



Finding expensive product managers...for free!

★ GREAT Nonprofits

## A technical challenge

GreatNonprofits is the leading developer of tools that allow people to find, review, and share information about great - and perhaps not-yet-great - nonprofits and charities.

Users can rate more than 1.2 million organizations on the GreatNonprofits site and partner sites. Maintaining and growing this massive database, while building new products and partnerships, is no easy feat for a small staff on a tight budget.

## LinkedIn Volunteer Marketplace to the rescue

Founder and CEO Perla Ni had a bold product vision but needed to think out of the box to bring it to life. Having heard about LinkedIn's commitment to helping nonprofits find skilled volunteers, she decided to tap into its network of over 313 million professionals. Ni posted, for free, two volunteer product manager positions - and asked up-front for a six-month commitment in both.

Turning up in LinkedIn's Volunteer Marketplace reaped immediate benefits. In short order, Ni had four qualified candidates apply. She ultimately selected two: one to focus on product development to help nonprofits showcase their reviews, and the other to work on a statement of social impact and partner nonprofit videos.

*"We just got a new volunteer Product Manager via LinkedIn! She's committing to eight hours a week to work on our reviews widget and our search for six months."*



**Perla Ni**  
Founder and CEO  
GreatNonprofits

### What you can learn from GreatNonprofits:

- 1) **Engage deeply with skilled volunteers:** Treat volunteers like actual employees. Give them strategic projects that really matter, and bring them into the fold to get a true taste of your culture and values. Make the engagement about their development too, not just your needs.

Says Ni:

*"What we've found with skilled volunteering is that shorter amounts of time are okay, but the reliability of making sure somebody is committed for, say, six months is great for understanding your mission, context, audience - and to start producing work that is directly in line with the mission and what the nonprofit needs."*

According to Ni, in both cases, the matches were superb. "Both volunteers had time and energy, and were very interested in our work," she says. "And since they both have day jobs as product managers for enterprise tech companies, we're able to offer them a different perspective and experience from which they can learn and expand their skill sets."

"Having them come in and be very committed from the start is great," says Ni. "They're creative and analytical, and engaging with staff and asking questions. We can't compete with for-profit companies on the perks, but we try to do what we can to make it more fun. It's great because hiring a full-time product manager at Bay Area prices is not easy."

## Impact - right away and into the future

One month in, both volunteer product managers are already making a material impact. Their work is not merely "nice to have"; it's truly strategic and important for the organization.

"We started with small and defined projects, but these are real deliverables," says Ni. "It's not 'pretend' work or back-office stuff. They're interacting with developers, and making decisions and recommendations."

Ni is encouraged about what the future holds for GreatNonprofits and for a society where skilled individuals are taking time out of their work week to volunteer and make a difference. "Because of our experience with LinkedIn, we definitely want to do more with it," says Ni. "We're encouraged by how many talented, passionate people there are who are willing to commit time to help nonprofits. It's been really fabulous, and we're going to continue to use the service and tell other people about it."

2) **Post your volunteer positions on LinkedIn:** people looking to volunteer their skills may not seem to be in abundance. But you're bound to find someone on LinkedIn who connects to your mission *and* has the requisite skill set. You just have to ask. [Post a volunteer position](#) directly on LinkedIn or a partner like Volunteer Match. And check out the [LinkedIn nonprofit resource center](#) for sample volunteer job descriptions you can copy and paste.

Says Ni:

*"Both (our organization and the volunteers) are electing to be together because we have a common, shared purpose...It's a meeting of minds and hearts, which is great."*

3) **Make a bold ask to move volunteers up the ladder:** Whether they're skilled volunteers or board members, think about requiring an up-front commitment before bringing a volunteer into the fold. This clarifies expectations on both sides from the outset. And over time those volunteers will become more engaged and active, and may even move into board, staff, donor, or evangelist roles.

Says Ni:

*"We've had previous volunteers join our staff. We want volunteers to stay with us for as long as they can as volunteers, but if we have the budget and if it's a good fit for pro-bono volunteers to take a staff position, that's ideal. They've proven they're qualified and have already worked with us."*

Post your volunteer or board opportunity, see sample posts, and get more tips and tricks at [nonprofit.linkedin.com](https://nonprofit.linkedin.com)