"Skilled volunteers" may be a bit of a misnomer. After all, *all* volunteers have skills. That said, targeted professional services and expertise can have a deep impact on your organization's ability to meet its mission and strengthen its capacity for future sustainability.

Most organizations don't have the budget to bring aboard paid staff with high-level expertise in areas like IT, human resources, or legal support. That's where professional volunteers come in. Due to their depth of experience and training in their field of expertise, they can implement a project successfully and in less time than people without their skilled backgrounds.

Nonprofit staff may at first resist the idea of skilled or pro bono volunteers. All resourceful nonprofit professionals can be fiercely independent. We take pride in our self-sufficiency. But rather than trying to muddle through a complex task or project, why not recruit a professional volunteer to take the reins?

Skilled Volunteers as Capacity Builders

We often think of skilled volunteers in roles such as pro bono legal aid, but freelance volunteers can offer even much more. Volunteers can help with IT, strategy, marketing, and human resources, to name a few.

Engaging skilled volunteers specifically for capacity building projects can be a smart investment. At nonprofits, these projects are often shelved due to more pressing concerns. But, they have the benefit of helping take your nonprofit or government program to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity. If the project is successful, you'll be able to more effectively and efficiently advance your mission.

50 Projects for Skilled Volunteers

Below is a list of projects that skilled volunteers might take on. Which would have the most impact on the future success of your organization?

1. Reviewing your volunteer manual to ensure it meets legal requirements
2. Optimizing your organization's current IT structures and databases
3. Developing a volunteer recruitment strategy to boost inquiries
4. Increasing the usability of your website to enhance engagement
5. Conducting audience research to identify donor needs and key talking points
6. Converting a paper-based volunteer tracking system to digital one
7. Preparing a financial analysis of the organization to create a sustainable plan
8. Creating a search engine optimization (SEO) plan so your website is found
9. Conducting a volunteer survey and focus groups to improve satisfaction
10. Renovating an outdated volunteer orientation training for better learning
11. Developing an automated email marketing campaign to engage newcomers
12. Redesigning a logo and a brand standards guide to increase consistency
13. Presenting leadership training to paid employees and volunteers
14. Conducting a service beneficiary survey to improve satisfaction and results
15. Reviewing the organization's employee fringe benefits structure to improve it
16. Developing a social media strategy that is realistic and achievable
17. Reviewing the organization's client intake process to find greater efficiencies
18. Crashing your organization's website for a quick weekend renovation
19. Copywriting key content for your next fundraising campaign
20. A/B testing your website's calls to action and landing pages
21. Reaching out to reporters to generate free, earned media for your cause
22. Writing a communications messaging platform for your organization
23. Developing a document retention policy and plan for the organization
24. Recommending a learning management system for your volunteers
25. Conducting a job analysis to determine if staff workloads are realistic
26. Leading an agency strategic planning session with employees and volunteers
27. Reviewing your program outcome data for insights for decision making
28. Setting up an accounting system that is accurate and reliable
29. Developing a digital media tracking process, metrics, and template
30. Translating agency materials into multiple foreign languages

31. Developing a code of ethics for the organization
32. Leading a youth or adult employability fair for service beneficiaries
33. Transcribing handwritten or recorded comments into a digital document
34. Designing an online dashboard to publicly report the agency's progress
35. Training staff and volunteer spokespeople to present to the press effectively
36. Developing professional-looking presentation slide and handout templates
37. Evaluating the outcomes of an initiative in an objective, unbiased way
38. Forming a knitting or quilt club to create warm items for those you serve
39. Investigating the core causes of volunteer retention and turnover
40. Proofreading and edits grant applications and reports
41. Designing and maintaining a low-maintenance landscape at your agency
42. Compiling a list of community events and creating an outreach plan
43. Improving the sales operations of the organization's retail-based business
44. Re-design the organization's data collection forms for improved usability
45. Lead staff-volunteer team building activities to increase trust and morale
46. Create a change management strategy to introduce a major change in policy
47. Review ways the agency can increase accessibility for people with disabilities
48. Fixing or upgrading facilities like plumbing or electrical fixtures
49. Shooting and editing a volunteer appreciation or welcome video
50. Monitoring, curating, and amplifying social media messages

These are only a few ideas. The sky really is the limit. Consider the core needs of your organization and decide how you want to engage skilled volunteers in helping you grow and sustain your mission.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PRO BONO PROJECT NEEDS

There are two primary ways to go about identifying specific pro bono project needs. In this resource we'll cover the more fundamental of the two approaches—using your to-do list to identify potential projects. With this approach, you can identify specific things you think your organization needs and then confirm that the projects fit your high-level strategy.
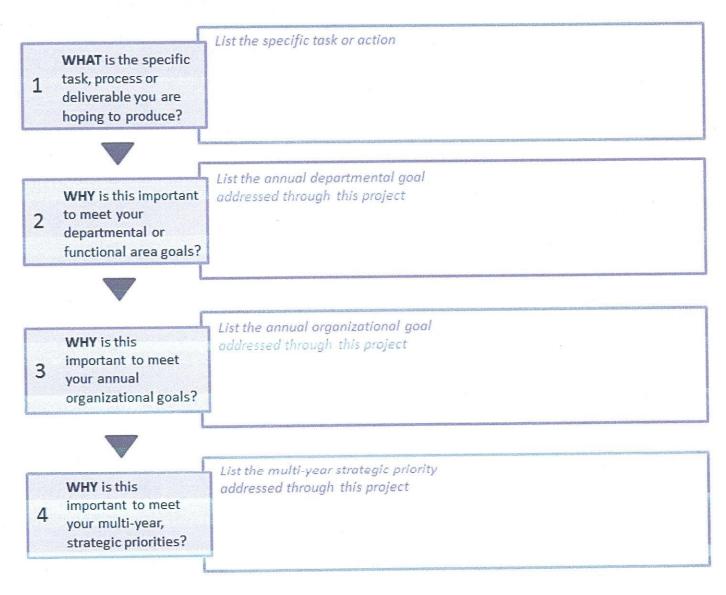
For example, you know intuitively that you need a new website. Every organization needs a website! But why? Looking back at your strategic plan can confirm and clarify this website priority: if one of your goals is to provide more information to the public to educate them about your issue, a website is a critical tool. A **to-do list based needs assessment** helps you to move quickly from needs to potential projects.

The advanced approach, called **strategy-based needs assessment**, uses an organization's strategic plan or other guiding document to generate project ideas. You first identify a goal, then as yourself, "How am I going to accomplish this goal? And is there any resource or task that is a potential match for pro bono?" For example, you might identify a need to provide more information to the public to educate them on an issue, and then determine that a better training for your front-line staff is the best way to implement that strategy.

While the strategy-based approach has potential for higher-impact, more holistic results, it also makes it much more difficult to get to a specific project list. The effort is worth it when you are more experienced with pro bono and want to better integrate pro bono work into your overall strategy for using resources—as you scale your pro bono use and become Powered by Pro Bono. *To learn more about strategy-based assessment, check out the "Scale" section in Taproot Foundation's Powered by Pro Bono, available through Jossey-Bass.*

taproot
FOUNDATION

Instructions: Using the diagram below, begin by describing the specific tactic, project, or action that the pro bono project will help you accomplish. Then, working down the list, continue to ask yourself "Why will this help us accomplish our departmental, organizational and strategic, multi-year goals?"

1 **WHAT** is the specific task, process or deliverable you are hoping to produce?	List the specific task or action
2 **WHY** is this important to meet your departmental or functional area goals?	List the annual departmental goal addressed through this project
3 **WHY** is this important to meet your annual organizational goals?	List the annual organizational goal addressed through this project
4 **WHY** is this important to meet your multi-year, strategic priorities?	List the multi-year strategic priority addressed through this project

It is important to remember that there may be multiple tasks or actions that accomplish each departmental goal, organizational goal, and strategic priority. If your organization doesn't have a strategic plan, answer as many of the "Why" questions as you can. The key is to trace the action/activity back to the reason why it is important to the organization.

Interested in seeing how this exercise might look in real life? Here are some sample projects that each trace back to a different multi-year priority.

	Example 1 – Update Volunteer Management Database	Example 2 – Geographic Expansion Plan
1 **WHAT** is the specific task, process or deliverable you are hoping to produce?	We need to modify the database to track volunteer hours and attendance **(because)**	We need to create an expansion plan to support our transition to an new metro market **(because)**
2 **WHY** is this important to meet your departmental or functional area goals?	We wish to implement a new recognition system for volunteers based on tenure of service **(because)**	We wish to understand the feasibility, costs, and expectations of entering the new market **(because)**
3 **WHY** is this important to meet your annual organizational goals?	This year our goals include to improve the retention and extend the average length of volunteer service **(because)**	This year our goals include supporting the planning for the opening of an office in one new metro area **(because)**
4 **WHY** is this important to meet your multi-year, strategic priorities?	Our strategic plan states that we must increase the role of volunteers in our organization	Our strategic plan states that we will expand to two new cities in the next 3 years.

Are you having trouble identifying specific tasks or activities that need to be accomplished? Or, are you struggling to connect those tasks to a defined pro bono project? Often, thinking about the challenges you face within your organization or within specific departments can also help generate a list of viable project opportunities. Reference the table below for common challenges and correlating pro bono solutions.

"We need to build stronger relationships with our donors and maintain those relationships over time."

- Donor database implementation
- Fundraising executive coach
- Donor segmentation
- Donor relations strategy
- E-newsletter design
- Visual identity

"We need to make it easier for our target population to get involved and interact with our programs."

- Program evaluation
- Market research
- Client needs assessment
- One-Pager
- "Competitive" analysis

"We need to raise visibility of our services in the community."

- PR Plan
- Search engine optimization
- PSA development
- Board recruitment process design
- Event planning and production

"We need to reduce the time we spend on budgeting and forecasting."

- Budgeting process design
- Accounting process design
- Organizational budget design and development
- Security systems audit
- Database customization

"We need to improve our staff's experience to retain them for longer."

- Performance management system
- Compensation and rewards audit
- Training design
- Volunteer manager training
- Executive coaching
- Training and development planning

YOUR SHORT LIST OF POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Now that you've considered several approaches to drafting your potential project ideas, list them in the table below in general order of priority.

PROJECTS OF INTEREST

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Now you are ready to take this list and test each potential project against criteria for successful pro bono engagements.

*Ready to continue with this process? Check out **"SCREENING WITH FOUR TESTS FOR GREAT PRO BONO ENGAGEMENTS"** in the Taproot Foundation's* <u>Powered by Pro Bono</u> *(Jossey-Bass, 2012).*

Dreams and Wishes: Brainstorming to develop new volunteer roles

Start with your Dreams - for more time, more follow-through, more focus on key tasks...

Develop a list of your work tasks:

➢ Identify tasks you complete on a "regular" basis. You determine what "regular" means (daily, weekly, monthly).

➢ Identify your "wish list" - what would you do if time, money, resources were plentiful and competing priorities didn't exist?

➢ Once you have a list of tasks, circle at least five tasks that you do not have the time to complete to your satisfaction. From the five circled items, identify three of the five tasks that you can see volunteers assisting with (even for a small portion of the work).

Making the Dream a Reality...

Choose a task:

➢ Define the task or volunteer role.

➢ What is it? What are the steps in doing it?

➢ How much time does it take? When is it needed (daily, weekly, etc.)?

➢ How often does it happen (special event, once a quarter)?

➢ Why is it important? What is it dependent on? What else depends on it?

➢ How is its success measured?

From Ideas to Action...

Create a volunteer position description from your brainstorm:

➢ Could the position be filled by an ongoing/regularly scheduled/long-term volunteer or would it be better suited for a one-time/project-based/short-term volunteer?

➢ Are there any special skills a volunteer will need to be a success in this position?

➢ What support and supervision will be needed to ensure a volunteer will be successful?

➢ How will a volunteer benefit from taking on this position?

Volunteer Leader Needs
Assessment Worksheet

Developing a volunteer leadership framework begins by identifying your program needs. As you define your volunteer engagement goals and objectives, consider your current program, how you want to expand your work, and how you can utilize volunteers in leadership positions. Take a few minutes to think about these questions:

What are the goals of our organization/program?

_____

_____

Are we able to meet these goals with our current staff capacity? Why or why not?

_____

_____

How do we want to expand the work we do currently?

_____

_____

What types of volunteer projects do we want to undertake?

_____

_____

How can volunteer leaders help us enhance our current work, take on new projects, and accomplish our goals?

_____

_____

What specific needs do we have that volunteer leaders can fulfill?

_____

_____

Points of Light   HandsOn Network   generationOn   Corporate Institute   AmeriCorps Alums

600 Means Street NW   Suite 210   Atlanta, GA 30318
281 Park Avenue South   6th Floor · New York, NY 10016
1875 K Street NW   5th Floor · Washington, DC 20006

www.pointsoflight.org

POINTS OF LIGHT

It is important to define clear goals and objectives for your volunteer leadership program. Equally important, your organization must have the capacity (i.e., supervision, space) to support volunteer leaders. Conducting a needs analysis will help you determine where leaders can be used productively.

Organizational Need	Tasks	Support Needed

Points of Light   *   HandsOn Network   *   generationOn   *   Corporate Institute   *   AmeriCorps Alums

600 Means Street NW   Suite 210   Atlanta, GA 30318
281 Park Avenue South   6th Floor   New York, NY 10016
1875 K Street NW   5th Floor   Washington, DC 20006

www.pointsoflight.org

Once you have identified your major needs, answer these questions. Explain the reasoning behind your responses as much as possible.

Is the need genuine or contrived?

_____

_____

Can we give the volunteer leader ownership of the project?

_____

_____

Can we provide the essential support?

_____

_____

Will the benefits be worth the work of training and supporting the volunteer leader?

_____

_____

Would a volunteer want to perform the task(s)?

_____

_____

Points of Light   HandsOn Network   generationOn   Corporate Institute   AmeriCorps Alums

600 Means Street NW   Suite 210   Atlanta, GA 30318
281 Park Avenue South   6th Floor   New York, NY 10016   www.pointsoflight.org
1875 K Street NW   5th Floor   Washington, DC 20006

Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration
Building the Profession

Recognition Ideas from Minnesota Colleagues
Developed by the MN Association for Volunteer Administration
www.mavanetwork.org

Thank yous
- Keep a log of when you hear a volunteer has done something especially good. Then send a note to the volunteer to commend them.
- Verbal thank yous
- Send personal handwritten cards of thanks yo
- Random notes (thank you for being you)
- "Thank You" said daily – often

Learning
- Offer training
- Include in staff trainings
- Send to a conference

Extra responsibility
- Ask volunteers who do an especially nice job to mentor newer volunteers
- Move up – promote to more challenging tasks

Social opportunities/networking
- Offer opportunities for group interaction
- Provide lunch and a chance to visit with other volunteers
- Lunch with the CEO

Share organizational success
- Send e-mails when organization is in the media to look for it
- Let know about organizational successes

To learn what would like
- Use "Survey Monkey" to ask volunteers what they would like for recognition
- Ask in initial interview

Opportunities to give feedback
- Informally ask advice
- Survey for input

Small gifts
- Pictures showing personal achievements
- Give out candy bars with a note related to candy - for a mint "You are worth a mint"
- Give gift cards
- Goody treasure bag at work (i.e. candy, pencils, etc.)

Recognition when volunteering
- Have ribbons for the volunteers to wear at work to draw attention to them
- Communicate birthday/accomplishment to other staff and volunteers so that they are aware to congratulations

Personal attention
- Send birthday cards
- Get well/sympathy cards
- Seek personal moments
- Anniversary card (when they started)
- At anniversary, call and talk about how their volunteering is going

Public attention
- Do public acknowledgement
- Have a "Volunteer Hall of Fame"
- Take a picture and post for all to see
- Highlight volunteers in newsletter
- Nominate volunteers for awards

Nice working conditions
- Providing a welcoming atmosphere -Coffee available during projects, cookies, etc.
- Provide the with their own work space – comfortable environment
- Access to equipment/facilities/technology needed and the training required
- Name tags
- Introduce to all
- Provide treats daily/ weekly/monthly

For a project
- Include results in a thank you card
- Offering lunch/food during project times
- Make sure paid staff are aware of the results of the project
- Present them with a special specific recognition based on that project
- End of project party/dinner/lunch celebration
- Project intervals – separate rewards – completion of project goals
- Team incentive/friendly competition within the group

© Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) 2014

Assessment of Volunteer Program and Staff Training Needs
Administration Input

It is important in designing a staff training program in volunteer management that we have your perspective, commitment, and thoughts to guide us. I look forward to discussing these questions with you at a convenient time or, if you prefer, you can answer the questions in writing prior to our meeting. Thank you for your leadership in ensuring high quality services to our clientele through our staff/volunteer teams.

1. When hiring staff, is consideration given to their experience, motivation and skills in working with volunteers?

2. Do you think that the role of staff in supervising volunteers is clearly defined in our organization? If yes, how is this accomplished?

3. Are staff evaluated as to their work with volunteers in the organization? If yes, how is this accomplished?

4. In what ways are staff rewarded for excellence in working with volunteers? Any new ideas?

5. Do you think that staff training in volunteer management principles is important to enhancing our readiness to effectively utilize volunteers?

Assessment of Volunteer Program and Staff Training Needs
Administration Input
(continued)

6. How could we enhance our orientation to new staff in order to give more information and review expectations about our volunteer program?

7. What is your philosophy on training of staff, board, and lead volunteers to be better equipped to work with volunteers?

8. In your opinion, is the Board of Directors given adequate orientation and updates on the volunteer program of our organization?

9. What is a realistic expectation of the level of support for staff training in working with volunteers (e.g., resources such as books and tapes on volunteer management, access to staff for training, time for volunteer manager to prepare and deliver the training)?

Name_____   Position_____