

## **Immigration Detention Visitation Supplement**

Some organizations use volunteers for jobs that include office work and product creation, while others use volunteers for 'day of service' activities. Volunteering in an immigration detention visitation program is unique in that oftentimes, the manager will not directly oversee the volunteer. Visitation volunteers don't produce tangible work and often go to detention facilities in small groups or on their own, without direct contact with the volunteer manager. A visitation ministry leader's primary role is to offer ongoing encouragement and support, because the biggest danger facing visitation volunteers is burnout.

### **A Management System**

It is important to track and record volunteer hours for your own organization and potential grant-writing purposes. Even a simple Excel spreadsheet can work as a log for volunteers and their hours. There are also some more complex models that you can purchase. Both CIVIC, the national visitation network, and LIRS are currently investigating opportunities to purchase volunteer management systems for visitation ministries in which the cost would not be prohibitive. While neither system is running at this time, please reach out LIRS to find out if or when a system will be released. Such a system could allow volunteers to communicate with one another for rides, log their hours in an app on their mobile device, and provide managers with a way of easily collecting data on their volunteers. You can find out more by contacting Laura Griffin, LIRS Program Coordinator, at [LGriffin@lirs.org](mailto:LGriffin@lirs.org).

### **How to Address Substandard Performance**

Because visitation volunteers are working face-to-face with human tragedy that is perpetuated by the laws and policies of our government, many experience burnout. Read the Chapter V section on Additional Support to learn about some of the causes and signs of burnout. If you have a volunteer that is experiencing any of these signs, don't hesitate to invite the volunteer to take a few months off to find joy in other activities and recharge. You're not firing them or implying they are incapable for the job; you are caring for their emotional well-being as a good supervisor should. In all likelihood, they will be relieved to have time off and excited to begin visiting again in a few months.

### **Reflection**

Use the LIRS post-visit debrief guide to lead reflective and revitalizing conversations with your volunteers. These might happen after each visit or perhaps once a month. Provide a space for your volunteers to unleash frustrations and joys and to decompress with one another after an emotionally exhausting experience.

### **Peer Support**

Read under the Additional Support section of Chapter V about ideas for peer support. One method of encouraging volunteers to support one another is to establish a buddy system. Pair volunteers together and ask them to get coffee once a month to talk about their experiences with visitation. Encourage them to call each other after particularly emotional visits. Providing multiple avenues for volunteers to recharge is a powerful method to maintain optimism and keep volunteers coming back.

### **Bi-monthly National Call**

LIRS hosts a national visitation call for volunteers and ministry leaders every two months to talk about compassion fatigue and to share experiences. This can be a powerful way of empowering volunteers to understand that they are part of a national movement. The immigration detention system can be an isolating and lonely ordeal for both detainees and volunteers. The national call is an important reminder that there is a network of hundreds of people who care about the individuals in detention; it is a reminder that volunteers are not alone. Email [visitation@lirs.org](mailto:visitation@lirs.org) for a calendar of upcoming calls.

### **Celebrate Accomplishments**

It is common for volunteers to feel that their work is in vain when yet another detainee is deported. In the midst of such an emotionally exhausting system, it is important for volunteer coordinators to maintain hope and enthusiasm and to share that spirit with volunteers. Celebrate each success. If your facility has a high deportation rate, share the stories of individuals being released or winning their cases at other facilities around the country. You can read or ask for some of these stories on the CIVIC listserv, which you can ask to join by emailing [info@endisolation.org](mailto:info@endisolation.org). When possible, take time to celebrate positive immigration policy changes to inspire long-term optimism.

### **Say “Thank You”**

Expressing gratitude and restating the importance of visitation is essential to retaining volunteers. You can say “thank you” by sending holiday cards, hosting a potluck, or holding an annual volunteer appreciation day. These simple gestures can inspire people to become lifelong volunteers.

### **Learning Doesn’t End After the Volunteer Orientation**

Facilitate ongoing opportunities for learning about immigration and detention issues. Encourage your volunteers to join the CIVIC listserv by emailing [info@endisolation.org](mailto:info@endisolation.org). Some other ongoing learning ideas include starting an immigration-themed book club or hosting movie screenings. LIRS can offer a few different movies with accompanying discussion guides for such events. Email [visitation@lirs.org](mailto:visitation@lirs.org) for more resources.

### **Be Part of the Movement**

Share advocacy campaigns with your volunteers to engage them in wider immigration reform efforts. Your volunteers are part of a movement of people around the country who care about immigrants. Many will want to participate in advocacy efforts; you can help them access those opportunities at the [LIRS Action Center](#).