

INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATE

## Update

## Six Tips for Successful Volunteer Involvement

by Susan J. Ellis

**T**he core of Habitat for Humanity is volunteer involvement. From the beginning, Habitat has recruited and involved thousands of willing volunteers. But are there ways to make the process even more effective? Consider these tips:

**1. Be thoughtful and not thoughtless about volunteers.**

When was the last time you had a discussion focused on your goals for volunteer accomplishments and recruitment? Is anyone in charge of thinking about how you invite people to volunteer and how they are treated once they arrive? As

volunteers because you've *been* a volunteer is much like saying you can *conduct* brain surgery because you've *had* brain surgery. There's something missing in between. Take the time to train leadership-level volunteers in the basics of volunteer management; for example, how to treat people when they are not employees, the right ways



to motivate and praise volunteers, how to deal with problems. Leaders usually are grateful for practical pointers

involves volunteers mainly because there is not enough money to pay people to do the necessary work. Unfortunately, that makes volunteers a "second choice." The better you become at expressing the **first-choice** reasons that Habitat wants volunteers, the more successful you will be at recruitment and even at fund raising. For

example: Habitat builds communities as well as houses. The spirit that volunteers bring to the work site is based on neighborliness and communal ownership. Paying would get the house built, but wouldn't generate the vitality.

- 4. It's as important to understand why people do not volunteer as why they do.** Examine the image(s) of your organization, its clients/public and the cause you support. What might be the reasons someone is reluctant to get involved? For example, might there be concerns about safety, the physical demands of the work or the neighborhood in which the houses are being built?

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with any other management issue, the more time you spend planning for volunteers, the more effective the results will be.

- 2. Never assume everyone "knows" how to work with volunteers—even if they are volunteers themselves.** To say that you can *manage*

- on effective techniques.
- 3. Articulate why Habitat wants volunteers in the first place.** This tip may seem silly at first glance. Isn't it obvious why Habitat has always done its work through volunteers? Maybe. But maybe not. For example, too many people think that our society

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Separate fact from fiction and then deal with any real obstacles to volunteer involvement (such as the need to transport or escort some people to your work site).

5. **Most people don't say "no" to the invitation to volunteer—they are never asked in the first place.** Publicity is not recruitment. The fact that many people know about Habitat for Humanity does not mean they know that they can be volunteers. Are you recruiting actively? Or are you hoping current volunteers will bring their friends with them? If you want people to volunteer, ask them to do so. Remember, it is always flattering to ask someone to add his or her talents to important work.

6. **Recognition is much more than a "thank you."**

Appreciation and recognition are not the same. While thank yous are very important, true recognition includes a willingness to grant volunteers input, to listen and to use their ideas and suggestions. Maintain enthusiasm by celebrating benchmarks, not just end products. Be aware of inevitable "low points" in the process and design "pick me ups" to renew volunteers. As someone who works with Habitat daily, you understand

the steps in the timeline from the start of a building project to watching the family move in. But volunteers may not have the big perspective. Do a "mental walk-through" of the entire process, mapping out the times when progress seems the slowest or when obstacles often arise. So, if you usually have to wait a few weeks before the city inspector gives approval to continue with the work, help volunteers anticipate the delay and acknowledge the frustration. Also, plan something unexpected during lulls. Maybe you can organize a get-together or a fun evening.

If you feel uninformed about the dynamics of volunteer management, there are sources of help: conferences, workshops, books, Internet sites.

*Susan J. Ellis is president of Energize Inc., an international training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. Since 1977, the company has worked with a wide variety of clients throughout North America, Latin America and Europe to start or expand community participation in various kinds of projects.*

Learn more!



### Editor's note:

For more information about volunteer management resources provided by Energize Inc., you can:

- Visit Energize's web site at <http://www.energizeinc.com> and sign up for their free monthly electronic update.
- Order a free copy of their "Volunteer Energy Resource Catalog" either online or by mail: Energize Inc., 5450 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144, USA.

## Notes from Construction and Environmental Resources

by Wayne Nelson

From my inquiries, I know that many HFH affiliates have concerns about the environment. Some affiliates express the need to plant trees and to develop good harvesting practices for the trees used to construct Habitat houses. Others see the need to develop low-cost, healthy water and sewage systems. Some are concerned with the waste disposal of products and packaging.

At HFHI, the Construction and Environmental Resources department's responsibility is "to promote good stewardship of natural resources in the process of eliminating substandard shelter and to raise awareness of the impact of human habitation on God's creation." This is in keeping with the growing concern worldwide for our environment and how we affect it. This heightened awareness of environmental needs has people and organizations looking for ways to help. Habitat affiliates can partner with environmental groups to the benefit of both.

Organizations and individuals concerned with environmental needs are more likely to give to the work of house building when they discover that Habitat is actively working to improve the environmental impact of housing. For example, HFH in Papua New Guinea has a total forestry plan that limits the harvesting, grows trees and tracks the progress. For having implemented this plan, HFH PNG has qualified for additional funds from various organizations to use in house building. Habitat affiliates in other countries such as Malawi have planted trees and been involved in erosion control and in the development of fuel-efficient stoves. Some affiliates train children, each of whom is responsible for nurturing a tree. At house dedications in Botswana, homeowners receive both a Bible and a tree—the trees will provide wood for future generations.

For more information on these subjects, you may contact the Construction and Environmental Resources department at HFHI or the HFH construction consultant for your area through your national office.

### Construction Consultants are:

Bryan Hughes, Latin America  
Doug Dahlgren, Europe  
David Rawlings, Africa  
Jack Blanchette, Asia/Pacific

If your affiliate has implemented measures to help the environment, please write to us at HFHI, and share photos and a description of the work done.

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