

COMMUNITY LINKS

Progress Through Partnerships

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**Managing Today's
Volunteers**

**Tips for Recruiting
and Supporting
Volunteers**

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Spending Time Up Front Will Save You Headaches Later

10 Tips for Recruiting and Supporting Dedicated Volunteers

SOMERVILLE, MASS.

Strategically placed volunteers are a tremendous resource for an organization. Volunteer involvement can also contribute to a successful approach that complements your organization's mission. However, mismanaged volunteers can drain resources and result in frustration for everyone.

Finding great volunteers takes effort. And after you have found them, you will have to act strategically to keep them. When looking for volunteers—no matter how desperate your need—do not settle for the first person who signs up (unless he or she is exactly what you are looking for). The key is combining skilled volunteers with the support, supervision and appreciation they need to be successful. Here are 10 tips that should increase and improve your volunteer force with fewer headaches.

1. Provide clear job descriptions. Write a simple, yet detailed, description of job expectations, commitment required and what volunteers can expect in return. Do not lie about or minimize the amount of work or time needed. Once you have found a suitable person, make sure others in your area get the chance to chat briefly and informally with the potential volunteer, especially employees who will be working closely with this person. Get

feedback from them. They might have noticed something about the person that you overlooked. Also, ask volunteer candidates to supply three to five work references, and check them out!

2. Treat volunteers like employees. Volunteers are a vital component of any organization and should be valued as such. Maintain high expectations. The traits you want in employees are the same ones you should look for in volunteers. Provide training and professional development opportunities. Keep records of hours and dates volunteered.

3. Invite volunteers to recruit their friends and family. Word of mouth is one of the most effective ways to recruit dedicated volunteers. Encourage current volunteers to refer their friends to your agency. Ask them to recruit others at events or open houses. (Keep in mind that many individuals seek volunteer positions that allow them to meet other people.)

4. Invest the time to manage your volunteers. A common misconception with volunteers is that they can manage themselves. Volunteers need supervision and support like any employee. They need to be able to ask questions and provide feedback. No one wants to feel like a burden, particularly someone who is donating time. Assign tasks that your volunteers



Above: Volunteer Hae Soo Kim enjoys a fun-filled moment with her third- and fourth-grade students. Kim attends Tufts University.

will "connect" with (emotionally or skills-wise). Make sure you can adequately support volunteers before you bring them into your agency.

5. Enlist volunteers in support of your mission. Volunteers can become an organization's best salespeople. Clearly communicate to them your organizational mission and structure so that they are comfortable sharing this information with others who might be interested. Ask them to help with fund raising or press relations. Provide opportunities for volunteers to talk about their own experiences and generate interest in your work.

6. Ask for help. What is the number one reason people say they do not volunteer? No one asked them. Even people with busy lives like to contribute a few hours on a weekend. Post your volunteer job descriptions at college internship offices, high schools, grocery stores, community centers and other visible community locations. Find out if local newspapers, radio stations or public-access television channels offer free or discounted public-service announcements. Besides staff members, make sure the board of directors knows about the search. They can help you publicize your need for volunteers through their workplaces and communities.

7. Target underrecruited groups. Retirees, college students and young people make great volunteers but often are not recruited. Involve entire families. Parents who are full-time caregivers might enjoy an afternoon of volunteering if they can do it with their children. Many retirees acquired fabulous skills while in the workforce, and that same knowledge can be used today to benefit your organization.

8. Create culturally responsible volunteer programs. If you want to recruit parents, offer child care and transportation. If college students are your targeted group, speak with the career center or a specific department about offering academic credit for internships and work-study options. If you need Spanish-speaking volunteers, then advertise in Spanish. In other words, make sure your volunteer opportunities reflect the people you seek.

9. Evaluate and provide feedback. Many people volunteer because they want to develop new skills. Give feedback to volunteers about their performance and support their skill development. Encourage them to look for other opportunities within the agency that relate to their areas of interest. For example, arrange for a volunteer who has an interest in graphic design to assist the art department in designing pro-



Above: Peace Games volunteers teach curriculum training sessions in teams of three. Here volunteers (from left to right) Hermon Ghermay, Eric Forester and Kerri Sweeney kick back for a quick break.

What's in it for Me?

Managing Today's New Breed of Volunteers

COLUMBIA, MO.

Have you ever volunteered and been glad about it? Or were you sorry you said yes? One of the things that made the difference in whether your experience as a volunteer was positive or negative may have been the quality of the organization's volunteer management.

We all want help running our organizations, but the key is to get the right person in the right place. This is true for both paid staff and volunteers. Let's look at identifying volunteers from their point of view. Before they get involved with our organization, what do they want to know? At the same time, we need to ask ourselves exactly what attributes we want in a volunteer. The chart at right provides some beginning questions to ask. You will want to add your own questions.

A New Breed of Volunteers

People are volunteering more than ever, but they are volunteering very differently than in the past. Previously, stay-at-home mothers formed the primary volunteer pool, but the advent of the working mom has cut down on these "traditional" volunteers. The time that people have to volunteer may be limited, but often they are volunteering to do more intensive work—work that might otherwise be performed by salaried workers.

Why do people volunteer? For many reasons: they believe in the organization or its cause, they want to be with other people, they want to be busy, or they want to learn new skills and meet new people. When you know why people are volunteering, you can assign them to particular roles that will meet their needs as well as your organization's needs.

What Makes a Good Volunteer Manager?

We all want volunteers with skills, commitment and creativity. How can we get "the best and the brightest?"

First, by encouraging involvement of those volunteers we most want. Ask yourself these questions to identify

who will be the best volunteer: Do I want somebody to do routine jobs? Creative jobs? How much time do I want them to contribute? Is it in large blocks (a week, a month, half-days, etc.)? Or shorter time frames, say one to four hours periodically? What skills do they need to do a good job?

When you know what you want from volunteers, you can match your needs with the interests of potential volunteer candidates. You will want to apply leadership strategies to them just as you do with

Do We Have the Vision?

If we want our volunteers to help us achieve our goals, we need to effectively communicate our vision. Can we share our organization's vision with others in a way that inspires them to help us reach it? Many times we understand where we expect the organization to be in the future, but we don't share it with our volunteers. A good manager will orient volunteers so they are able to tell others what our vision is, and how they fit into it.

As a volunteer, I want to know:

- *What do you want me to do?*
- *How much time will it take?*
- *How much money will it cost me?*
- *Who else is working on the project?*
- *Will I have any help?*
- *When do I start, and when do I finish?*
- *What's in it for me?*
- *What are the rewards of volunteering?*

As one who solicits volunteer help, I want to know:

- *Exactly what is the job I want the person to do?*
- *Can the person do the job?*
- *Does the person have experience that will transfer to the job?*
- *Does the person have a track record of following through?*

your paid staff. Three basic strategies will bring positive results in your volunteer management: 1) create a shared sense of direction, 2) engage them in accomplishing the agency's vision, and 3) empower and enable them to achieve goals. You might want to think about the following questions before setting out to recruit volunteers.

Where Will We Find Committed Volunteers?

Donors and people who are interested in our organizations are the most likely volunteers—if they believe in what we are trying to accomplish, they will be more likely to buy into our sense of direction.

How Do We Empower Volunteers?

Is training provided when they start the job? How about when they learn the basics—can we keep them moving up in the organization by empowering them in their volunteer roles?

Should We Reward Volunteers for Their Work?

Yes! Rewarding volunteers is an important part of volunteer management. Rewards can be as simple as a smile and a pat on the back, or as elaborate as a billboard or formal banquet. Always remember to thank people—preferably with a written note. Reimbursing expenses can be a reward, as can giving your volunteers visibility. Some volunteers want

to be recognized, while others want to be anonymous. As you interview potential volunteers, ask why they want to volunteer (there may be many reasons); their responses will give you clues about how to reward them. For those who want to be with other people, putting them on a task force or project group is a reward. For those who want to remain anonymous, publicizing their participation definitely would be the wrong thing to do.

You may say, "But all this sounds like the questions I ask and the things I consider when I'm hiring a salaried person!" You're right! Would you want an employee to represent you who didn't know where the organization was going and why? Who wasn't skilled to do the work you hired them to do? Of course not.

Smart employers are getting more organized in their volunteer management so that they can multiply the efforts of the paid staff and strengthen public support for the organization. Managing the process is the key to keeping good volunteers. Remember, an energized, satisfied volunteer is one of our best ambassadors.

By Doris Littrell, Ph.D.

Doris Littrell is director of extension teaching, a continuing- and distance-education unit at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has been active as a volunteer and volunteer manager, and teaches in the Community Development Academy sponsored by the university.

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motional fliers—not just distributing them. Finally, provide opportunities for volunteers to evaluate the organization and their experience working there.

10. Appreciate your volunteers. Certificates, letters of recommendation, parties, and birthday and thank-you cards are all ways of letting volunteers know their time is appreciated. Mention them in your agency's newsletter. Also, appreciate them by valuing their time. Start events and meetings promptly, and make sure you have the materials your volunteers will need to be successful. Never forget that a simple "thank you" every time they come in is invaluable.

In creating volunteer opportunities, it is important to make sure that you support your volunteers in every way possible. Be enthusiastic and share why you are personally committed to your work. Volunteers can be an agency's most priceless resource. Do not allow them to

leave your door without thinking they made a difference.

By Eric D. Dawson and
Yolanda C. James

Eric D. Dawson is the executive director of Peace Games and has been with the organization since its inception. Dawson has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors including Youth Service America's Fund for Social Entrepreneurs and the Echoing Green Fellowship for Public Service. Yolanda C. James joined the Peace Games staff in 1998. She serves as the public relations coordinator and is a member of the AmeriCorps "VISTA."

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Above: Tami Goldman and Tia Kaul (from left to right in navy blue shirts) share a "peaceful" moment with their third- and fourth-grade students at the Sixth Annual Peace Games Festival. The festival is a day-long event that brings all of the Peace Games students together to celebrate peace-making efforts and to share the community service projects they worked on during the school year.

Getting Down to the Basics of Grassroots Organizing

DES MOINES, IOWA

Today, many police departments are working with community organizers to help them develop active partnerships with citizens as a way

to safeguard and enhance neighborhoods. Mary Welsh, director of Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI) in Des Moines, has organized neighborhoods for 20

years and shares her wisdom on how others can do the same.

Getting People Together

"The first challenge of building and maintaining a neighborhood group is finding people who are interested in participating," says Welsh, who recommends using a combination of surveys, door knocking and one-on-one interviews to find out who else might be interested. "Find enough people for critical mass," she advises. "Once you have hit your mark, continue searching for new members and leaders. A big mistake is gathering a few concerned people and thinking that you have done your job. If those people leave, your group will fall apart."

Deciding Who to Recruit

"Be careful who you invite to join a planning committee," advises Welsh. "The first recruits usually set the tone, so make sure the group is as diverse as possible."

Heterogeneous groups will give you instant credibility. Include residents from several sectors of your neighborhood, not just a couple of streets.

When considering whom to recruit, make a list of individuals who genuinely care about the neighborhood, want to improve it, are able to work with others and are known to follow through on their commitments. "Beware of personal agendas," cautions Welsh. "If someone asks to participate in your group and you know he or she is planning a future run for office, understand that their personal goals could damage the group's dynamic and possibly its credibility."

Establishing Trust

Part of community organizing is helping people learn to trust each other. When CCI began organizing a neighborhood group in a trailer park, the presenting complaint concerned drugs and violence. But it was soon evident that distrust between the park's English- and Spanish-speaking residents was clouding each group's perspective about what needed to be done. When CCI convened a meeting where residents could talk directly to the city council

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