



Summary & FAQ's from Volunteer Program Action Plan Listening Sessions

General Notes

- The park has a new volunteer coordinator in Williamsport and is in the process of hiring a new volunteer coordinator at Great Falls. Please be patient with the new staff. They will be hands-on but will have a lot of programs to take care of.
- Administrative questions will be answered by program coordinators as programs are re-activated.
- Volunteers play a vital role in helping the park carry out our mission and our strategic plan. We hope the volunteers and park continue to work together toward this goal.
- Communication is a key part of this Volunteer Program Action Plan. Please let park staff know if you have any further questions.

Questions

1. What role will volunteers play in leading programs?

The park firmly believes in fostering leadership within volunteer programs. We want to utilize the leadership skills of volunteers, but ultimate responsibility for the programs lies with the park staff. The park will continue to be strategic about cultivating and utilizing volunteer leadership.

2. Will programs that are not yet active get to come back this year?

The park continues to assess safety during COVID-19. As we re-activate programs, there will be safety mitigation strategies. There will be more information to come as the park works on further re-activation of volunteer programs. The park is going to bring volunteers back as safely as we can.

3. If volunteers do not feel comfortable coming back during coronavirus, will they be allowed to come back after the pandemic?

Absolutely. If a volunteer chooses not to come back during COVID-19 due to health concerns, the park understands and will not hold those volunteers to the hours requirement at this time. Likewise, the park recognizes this is an off-year even for active volunteers due to COVID-19 and the minimum hours requirement will not take effect until after the pandemic.

4. Are the individual volunteer time commitments listed a minimum or maximum?

The Individual Volunteer Time Commitments listed in the Action Plan are the minimum required to be considered an active volunteer. Volunteers are welcome to volunteer more hours if they are able and would like to.

5. How will annual evaluations be conducted with so many volunteers on the team, some of which live a long distance from their program supervisor?

We recognize the lift of evaluating hundreds of volunteers. Having things in writing in the Action Plan allows staff to remind management of the workload involved in large volunteer programs. The evaluations are going to be informal check-ins, not something that is extremely time consuming for volunteers. We are not grading volunteers on their service, but instead want to ensure a staff check-in with volunteers and get feedback on programs. This might be via email, a conversation, etc. The format depends on the program and the park coordinator. The goal is to keep lines of communication open and make sure that volunteers feel they have the training and support to be successful in their role. This is part of an effort build a foundation to help us all achieve long term strategic goals.

6. What will training look like?

A list of training for the different volunteer programs is attached. General on-boarding will likely remain similar and volunteers will see a lot of the same training as before. The Action Plan ensures staff and volunteers will be clear on what training is required for each volunteer program. We are not reinventing the training wheel for existing programs with solid training already developed. We are assessing the training materials and updating as needed and ensuring that any new volunteer projects will have clearly outlined training objectives.

Please note: The park has added safety training requirements as programs are reactivated during COVID-19. If your program is not yet reactivated, your program coordinator will provide more information on COVID-19 safety training before the program reactivates.

7. What is the timeframe for implementing the Action Plan?

The park has already started implementing the Action Plan. Some items have been completed. Some items will be ongoing. The park recognizes that adjustments will be needed along the way and thus sees ongoing communication as a vital part of the implantation process. Having an Action Plan and operating guidelines will help with consistency in the program over time and through staff turnover.

8. Will the park continue the Bike Loaner Program at Great Falls?

The park recognizes that visitors appreciate the opportunity to get bikes during their visit and is committed to exploring options such as nonprofit partners, concessionaires, or commercial entities to deliver a similar experience. This is part of a broader regional effort, and we are looking at best practices provided by the regional office to continue to support bike loan/share programs. There is a lot going on at Great Falls and the park wants to ensure that staff have time to manage programs and give each program the support it deserves to be successful in keeping with the goals set in the Strategic Plan.

9. What will scheduling for volunteers look like?

Some programs will have an informal schedule while others will need a structured schedule. Park program coordinators will develop guidelines that make sense for the different programs they manage.

10. How does the park plan to reach the maximum volunteer numbers for the programs?

Knowing healthy program staffing levels allows us to best plan for turnover, new recruitment, and the future of each volunteer program. The numbers in the Action Plan are our starting point and the park will continue to assess each program on a regular basis, updating this maximum number of volunteers for each program as needed. **We are not cutting volunteers;** in most cases we will be recruiting new volunteers. For some programs, we have work to do with records management. For these programs, we have a lot of Volunteer Service Agreements, but not all of those individuals have been active in the volunteer program since signing up. We will be contacting volunteers to determine ongoing commitment to volunteering with the park and adjusting our staffing levels and records accordingly. Looking to the future of each program, the outlined staffing levels allow staff to plan for volunteer turnover. Turnover in a program is normal and healthy – each program should and does plan for some level of turnover. We do want to build an environment where volunteers feel they have a deep connection with the park and a solid relationship with park staff so they stay on as volunteers for as long as possible, with a solid foundation for onboarding and engaging new volunteers.

11. Will the Park Service be doing anything to raise morale within the volunteer team?

The park greatly values volunteers and is committed to continuing and strengthening the volunteer program in the park. We recognize that some volunteers feel morale has been damaged in the past couple of years. One of the main purposes of the Volunteer Action Plan is to assist in keeping volunteer programs consistent if there is staff turnover, alleviating some of the stress and confusion that may come with such a change. Additionally, articulating clear goals for volunteer programs to all volunteers as outlined in the Plan will help both staff and volunteers understand what metrics for success the park has established. We know there are some questions about past personnel issues. The park will not discuss personnel actions in public forums – it would not be appropriate. We recognize that there are some questions that will therefore not be answered and encourage volunteers to reach out to staff with questions or concerns. The listening sessions are just one of the ways that we are working to ensure lines of communication stay open and strong.

12. Why is supervision emphasized in the Action Plan?

The themes in the Action Plan are best management practices - each section of the plan provides details on how those best management practices will be carried out so that staff have proper guidance and basic skills on supervising volunteers, communicating with and recognizing volunteers, creating proper job descriptions and training for volunteers, ensuring safety within a volunteer program, and the relevant NPS policies. Effective supervision is an important strategy to keep two-way communication going. It is a standard of excellence. There is flexibility in the Action Plan so that each volunteer program can be tailored to its respective needs. The park wants to set clear expectations for both volunteers & staff. Things that were understood in the past, are now on paper for clarity and for future staff and volunteers. Having the park's expectations for the

volunteer programs in writing is a best management practice, and it is vital to the success of the program.