

Volunteers on the Clock: Why Time Tracking is so Important

By Kara Kaczmarzyk

Why, each month, are you urged to email in your hours (or, to write them in a sign in book...or, to add them to your IBA survey report...or, to mark them on your field trip waiver)? There are a few reasons why we insist on this time tracking.

First of all, it's a great measure of the impact that our stellar crew of hundreds of volunteers have on our organization, and, in a larger sense, on birds and nature in southeastern Arizona.

Accurately tracking the number of volunteers and volunteer hours devoted to a project are so necessary when, as a nonprofit, Tucson Audubon applies for grants. A recent grant award from The Heritage Foundation is a great example. Tucson Audubon applied for this grant from the Arizona Game and Fish Department to support activities around the importance of watchable wildlife, one of the activities being the 2012 Tucson Bird and Wildlife Festival. In the budget area of the application, we were able to leverage the time donated by the many volunteers who help make the festival a success as part of our match. We now have over \$15,000 approved thanks partly to the volunteers who support the festival. Other initiatives that are grant-funded thanks partly to our volunteer support include for the IBA and TogetherGreen programs.

It is also helpful when assessing program effectiveness and efficiency to consider the full picture of what is involved in a project. The time spent to implement a program would, naturally, include how much time is volunteered. Balancing this among a number of factors helps to inform our current activities and future endeavors, to ensure Tucson Audubon continues to be as effective as possible in our charges of environmental conservation, restoration, and education.

With this emphasis on time tracking in mind, it is also important to note that the number of hours volunteered is only one very limited way of understanding the full, significant impact that volunteers provide for an organization such as Tucson Audubon. Think about the TogetherGreen volunteer workdays for example. These see many first-time volunteers coming out for four hours of one day, but the work that is accomplished is huge, and cumulatively, the hours add up. On the other hand, we have one-time projects that are long term in their production, like the Tucson Audubon library. One volunteer has been working for a year to get this amazing service ready for the public. Others are ongoing, such as our nature shops. Each service provided by Tucson Audubon volunteers is unique and can be quantified, and qualified, by many different factors, some of which we will discuss in future articles.

So whether you are logging your 1,000th hour or your first, know how important it is, and how grateful we are for your service.

