A Voluntary Commitment

Fictional scenario

All people, organizations, figures, and circumstances are fictional. No acceptance, approval, or successful result is assumed.

Sam is invited to chair a community food-distribution program for six months. The organizer describes an average eight hours per week, but the previous chair reports peaks of 14 hours. Sam has a full-time job, a regular family care responsibility, and four reliably available hours per week. The role would involve coordinating volunteers and being the escalation contact during two weekly distribution sessions.

Sam values the program and feels guilty about declining. The organizer needs an answer Friday, but gratitude and urgency do not create additional capacity. Sam cannot promise family members' time or assume another volunteer will absorb overruns. The committee appoints the chair and sets responsibilities. A smaller, four-week task coordinating a volunteer rota could contribute without accepting overall operational authority, if the committee names a chair and escalation contact.

Completed Decision Brief

1. Define the decision

Decision owner, date, and decision needed by

Sam; Monday; response needed Friday.

Choice and intended outcome

Accept chair role, offer a limited rota task, or decline. Contribute usefully while honoring work and care responsibilities.

Principles, responsibilities, and authority

Sam controls personal time only. Family care and employment commitments must be honored. Committee assigns operational authority and escalation coverage.

2. Examine the situation

Verified facts and sources

Organizer role outline: six months and average eight hours weekly. Previous-chair message: peaks of 14 hours. Sam's calendar shows four reliably available hours weekly. These are reported estimates, not verified future demand.

Assumptions and important unknowns

Rota work may spill into escalation duties. Backup coverage and the organizer's willingness to narrow scope are unknown.

Decisive gap and how to investigate it

Request written boundaries, a named chair, and escalation coverage from the committee by Thursday. Ask the former rota volunteer about typical demands.

Pressure and constraints affecting judgment

Guilt and concern about disappointing the organizer favor acceptance. Four available hours and fixed care duties limit a responsible commitment.

3. Compare realistic options

Option A: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Accept chair. Greater influence on the program; expected and peak hours exceed availability and coverage is uncertain.

Option B: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Offer a four-week rota task, capped at four hours weekly. Makes a bounded contribution; committee must cover operations and accept narrower support.

Option C: approach, main benefit, and risk or trade-off

Decline. Protects existing commitments; forgoes a valued contribution and may leave the committee short of help.

4. Test the preferred option

Preferred option, strongest objection, and condition before proceeding

B if written boundaries and coverage are confirmed. Strongest objection: informal escalation could turn a limited task into the chair role.

Right: principles, responsibilities, and required agreement

Do not promise unavailable time or transfer duties to family without agreement. Tell committee exactly what is offered and excluded.

Smart: evidence, uncertainty, and reasons over alternatives

Check actual rota demands with the former volunteer. Require a named chair and escalation contact. Decline if bounded work is not useful or cannot be separated.

Sustainable: capacity, recurring demands, and acceptable limits

Four weeks, at most four hours weekly, in scheduled blocks. No on-call role. Committee must provide another owner for unfinished work at the cap.

5. Commit to a next step

Decision, rationale, and condition before proceeding

Decline chair. Offer B conditionally; otherwise decline involvement for this period. The full role exceeds reliable capacity.

First action, owner, and deadline

Sam sends the bounded offer and requests written coverage by Thursday; gives final answer Friday.

Communication: who needs to know, agree, or act

Organizer and committee approve scope and name accountable contacts. Sam confirms care and work schedules before accepting the limited task.

6. Set the review point

Observable trigger for reconsideration

Reconsider if forecast or actual time exceeds four hours in a week, escalation is redirected to Sam, or care responsibilities change. Notify chair before taking on extra work.

Review date and what evidence to bring

After the first week and at four weeks if accepted. Bring time log, unfinished tasks, and coverage issues. Do not assume extension or a successful outcome.