



The Center for Creative Community



The Revolution In Recruiting Involves @

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Center for Creative Community
1989

The Revolution in Recruiting Involves

- ...New Strategies
- ...New Methods
- ...New Sources
- ...New Expectations
- ...New Concepts
- ...New Focus

And most of all NEW HOPE!

Attracting People To Your Cause: Otherwise know as Volunteer Recruitment

Ivan Scheier,
VOLUNTAS

Background Points

***Your best recruiter, always, is a good volunteer program in a decent, caring organization. No amount of slick recruiting technique can cover up a bad program for long; the word gets around.

***Avoid the numbers game. Quality counts. Otherwise, you have a revolving door. Decision-makers may need re-education here.

***Watch your language; adapt it to the people you're talking to. Thus, some people have a negative image of the word "volunteer" and don't like to be "recruited" either. But they'll "pitch in" or help out."

***Do some "metal recruiting" first; that is, be sure to count all the people who help without pay now, e.g. informally or occasionally.

Main Approaches

EACH-ONE-REACH-ONE is by far the most effective recruiting strategy, if you have a good program. Also called Network Recruiting. Build in incentives for volunteers who bring in others.

RECRUITER OF (other) VOLUNTEERS as one of your volunteer jobs.

EXISTING, POTENTIAL POOLS OF VOLUNTEERS. Identify them comprehensively and creatively, then connect with them.

Offer MAXIMUM CHOICE, within mission framework, in range of job content, style, setting, and locale. "Our way is the only way" is the ultimate turnoff. "Do it your way" is more respectful and effective. Go "People Approach" when you can vs. Job Approach.

Related, think of yourself as A VEHICLE for the volunteer achieving some things deeply important to herself, which she can't achieve by herself and which happen also to be important to the organization.

RECRUITING COOPERATIVELY with other programs or organizations often ends up with all of us getting more volunteers with less work.

MEDIA RECRUITING is not as effective as some people think, but is best when focussed specifically on a particular job.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN RESPONDING TO SHORTAGE OF VOLUNTEERS

July, 1988

(Trend 6 and 6A)

ADMIT DEFEAT, Cutback on volunteer program, including cutting back on staff time allocated to encouragement and support of volunteers. Rely increasingly on totally self-directed and/or 'accidental' volunteer help. When you do try to recruit new volunteers, use the "rigid regression" approach: whatever worked with volunteers 25 years ago, and isn't working any longer, do twice as much of it today!

GET MORE OUT OF THE VOLUNTEERS WE HAVE NOW. Try to remove inessentials, perhaps ask a bit more time and responsibility, in return for giving more rewards, more support, for the precious volunteers you now have. Danger, of course, is burnout, if you go to extremes in this.

RELY MORE ON MASS PROMOTION, MEDIA RECRUITMENT. Might help a bit, but remember everyone else is going the same direction and there's likely to be fiercer and fiercer competition here. Also, beware superficial motivation to volunteer in response to "glitzy" promotions, meaning we have to screen prospects far more carefully. Watch PR as an end in itself.

IDENTIFY AND EXPLOIT "NEW" SOURCES OF VOLUNTEERS. These include relatively independent individuals and organizations that may exist outside the human service delivery system (Trend 2), and may be more interested in using us than in being used by us (Trend 3) -- which is perfectly okay as long as clients and our organization ultimately benefit. We need also to tap more into the motivation to use volunteer experience for career exploration and preparation (Trend 7). Clearly, we must recognize, understand and place increasing value on people whose unpaid service is a bit more prescribed by others than chosen by themselves as individuals (Trend 9). Finally, let us no longer neglect clients/patients and their families as themselves volunteers, or as excellent recommenders of volunteer prospects.

GO BACK TO BASICS IN RECRUITING PROCESS. It isn't glamorous or modern, and it doesn't require fancy equipment, but word-of-mouth, each-one-reach-one is by far the most effective way of reaching out to new volunteers. It isn't automatic, though; there are definite 'do's' and 'don'ts'.

SHORE UP ORGANIZATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEERS -- it will never be needed more than in a volunteer shortage situation. Though we must beware the temptation to oversell volunteers (Trend 8, unrealistic expectations), one major track should be shift in role expectations from only service-providing, to the volunteer as part of the organization's constituency, as a 'Friend of...' who is a supporter-advocate in the community, a supporter of staff (as much as clients), a fundraiser and other resource-raiser perhaps, a source of information, ideas, education, an ambassador to and from the community, a recruiter of clients as well as other volunteers, etc. Another major tack is, via the power of your volunteer-related association, make organizational funding contingent on a showing of humane and effective involvement of the community via volunteering. (Also called "citizen participation match"). Once again, it will be easier when volunteers are seen as a crucial component of a larger "community resource development" or 'community-based support system' process.

PRESERVE ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT IN A CLEAR DETAILED POLICY VOLUNTEERS

In outline form, the essentials of such a policy include:

1. One of the areas explored with every prospective new staff member will be their attitude and experience re working with the community (as volunteers, etc.). Volunteer coordinator should sit in.
2. In every staff job description, there will be a boilerplate statement such as: "One of the ways this organization tries to achieve its goals is by seeking the help and support of the community. It is your responsibility as a staff person always to respect and encourage community people who may support us."
3. Every new staff member, as part of their initial orientation, receives a significant "course" on how to work well with volunteers. The volunteer coordinator or specialist should be given major responsibility for this session.

4. Ditto, in-service training on working with volunteers, as deemed needed.
5. There shall be definite important incentives for all staff, encouraging them to work productively with volunteers, and there shall be definite rewards for so doing.
6. The above will be based on regular assessments of all staff, a part of which shall include a question such as: 'How are you doing working with the community?'
7. Wherever, possible, volunteers shall be recognized in conjunction with their supervisor/partner/teammate.
8. Wherever possible, volunteers shall be treated like staff.
9. Wherever possible, staff will be treated like volunteers.
10. Clear, effective grievance procedures shall be open to both volunteers and staff, on matters that may need to be resolved between them.

These are only some of the main ingredients in a model policy on volunteers. Others, for example, might include that top and middle management should model productive involvement of volunteers, personally, by each recruiting and supervising at least one volunteer to help them in their work. Another whole subject for specific guidelines, is the manner in which an individual may transition from a volunteer to a paid staff person in an organization.

For more on key conditions supportive of volunteer programs in an organization, **SO YOU STILL WANT TO WIN WITH STAFF: HERE'S HOW TO GET SOLID STAFF SUPPORT FOR YOUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM** available from Yellowfire Press.

MODERNIZE YOUR APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT MOTIVATES VOLUNTEERS. Virtually all of the preceding discussion is relevant here, especially the recognition that, while altruism is alive and well in America, it's becoming much more okay to ask that volunteering do something for yourself as volunteer, too. Also increasingly understood, is that without solid daily staff support, volunteers will leave just about as fast as you recruit them (the revolving door). Finally, we need to exploit to the fullest the dawning recognition now increasingly research-based, **THAT VOLUNTEERING IS GOOD FOR YOU, BOTH MENTALLY AND MEDICALLY.** We might even coin a slogan: "Not volunteering is hazardous to your health!"

New Sources

Lining Up New Volunteers

From "DOVIA Exchange," February 1989

A recent feature article by Copley News Service reports the following findings: 'Scientists estimate that the average American spends 30 minutes a day in line and the country spends 37 billion hours in line each year.' People can get very unhappy about it, too, the article goes on to say. 'However, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Richard Larson says retailers can cut emily time-line anxiety by providing interesting diversions for customers -- like providing mirrors for primping or having reading materials on hand.'

Hmmm, reading materials, is it? So why not get your recruiting message on the line at the bank, in the supermarket, and all those government office wait-a-bits. Poster, snappy brochure, whatever. I by extension, think of all the other places people sit and wait, such as doctors, dentists', lawyers offices. Back to lines, though, I've even seen a coordinator successfully recruit volunteers, in person, walking along a waiting line of low-income clients. But this might work differently with customers. I don't know. Has anyone experience with any of the above or anything like it? We'd love to share it with your colleagues, next issue.

The other part is a bit wilder, but so are the figures: 37 billion hours per year waiting in line -- almost as many hours as people volunteer! Question, is there any proto-volunteer work people might do while standing in line, if only to get acquainted with our cause, in a helpful way. We're talking about one-minute kinds of work here, possible just signing a book of endorsements, adding a significant address or two to our prospect list. Does this seem possible to any of you? What did the poet mean, anyhow when he said: 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'???

SETTING CEILINGS FOR RECRUITING

Ivan Scheier,
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Why Worry?

Setting ceilings for recruiting sounds so negative! The more likely attitude, largely reflexive, is: the more volunteers the better, the sky's the limit. Yet, a very good case can be made for taking the trouble to estimate your current 'volunteer saturation point' -- the upper limit on the number of volunteers your program or organization can productively involve. Here are 3 reasons:

1. To help determine the intensity/priority and nature of your recruiting effort. If you have 50 volunteers now and your ceiling is 55, that suggests a 'hand-picked' kind of recruiting effort, which doesn't need to be high priority. You can then invest more effort elsewhere, e.g., in keeping the good volunteers you now have. But if, in the same situation, you feel you could use up to 500 volunteers at saturation point, recruiting becomes a much higher priority and mass recruiting methods become your more likely choice. In either case, precision here should impress bosses.

2. A surprising number of programs seem to be above their saturation point, with more volunteers than they can reasonably support. This leads to high burnout and dropout rates among both volunteers and staff. Ethically, it is also unfair to volunteers, staff, and probably clients as well.

3. Thinking about volunteer ceilings often forces useful re-consideration of such questions as: "why do we want volunteers anyhow?", and 'just what is it we expect them to do?'

If, after all this, you still feel that setting ceilings for recruiting is negative thinking, remember that you can always set higher targets in the future, as conditions may warrant. You can always "raise the roof", when the time is ripe for it.

Estimating Your Volunteer Saturation Point

Surprisingly little is currently known about how to do this. Please consider the following as only rough rule-of-thumb suggestions, as basis for discussion. To begin, we suggest you estimate saturation point separately for each of your volunteer programs, if you have more than one, then combine them later, if desirable.

A. Estimation Based on the Number of Clients/patients/recipients of Volunteer Services

__ Total number of clients you have or might have within next six months

__ What percentage of these clients might be helped by volunteers (might not be 100%)

__ Number of clients who might be helped by volunteers (multiply 1st 2 lines)

__ If volunteers are working 1-to-1 with clients, put same number here. If one volunteer is working with, say, five clients divide by 5 or whatever the number is. This number is the estimate of your volunteer saturation point based on clients.

B. Estimation Based on Person-Power Available to Supervise and Support Volunteers

__ Total number of hours available either from staff or leadership volunteers, use-able to provide supervision and support to "line" volunteers.

__ Divide by 40 to get full-time equivalent (FTE) supervision person power.

__ If this is a new program multiply by 10 to get the maximum number of volunteers one FTE can reasonably Supervise. In more established programs it may be reasonable to multiply by as much as 25 or 35, or even 100. Your decision. Number in blank here is saturation point estimated from supervisory person power.

C. Summation

__ Lowest of two numbers from A or B above

__ Rate your overall level of staff-organizational support for volunteers on a scale of where 1 = best possible, excellent to 5 = awful, worst possible. Divide by this figure to get your estimated volunteer ceiling.



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