



# How Diversity Can Be at the Heart of Every Volunteer Manager

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**At** the heart of every volunteer manager lies the challenge of recruiting the right volunteer with the right experience and skills. This challenge becomes even greater when recruiting for a diverse volunteer pool. Organizations face many challenges as their client base increasingly diversifies. The growth of immigration and changes in the "traditional" American family contribute greatly to those challenges. In many ways, the success of organizations will depend greatly on how different value systems can be integrated into existing programs and volunteer opportunities. Ask yourself, does your program look diverse? Sound diverse? Feel diverse? Can individuals whom you want to recruit find people and materials in your program to identify with? Do your recruiting materials reflect diversity? Do your policies align with your diversity values? Remember that organizations that have taken the time to develop and communicate their vision for diversity have the most successful volunteer recruitment and retention rates.

Volunteerism exists in all cultures but is often executed differently from one culture to another. In the United States, there are a great number of community-based organizations focusing on volunteer activities. The challenge for volunteer organizations in an increasingly multicultural U.S. population is to learn how to tap into networks different from those used

## Successful Strategies for Recruiting for Diversity

10 tips for recruiting for diversity:

- 1 Make use of existing community resources—be sure that volunteer centers are aware of your need for diverse volunteers.
- 2 Conduct joint diversity outreach projects with other volunteer organizations.
- 3 Solicit support from minority business organizations, minority legal associations, and agencies such as the Urban League that are committed to diversity.
- 4 Distribute culturally appropriate materials and pulpit messages to churches and community centers.
- 5 Enlist the help of barbershops, beauty shops, and doctors' and dentists' offices to distribute brochures.
- 6 Use minority media extensively—distribute public service announcements to minority radio stations, and camera-ready ads targeted to minority communities to local magazines and newspapers that market to diverse communities.
- 7 Enlist the support of minority disc jockeys who can promote volunteerism.
- 8 Run public service announcements geared to minorities on local cable television stations.
- 9 Consider establishing an inclusiveness advisory committee, which includes members of the communities you are targeting.
- 10 Help staff members and volunteers understand the cultural issues and life experiences within underrepresented populations.

routinely. Issues such as how people are managed and how decisions are made within groups are affected by different cultural norms. In many cultures, involvement with religious organizations and extended families play a more significant role in the lives of individuals than they do in other cultures.

How much time and energy will you put into recruiting diverse volunteers? How much will you try to understand the world view and cultural norms of those you recruit? How much will you expect your diverse staff to understand your world view and cultural norms? These are questions to consider before launching a diversity recruitment effort.

Diversity, then, is about learning to include different perspectives and processes so that the work of the organization can be as effective and successful as possible.

Often, the lack of understanding cultural norms may inhibit, impair, or even damage the connection with diverse communities. Many barriers to recruiting diverse individuals can exist but not be clearly visible at first glance. Some barriers may include limited English language proficiency, the feeling that the volunteer's cultural background is not valued, not feeling connected to the mainstream community, belief that minority input is not taken seriously, or a lack of a supportive environment.

Outlined in the side bar on this page are some successful techniques on how to jump start your diversity recruitment effort and how to create an inclusive environment. For purposes of this article, these tips will focus on recruiting from ethnic communities and people of color.

Two areas often overlooked, but particularly important in recruiting volunteers, involve getting the message out to those who need to hear it and connecting volunteers to opportunities. Once you've determined what you want volunteers to do and the types of individuals who can best do the job—now you're ready to identify the best places to look for volunteers. This is where recruiting for diverse volunteers takes off. Before beginning your recruitment effort, build effective community partnerships and collaborations with cultural groups and associations to identify those who would like to work with your organization. They, in turn, can assist you in your search for the kind of volunteers who can help advance your goals. Consider the diversity in your immediate geographic area and ways to reach potential volunteers from a variety of back-

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grounds. Your area may have a predominantly Latino or Asian community, for example.

Questions to consider when marketing your program include: Are the printed materials of your organization relevant and sensitive to the specific group you are trying to recruit? How about the use of graphic images and language—what do they reveal? Are the venues you use to endorse your organization suitable to the audience you are trying to attract?

In building relations with multicultural volunteers, an effective approach to build trust is to follow up with a volunteer's expression of interest as soon as you can—preferably with a phone call to the potential volunteer. Experience has shown that an ideal match between volunteers and the organization is a key trait for successful programs.

There are significant contributions that volunteers offer that should not be overlooked. Volunteerism in its true meaning should embrace, nurture, and encourage involvement. As a leader of volunteers you should be able to mobilize volunteers in meaningful service by stimulating and supporting them. Recruiting volunteers is not a new experience for managers of volunteer programs. Recruiting for diversity, however, may be more of a challenge. Creating a plan that involves volunteers generates pathways for engaging volunteers more effectively while capitalizing on their skills. Don't let limited knowledge of your diverse volunteer communities be a barrier for your volunteer program. Minimize the gap by being aware of opportunities, working with cultural groups, and staying connected. You too can be a volunteer manager with diversity at the heart of your recruitment efforts. VM

Sources: *National Multicultural Institute* and *www.energizeinc.com*