



Not So Fast: Keep Chairs and Committees for Virtual Programs

By Kelly Segal

It's post High Holidays in the Jewish nonprofit universe – the time when many organizations kick-off a slate of programming to showcase the importance of their mission, and educate and engage their community.

Now that everything is remote, likely for the year, this may have some of us wondering: *what can we, and should we, be doing about visible volunteer roles?* In-person program committee and chair positions fell squarely in the center of the pipeline: just between Ambassadors and Friendraisers; and Cultivators, Solicitors, and Stewards. Finding meaningful participation opportunities for individuals at this point in the pipeline, was often the difference between whose organizational engagement would advance, and whose would fizzle.



Volunteer engagement opportunities in the world of in-person programs and events were important visible roles:

Event or Program Committee Chair(s) – Partnered with professional staff to set the vision and purpose of a given initiative, and help with the recruitment of committee members.

Event or Program Committee Member – Under the leadership of the committee chair, committee member responsibilities were planning contributions, recruitment, and visible roles such as: welcoming, speaker introduction, sharing their personal involvement stories, and fundraising.

Though it may require more work, don't eliminate these roles. The right volunteers in these positions are crucial to the success of a given program by bringing new people

in, and getting them started on their own journey through the pipeline. The practice had the equally important benefit of giving volunteers a stake in the organization's growth and success, and often resulted in an increase in their own financial contributions.

Visible, elevated community leadership opportunities are extremely important right now. Constituents are seeking the right ways to connect to organizations doing meaningful work, and given restrictions organizations are facing, fundraising opportunities need to be top of mind. **Remember that sustained, quality volunteer engagement results in increased financial commitments over time.**

If your organization is planning a virtual program/event, continue with the practice of having a chair(s) and a committee. The roles are the same, and work just as well. Charge leadership with:

- **Planning**
Program input on topic, speaker ideas, flow, and target audience.
- **Recruitment**
Innovative recruitment by way of personal social media posting with "Join Me" messaging, and a ready-to-post link for easy registration. Charge committee with registering 2-3 people to virtually attend.
- **Visible Roles**
Designated roles like program opening, speaker introduction, and sharing personal involvement stories with a fundraising ask still exist. We are just swapping out actual podiums for virtual ones. Professionals should clarify those roles still, collaborate on talking points, and practice delivery.
- **Follow-up**
Post-program, ask committee members to reach out to those they recruited to collect program feedback. Ask attendees how they'd suggest improving future virtual programs, what they think worked well, and what they'd like to see more of in the way of virtual offerings. Ask if they'd be interested in learning more about the organization, or serving on a committee themselves.

While nothing replaces the sense of community we feel physically gathering together, it's important for us to realize that not only do our communities still exist, we are lucky to live in a time where technology provides us the opportunity to connect to one another. Additionally, data collected since March tells us that virtual programming allows nonprofits to cast an even wider net, reaching and engaging those who faced any number of challenges participating in person; and **virtual programming is not going away even when we return to normal** – so stick to the model of having program chairs and committees.

Continue the work – keep your pipeline moving: activate leadership, deepen engagement, and generate new interest.

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