

2021 Volunteer Feedback Report

Inland Seas Education Association



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Volunteer Numbers

81 volunteers were active with Inland Seas during 2021, donating 6,191* recorded** hours.

**As of December 8, 2021*

***Actual hours are likely higher, as volunteers sometimes forget to record hours or turn in timesheets.*

Volunteer Survey

The following information is compiled from the 2021 volunteer feedback survey. The questions on the survey included general questions applicable to all volunteers as well as questions specific to the crew and instructor volunteer positions. The link to the survey was disbursed through the monthly Volunteer Newsletter. The survey return rate was around 41% of total active volunteers. We received 33 surveys out of the 80 volunteers who donated hours in 2021.

Volunteer Experience

General Survey

All volunteer respondents **agreed or completely agreed** with the following statement:

- ISEA staff supported me by providing guidance and answering questions along the way.
- I am learning more about the Great Lakes as a result of participating with Inland Seas.

During this year's unique and demanding season, volunteers at ISEA felt supported by staff and comfortable asking questions, all while learning together about the Great Lakes. These elements of our volunteer experience are imperative; we will work to maintain this supportive learning environment.

Most volunteer respondents **agreed or completely agreed** with the following statements:

- I feel like my time is valued.
- The communication between ISEA and me was clear, consistent, and helpful.
- I am enjoying my volunteer experience.

Our programs cannot run well without the help of our volunteer team. These statements represent foundational goals of our volunteer program, and it is essential that they are met. ISEA staff are always striving for better communication with the volunteers. Clear communication helps to ensure a positive and fun experience.

Instructor Survey

Instructors were asked about how the students are interacting with teaching materials, the efficacy of the small-group stewardship discussion, and if they are interested in learning to be a lead instructor.

SCHOOLSHIP EXPERIENCE

- Most instructors observe students examine, touch, and talk about materials **more than 75% of the time**.
- All instructors **agree or strongly agree** that the Schoolship program is fun for participants, and that participants demonstrate awe and curiosity.
- Most instructors **agree or strongly agree** that they would like training in good teaching techniques.

The Schoolship program, above all, is about immersive and experiential learning. Instructors are there to guide students through each station's learning objectives using a combination of conversation and hands-on materials.

Moving forward:

- We want to make the program as fun for our volunteers as it is for our participants by providing more focused training on teaching techniques.

STEWARDSHIP DISCUSSION

- Most of the instructors **agree or completely agree** that the stewardship questions on the back page of the logbook help guide the stewardship conversation.
- Most instructors are **neutral** on whether or not the students are able to answer the stewardship questions meaningfully.
- Most instructors **agree or completely agree** that it is more helpful to have the lead instructor lead the stewardship discussion.

Near the end of the Schoolship sail we take a break from engaging students in Great Lakes information and ask them to reflect on everything they have seen that day. According to the open-ended responses, volunteers agree that the stewardship questions provided help guide the conversation, but they do not feel confident that the conversation is impactful given that the students are quite tired by this point.

Moving forward:

- This portion of the program lacks training. In 2022 training we will create more opportunities to practice the stewardship discussion.
- The stewardship discussion is all about reflection; leading reflective conversations will be included in the training techniques mentioned above.

TRAINING

- Most instructors **agree or completely agree** that training is sufficient for them to feel successful onboard.
- Similarly, most instructors **agree or completely agree** that the transition from shadowing to teaching was easy.
- **Half** of surveyed instructors said they would be willing to attend a lead instructor volunteer training.

A robust training program is necessary for our volunteers to feel confident leading students in our programming experiences. Instructors who feel confident in their ability to lead a station are more likely to take the next step to enter the lead instructor role.

Moving forward:

- We will be hosting a lead instructor training because a good amount of volunteers are excited by the idea!
- Some respondents said that they were not ready to lead a program because they have not taught every station- that is not a requirement! We encourage anyone to join us to see what it's all about.

Crew Survey

The crew were asked about scheduling and crew training. Of those surveyed, 41.2% were certified crew and 58.8% were Crew in Training (CIT.)

Scheduling

- 88.2% of volunteers agree that signing up for crew shifts is **easy and straightforward**.
- 58.8% of volunteers agreed that they would rather continue scheduling on a **week by week basis**.
- 94.1% of volunteers felt that the **number of sails** they worked during the season was **just right**.

The 2021 season was full of Schoolships, public sails, long transits, and programs in away ports. Our volunteers did not report feeling overwhelmed with the sailing opportunities. In fact, one volunteer responded that they did not get to sail enough.

Moving forward:

- Most volunteer crew are not interested in a consistent crewing schedule. We will maintain course with our Google Doc signup.
- Some individual responses asked for a more direct conversation about weekly scheduling. We are always open to talking about how our program schedule and a volunteer's personal schedule can fit better together.

Crew Training

- **88%** of crew **agreed/completely agreed** that other crew members are supportive of learning aboard the ship.
- **71%** of crew **agreed/completely agreed** that crew training was sufficient for them to feel successful on the ship.
 - **12%** of the surveyed volunteer crew *disagreed* with this statement.
- **76%** of crew **agreed/completely agreed** that workshops were comprehensive in what knowledge was needed aboard the ship.
 - **12%** of the surveyed volunteer crew *disagreed* with this statement.

Thorough training is essential to safe operation of the ship. We are grateful and lucky to have a volunteer crew team that takes their job seriously.

Moving forward:

- This year we tried a half-day, dockside crew training event in September that many of the CIT found very helpful. In the coming season we will make time to increase the hands-on learning opportunities like this for our crew.
- We will continue to encourage a ship culture that empowers crew members to ask for help and/or clarification about a policy or procedure.

ISEA Culture

An organization's culture is a mix of leadership, values, behaviors, attitudes, and traditions that create the working environment. The workplace culture plays a powerful role in volunteer satisfaction and relationship building. ISEA is committed to maintaining a positive working culture. All survey respondents were asked about the culture at ISEA.

- 94% of volunteers agree that staff contribute to a positive volunteer culture.
- 97% of volunteers said they have fun at ISEA!



Top words about ISEA: Fun, educational, learn, amazing, and exciting!

Comments about the culture at ISEA:

- ★ The culture is demanding, respectful, thought-provoking, rewarding and fun.
- ★ This is a great place to learn and enjoy.
- ★ You have a great atmosphere, very supportive. I am not an expert on marine ecology, but you make me feel like I am making a contribution.
- ★ It's hard for me to put into exact words, the culture of ISEA. But at the end of my volunteer shift I always feel positive and leave with a smile on my face.
- ★ I can't imagine a greater group of people to volunteer with.

Looking Forward

- 94% of volunteers responded that they will be volunteering again next year!

Reasons for volunteering again include:

- ★ Because it makes me feel useful and youthful.
- ★ I love spending time on the boat with the volunteers and staff members. It's fun!
- ★ It's what I do!
- ★ I enjoy it and want to learn more.

Suggestions for improving the volunteer experience include:

- Have more team building events during the sailing season for instructors outside of sailing time.
- I'd love to see a written document of the ambassador's role. ... I like to arrive on the boat knowing what's expected of me ahead of time.
- Dockside training scenarios without students/customers onboard.
- Control the weather!

Moving forward:

- While we cannot control the weather, we can always improve our communication.
- We are tentatively planning to host the annual Spring Potluck in the 2022 season!
- As an organization, Inland Seas Education Association is committed to creating an inclusive space for a diverse learner audience and volunteer community. A part of this commitment is holding space for conversations about underrepresented populations in outdoor recreation. Building an inclusive space begins with our community culture; we are grateful to be doing this work with our volunteers.