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## The Power of Short-Term Projects for Volunteer Engagement

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**Summary:** While association volunteering has traditionally been term-based, the growth of task-based volunteer opportunities has proven to be a highly effective engagement strategy for associations. Here are a few examples.

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The strong correlation between member engagement and member retention has long been established among association executives through numerous studies and empirical evidence. The definition of member engagement, itself, has also been expanded to include not only term-based volunteerism such as committee work but also task-based volunteerism such as proofreading white papers, writing blog posts, or even "micro-volunteerism" such as commenting on a post in the association's social community.

Task-based volunteerism, in particular, is highly appealing to both volunteers and staff in that it enables the member to commit to a project of relatively short duration that otherwise would have filtered through the committee structure or been handled by staff. This approach to volunteerism has been mutually beneficial in terms of reducing the sometimes overwhelming demands on volunteers, as well as encouraging new volunteers to perform much more defined tasks.

Here are some examples of how associations are utilizing task-based volunteer opportunities to engage members:

- The [Association of Academic Physiatrists](#) (AAP) recently completed two projects offering task-based volunteer opportunities to its members: abstract review and input on the design and

navigation of its new website. AAP Executive Director Tiffany Knowlton, JD, MBA, says she found it to be a great method to get members engaged without a lengthy, time-heavy commitment.

- Joel Dolci, CAE, president and CEO of the [New York Society of Association Executives \(NYSAE\)](#) has long espoused task-based volunteerism, particularly for NYSAE's annual professional recognition awards. "Reviewing nominations for NYSAE's Synergy Awards represents an opportunity for members to utilize their expertise," says Dolci. "But they can do so without the level of time commitment required for some other committees, such as membership or education."
- Task-based volunteerism has long been the norm at cultural institutions. James Horan, HR generalist and volunteer coordinator of the [The Brooklyn Museum](#) says, "We engage volunteers for short-term assignments such as sorting images in the digital library, proofreading newsletters, and enhancing our visitor engagement during special events."

The impact of association social communities on member engagement is a significant factor in recruiting task-based volunteers. Cindy Ruckman, publications director for the [National Association of College Stores](#) expressed a sentiment common among association executives when NACS launched its community. "After we introduced The Hub, NACS' Connected Community," she says, "we heard from many members who had not yet found their voice in the association until they became active in the social community."

Similarly, any ASAE member who has ever posted or responded to a message on [Collaborate](#) knows how quickly one can become engaged in a discussion and, in some cases, recruited for a task-based volunteer opportunity.

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