

2023 ISEA Volunteer Program Evaluation Report



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Volunteer Numbers:

In 2023 Inland Seas Education Association had **80** active volunteers who gave **9126*** recorded hours** to the organization. Crew volunteers recorded 4,554 hours onboard. 1,659 hours were recorded for program instruction on Schoolship and ROV programs. Every hour donated is a valuable contribution toward our work to inspire future stewards of the Great Lakes!

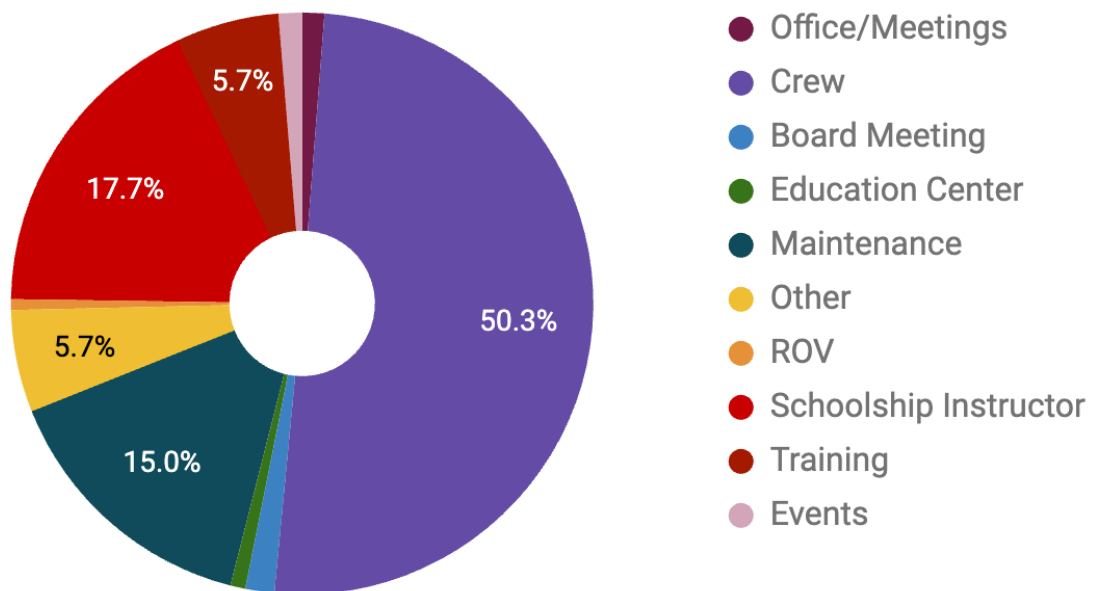
Our volunteer team grew by **38** members this year! **23** of those volunteers gave over **10** hours.

**As of January 12, 2024*

*** Actual hours are likely higher as some volunteers do not record hours*

Volunteer Hour Distribution

Jan - Dec 2023



In 2023 we changed the hour-reporting on ship transits. Following Coast Guard systems, when a volunteer is aboard for an overnight program or transit, they are now asked to record 24 hours for each day of service. If a volunteer is living onboard the ship for three days, they recorded 72 hours on their timesheet. This, combined with the 5-week *Alliance* transit from the East coast to Suttons Bay,

contributes to this year's drastic difference between crew volunteer hours and other volunteer hours. It is not unusual for crew volunteers to accrue more hours than other volunteer programs. In 2022 crew members gave 36.1% of all hours donated, the largest share. However, a difference this significant feels important to detail further. Crew members, thank you for all that you did to make this year a success.

General Survey

The following questions were asked to all volunteers regardless of which role they filled (Instructors, CIT/Crew, Clerical, Gardening, and Board Members.) In total we had **39** survey respondents. Thank you to everyone who shared their feedback. If you volunteered during the 2023 season and would like to provide feedback, please reach out to our volunteer coordinator, Rachel Ratliff, at rratliff@schoolship.org.

All respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** to the following statements:

- I received adequate practical training for my time as a volunteer.
- I am enjoying my volunteer experience with ISEA.
- The staff supported me by providing guidance and answering questions along the way.

Most respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** to the following statements:

- I feel like my time is valued. (94.8%)
- I feel like my contribution to ISEA is making a difference. (97%)
- The communication between ISEA and me was clear, consistent, and helpful. (89.7%)
- I am learning more about the Great Lakes as a result of participating with Inland Seas. (97%)

Of the above respondents, those who did not “agree” answered that they felt “neutral” to each of the prompts.

Moving forward:

- We are interested in continuing to strengthen the relationships between volunteers and interns/seasonal staff. There is so much Great Lakes knowledge shared during training and during program preparation!

- Our scheduling is getting better each year. ISEA is working to get dates on all calendars as soon as possible! During spring training we will be including the volunteer celebration dates so team members can plan for those as much as they plan for a Schoolship program!

Volunteer Program Evaluation

The following questions were posed to volunteers who participated in program instruction. In total we had **20 responses** to this survey.

The Schoolship Experience:

All respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- The Schoolship program is fun for participants.
- Participants in the program demonstrate awe, wonder, and curiosity.

Most respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- I feel comfortable connecting with students of all ages. (95%)
- I have a solid understanding of the station material I am teaching. (95%)

Positive experiences are necessary to encourage future stewardship and it is delightful to read that our volunteers believe that our shipboard programming is fun and exciting for students! The time that our volunteer team spends with interested learners is impactful work. It is important that the educators feel comfortable working with students and understand their teaching material.

Additional comments on the topic included:

- “With large groups, rotations are too rapid.”
- “When teaching rotations for Next Gen are less than 15 minutes, the amount of ‘hands on’ time is reduced significantly.”
- “One challenge is trying to assess how much background information the kids have. For example, have they heard of invasive species? Time management is a challenge. I appreciate when the lead gives warnings about the amount of time left in each rotation.”
- “I have noticed that it is hard for students to write in the log books when they are using their leg as a hard surface as well as having plenty of water around. Some just don’t want to

participate in this way. [...] I think there are so many things going on that make it hard to pay attention. I wonder if a couple more 2 minute sessions of quiet would help.”

Some comments have been edited for length and clarity.

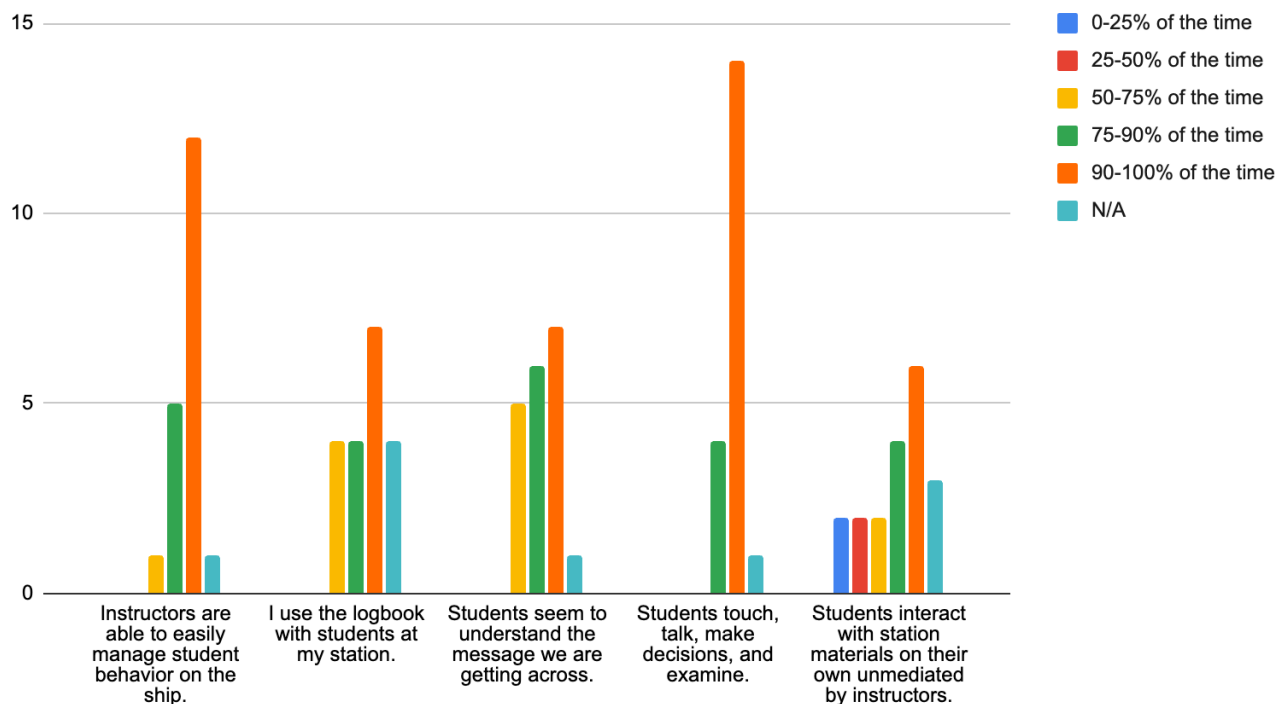
ISEA staff have had internal discussions regarding the length of station time. We are always working to streamline the process of getting students off of the bus, through the bathrooms, and equipped with their nametag and logbook. It is easy to lose time in the education center and this resulted in sails having shorter learning stations.

Moving Forward:

- ISEA staff will be more swift with our pre-sail preparation, especially on days when the school arrives late.
- Training will emphasize one specific learning objective for each science station. This learning objective will act as the primary focus with students, and instructors are welcome and encouraged to grow their subject knowledge over time.

Teaching Rotations:

While teaching, how often do you observe the following during each rotation?



The above graph details survey respondents' observations during their teaching rotations. According to these answers, our instructors are successful in creating a welcoming environment for students to touch program materials and talk about their observations. Similarly, most instructors feel confident in their ability to manage their student groups.

Our final prompt, "Students interact with station materials *on their own*," had the widest range of responses. This is an interesting prompt because most often, the instructor must hand the students their learning materials. We would not want students to make a mad-grab for the chemicals in the Water Quality station, or reach with wild & reckless abandon into the fish tank. However, there are opportunities built-in for free-play, such as the wooden *Inland Bucket* at our Seamanship station and the new Great Lakes Challenge station. The wide spectrum of answers is a great representation of our varied teaching styles at ISEA. In truth, the ability for students to safely interact with materials without guidance varies by station. ISEA will continue to support instructors in leading students in whatever way feels comfortable and safe.

In this year's survey there were an increased number of respondents who did not participate in a NextGen Schoolship program. Instead, they volunteer exclusively at our away ports or during summer programs. These programs do not use logbooks. This explains the increase in "N/A" response to the logbook question. (ROV program instructors are also represented here and there is no logbook for that program.) If you feel like you are struggling to use the logbook during your NextGen program, remember that it isn't required for a successful teaching experience. It is merely another tool in your teaching toolbox.

Comments regarding teaching rotations and program materials included:

- "I would like a quick guide to the microscope, in print at the station."
- "Sometimes there is an issue with the hose not draining at the benthos station."
- "Naturally, there is always a mix of students and emotions: afraid of being out on the water, shy, gregarious, super excited, not wanting to be taught/disrespectful, curious & ready to learn. I have witnessed several times when parents on board are not tuned into keeping kids in line or to be respectful, but rather not paying attention & on their phones."
- "I love having students at my station and hope they enjoy what we do!"

Moving forward:

- Thank you for telling us what you need to better guide the learning stations! A microscope quick guide and benthos hose have been added to the list of things to update for the 2024 season.
- Student management is important for success during a program. Our outdoor programs are a *very* stimulating environment that can lead students to exhibit any number of behaviors. In training we will discuss why a student may feel disengaged and how to support them in their time onboard.

Training & Calendar Sign-Up:

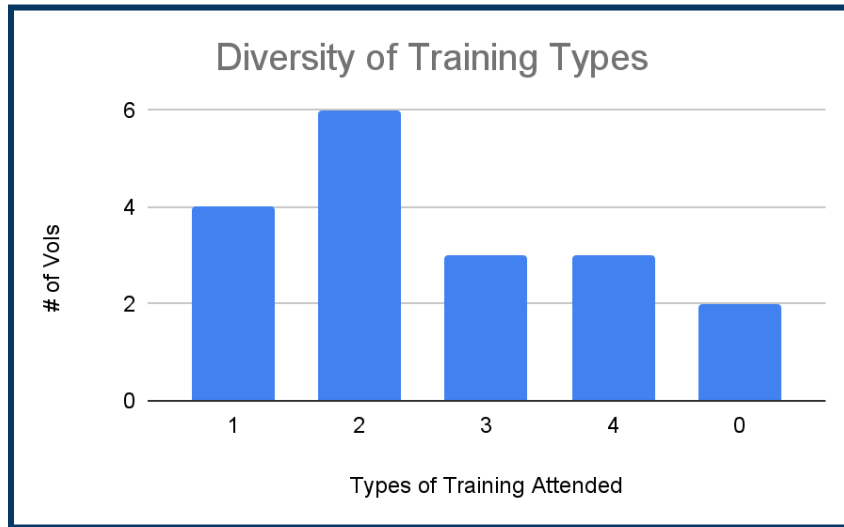
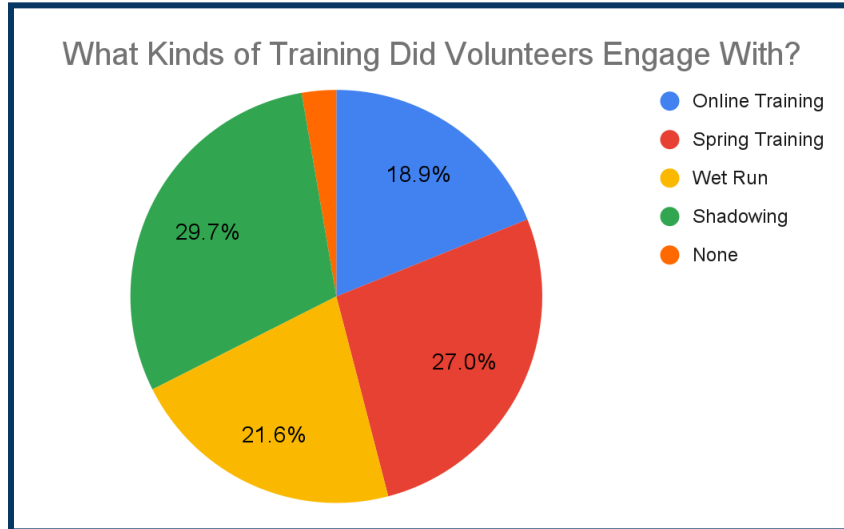
The following is related to our training procedures and signing up for volunteer shifts.

All respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- Training for the Schoolship and ROV programs were sufficient for me to feel successful during the program.
- Signing up for instructor shifts was easy and straightforward.

Most respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- The transition from training to teaching was easy. (89%)



The above figures show how survey respondents engaged with ISEA training in 2023. Since 2020, ISEA has made an effort to diversify our training offerings and to make some training available year-round. It is encouraging to see that of our 20 respondents, 60% engaged in 2+ types of training! Shadowing an instructor is required for new volunteers and we welcomed 15 new instructors this season, making shadowing our most utilized training opportunity.

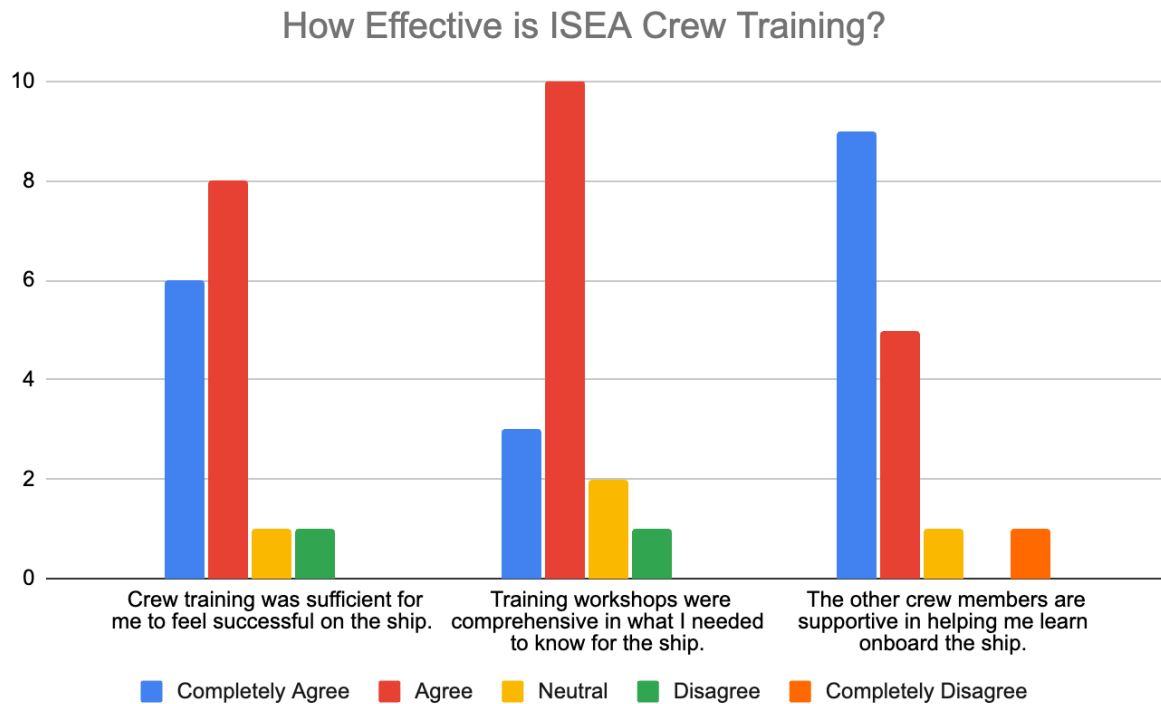
Moving forward:

- As our program season grows, it is imperative that we are able to engage with anyone interested in volunteering with us at any time of the year. Continuing to develop our online training suite is a high priority.
- In 2023 we introduced a “Shadowing Checklist” for first-timers onboard. We will work to more effectively integrate the checklist into the shadowing experience.

Crew Program Evaluation

The following questions were posed to volunteers who served as crew and/or “crew in training” (CIT) during the 2023 season. In total we had **15 responses** to this survey. Of those respondents, **8** were Crew members and **7** were CIT.

Crew Training



The above chart details how volunteers are feeling about the effectiveness of our training process. Overall, responses indicate that our training suite (online training videos, shoreside training, onboard training, and shakedown sails) is sufficient for most respondents to feel successful in their role. Additionally, crew members feel supported by other crew members while working onboard. It is important to note that while many team members are feeling satisfied with training, there is always room to improve.

Comments about ISEA's training process included:

- Jack Messer's involvement in training is extremely helpful!
 - *(Don't we know it! Thank you Jack!)*
- More frequent drills are needed.

Volunteer willingness to serve as crew onboard our programs is not a gift with which we want to be dismissive. It is a skilled role that takes time and practice to feel confident performing. Safety is a top priority for both of our Captains. Time onboard is the best method we have to train our team members and we are grateful to everyone who is willing to step out of their comfort zone to learn something new!

When asked, "Are there other trainings that you are interested in ISEA providing?"

- Fire extinguisher training (x3).
- Recovering an actual person into the rescue boat for a man overboard drill.
- More practice throwing and catching lines when docking and departing.

All above comments have been paraphrased for clarity and brevity.

Moving Forward:

- The number of shakedown sails, the practice sails where drills are run, are increasing this year! More drills will be integrated into our training.
- We will absolutely schedule another fire extinguisher training with the local fire department this spring.
- Communicating other training needs is always encouraged. Please email Rachel directly (rratliff@schoolship.org) with any training suggestions for our spring training season.

Schedule Sign-Up

Most respondents **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- Signing up for crew shifts was easy and straightforward.

Comments about ISEA's sign-up process included:

- At times I was called at the last minute and asked to participate as crew and part of the station bill and after arrival my participation was not needed.
- I never had any challenges with scheduling.
- I'd try to follow the arrival time and was often at the boat an hour and a half before the sail. Please just publish the time we should arrive and the time the program starts. [...] I understand that school transportation problems are out of our control and can make programs start late.

Some comments have been edited for length and clarity.

Moving Forward:

- Late start times are addressed in the instructor volunteer program section (pg. 6). While we cannot control when the bus arrives, we can be more efficient with moving students through the pre-sail process and getting them out to the ship for the program.
- There should never be an instance where a crew member shows up without needing to be on a program. Rachel makes many calls when a position needs to be filled, and leaves a voicemail if the volunteer is unavailable. An "all-clear" message needs to be integrated into the procedure to make sure people are not driving up unnecessarily.

Welcoming *S/V Alliance*

In 2023 ISEA hit a MAJOR milestone by purchasing a second schooner! Schooner *Alliance* came home from Virginia and was put to work almost immediately with summer programs and travel to Detroit. 25 of our 39 respondents answered questions regarding our new schooner and her operations. While we are not interested in acquiring another vessel anytime soon, this feedback is helpful for future program integration and larger communication needs.

All of the instructors **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- I feel confident in my ability to teach onboard Alliance.

Additional comments included:

- The benthos station needs a hose, not only for the teaching rotation but also for cleanup.
- Having more deck space is nice, but there were no easy places for students to sit in their small groups.
- My capacity to teach on the Alliance is affected by the height of the boxes we use for work-spaces. For me, it is difficult for my back to be in that position for several rotations.

Some comments were edited for length and clarity.

Most of our crew members **Agreed** or **Completely Agreed** with the following:

- The skills I have learned on *Inland Seas* are transferable to *Alliance*. (85%)
- I feel confident in my ability to serve as crew on *Alliance*. (85%)

Additional comments included:

- The size and weight of fenders and dock lines put crew members at risk of injury.
- On windy days it is difficult to hear. Establish/practice hand signals.
- Many things are the same, which is great, but it will take more hands-on time to establish routines and ensure a smooth transition.

Finally, we asked for any comments or feedback about the *Alliance* transit home. Some of the comments are included here:

- Put a big strain on volunteers who remained behind to fill programming positions in SB.
- Good teamwork got the boat through a challenging prep/launch process. The transit was well planned/organized and the weather was cooperative.
- Transits are the extrinsic reward for volunteering. Alliance is/was super comfortable for crew - privacy, heads, deck space.

Some comments edited for length and clarity.

The 2024 operating season will be the first full season for *Alliance*! We are working hard to preemptively problem-solve and create a volunteer space that is as easy to step into as *Inland Seas*.

Moving forward:

- We are adding another davit and a benthic hose to *Alliance*.
- The size of the fenders are not likely to change, but the dock lines will be smaller in 2024.
- There are hand signals currently in-use; we will be more deliberate about including them in shoreside training and shakedown sails.
- We know that seating is an issue. There are plans to build more permanent seating that is specific to our needs as we continue to iron out seating and small group placement! We are planning to build benches that double as station-bin storage.

ISEA Community 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.

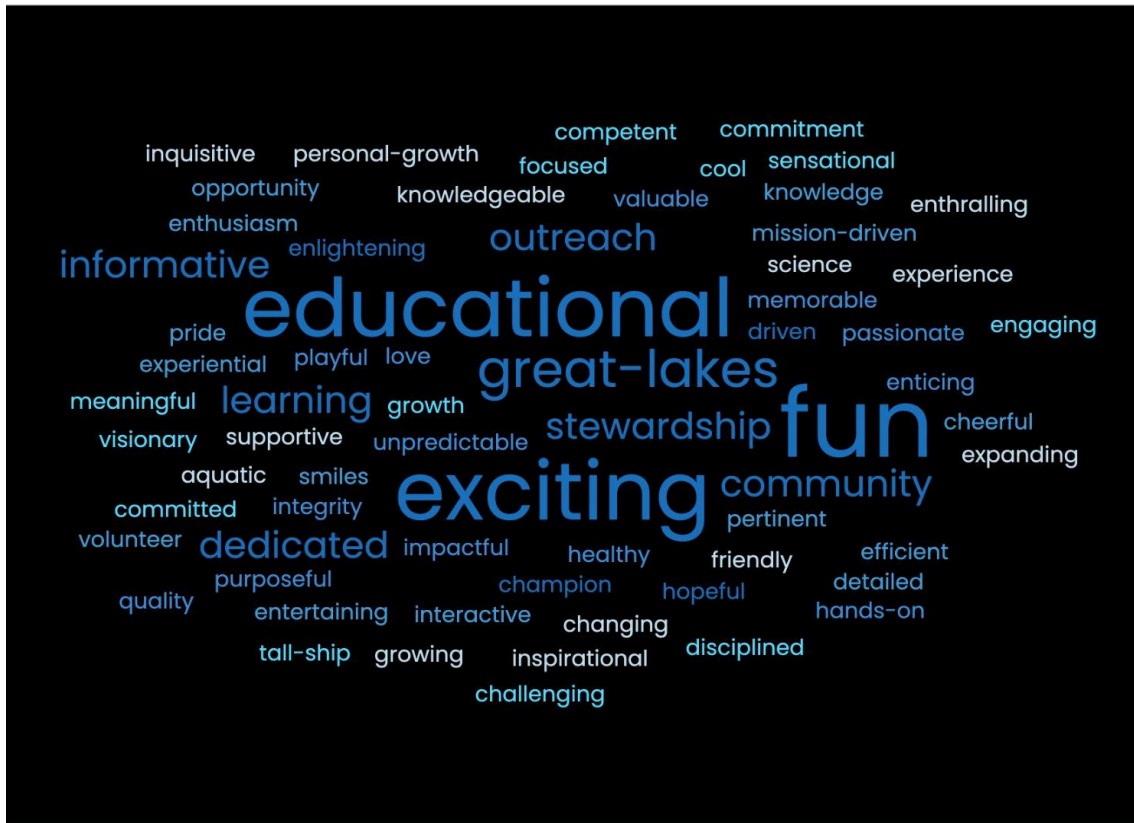
All respondents said **yes** to the following prompts:

- Do you have fun at ISEA?
- Does our staff contribute to a positive culture?

We are so grateful to share Great Lakes stewardship with the ISEA community! Our program model involves close collaboration between staff and volunteers, sometimes we share very close quarters. It is reassuring to know that you are having fun with us AND working on the mission!

- 97% of respondents said that they plan to volunteer with ISEA again in 2024! Hooray!

What does our volunteer team say about ISEA?



Your top 3 words to describe ISEA: educational, exciting, fun.

Comments describing the culture at ISEA:

- Positive changes since 2017. Open door communication.
- The positive culture at ISEA is one of the reasons I keep coming back. The staff at ISEA is very supportive, always interested in feedback, and dedicated to the mission. That really spills over into a positive and supportive vibe among the volunteers. I also appreciate the continuity among the staff. You have a very low turnover rate. From a volunteer's perspective, that stability helps me feel comfortable that we are all pulling in the same direction. (It also helps that ISEA is a fun group of people.)
- While focusing on Great Lakes stewardship and learning, ISEA is very keyed in on social/relational health.

- The culture promotes a very good sense of purpose and sets a high standard for safety and job performance. My sense is that some volunteers can feel unappreciated.
- Rapid growth is changing the culture of ISEA.
- As someone who came quite a distance to volunteer for two weeks, and with no background whatsoever in sailing, and with no prior experience with Inland Seas (other than a couple of short rides at the Tall Ships Festivals), I don't feel qualified to give much response to the questions, but I truly want to thank you all for helping provide me with an introduction to sailing and for providing a very memorable experience last September! I don't know if I will be able to return but if not, it won't be because of a lack of interest! I was made to feel very much at home and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting the staff and other volunteers at Inland Seas! THANK YOU for an incredible experience and perhaps someday I can return!

These comments have not been edited.

Suggestions about improving the volunteer experience:

- Hardest part for me is chatting with the other instructors, crew, staff etc. when I first get there and until kids show up. Many already know each other and I feel awkward trying to break into conversations... would appreciate suggestions.
- Make sure each Next Gen group has an adult to help instructors coordinate student participation.
- Get a helicopter to take the TC folks past the construction planned on the parkway this year.... Ugh.
- Can you look into the possibility of logging in our volunteer hours online?
- Make sure there's coffee on board in the a.m. and cold water during the day.

Some comments edited for length.

Moving forward:

- We are creating a laminated print-out with coffee making instructions so anyone is welcome to make coffee when they come aboard to volunteer.
- The lead instructor is responsible for making sure everyone knows one another prior to the program starting. Being more intentional about starting conversations is an easy and fun thing for us to take on!
- While we cannot offer air transport across town, I am glad someone mentioned the road construction beginning in March. More information can be found here: [US-31/M-72 Rebuilding Project](#). Please expect longer travel to both ships this year (*Inland Seas* in Suttons Bay & *Alliance* in Greilickville.) We are anticipating a few school-bus delays as well.
- We cannot guarantee that each small group is going to have an attentive chaperone. What we can do is provide more tips for engaging with students of all ages (and attention spans!)
- Regarding volunteer hours, we are exploring a few online options but we want to be deliberate and intentional when introducing new systems.

Conclusion:

The 2023 operating season was historic for its explosive growth. We could not manage a schooner acquisition, onboarding 38 new team members, and an expanding internship program without the support of our volunteer community. As we continue to adjust to our facilities and program demands, it is imperative that our volunteers' needs are met at every new opportunity. Our spring training sessions need to be more community-oriented in order to facilitate this growth and maintain our welcoming environment.

Direct feedback helps our volunteer coordinator create a volunteer experience that fulfills volunteer needs as a steward of the Great Lakes. This feedback is welcome at any time and is not limited to the annual survey. If there is anything included in this report that raises questions do not hesitate to reach out to Rachel (rratliff@schoolship.org) or anyone else on staff. Our volunteers deserve endless accolades for their hard work in 2023. Onto another exceptional season!