



Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP) 2026 Annual Meeting

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Preventing Volunteer Burnout: A Practical Guide for Byway Organizations

Volunteer burnout is one of the biggest challenges nonprofits face, especially when passionate people take on too much for too long. Here are practical strategies you can use to help protect your volunteers and strengthen long-term engagement.

1. Build Reasonable, Clearly Defined Roles

Burnout often happens when volunteers don't know what's expected — or when expectations quietly grow over time.

- Create written role descriptions (even short ones)
- Clearly define scope, time commitment, and boundaries
- Assign tasks based on skills, interest, and availability

Tip: Reassess roles on a regular basis.

2. Respect Time — Make It Flexible

Many volunteers leave because they feel overcommitted or guilty saying “no.”

- Offer shorter, bite-sized volunteer opportunities
- Use rotating schedules so the same people aren't always “on”
- Allow volunteers to pause or step back without judgment

Warning sign: If you hear “I'm the only one who does this,” burnout is already forming.

3. Strengthen Your Leadership Pipeline

Dependence on a few super-volunteers is one of the most common root causes of burnout.

- Pair every key volunteer with an understudy/backup
- Build a simple, ongoing training program
- Rotate leadership roles on a regular basis

This not only preserves energy but also builds organizational resilience.

4. Create a Supportive, Appreciative Culture

- Volunteers stay when they feel valued.
- Share impact stories regularly (“Because of you...”)
- Publicly acknowledge contributions (emails, social media, meetings)
- Provide small perks: snacks, shirts, appreciation events, handwritten notes

Appreciation doesn't have to cost anything - but it must be intentional.

5. Ensure They're Doing Work That Feels Meaningful

People burn out faster doing tasks that feel thankless or disconnected from the mission.

Help volunteers see:

- How their role matters
- The real-world outcomes of their efforts
- The beneficiaries of their work

Even a monthly “mission moment” can recharge purpose.

6. Encourage Feedback — and Listen to It

Volunteers often see opportunities or bottlenecks that staff miss.

- Hold quick “temperature checks”
- Use anonymous surveys
- Ask: “What should we stop, start, and continue?”

Taking a volunteer's idea seriously can re-energize them.

7. Promote Community and Social Connection

People stay not only for the mission — but for the people they serve with.

- Host low-stakes social gatherings
- Encourage buddy systems during activities
- Make new volunteers onboarding welcoming and relational

If volunteers have friends in the organization, retention skyrockets.

8. Provide Training and Confidence Building

Burnout isn't always about too much work - sometimes it's about feeling unprepared.

- Create simple onboarding guides
- Offer short training sessions or checklists
- Pair new volunteers with experienced mentors

Confidence breeds enjoyment, which reduces burnout.

9. Watch for Early Red Flags

Be proactive if volunteers show:

- Fatigue or irritability
- Reduced participation
- Reluctance to take on tasks they used to enjoy
- Lack of communication

A simple, caring check-in — not about tasks — can make a huge difference.

10. Make It Safe to Say “No”

This may be the most important factor.

- Normalize stepping back
- Encourage healthy boundaries
- Avoid guilt-driven recruitment

People stay longer when they aren't pressured to do everything.

11. Have fun

Most importantly – if volunteers are having fun they'll stay longer