At the Minnesota Literacy Council’s [2015 Volunteer Management Conference](#) we asked participants to answer one of three questions about changes to their programs, new ways volunteers have been involved, and ideas they would like to try in their programs. Here’s what they said!

1. Consider changes you’ve experienced in your program over the past year. How have they impacted the way you work with volunteers? Have they changed your ideas about volunteerism?

   I have learned to have closer communication with my volunteers. I used to train them and send them on their way to work with the supervising teacher. I now realize that volunteers need more support from me AND each other.

   Employee partners: when you get a connection, get a second one also since companies have turn-over. If your main contact leaves, you won’t have lost connection to the whole company.

   We’ve had an increase of low-level ESL learners, including several pre-lit students. How can volunteers be utilized in low-level classes? How can they work with the Level 1 teacher to do pullouts with pre-lit students?

   We’ve experienced a need to be responsive to and appreciative of volunteers’ time.

   I took over the Literacy Project this past summer and it has seemed to have fallen off some so I’m trying to build it back up. Now I coordinate all volunteers and match them to students. This is new for me and I’m learning the whole process.

   Volunteers need to be aware of the standards.
I have only been in my position for about 2 ½ months. One of the major goals I have based on feedback from staff and teachers who have been at the program longer is to engage more directly with volunteers. I want to get more feedback and suggestions from them to help enrich their experiences.

We now have ESL at three levels and tutors have more input into the lesson plans.

I have a better understanding of the whole picture.

It’s become more important to communicate with new teachers about volunteers.

We have had more community volunteers and fewer service learners. This has helped us to be more balanced. We still have a fair number of service learners which brings energy to the program. We like the stability of the community volunteers and more time to get to know them.

Our volunteer has been able to come in at a time to accommodate our students’ schedules. It’s especially beneficial due to our time constraints.

2. How have you engaged volunteers in new or different ways in the past year?

We created a new position for volunteer mentors. ‘Veteran’ volunteers help new volunteers.

District 194 has a Skype Coaching Program where volunteer coaches provide intensive, personalized, one-to-one instruction. This has proven to be a tremendous benefit to our learners.

I have started connecting new volunteers with mentor volunteers. I hope to increase the feeling of support.

I developed a newsletter to share statistics, goals, and other library information specifically aimed at our volunteers. This was by their request.

Regular meetings together so we can learn from each other. Always having some sort of treat for them at meetings.

Starting reading ‘groups,’ not ‘classes,’ led by volunteers only and supported by a teacher. Students like the small group work; volunteers feel valued; we get hours. 😊

Using LOTS of volunteers.

We’ve changed the pre-service training we offer. It’s now a hybrid online and in-person training that shortens our face-to-face time. It also shortens it so the volunteers aren’t overly bombarded with information (2 hours vs. 3 hours), and still have the opportunity to connect with and learn from each other.

I have met one-to-one with as many education volunteers as possible.

Setting them up in a volunteer position that suits their personalities is best. Therefore, it’s helpful that our program has a variety of position to offer them. We offer one-to-one, small classroom settings, or Reading Lab assistance where no preparation is needed.

I sat down with a math volunteer to get her input on textbooks and materials to order for this year.
We have started having volunteers serve as mentors to new volunteers. Both parties are excited about this new opportunity.

I plan and prepare tutor trainings; instructors work beside them with goals in mind.

Using a church group of volunteers to teach after school ESL enrichment – sewing.

We traditionally have them work one-to-one with adult learners. To share more volunteers’ hours, we have tried different things: doubling people up, or having volunteers work one hour and then switching to a new student the second hour.

Volunteers who haven’t gone through Minnesota Literacy Council training can volunteer in Early Childhood while they complete training. They get to know our students’ families and to keep a foot in the door.

We utilized student volunteers to work with other students on their strengths.

Training volunteers in the classroom.

Direct meetings to support our shared goals in our Adult Education classrooms.

3. What new ideas would you like to try in the next year?

Implement more communication, newsletters, blogs, emails, etc. Start an evaluation process, more formalized check-in and follow-up with volunteers. More regular appreciation and recognition.

Find a volunteer or intern for registration and testing.

Finding short-term projects for volunteers who only want a 1 day experience (or a few hours).

Offer one-to-one tutoring appointments for students in the afternoons or Skype for tutors and students.

I would like to have volunteers provide support in non-traditional ways: audio recordings, using higher level students to tutor or help lower level students, and other ‘out of the box’ ways to use volunteers.

In the next year I want to try involving my volunteers in lesson planning. By getting their input, observations, and preferences, I hope to make volunteering more rewarding.

I would like to try a ‘Bus Buddies’ program where volunteers train and work with students on learning to take public transportation.

I would like to start a new volunteer position to help with office tasks.

More professional development and team building for volunteers.

Literacy Learner to recognize volunteer contributions!

I’m hoping to start a monthly newsletter aimed at education volunteers. I want them to see their impact and value through student and program success stories.
I’d like to try the pen pal project with community members and ESL students.

Prepare a volunteer newsletter.

Using volunteers for more teacher support tasks, bulletin boards, etc.

Add small group activities and more often; have volunteers teach a daily activity with learners to move away from worksheets.

Engaging more community volunteers; speak at meetings to share the benefits of adult education; work closely with CEP, PEO, and M-State.