Volunteers built, sustain, and enrich Cornell.

Volunteers are important to every great university; at Cornell, their contributions have been profound. From Ezra Cornell’s advocacy and financial investment in the university’s founding to the contributions of “time, talent, and treasure” from tens of thousands of students, alumni, parents, and friends since then, Cornell volunteers create a vibrant and engaged community around the globe.

Cornell continues to strengthen and improve the volunteer experience.

In 2009, the Trustee Task Force on Volunteer Leadership was charged with the following:

• understanding the breadth and scope of volunteering at Cornell;
• reviewing the impact of volunteer organizations on the Ithaca campus;
• learning how those organizations function and interact with the university; and
• developing a plan to improve and enhance volunteer experiences, involvement, and impact.

What the task force has already achieved

The creation of the task force provided a unique opportunity for volunteers, faculty, and staff to share information and experiences about volunteering at Cornell. The 12-person task force (supported by staff in Alumni Affairs and Development) interviewed volunteers, volunteer managers, deans, and directors. It gathered data about hundreds of volunteer groups at Cornell, as well as at peer institutions. The task force has established that:

• there are currently over 15,000 volunteers (not including 40,000 volunteers associated with Cornell Cooperative Extension);
• there are 476 known volunteer organizations; and
• volunteers contribute significant financial resources to Cornell, and at a rate at least 10 times greater than non-volunteers.

In addition, the task force solicited ideas for improvement, tested many of them, and developed final recommendations through the work of its six functional committees: Strategic Planning; Recruitment; Orientation, Training and Feedback; Appreciation and Recognition; Communications; and Systems Management.
Perhaps most significant, in addition to identifying ways to improve the potential efficiency and effectiveness of Cornell’s active volunteer organizations, the task force realized the need to create vehicles to support the lifelong engagement of Cornell volunteers. As a result, the task force prepared a detailed, five-year plan.

The future of volunteering at Cornell

This plan renews Cornell’s commitment to volunteers and their many volunteer organizations, and affirms that (i) the volunteer experience can and will be improved; (ii) opportunities for engagement with the university will become more meaningful; and (iii) transitions from one role to another will become more consistent and thoughtful. In addition, appreciation and recognition of volunteering will become more prevalent; volunteer groups will become more diverse in age, interests, and affinities; and the university’s volunteers will hopefully derive greater satisfaction and benefit from what is often a lifetime of involvement. All of this can be accomplished through the implementation of the task force’s recommendations.

How we will get there

From 2013 to 2018, the plan provides for a continued commitment to offer opportunities for lifelong engagement with Cornell by:

- **expanding** participation of alumni, parents, and friends through the creation of an online volunteer management system that lists volunteer organizations and matches volunteer interests with opportunities;
- **enhancing** communications with volunteers through the creation of an interactive website and quarterly newsletters;
- **creating** tools that volunteers can employ to be effective, including standardized position descriptions, a new-member orientation program, and tailored training opportunities;
- **developing** proven and actionable practices and procedures for volunteers and volunteer managers;
- **increasing** opportunities for appreciation, celebration, and recognition of volunteers; and
- **working** with individual colleges and units to adopt the recommendations.

In summary

By learning from the experiences of Cornell’s most successful volunteer organizations, by incorporating the good ideas and recommendations of many volunteers and staff, and by introducing a more systematic and consistent set of guidelines for use by Cornell’s volunteer organizations, the university can build upon a nearly 150-year history of dedication and service. In doing so, Cornell would significantly strengthen the good experience it seeks for its vital volunteer community and the impact of the outstanding work this committed, multi-generational corps of alumni, parents, and friends accomplishes on behalf of our great university.

To read about the task force’s recommendations and Cornell’s plans in more detail, please see our complete report at www.alumni.cornell.edu/volunteer.

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