

# The Village Common of Rhode Island

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*Aging Better Together*

## Volunteer Handbook

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## **WELCOME**

Thank you for joining our community of mutual support. All across Rhode Island, volunteers like you are supporting and enriching the lives of older adults in their own homes and communities.

This handbook introduces The Village Common (TVC), its mission, and some of the many roles that volunteers play. It aims to lay out the basics of volunteering, and to give you some tips on being a good one. Know that your talents and commitment will make a difference.

## ***OUR MISSION***

The mission of The Village Common of Rhode Island is to fundamentally change the experience of growing older here in Rhode Island by fostering the creation of communities of mutual support – villages – across the state and by directly supporting their long-term sustainability.

## ***OUR CORE VALUES***

### **Generosity**

*Generosity is the lifeblood of The Village Common. Members and friends volunteer their time and resources to support one another.*

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

*The Village Common thrives on diversity and inclusiveness. We welcome all to join us, regardless of factors such as age, gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, faith, socio-economic status or income.*

### **Engagement**

*Engaging with others is central to our health and well-being. Our members and friends are active participants in social activities and volunteer work that nourish our connections to one another and to the larger community.*

### **Collaboration**

*We embrace the spirit of collaboration. We contribute to and benefit from working with each other, and with other organizations and communities.*

### **Sustainability**

*Our sustainability rests upon good governance and fiscal responsibility. Our communities of mutual support remain strong through the financial and volunteer support of members and friends.*

## GOALS OF THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

- To support the mission of TVC by providing services that allow our members to remain in their own homes and communities.
- To employ a volunteer-first policy: We rely on volunteers' generosity and skills to provide these services. When necessary, we may be able to connect our members with outside assistance.
- To build and nurture community by providing opportunities for connection among volunteers and members as they participate in social programs, share experiences and discover mutual interests.
- To ensure that volunteers have a rewarding service experience.

## STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE VILLAGE COMMON

TVC is a non-profit, membership organization that aims to develop and support local member villages. Our executive director works with the board of directors, support staff and myriad volunteers to this end. An advisory council works with the board to provide vital community and state-wide connections. Steering committees (or comparable leadership groups) for local villages make policies, develop procedures, recruit members and volunteers, organize events and much more.

TVC is a volunteer-driven organization. Our volunteers, many of whom are also members, contribute time, skills, expertise, energy and thought to support the organization at all levels. Our organization's programs and services evolve based on our members' needs and our volunteers' abilities. TVC underpins the work of local villages and volunteers in support of its members.

## THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE VILLAGE COMMON

Volunteers provide myriad services in support of their local villages and TVC. These include working on committees and teams both at village and TVC levels, assisting with office tasks, writing for the newsletter and much more. Many volunteers work directly with members to provide, among other things, transportation, in-home help, technical assistance and errands. Others work behind the scenes. You can choose what suits your interests, time and talents. Volunteers often add roles to their rosters or move from one "job" to another as they become familiar with their villages and with TVC. Volunteers are expected to attend orientation and training sessions along with occasional refreshers/updates.

**Note: Potential volunteers are required to undergo a background check (done online). The results are confidential and will be shared only with TVC and the potential volunteer.**

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN LOCAL VILLAGES**

These vary from village to village, but many common to all villages are described below. Some require training beyond the general orientation, as noted.

### **Membership Ambassador (additional training required)**

Membership ambassadors meet with potential members to have a conversation about TVC and the specific village of interest. This conversation covers services, activities, membership dues and more. If membership seems beneficial, the ambassador helps fill out the membership application, collects payment information, provides the member with a member's handbook and welcomes the member to our community.

### **Driver (driving record check, vehicle registration, auto insurance information, some additional training)**

Drivers either provide rides or do errands.

- **Rides:** Each village determines what the *general* maximum distances are for rides. Typical destinations include a doctor's office, grocery store, hair salon, veterinarian, lecture, walk with friends or other social events. A volunteer may always say "not available" when asked - no reason required. A volunteer may also choose to drive greater-than-usual distances.
- **Errands:** Errands by definition do NOT involve transporting a member. Some examples: Picking up prescriptions, buying stamps, picking up pre-ordered groceries or doing the shopping.

### **Village Friend**

At a member's request, a village friend calls to check in, or just to chat and get acquainted. For example, calls may be welcome after surgery or following a death in the family. Friends may visit, you might play chess, take a walk, have a cup of tea - no matter what, you'd get to know each other.

### **Technology Support**

Volunteers assist members with devices and systems, including computers, tablets, smart phones and TVs - whatever the volunteer feels competent to do. If volunteers are unavailable, or a service request exceeds our volunteers' collective abilities, we may be able to suggest reasonably priced outside support.

### **Home Help**

Volunteers help with tasks such as simple repairs, dealing with screens and storm windows, replacing hard-to-reach light bulbs or smoke detector batteries, hanging pictures, fixing a leaky faucet, organizing books or other similar small jobs.

## **Steering Committee Member**

Each village has a steering committee (or comparable leadership group). Steering committees devise policies and procedures for their village; identify and solve problems; plan social and community events; engage in outreach initiatives and volunteer recruitment; and are actively engaged with the welfare of village members. Steering committees hear from volunteers when a member has challenges of any kind and then work to address these, using village/TVC resources or trying to find outside assistance. This is the nuts-and-bolts governance group for each village. Being a steering committee member is a great way to get involved in all kinds of projects.

## **TVC-WIDE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

These opportunities are not tied to a specific village but serve the entire TVC community.

### **Office Assistant**

An office assistant may help with administrative tasks for TVC, for example, preparing mailings, filing or entering data into a database. There may be long-term or one-off projects. If you are interested, please contact the TVC office (401-228-8683).

### **Service Coordinator (requires additional training, a home computer, a phone and an internet connection)**

Service coordinators work from home on their own computers using both a database and the service coordinators' Google account (gmail, drive and calendar). They match a member's request with an available volunteer. Service coordinators generally cover one weekly four-hour shift on a weekday and may also choose to volunteer to cover one weekend a month. If you are interested, please contact the TVC office (401-228-8683).

### **TVC-Wide Committees**

TVC-wide committees, listed below, welcome volunteers with experience or interest in a range of topics. Your steering committee members can direct you to the right person for more information about any of these.

- Board Development Committee
- Communications Committee
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee
- Finance Committee
- Fund Development Committee
- Health and Wellness Committee

## **PRIVACY, ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

TVC expects volunteers to exercise good judgment and to treat members and other volunteers with courtesy and respect. Volunteers are responsible for keeping confidential all proprietary or privileged information they may encounter while serving as a volunteer, whether this information involves a member or another volunteer. Examples include:

- Information about a member's or volunteer's health (physical or mental) or finances.
- Information about a member's medications (volunteers often pick up prescriptions).
- Other personal information a member or volunteer shares with you that doesn't indicate to you a crisis or emergency.

Volunteers *must* decline gifts or tips if offered. Instead they may suggest donations to TVC in lieu of a gift or tip.

## **WELL-BEING CONCERNS AND REPORTING ABUSE**

If a volunteer has concerns about the well-being of any member, these concerns should be reported promptly to the volunteer's village steering committee. Problems may include signs of cognitive impairment, increased difficulty in seeing or hearing, decreased mobility, or unsafe or unsanitary living conditions. Any signs of elder abuse or major injury should be reported immediately to the TVC office (401-228-8683).

## **A WORD ABOUT BOUNDARIES**

Volunteers get to know village members over time as they provide services and socialize with members at village and TVC events. TVC of course encourages friendships between members and volunteers. However, remember that all service requests *must* come through service coordinators. Also important: TVC volunteers do not provide personal/medical care. If a member makes such a request, please inform a village steering committee member. The village (and TVC office) will work with the member to find appropriate care (e.g., home health aides).

Volunteers are never obliged to provide a service, even if the requesting member has become a friend. Volunteers should always notify their village steering committee if they feel a boundary has been crossed. Steering committee members will work with the member and the volunteer to find a good resolution.

## **REPRESENTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION**

Volunteers must not act on behalf of The Village Common of Rhode Island, or make statements representing The Village Common of Rhode Island, unless they have been authorized to do so by the board of directors or the executive director. For example, volunteers should not make statements to the media without prior authorization.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q: What if I am asked to do something I just do not want to do?**

A: It is perfectly okay to say no.

**Q: What if I am uncomfortable answering a question posed by a member or don't know the answer?**

A: Tell the member that you don't know the answer, and you will have someone get back to them. Check in with someone on your village's steering committee and work together from there.

**Q: I'm elsewhere for several months during the year - may I still volunteer?**

A: Absolutely, just let us know in advance when you're leaving and returning.

**Q: Whom do I contact if there is a medical emergency?**

A: **Call 911!** Once the member is receiving medical care, please call the TVC office (401-228-8683) to report the emergency. The office staff will contact family and others listed in the member's profile.

## **VOLUNTEER TIPS**

- Know what you want to get out of volunteering. You may volunteer to meet new friends, enjoy the satisfaction of helping others or because you believe in our mission - or all of these. Whatever your reasons, you WILL make a difference!
- Please tell us about your skills, interests and experiences. We'll help you figure out how these could be useful, enlightening, educational and enjoyable for all.
- Be willing to give and take honest feedback. Your ideas and constructive criticism are always welcome.
- Most important: Bring your heart, your sense of humor and your enthusiasm.



## **Appendix 1**

### **REQUESTS FOR SERVICES**

#### **How it starts:**

- A member calls Member Services (401-441-5240) and speaks to the service coordinator on duty. Service coordinators are on duty Monday-Friday, 9am to 5pm, in two four-hour shifts (9am-1pm and 1pm-5pm). One service coordinator covers calls (via voicemail) on weekends. Service coordinators work from home; they are not together in a central office.
- The service coordinator asks questions (or calls the member back if responding to a voicemail) to collect the necessary information and enter it into the database system we use, called Club Express. After entering the request, the service coordinator selects potential volunteers for this service and sends them a scripted email.
- Who is a potential volunteer?
  - In general (but there are exceptions), the request goes only to those volunteers in the member's village. For example, a request for a Providence member will only be sent to Providence volunteers.
  - When volunteers sign up, their "jobs" are noted in Club Express and only volunteers who have signed up for that type of service will receive the request. For example, a ride request will only go to volunteers who have signed up to provide rides.
  - Volunteers can block off certain times (mornings, afternoons, evenings) and days (Monday through Sunday) when they're routinely not available. They can also block off more extended times, so-called "vacation" times, when they won't be available. Club Express honors daily availability and vacation schedules, such that a volunteer will not receive a service request for days/times they are marked as unavailable. A volunteer may call a service coordinator (or send an email to [services@villagecommonri.org](mailto:services@villagecommonri.org)) at any point to update their daily availability and vacation schedules.

#### **A request is sent out:**

- The service coordinator sends out scripted email requests to the potential volunteers from [services@villagecommonri.org](mailto:services@villagecommonri.org). The request contains contact information for the member and a brief description of the service, including type of service (e.g., ride, errand, tech support), date/time, and destination (if a ride). When members sign up, we note any information of use to a volunteer in the member's profile, and this information is also included in service requests. Examples include hearing difficulties, no cell phone, doesn't use email, uses a walker, and needs help on stairs. If a volunteer can't assist as needed, they should simply decline the request.

- Volunteers may receive many requests. It is important that they reply quickly letting us know whether or not they'll be able to take the request. A simple "Yes, I can" or "No, I can't" is sufficient. A volunteer never has to explain why they are declining a request.
- Service coordinators keep track of requests and continue contacting volunteers who haven't responded until the request is filled or it's clear there isn't a volunteer for the request.

### **Someone volunteers:**

- Once a volunteer responds to an email saying they can take the request, the service coordinator checks Club Express to see whether the request has already been taken by another volunteer or if the request is still open.
  - If the request has already been taken, the service coordinator replies to the volunteer, letting them know that another volunteer is confirmed for the request. No further action is required on the part of the volunteer.

*Important:* Volunteers should not contact the member without receiving a confirmation; someone else may have already taken the request.

- If the request has not already been taken, the service coordinator sends a scripted confirmation email from [services@villagecommonri.org](mailto:services@villagecommonri.org) to the volunteer *and* to the member. (Note, however, that not all members have or use email.)

*Important:* Once a volunteer receives a confirmation email, they should call the member ASAP to let them know they'll be driving, picking up groceries, etc. If the service allows flexibility in date or time (an errand, for example) or if there are other arrangements to consider (for example, using a credit card), the volunteer and member work this out.

- The volunteer who was confirmed for the service and the member both receive an automatically generated email reminder from [services@villagecommonri.org](mailto:services@villagecommonri.org) two days before and on the day of the service. There is no need to respond to these emails. (Remember that some members don't have or use email, so they won't receive these reminders.)
- Volunteers should call the member again the day before the service to confirm.
- If the service involves driving the member or going into the member's home, the volunteer should inquire about Covid symptoms, vaccinations and masks.
- If a confirmed service provider must cancel the request because of unforeseen circumstances, they should immediately call Member Services (401-441-5240) and send an email to [services@villagecommonri.org](mailto:services@villagecommonri.org). If there is time, the service coordinator will try to find another volunteer to take the service.

*NOTE: There are two ways in which volunteers can sign up directly for open service requests, Automated Open Requests (AOR) and Volunteer Self Signup (VSS). Special training is provided for those wishing to use these options.*

## **Appendix 2**

### **TIPS FOR DRIVERS**

#### **Once you've volunteered to drive a member or do an errand:**

- Call that person right away to confirm. Not all members have or check email.
- You'll receive automatically generated email reminders. No response needed!
- Call the day before or the morning of the ride or errand to re-confirm. Be sure to re-confirm both the destination and the pick-up time.
- If it's an errand involving money, you and the member will work out payment in advance (they may have an account, give you cash or a credit card, etc.) as well as drop-off details.
- If a ride, you and the member will discuss how the pick-up will work. Generally, they'll be outside at X time.

#### **There and back again:**

- Be sure you have the member's name, address, phone number and destination with you.
- If they're not outside when you arrive, wait a couple of minutes, then call.
- Get out of the car, greet them and introduce yourself (especially if this is the first time you've driven them).
- If they seem hesitant, ask if they'd like to take an arm to get to the car.
- If they're using a walker or wheelchair, get them settled in the car, THEN fold up the equipment and stow it. If unsure how, ask! Members are experts.
- They can close the door, or you can; if you do, be sure hands/feet are in.
- People may have favorite routes or be backseat drivers. Remain patient and polite. They may know best, but then again, they may not.
- If they don't have a cell phone, jot down your cell number (a small pad kept in the car is handy). A receptionist will call when the member is through. If you need to meet the member inside, let the receptionist know you'll be coming in.

- In bad weather, you may want to call the member when you are at the door of the establishment, or if you're heading in to escort them back to your car. Good to have an umbrella handy.
- Once back at the member's home, do whatever's necessary to get them safely out of the car and to the door. Lend a hand with bundles, purses, keys, etc.
- Keep in mind that people on their way to or from medical appointments may be anxious/nervous, etc. and not at their best. Rely on your common sense, patience, good manners, listening skills and humor to make this a positive experience for both of you.
- Drivers may NOT accept tips, presents, etc. If someone offers, instead suggest that they make a donation to TVC.