



## Protect your nonprofit by cross-training staff

What would happen if one of your managers was suddenly forced to take long-term disability leave? Or an accounting staffer quit without notice? It's possible that your not-for-profit's work could come to a standstill — unless you've cross-trained your employees.

### Problem and solution

Cross-training employees — teaching them how to do each other's jobs — can help protect your organization from an absence in the short or long term. The potential reasons for an absence are almost countless: An employee may suddenly die, become sick or disabled, have a baby, take a vacation or military leave, be called to jury duty, retire or resign.

Having someone else on staff set to jump in and take the reins can keep your nonprofit up and running without much of a hitch.

### Your organization benefits

Cross-training involves teaching accounting department and other staffers the basics of one another's jobs. With cross-trained employees, you can temporarily shift people to fill an empty seat until the missing staffer returns or you're able to hire someone. Cross-training can also provide relief when certain departments go through busy periods and need extra help.

For example, let's say your accounts receivable function is hectic in the fall when annual membership dues are processed. Cross-training could enable you to, for example, move a development or admin employee to help out for a few weeks.

There's also the value of a fresh pair of eyes. An employee who's temporarily filling in for another person will bring a new perspective to operations and may be able to come up with process

improvements. Cross-training can also help prevent fraud because potential thieves know that another employee may view their files at any time.

### **Staffers also gain**

Employees also benefit from cross-training. If the task the cross-trained person learns is *vertical* — it requires more responsibility or skill than that employee's normal duties — the cross-training will likely make the employee feel more valuable to the organization.

If the task is *lateral* — with the same level of responsibility as the employee's routine duties — the cross-trained employee still gains by getting a better understanding of the department as well as a change of pace.

### **Getting started**

You can start the cross-training process by appointing a small task force to 1) determine which positions should be cross-trained, 2) segregate the duties of those positions and 3) create an implementation plan. Make sure you reassure staffers that cross-training doesn't mean that their jobs are in jeopardy. In fact, everyone in your organization is likely to benefit from the process.

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