

Guide to Managing Volunteer Performance Concerns

A practical guide for chapter leaders to address volunteer performance concerns, support improvement when possible, and respectfully end a volunteer role when needed.

Purpose

This document provides chapter leaders with a fair, respectful, and consistent approach for addressing volunteer performance concerns in a chapter setting. It is designed to help leaders clarify expectations, offer support when improvement is possible, protect the mission and member experience, and recognize that unmet expectations can affect other chapter volunteers, chapter members, and the chapter as a whole. It also offers guidance for handling difficult conversations with professionalism and dignity if a volunteer role needs to end.

Chapter Leader Considerations

Because chapters rely on volunteer leadership, peer relationships, and member trust, performance concerns can have a broader ripple effect. A volunteer who is not meeting expectations may unintentionally create extra work for other chapter volunteers, reduce confidence among chapter members, disrupt events or programs, or affect the chapter's ability to deliver a consistent and welcoming member experience.

Chapter leaders should address concerns in a way that balances compassion for the individual volunteer with responsibility to the chapter community. Chapter leaders may wish to discuss with their Regional Executive before ending a volunteer role.

Guiding Principles

- Address concerns early, before patterns become harder to change.
- Focus on observable behavior and role expectations, not personality or intent.
- Apply expectations consistently across volunteers.
- Assume positive intent when appropriate, while still protecting chapter volunteers, chapter members, the chapter experience, and the chapter overall.
- Document through email any follow-ups, check in timeline, etc.
- Use the least severe effective response to address the situation.

Step 1: Clarify the Concern

Before meeting with the volunteer, chapter leaders should define the specific gap between expectations and what is happening. Consider whether the issue is related to skills, training, communication, availability, motivation, role fit, or interpersonal behavior. Also consider how the concern is affecting chapter operations, other chapter volunteers, chapter members, and the overall member/volunteer experience.

- What expectation is not being met?
- What specific examples show the concern?
- Who or what is being affected, including chapter volunteers, chapter members, chapter programs, or the chapter's reputation?
- Has the volunteer received clear training and written expectations?
- Is this a one-time issue or a repeated pattern?
- Could reasonable support, reassignment, or clearer communication resolve it?

Step 2: Start with a Coaching Conversation

If the concern appears correctable, schedule a private coaching conversation. Keep the tone calm, direct, and appreciative. The purpose is to understand what may be getting in the way, reinforce the expectations of the chapter role, and agree on what needs to change.

Suggested opening: “Thank you for the time and energy you have given to this chapter role. We want to talk through a few things we have noticed, make sure expectations are clear, and determine the best path forward.”

Describe the concern: “The expectation for this chapter role is [expectation]. Recently, we’ve observed [specific behavior or missed expectation]. The impact is [impact on chapter volunteers, chapter members, programs, or the chapter as a whole].”

Invite their perspective: “We’d like to understand what’s been happening from your point of view. Is there anything making this role challenging for you right now?”

Step 3: Offer Support and Set Clear Expectations

When appropriate, offer a reasonable path for improvement. Be specific about what needs to change, what support will be provided, how progress will be measured, and when follow-up will happen.

- Clarify the role description, meeting requirements, and/or communication expectations.
- Provide refresher training or shadowing.
- Pair the volunteer with a mentor or point person.
- Reduce responsibilities temporarily while skills improve.
- Reassign the volunteer to a better-fit role if available.
- Create a short, written improvement plan with measurable expectations.

Suggested expectation statement: “Going forward, we need [specific behavior] by [date or timeframe]. We will provide [support]. We will check in on [date] to review progress. We want you to succeed in this role.”

Step 4: Reassessment

If the concern continues after coaching, affects other chapter volunteers or chapter members, or creates operational disruption for the chapter, then it may be best to end the volunteer relationship.

Preparing for a Difficult Conversation to End the Volunteer Relationship

When ending a volunteer relationship, chapter leaders should prepare carefully and keep the conversation brief, private, respectful, and clear. Chapter leaders may wish to review the items below with their Regional Executive to have an outside perspective.

- Review documentation and confirm the decision is reasonable.
- Identify whether the volunteer should be reassigned, paused, or fully released.
- Choose a private setting and have a second chapter leader or regional leader present.
- Prepare a concise statement of the decision and the reason.
- Avoid debating the decision during the meeting; listen respectfully, acknowledge what the volunteer shares, and remain clear about the outcome.

Sample Script: Ending the Volunteer Relationship

“Thank you for meeting with us. We want to acknowledge the time you have given to the chapter and the care you have shown for our mission. After reviewing the expectations for this chapter role and the concerns we have discussed, we have decided it would be best to end your volunteer role with the chapter, effective today.”

“This decision is based on [brief, factual reason: continued difficulty meeting role expectations, following procedures, role mismatch, etc.]. We have previously discussed [coaching/support provided, if applicable], and the expectations have not been met consistently enough for this chapter role to continue. We also need to consider the impact on other chapter volunteers, chapter members, and the chapter as a whole.”

“We understand this may be disappointing, and we appreciate what you have contributed. We will follow up with written confirmation and any next steps.”

If reassignment is appropriate: “Although this role is ending, we would be open to exploring whether another volunteer opportunity may be a better fit. [Share other roles available and job descriptions/expectations]”

In either situation (ending role or reassigning), emphasize they are still part of the chapter and are welcome to attend any/all chapter events. As applicable, encourage them to volunteer in a limited capacity (i.e. registration desk at an event, etc) and/or revisit volunteering with the chapter when it is a better time for them.

What to Avoid During the Conversation

- Do not surprise the volunteer if the issue could reasonably have been addressed earlier through coaching.
- Do not over-explain, argue, or revisit every incident in detail.
- Do not make the conversation personal or label the volunteer.
- Do not apologize for making a necessary decision, though empathy is appropriate.
- Do not suggest future opportunities unless that option is genuinely available.

Documentation Checklist (recommended)

- Volunteer name and role.
- Date, time, and location of concern or conversation.
- Specific expectations not met.
- Objective examples of behavior or performance concerns.

- Impact on chapter programs, chapter volunteers, chapter members, or the chapter as a whole.
- Support, coaching, training, or reassignment offered.
- Agreed-upon next steps and follow-up date.
- Final decision and effective date, if service ends.
- Next steps completed (if any).

Prevention Ideas for the Future

- Use written chapter role descriptions with clear responsibilities, time commitments, expectations, required skills, and how the role supports the chapter's goals.
- Provide regular check-ins, especially during the first few weeks or months. Assign a chapter leader (or leaders) to this role, such as a Past President or the President-Elect.
- Create simple channels for volunteers to raise concerns early.
- Recognize volunteers who meet expectations and model the desired culture.
- Review patterns periodically to identify whether training, role design, or communication needs improvement.