

Success

By Design

Building Strong Organizations... Strong Communities

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Working With Volunteers

Volunteers are the “lifeblood” of any not-for-profit organization. It’s critical to ensure that the methods your organization uses to recruit, train and support these volunteers reflects a well organized and caring organization.

Recruiting for Success

Before you begin to recruit volunteers for the various duties within your organization, it’s wise to consider the following:

- What specific tasks need to be done?
- Which tasks should be done by volunteers?
- What skills are needed to carry out these tasks?
- When, where and how do we recruit volunteers?
- Who recruits volunteers in our organization?
- Who will train the volunteers?
- Who will supervise the work of the volunteers?

Let’s face it, not everyone enjoys searching out individuals to help do a job (asking someone to volunteer). Recruiting volunteers can be a time consuming process. Unfortunately, it often becomes a case of looking for a “warm body”, somebody, anybody, to get the job done.

Why Recruit?

- to help spread the work among volunteers
- to keep the organization alive
- for new ideas
- to get the work done

Recruiting is getting the right person in the right job, with the right skills at the right time.

Whether your present volunteers can fit the job, or if you have to recruit others, it’s important to match the right person to the job.

Securing volunteers should be done through a total recruitment process rather than by taking the first individual who comes along. The recruitment of volunteers in your organization, whether it’s to get someone to chair the annual banquet or run for president, shouldn’t be handled any differently from the recruitment of paid staff.

Alberta
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Define the Job

The first step in recruiting volunteers is to define the job to be done. This helps ensure the organization gets the right person to fill the position.

Determine Job Qualifications

Once the job is defined, determine what qualifications are required to do the job.

A job description is a useful tool. It lists all the qualifications needed to do the job. This step clarifies, for all those involved (including the recruiters), the expectations and requirements of the volunteer position. It also gives volunteers an idea of the part they play in the total picture of the organization.

A volunteer job description should include –

Title – This is the volunteer’s identification. Give this as much prestige as possible.

Purpose – This is a general statement identifying what the job is and why it’s necessary.

Responsibilities – List each duty and responsibility of the job. Be as specific as possible.

Qualifications – Outline the skills, knowledge and attitudes you seek.

Relationships – Clarify who the volunteer is accountable to.

Time Commitment – Estimate time demands of the job. Be specific! i.e., weekly, monthly, long-term basis, flexible, self-determined.

Benefits – What’s in it for the volunteer? What’s to be gained personally by doing the job?

Develop a List of Potential Candidates

Now that you understand what the job is and what sort of person is required to do it, you need to make a list of potential candidates who may be able to do the job.

People volunteer for different reasons. Some people volunteer because of the power or status of the position. Others join your group for the chance to socialize or to be with other people. And still others want to get ahead, to achieve worthwhile and sometimes unique results for themselves or others. All three reasons are valid motives for volunteering. The organization should make every effort to satisfy the individual’s own needs when filling positions.

Examples

- The “people” person might be good at social committee work, canvassing or public relations.
- The “prestige” person might enjoy being master of ceremonies or media spokesman.
- The “achievement” person might like program planning, chairing a committee, working on a new activity or being on the executive.

Any “type” of person could do a very good job at any volunteer position, but both the organization and the volunteer benefit from a perfect match.

Where to Look for Volunteers

The first place you might start is within your organization. Have your volunteers fill in a “window of work” to help you get the right volunteer for the job. It’s a means of locating a special place for your volunteers within the organization.

Window of Work

Skills I have –

Special skills, talents, interests I like to use
e.g., typing
talking to people
writing
working with young people

Interests I want to develop –

Areas I want to learn more about
e.g., computers
bookkeeping
chairing a committee

Things I don't like to do –

Please don't ask me to do this!
e.g., fundraising
public speaking

Other sources of volunteers might be other community organizations, the welcome wagon, friends, family, schools or places where people gather (e.g., church meetings).

“Eighty per cent of those people not volunteering say the primary reason they didn't volunteer was because they weren't asked.”

You aren't always going to find the perfect, experienced, highly qualified candidate. Try to select the best person for the job.

Interview the Volunteer

The best people to contact a possible volunteer are those who are happy with their committee or organization. People are attracted to organizations that are positive, enthusiastic and fun.

Up to three people should approach the potential volunteer at their home, office or another convenient place. This should be done as soon as possible. Having more than one person approach the volunteer shows the organization or committee has really thought about it's decision to choose them. It also indicates the volunteer is supported by the group and insures all points about the job are covered.

If you are recruiting someone for a position that must be filled by an election (e.g., president, treasurer) you need to explain the process.

Welcome the Volunteer

If the potential volunteer accepts the offer, welcome them into your group or organization.

Orientation and Training

Both orientation and training are necessary to build and maintain the volunteer's confidence and abilities. Neither procedure needs to be lengthy or too involved.

New volunteers appreciate an orientation session about your organization. Providing basics about the structure, policies, procedures and activities done in the last three months helps the new volunteer understand the group. A policy and procedures handbook can be distributed at an initial orientation workshop or at the first meeting of the organization.

Beyond orientation, further training might be considered (e.g., effective chairmanship, public speaking, developing resolutions, etc.). This can be done one-on-one as part of the agenda during regular meetings or as an outside event. Training and upgrading of skills is a show of support to the volunteer. It serves to motivate and build commitment to the organization.

Follow-up and Recognition

A simple smile and warm “thank you” may serve to spur a volunteer to undertake another task. What happens when a volunteer works hard and gets results, but nobody notices? Soon the volunteer will begin to question whether he or she makes a difference. There are as many ways of recognizing the work of the volunteer as there are people in the organization. Creative suggestions range from naming a “volunteer of the month” or publishing a profile in the newspaper to a plaque

or pin awarded at the annual banquet. Asking a person for advice and guidance is a more subtle, and perhaps for some a more motivating, vote of appreciation. Your methods are your own, but be sure to include them in your organization's routine.

When it's Time to Leave

The signs of volunteer dissatisfaction aren't always evident. In cases where there's some concern about a volunteer and his or her effects on the organization, there is no easy answer. Treat the volunteer fairly. Ask the person if he or she needs help. Suggest that perhaps there's something else that the volunteer would rather do. The volunteer may actually be looking for a change. In any event, the problem should be dealt with before the volunteer is lost.

Summary

Remember, an organization is made up of people and those who volunteer have varying interests, motivations and talents. The objectives of the organization can only be met if a certain amount of time is spent dealing with the individual needs of each volunteer. A good volunteer program will satisfy the needs of the people.

Bibliography

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2. Larmer, Nancy. *Recruiting Volunteers*. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 1989.