



The future of sports event volunteer programs

How an engaged community elevates the
guest and athlete experience

A guide to transforming your sports event program told through the real world
stories of some of the most engaged programs in North America and beyond

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Contents

1. Executive Summary: The Strategic Shift in North American Sport
2. Modern Solutions and Challenges in Volunteer Management
3. The Athlete and Guest Experience: Why an Engaged Community Matters
4. Case Study: Golf Association of Philadelphia
5. Building Connection: Volunteers, Community, and Heritage
6. Case Study: Sportera – MUDGIRL
7. Interview Spotlight: Formula E's Volunteer Program
8. Technical Insight: Security and Integrations
9. What Your Leadership Team Needs to Know
10. Measuring the ROI of Rosterfy
11. Case Study: Special Olympics World Games
12. Conclusion: Future-Proofing Your Volunteer Workforce



Section 1

Executive summary: The strategic shift in North American sport

Across North America, marathons, triathlons, multi-sport games, and motorsport events are scaling faster than the manual systems built to support them.

Volunteers remain the backbone of the guest and athlete experience — the friendly face at registration, the water station cheer, the marshal who knows the course better than the app does. But as event calendars grow and expectations rise, the operational weight of coordinating thousands of people is exceeding what spreadsheets, email chains, and legacy databases were ever built to handle.

Recent research from AmeriCorps and the U.S. Census Bureau shows formal volunteering is rebounding: more than 75.7 million Americans — 28% of the population — formally volunteered through an organization in the year to September 2023, contributing an estimated 4.99 billion hours worth \$167 billion in economic value.

Encouragingly, 16-to-17-year-olds now post the highest formal volunteering rate of any age group, at 34% — a strong signal for sports organizations building the next generation of race-day crews.

This white paper explores how sports associations, marathon organizers, and major event hosts across North America are moving from reactive, logistics-first administration to strategic, digital-first volunteer engagement — and what that shift means for the athlete and guest experience, for compliance and risk, and for the bottom line.

The state of volunteering

Formal volunteering in America is rebounding - but the hours each volunteer gives are still falling even as more people sign up.

For sports associations and event organizers, that means the real competition isn't for volunteer interest. It's for volunteer time.

Programs that remove friction - in applying, training, scheduling and staying engaged - are the ones that convert interest into a reliable, returning workforce.



Section 2

Modern challenges and solutions in volunteer management

Across marathons, triathlons, multi-sport games, and motorsport series, volunteer coordinators are wrestling with a familiar set of pressures – even when the events themselves couldn't look more different.

The recurring pain points

- **The time barrier:** Time is the volunteer's scarcest resource. Lengthy applications, redundant paperwork, and manual scheduling all eat into the goodwill of people who are already giving up a weekend.
- **Manual administration:** Coordinators can spend the bulk of their week on data entry, chasing spreadsheets across departments, rather than building the relationships that keep volunteers coming back.
- **Uncertain attendance:** “Will they show up?” is the question that keeps event-day operations up at night. Without automated waitlists and two-way messaging, a handful of no-shows can leave gaps in coverage exactly where guests and athletes notice most.
- **The retention gap:** Recruiting from scratch for every race or season is expensive and unsustainable. Without a system to track who volunteered, when, and how they performed, organizations lose the institutional memory that turns first-timers into course captains.
- **Compliance and safeguarding:** Sporting events increasingly involve minors, vulnerable participants, and safety-critical roles. Tracking certifications, background checks, and renewal dates by hand carries real organizational and reputational risk.

What a digital-first approach changes

Moving to a purpose-built volunteer management system doesn't just digitize the paperwork – it changes what coordinators spend their time on. Automated applications, intelligent auto-rostering by geography, availability, and skill, and QR-code, on-the-day check-in all shift the workload away from repetitive admin and toward the human side of the role: **welcoming people, training them well, and thanking them properly.**



The self-service era of volunteering

No matter the size of the operation you're running one thing is consistent - volunteers want to 'own' their volunteer profile and manage their experience - offering the ability to quickly access shifts, check-in and out will help **bridge the gap between their busy lives and your program.**

Section 3

The Athlete and Guest experience: Why an engaged community matters

Volunteers are not a background function of a sporting event — they are frequently the event, as far as the athlete or guest is concerned.

The runner's first interaction is a bib-pickup volunteer. The golfer's confidence in a rules decision rests on a well-trained official. The parent at a multi-sport games venue judges the whole organization by how warmly their child is greeted at check-in.

From logistics-first to experience-first

- **Seamless registration:** When volunteers can register once and apply to multiple shifts or events without redoing paperwork, they arrive less frustrated and more ready to engage with guests.
- **Personalized dashboards:** A central hub where volunteers can see upcoming shifts, manage availability, and pick roles that suit their interests leads to higher satisfaction and materially lower turnover.
- **Real-time, on-the-day coordination:** QR-code check-in and real-time visibility mean coordinators know who is on-site and where — so gaps can be filled before a guest ever notices a station is short-staffed.
- **Recognition that sticks:** Reward modules that track and celebrate milestones — hours served, events completed, skills gained — give volunteers a reason to return year after year, building the kind of institutional memory that protects the guest experience during high-pressure moments.



The **Golf Association of Philadelphia's** experience makes the connection explicit: **administrative clarity is what frees coordinators to focus on the guest and player experience, not a separate concern from it.**

On volunteers representing the club

"We take a lot of pride in our work. If we give you a logo shirt and you're wearing the brand, the hat and all the merch, we want you to share the same pride, enthusiasm, loyalty and respect for what we're doing"

**Laura Heien, Volunteer Operations,
Golf Association of Philadelphia**



Golf Association of Philadelphia



Sector: Sporting Association

Volunteers managed: Over 450

Events: Over 200 event days a year

Founded in 1897, the Golf Association of Philadelphia (GAP) is the oldest regional golf association in the United States, representing 350 member clubs and more than 130,000 players.

Running roughly 200 event days a year — including its signature Adaptive Golf Championship — GAP's mission goes well beyond logistics: it is about protecting a first-class, on-course experience for every player, delivered by a volunteer network that acts as the face of a 125-year-old brand.

The challenge:

- **Inconsistent brand identity:** A custom database built in the late 1990s, manual spreadsheets, PDFs, and constant email back-and-forth made it hard to deliver a unified, premium onboarding experience.
- **Administrative drain:** Staff spent as much as 75% of their time on repetitive data entry — time that could otherwise go toward high-touch relationships with volunteers and partners.
- **Risk to the guest experience:** Manually managed shifts, background checks, and logistics left room for errors that could surface as disruptions on tournament day.

GAP chose Rosterfy for total control over branding, messaging, and communication flows; a professional onboarding framework with built-in background checks; and a structured pathway to upskill volunteers into higher-tier roles like certified rules officials.

On choosing Rosterfy

"It was really that safety of knowing that we're picking a product that is well-respected, handling data compliance correctly and has the right tech behind it"

**Laura Heien, Volunteer Operations,
Golf Association of Philadelphia**

The results:

- **Streamlined administrative workflows:** By utilizing intuitive, customized workflows tailored to the organization's specific processes, volunteer coordinators can manage onboarding and scheduling with ease, significantly reducing day-to-day administrative tasks.
- **Eliminating data silos:** The organization utilizes the customizable reporting process in tandem with the easy to use export option to share information with Raiser's Edge NXT.
- **Frictionless self-service booking:** Volunteers gained total autonomy to complete visual onboarding checklists and schedule themselves into crucial shifts, eliminating those messy back-and-forth emails.

75% reduction in manual administration time unlocks the ability to build a community around your club.

Section 5

Building Connection: Volunteers, Community, and Heritage

For events with a strong sense of identity — a marathon with decades of history, a motorsport series built around sustainability, a community race built on female empowerment — volunteers want more than a task list. They want to feel like part of the story.

Two very different programs, **MUDGIRL** and **Formula E**, show what that connection looks like in practice.

MUDGIRL: 'Yellow Army'

MUDGIRL is a global obstacle race series spanning the USA, Canada, France, and the UK, built around community and women's empowerment. Its volunteers — self-described as fanatical and full of energy — are the encouragement at every obstacle and the hand at the finish line.

Rather than treat community as a side effect of good operations, MUDGIRL's parent company, Sportera, has built **group and family volunteering** directly into how it recruits: sports clubs and families sign up and are scheduled together, with parents able to register children without a separate account.

Family volunteering is a feature that turns volunteering into a shared, repeatable tradition rather than a one-off task.



Formula E: Building community around a globe-trotting operation

Formula E presents the opposite challenge.

As an all-electric racing series that moves between city-center circuits and purpose-built tracks across ten-plus locations a year - Their challenge is building a returning volunteer base, rather than starting from zero each race.

- **Local-first recruitment:** Formula E leans on local staff, comms and marketing teams' existing networks, and partners to reach volunteers in each new market rather than cold-recruiting every time.
- **Understanding who shows up, and why:** Post-event surveys, run through the platform, feed an insights team that shapes how the program talks to volunteers — whether they're drawn by sustainability, motorsport, or the volunteering itself.
- **Turning youth engagement into a pipeline:** A pathway from the FIA's Girls on Track program (ages 8–18) into Formula E's volunteer program (starting at 18) is being explored as a way to keep young people engaged in motorsport rather than losing them at the age boundary.

MUDGIRL



MUDGIRL

Sector: Major Events

Volunteers managed: 2000+

Events: Held internationally

MUDGIRL is more than a race — organizers describe it as a celebration of joy, camaraderie, and women's empowerment, run across the USA, Canada, France, and the UK.

With a core team of just 25 people supporting more than 2,000 volunteers, Sportera needed a way to manage recruitment, retention, and event-day logistics across different countries, languages, and time zones without juggling multiple systems.

The solution:

- **One platform, every market:** Sportera runs every country's events from a single platform instead of stitching together region-specific tools.
- **Group and family volunteering:** Self-selecting groups — sports clubs, friend groups, and families — sign up and are scheduled together, with group leaders able to invite members and assign shifts directly.
- **Automated communication:** Automated logistics emails covering everything from parking passes to shift details reduce the manual workload on a lean team.

Rosterfy's group and family volunteering functions have significantly contributed to SPORTERA's ability to manage and coordinate volunteer efforts with exceptional efficiency. The tailored features, such as the distinction between groups and families, have proven invaluable in accommodating the diverse dynamics of volunteers associated with MUDGIRL's events.

On Rosterfy's recruitment features

"Rosterfy is our best tool for volunteer recruitment and retention. If they volunteered last year and I want them to come back, I can just use a quick filter to reach out to all attendees and get them back this year."

Beth Jobin, People and Culture Executive

MUDGIRL
OBSTACLE RACE DEDICATED TO WOMEN

The impact:

Automated email workflows freed Sportera's small team from manual onboarding admin, while a simple filter lets them re-engage prior-year volunteers by name — turning retention into a few clicks rather than a fresh recruitment campaign every season.

'Family Volunteering' through Rosterfy has unlocked the potential for MUDGIRL's program to grow - while effortlessly streamlining recruitment.

Formula E

Sector: Motorsport

Volunteers managed: 2000+

Events: Worldwide

On Rosterfy's Engaged Volunteer podcast, we sat down with Emma Peat, Event Workforce Manager at Formula E, to talk through what it takes to build a volunteer program behind an all-electric racing series that visits ten-plus cities a year.

Key takeaways from the interview:

- **From paid to volunteer support:** Formula E's workforce was previously staffed by temporary workers. This was handled ad hoc by the event project management team through agencies — a model that could not scale as the series pushed further into volunteer-led delivery.
- **Ten races, ten different stages:** Because the team runs up to ten races in parallel, their team is simultaneously in kickoff meetings for one race and final-stage planning for another — every market at a different point in a roughly 12-week volunteer lifecycle.
- **Market-by-market recruitment strategy:** New markets like Tokyo start with a full public recruitment push; more sensitive markets like Saudi Arabia started with just 30 volunteers drawn from an existing network as a proof of concept before scaling up.
- **Data residency as a trust-builder:** Local teams in markets such as Tokyo were initially hesitant to run a volunteer program at all because of data protection concerns — a worry resolved by Rosterfy hosting data within the country where each event takes place.
- **The retention challenge of a traveling series:** Because the calendar mixes brand-new race locations with established ones, Peat's team is only beginning to see repeat volunteers who can be upskilled into supervisor-style roles — the same retention challenge, and opportunity, facing many North American event organizers.



For North American sports organizers weighing whether to build a volunteer program market by market or invest in one from day one, Formula E's experience is a useful signal:

The earlier a dedicated workforce function and a shared system of record exist, the faster local recruitment, data compliance, and volunteer retention all improve together.

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

Section 8

Technical Insight: Security and Integrations

For IT leaders and operations teams supporting sports associations and event organizers, choosing a volunteer management system is a data governance decision as much as an operational one.

Volunteer records routinely include personal information, background check results, and — for programs involving minors, such as youth-focused multi-sport games — sensitive safeguarding data.

What compliance, security and IT leaders should look for in a Volunteer Management System:

- **Seamless integrations:** A volunteer management platform should offer broad native integrations for background checks, CRM systems, payroll, and existing tech stacks, so volunteer data doesn't become another disconnected silo.
- **Rigorous data security:** Look for ISO 27001 and SOC 2-aligned architecture, with auditable trails for all volunteer information — table stakes for organizations managing background checks and youth-safety compliance.
- **Data residency:** Where events involve international volunteers or cross-border data, ask where volunteer data is actually stored. Housing data in the country or region where the event takes place resolves many of the local data-protection concerns that otherwise stall volunteer programs before they launch.
- **Configurable scalability:** A platform should handle sharp spikes in traffic during major recruitment pushes — think a marathon's registration opening, or a state games' volunteer sign-up going live — without compromising performance or data integrity.

[More on Volunteer Data Security](#)



Automating Compliance

Compliance tracking is consistently the top technical requirement for sporting organizations that need to maintain safety certification and insurance coverage.

Automated credential tracking—flagging an expiring background check or certification before a volunteer is scheduled—turns a manual liability into an automated background process.

Expiring Background Check				10 Days
Name	Expiry date			
 Sophie Davis	8th May	 s.davis@lumex.co	 0421 593 804	
 Lechlan Reid	16			
 Mateo Silva	21			
 Ethan Zhao	2			
 Daniel Novak	31			

Expired Background Check				Overdue
 Shift applications temporarily suspended.				
Name	Expiry date			
 Jason Turner	13th April	 j.turner@noviq.com	 0463 884 376	
 Amara Patel	15th April	 a.patel@verdan.io	 0468 209 153	
 Owen Gallagher	19th April	 o.gallagher@brayn.co	 0418 230 577	
 Claudia Rossi	22nd April	 c.rossi@monti.io	 0409 577 862	

Section 9

What your leadership team needs to know

For executives and boards overseeing a sports association, marathon, or major event portfolio, volunteer programs sit at the intersection of brand, risk, and cost. The question leadership should be asking isn't whether volunteers matter — it's whether the organization can prove it.

Three key elements that unlock investment:

- **Proven ROI:** Automation of onboarding, scheduling, and communication translates directly into labor-value savings and staff capacity — the same shift that delivered a 75% cut in admin time for the Golf Association of Philadelphia.
- **Data-driven decisions:** Dashboards covering volunteer demographics, hours served, and retention give leadership a defensible, board-ready way to demonstrate the social and operational impact of the program to sponsors, city partners, and funders.
- **Risk mitigation:** Enforcing certification and background-check compliance before any volunteer steps on-site — with automated renewal prompts — protects the organization's brand and insurance position at events involving athletes, minors, or the public.

The organizations profiled in this white paper — a 125-year-old golf association, a fast-growing international obstacle race, and one of motorsport's newest series — share very little in common operationally.

What they share is a leadership decision to treat the volunteer program as core infrastructure, not a seasonal inconvenience.



Measuring the ROI of Rosterfy

The social value of a volunteer program is easy to feel and hard to prove.

Rosterfy's own customer base gives North American sports organizations a benchmark for what digital-first volunteer management is worth in hard operational terms.



75%

of your day-to-day admin automated

50%

of your time saved via automations

\$\$\$

6-figure annual savings commonly reported

Where the savings come from

- Scale without headcount:** Automating end-to-end onboarding allows a team to manage significantly more volunteers without adding headcount – the pattern seen at both the Golf Association of Philadelphia and MUDGIRL, where volunteer numbers grew while admin time fell.
- Cost savings:** Replacing fragmented spreadsheets, PDFs, and legacy databases with one system of record cuts the time coordinators spend reconciling data across tools.
- Build your own case:** For any organization considering the business case, modeling potential time and cost savings against current headcount and volunteer numbers is the fastest way to bring a data-backed proposal to leadership.

OPERATIONAL FUNCTION	TYPICAL MANUAL ORGANIZATION	WITH ROSTERFY
 DATA INTEGRITY	Spreadsheet chaos and silos.	Single source of truth across multiple events.
 ADMIN WORKLOAD	Heavy manual data entry.	75% reduction in admin thanks to automations.
 RETENTION	High "one-and-done" rates.	80% retention of volunteers typically achieved.
 COMPLIANCE	High risk of expired certification and background checks.	SOC 2 and ISO 27001 Automate certification reminders

Try our [ROI Calculator](#) to see what you can save



SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES



Sector: Major Events

Volunteers managed: 16,000+

Venues: 17

The Special Olympics World Games in Berlin brought together more than **16,000 volunteers to support athletes and spectators across 17 venues.**

With **56,116 registrations competing for just 9,227 shifts**, the volunteer management team faced the kind of recruitment surge that overwhelms manual processes almost immediately.

The challenge & solution:

Capitalizing on a rush of interest at the moment registrations open is one of the hardest problems in large-event volunteer management – respond too slowly, and enthusiastic applicants disengage before they're ever scheduled.

Automated recruitment journeys let a team of 41 administrators screen, interview, and schedule volunteers across 9,227 shifts using tried-and-tested workflows rather than building the process from scratch.

The impact:

- **16,000** volunteers supported the Games across 17 venues.
- **Over 1 million emails** were sent through the platform to keep volunteers informed.
- **20,924 interviews** were completed as part of the screening process.

For North American organizers planning multi-sport games, state games, or other high-volume events, the Special Olympics World Games program demonstrates that recruitment surges and screening at scale are solvable with the right automated workflows – without expanding the administrative team proportionally.





Future-Proofing Your Volunteer Workforce

From a century-old golf association protecting its heritage, to an obstacle race building a borderless community of “yellow army” volunteers, to a young motorsport series learning to recruit market by market, the organizations in this white paper prove the same point in three very different ways: scalability isn’t about adding staff. It’s about removing the manual ceiling on how many volunteers your team can recruit, train, schedule, and thank well.

For North American sports associations and marathon organizers, the opportunity is timed well. Formal volunteering is rebounding nationally, younger generations are showing the highest participation rates on record, and the technology to convert that interest into a reliable, engaged, returning workforce is mature and proven at scale — from 450 volunteers in Philadelphia to 16,000 at a global multi-sport Games.

Grow your community with Rosterfy.

Footnotes and resources:

1. [AmeriCorps & U.S. Census Bureau, Volunteering and Civic Life in America \(Nov 2024\).](#)
2. [Rosterfy Case Study: Golf Association of Philadelphia](#)
3. [Rosterfy Case Study: Sportera - MUDGIRL](#)
4. [Rosterfy Case Study: Special Olympics World Games](#)
5. [The Engaged Volunteer Podcast: Driving Change - Formula E's Volunteer Program](#)

[Book a demo with a Rosterfy specialist](#)