



Before Volunteer Manager, The Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society (RAPS) used one giant email listserv to contact potential volunteers and manage their responses. “Traditionally, we sent a blast email out to everybody if we were looking for volunteers, like speakers or online course instructors,” said Wesley Carr, Senior Manager of Chapter and Volunteer Relations. “We didn’t have the ability to send direct or targeted messages, so the call would go out to all members.”

It’s a tactic that works well for some small organizations, but RAPS has a global member base of over 14,000 members. Despite a large listserv, however, RAPS didn’t generate a good response rate from their volunteer emails—mass email is so untargeted. Those steadfast volunteers were dependable, which was good for the RAPS staff who relied on them, but relying on the same people created several problems. First, volunteer burnout was high since the people who did volunteer volunteered so regularly. Second, their loyalty created a sense of exclusivity amongst members.

“Members had the perception that you had to be part of the ‘in crowd’ and that you had to know someone to volunteer,” said Wesley.

Listserv limitations kept volunteer growth, diversity and programs stagnant, and ultimately inspired RAPS to look at Volunteer Manager, with the goal of bringing in a larger pool of volunteers.

“We were attracted by the ability to do targeted campaigns to reach out to specific volunteers,” said Wesley, on one reason RAPS saw promise in a dedicated volunteer manager platform.

A Successful Soft Launch

Since RAPS launched Volunteer Manager in April 2016, the organization expanded both its volunteer programs—i.e. the types of volunteer activities available—and its pool of volunteers. But before promoting Volunteer Manager to their entire membership, Wesley decided to do a soft launch of the community to test the new system out.

During National Volunteer Week in April 2016, Wesley sent an email to RAPS' entire staff, asking staff members for the names and information of every single volunteer who had helped in 2015. He ended up with a list of about 500 members. They then auto-enrolled those people into Volunteer Manager and started promoting tasks within the platform to them. Wesley felt comfortable pre-populating Volunteer Manager with those members since they were already established volunteers. Wesley and his team then created five categories for volunteer opportunities, based on the time it would take to complete a task—less than one hour on up to terms-based opportunities, like serving on a board.

Even before RAPS formally introduced the system to the entire organization, members who weren't originally put into the system opted themselves in, gaining interest through word of mouth.

To engage all members on all levels right away, RAPS put in a variety of tasks, many of which aren't seen as traditional volunteer activities. For example, some opportunities are as simple as completing your community profile, tweeting about RAPS, or posting a RAPS blog post on a member's personal Facebook page. These "micro-volunteer" opportunities add up, giving members a sense of accomplishment and furthering RAPS' community engagement goals.

As members work their way up the level ladder—to harder tasks that take more time— they receive badges, like an "Engaged Member" badge.

"We're trying to make it fun and interesting, so all the volunteers that we initially put in the system got a badge," said Wesley Carr. "That's how we started creating a buzz about the system."

Within a year of auto-enrolling 500 members, RAPS' volunteer pool grew tremendously. Now they have 1,261 volunteers in their volunteer management system—152% growth in one year.

Build the Database Through Micro-Volunteering

Micro-volunteer opportunities can energize members—but it's much more than that. By significantly lowering the barrier to entry—and making volunteering fun—RAPS gains valuable information about their members' volunteer preferences, skills, interests and availability. With this information, RAPS has a wider pool of volunteers to recruit and choose from depending on organizational needs.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

The Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society (RAPS) is the largest global organization of and for those involved with the regulation of healthcare and related products, including medical devices, pharmaceuticals, biologics and nutritional products. Founded in 1976, RAPS helped establish the regulatory profession and continues to actively support the professional and lead the profession as a neutral, non-lobbying nonprofit organization.

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“As the volunteer pool grew, I created a form for my colleagues to indicate their needs so I can then send invitations out to appropriate volunteers,” said Wesley. “From the beginning, our strategy was to bring in volunteers with easy opportunities to get them in the larger pool.”

After only one year of Volunteer Manager, RAPS has seen success—especially when it comes to planning their upcoming annual conference. Before Volunteer Manager, RAPS would send their typical email blast to the entire membership, calling for proposals to present at their annual conference. Normally, they averaged about 100 submissions. This year they made the call through volunteer manager and received 198 submissions, nearly doubling the average. True, RAPS won't use nearly all the submissions, but now they have a list of 200 members interested in presenting at the conference, which will help them fill in the gaps as they get closer to the actual event.

“Once the conference committee narrows down the speakers and the types of presentations they want, they'll have another pool to reach out to for very specific things since they already have the information from people interested in presenting,” said Wesley.

That's one place where RAPS has found value in the platform. Volunteer Manager is helpful for finding volunteers for specific projects, but it's also incredibly helpful to find volunteers they didn't necessarily plan for or think they needed.

Wesley gave another great example:

“The US Department of Labor reached out to us because they were trying to get better stats on our profession. They wanted to survey our members about the regulatory profession. I decided to make that a volunteer opportunity. We sent it out to all our members telling them to take the survey through Volunteer Manager, and got about 150 people to participate. Those are people who may not have already been in our database or may not have explored the volunteer portal.”

Moving Forward

Looking towards the future, Wesley and his team are working to make the system continue to run smoothly, ensuring that members have a positive volunteer experience. Automation rules, which Wesley called “a stroke of genius,” are a big help in creating a cohesive experience for members.

“In a perfect world, we'd want all our members to feel connected to the organization,” said Wesley Carr. “Volunteering and being engaged on the platform, in general, helps with that. That's the ultimate goal.”

Higher Logic is an industry leader in cloud-based community platforms, with over 37 million engaged members in more than 270,000 communities. Organizations worldwide use Higher Logic to bring like-minded people all together, by giving their community a home where they can meet, share ideas, answer questions and stay connected.