, she also suggests an occasional informal chat. It's a good opportunity to keep the volunteer informed about your organization and helps with motivation.

These conversations also provide an opportunity to ensure your organization is appropriately utilizing volunteers' skills. Ask if they feel their skills are being used to the fullest potential. Ask what their opinions of your organization are and what ideas they may have. Once again, let them know their work is contributing to your organization's success. And with that, show your appreciation.

Whether you invite them to a year-end dinner, send a certificate or put their names on the project, recognition is important. Because on-site or virtual, you are still working with people.

And Adewumi says, "People come first, not technology. Technology is just a tool to help organizations work more efficiently, get faster results or achieve success faster. Virtual volunteering is not an end in itself — it's a tool that should expand your organization's horizons."

Source: Temi Adewumi, Principal, TAGb Consulting, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Phone (416) 893-9244. E-mail: [temi@tagb.ca](mailto:temi@tagb.ca). Website: [www.tagb.ca](http://www.tagb.ca)