

Volunteer Management Training: How to Recruit and Keep Volunteers

The Primary Goal of this training is to explore targeted volunteer recruitment: a strategy of invitation to reach the best people to fill and retain volunteer positions.

Introduction

Often when staff or key volunteers of an organization are involved in recruitment they are so anxious to fill slots that not enough care is given to finding the right person. We can all relate to the impact on the volunteer and the program when the wrong person is recruited. The volunteer feels incompetent and/or unfulfilled, leading to performance and retention problems, or the program does not get the job done well and builds resentment and resistance to further utilization of volunteers.

Successful recruitment involves marketing your program's volunteer needs to the segment of people who can fill those needs while simultaneously filling their own (for example, finding an AmeriCorps member who has a background in working with youth and who can help your Program develop an afterschool reading program). Recruitment is not merely following prescribed techniques to attract potential volunteers, for example, displaying posters and writing Public Service Announcements. Rather, a good recruitment program focuses on designing a strategy to find the right individual, utilizing an appropriate outreach technique, and inviting him/her to become a volunteer. It is difficult to isolate the topic of recruitment because its ultimate success is intertwined with the development of good roles (the product you are selling in recruitment) and with having the program prepared to utilize volunteers' time and talents effectively.

It is important, however, to examine how potential volunteers are invited to consider becoming a part of your organization, particularly if this function is not centralized. Even if most volunteers go through a central recruitment process, the staff and volunteers within your program are a significant part of its informal volunteer recruitment team. Thus, the principles of recruitment should be useful for all staff, whether they carry out this function themselves or act as ambassadors for the organization.

Background



Do Something U asked Micaela Connery, who founded Unified Theater, www.unifiedtheater.com to share her tips about getting people to volunteer. Unified Theater's model is to partner with middle and high schools, train student leaders, and help them reach a successful final production where students of all abilities are included. The concept is simple: let teens lead, let creativity rule, and treat people with disabilities as complete and entire equals.

Do Something U, www.dosomethingu.org, is an organization focused on teens. Do Something U harnesses that awesome energy and unleashes it on causes teens care about. Almost every week, they launch a new national campaign. The call to action is always something that has a real impact and doesn't require money, an adult, or a car. With a goal of 5 million active members by 2015, DoSomethingU is one of the largest organizations in the US for teens and social change. *(For AmeriCorps programs working with youth, this may be a good website to check out for additional resources.)*

Setup

- Identify facilitator to lead individual/group training activity.
- Training location: conference room, computer lab, or individual computer.
- If presenting to a group, ensure that you have projection and sound capability with the computer. *(Note: Sound is throughout this video and key to the training activity.)*
- Deliver training activity to a whole group or divide into groups or use individually.
- Outline can be provided to participants for discussion and as a good take away resource.
- Encourage participation with setup and facilitation of the training activity. *(Note: Give an AmeriCorps member the opportunity to present this activity as part of their own professional development and skill building.)*

Training Activity

Watch the You Tube video (4 minutes), “**Volunteer Management: How to Recruit and Keep Volunteers**”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naXpl6H6p0A&feature=related>, Presented by Micaela Connery, Founder of Unified Theater.



Summary of Information Presented in Video to Facilitate Discussion

1. Where do you start with volunteer recruitment?

Before you recruit for volunteers you need to know what your volunteers should look like and what you want them to do? Often, volunteer coordinators say, “I need volunteers” but what does that mean?

- Does that mean you need specific hours, skills, where do they need to be, do they need a car, what age(s)?
- Once you know what kind of volunteer you need then the recruiting process can begin.
- Tailor your recruitment to the type of volunteer you need. Consider creating a job description for the volunteer similar to a staff position description.

- During the recruiting process tell a story, “You’re going to make a difference this way or join in the movement” to create interest and excitement about your organization. Often, potential volunteers hear, “we need you to work 3 hours a day for 6 weeks doing...” It doesn’t matter what it is but it already sounds boring and uninteresting.

2. How do you get volunteers interested in your program?

Give volunteers “swag” or stuff. It can be as simple as serving pizza, ice cream or handing out candy at an information session.

- Micaela Connery, Founder of Unified Theater, doesn’t believe it matters how people get through the door but that they stay because of the mission and cause.
- Offer incentives beyond community service hours especially for youth volunteers.
- Let them know they’ll build their skills through grant writing, managing a group, public speaking, etc.
- The new skills look good on a resume and translate well to a letter of recommendation that might be needed for a college application, job, etc.
- Make the volunteer activity something substantive so they will want to keep on volunteering.

3. How do you keep your volunteers motivated?

In managing volunteers, keep your volunteers motivated by helping them understand the impact they make.

- Provide data about their impact – for example at Unified Theater they shared that, “for 62% of the participants this was their first time participating in an inclusive activity and you (volunteer) made that happen!”
- Thank volunteers often and publically – and publically doesn’t need to be a formal dinner.
- Be creative with your thank you so that volunteers stay engaged and see how they are connected to the organization.
 - post on a blog
 - shout outs on Facebook and Twitter
 - recognize in newsletter and emails

Recap

1. Make sure you know what you need volunteers for.
2. Cater your recruitment based on the kind of volunteers you need.
3. Recruit volunteers by making your program sound exciting and fun, offering food and swag also helps.
4. Allow volunteers to grow by offering skill-building opportunities.
5. Show them their impact. Let them know they are making a difference.
6. Don’t forget to show your thanks as often as possible!

Discussion & Activities

Once the video has been viewed, summarize the content and points presented using the outline above. The facilitator will then guide the discussion and activities regarding volunteer recruitment and the ideas shared in the video. Utilize the following facilitator presentations and activities for the training activity.

1. Facilitator Presentation: Ask participants to share a personal recruitment experience or anecdote from their AmeriCorps experience or in volunteering for another organization.

2. Facilitator Presentation: Too often we are tempted to fill positions without thinking of whether the needs of the program and the needs of the volunteer will both be met. In our urgency to fill slots, we take the first person who is willing to do the job.

Activity: Have participants share various reasons why people volunteer. Remind them that there are important benefits to volunteering that need to be met if the volunteer is going to remain active in the program.

3. Facilitator Presentation: As you design your outreach to prospective volunteers or analyze response from previous efforts at recruitment, you must begin to identify any barriers that may be keeping people from volunteering within your Program. These barriers may be personal time, child care needs, etc. or organizational location of facility, costs involved in volunteering, type of client served, etc.

Activity: Brainstorm barriers followed by personal barriers as to why people might not respond positively to opportunities to volunteer in your organization. Identify several steps which your program might be able to address so as to counter these current barriers.

4. Facilitator Presentation: The best strategy for finding the right volunteer is to use marketing principles which involve and exchange in values – the Program’s volunteer opportunity fits with the applicant’s interests and skills.

The Recruitment Message should include 3 elements;

1. The statement of need – the need is not the Program’s need but rather the needs of the beneficiaries.
2. How the volunteer can help – you have more impact by saying “You can help...,” not “Volunteers are needed...” (third person is not as appealing).
3. Benefits of the job – how volunteers will be helping themselves by doing the job. (Either general benefits of working at the Program or specific benefits of doing a particular task).

Activity: Break into small groups and design a recruitment message for your Program. Have the groups share their recruitment message with the group. Assess each message for the three elements. Note what works well and what could be changed or added to improve the message.

Summary/Wrap-up/Evaluation

In closing, use the points from the Recap to offer the group some reminders of principles for successful volunteer recruitment. Hand out the evaluation form and ask participants to complete.

Suggested Online Resources on Volunteer Management

- <http://energizeinc.com> – Energize, Inc. is an international training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. Their goal is "to connect leaders of volunteers with resources, information and ideas generated from around the world."

- <http://www.iave.org> – IAVE is "the only international organization with the mission to promote, celebrate, and strengthen volunteerism worldwide." The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) worked in close cooperation with the United Nations Volunteers and was a major contributor in establishing the International Year of the Volunteer.
- <http://e-volunteerism.com/> – The "Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community," e-Volunteerism is a quarterly online publication that caters to volunteer leaders and managers.

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