



# A Look at SHIP Roles for Volunteers

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When we think of SHIP roles for volunteers, we commonly think of volunteer counselors working with beneficiaries to help them make better health care decisions. This is the core of the service that SHIP provides. The role of counselor is a critical one in the operation of SHIP.

From a volunteer management perspective this is, in one way, admirable – strong, significant volunteer roles are a goal of volunteer involvement.

In another way, however, this focus on the volunteer counselor role can be a cause for worry.

It is, in fact, easier to operate a volunteer program if you have a range of volunteer roles. This is most apparent in recruitment, where a range of volunteer roles makes it more likely than you will have something to offer that a potential volunteer will find appealing – you have more options to evaluate. Having a single volunteer role, such as counselor, is the equivalent of a “take it or leave it” sales offer.

The other advantage of having multiple volunteer roles is that it can help the SHIP that is having trouble convincing potential volunteers to take on the relatively complex and time-consuming role of counselor. To someone unfamiliar with the role, it may easily seem overwhelming. Prospective volunteers have a strong tendency to say “no” when they’re not sure they are going to be able to do a good job.

Having a variety of entry-level volunteer roles can allow the reluctant volunteer an opportunity to become involved more safely and to slowly become more comfortable with the larger and more demanding volunteer role of counselor.

The 2016 SHIP profiles show some excellent examples of ways to involve volunteers in addition to the core counselor role. Some of these roles act as points of entry for new volunteers. Others provide ways to retain experienced volunteers who have served as counselors and are now looking for new ways to make a contribution.

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[Read more about the 2016 SHIP director interviews and resulting SHIP Profiles Project overview here.](#)

Here are some examples that both expand the range of volunteer roles and the composition of the volunteer population:

- District of Columbia: Volunteer law students assist with intake and some also volunteer to help with cases.
- Georgia: Students from the University of Georgia and Albany State University volunteer to staff a toll-free line during Open Enrollment.
- Iowa: Volunteers staff a toll-free line during Open Enrollment. Computer volunteers enter drug lists into databases. Office assistant volunteers help set up appointments and handle paperwork.



- Pennsylvania: Self-directed volunteer teams help provide Medicare training and perform audits evaluating local program success.
- South Carolina: Volunteers who don't want full counseling or presentation roles distribute marketing materials in local areas.
- Florida: Volunteers can become area or local coordinators, helping manage the SHIP program in their communities. Volunteers provide office help that includes administrative support, marketing, and volunteer recruitment.
- Indiana: Butler and Purdue pharmacy school students help counselors understand drug plans.
- Kansas: Volunteers perform data entry, help organize Open Enrollment events, and assist with pre-counseling events. Volunteers also act as mentors to new counselors.
- Kentucky: Volunteers act as application assistants and consumer educators and provide specialized counseling.
- Maine: A committee of SHIP and SMP volunteers reviews the Volunteer Policy Manual and makes recommendations.
- Nevada: Volunteers lead subcommittees that, among other tasks, oversee a client satisfaction survey, coordinate SHIP participation in health fairs, provide training and mentoring to new volunteers, and develop partnerships with faith-based volunteers.
- Oklahoma: Retired ConocoPhillips employees volunteer to help other retired ConocoPhillips employees with Part D since their retirement coverage doesn't include prescriptions.
- Massachusetts: Volunteer counselors who age and experience problems (hearing) become program ambassadors, perform data entry, help with client contact forms, or assist with project management.

The list above is not a complete list of the innovative volunteer roles that appear in the SHIP profiles. These alternate roles illustrate both the value and the ease of not viewing SHIP as a single-focus volunteer program but, rather, thinking of it as encompassing a wide range of volunteer roles. Such roles make it more likely that prospective volunteers will find SHIP work appealing while simultaneously offering more experienced volunteers opportunities for promotion and more significant levels of participation. 