



Strong Programs Invite Volunteers

Intentional Recruitment of Volunteers

by Debra Jones

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Good organizations recruit volunteers automatically as people from the community see good things happening and notice the excitement and dedication of those involved. Marketing and recruitment are strong partners. The best recruitment method is for community members to see a positive image of an organization — how it benefits the participants and how it benefits the community as a whole. As community members begin to know you, the program you represent and the value of the program, they want to be part of it and they want to see it succeed. Consider keeping the program visible and welcoming in the community by:

- Posting news or announcements of member achievements, recognition and stories
- Being ready to respond to inquiries. If a prospective volunteer's first impression is one of disorganization or unreadiness, he or she will not come back and the negative experience may be shared with others.
- Asking for help when it's needed

Don't wait for people to volunteer — ask for help when it's needed. People like to feel needed, and if



it's a good program, they will want to see it succeed. Explain what needs to be done, how it might be done and how much time it would take, answer questions, offer resources and allow the person to move forward knowing he or she can contact you or others as needed. A personal invitation is the most effective recruitment tool and it can be done by paid staff or volunteers currently in the program. Potential volunteers will pick up on the energy, enthusiasm and passion of those who enjoy the work.

Volunteer Roles

As you determine the roles to be filled, take time to outline what the positions will look like. This helps identify the type of person needed for the role and may give you an idea of likely places to find that person. Initial thoughts of position descriptions generally bring to mind lengthy, detailed descriptions. Dispel this notion and open your program to possibilities. Prospective volunteers should have enough information to make a decision about getting involved or not, but this can be done with few words. The basic elements of a position description include what needs to be done, how long the job is expected to take and who will benefit from the



work. Keeping it simple invites people to try it out. They can then decide to continue or not based on their experience with the organization. You might also consider breaking down larger jobs into smaller components. You may fill individual roles or you might find a group of people that would like to take it on as a project working together.

Be creative with job descriptions; avoid using the generic term volunteer and use terms which more fully describe the skill or task that is needed:

- Carpenters/plumbers/electricians needed for building of food booth.
- Cooks and cashiers needed for food booth at Harvest Festival, Oct. 10–12.
- Share your talents with current and future leaders at Teen Leadership Training, March 6–8.
- Share your expertise and skills at making, baking and raising things by serving as a judge for 4-H exhibits at the state fair, Sept. 2. Lunch and two passes to enjoy the fair provided.
- Share your love of wildlife and conservation. Be a coach for the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program. Contest registration provided.
- Remember your first overnight retreat away from home? Bring this excitement to fifth and



sixth graders at the Junior Youth Conference. Conference registration provided.

- Like high adventure and camping? Share your enthusiasm for the great outdoors with seventh and eighth graders at High Adventure Camp. Camp registration provided.
- See what teens can accomplish through service! Serve as an interviewer for State 4-H Ambassadors.

Consider the following brief outlines as you develop position descriptions.

- Longer-term positions
 - Title
 - Brief description of the job (one or two sentences)
 - Qualifications to do the job (bulleted list of minimum qualifications such as specific skills or expertise)
 - Good estimate of hours required
 - Training required or offered (indicate)
 - Benefits of service
- Short-term positions (Several positions could be grouped together to show the variety offered.)
 - Title
 - Brief sentence describing tasks to be accomplished
 - Date and time of event (time commitment)
 - Any training provided

Also, attract parents and families by offering opportunities to spend time together.

Volunteer Support

Understand and respect that there are many different reasons people share their time. Some volunteers prefer behind-the-scenes tasks and enjoy the detail work that is required for events, others prefer to share specific skills or expertise on an as-needed basis and some enjoy being front and center in representing the organization. Each person has a vital role in developing and maintaining a healthy organization.

Volunteers who choose to share their time with an organization do so because they care about the organization. Honor them by showing that the

organization cares for and values them as well. Be aware that they may want to:

- feel needed and appreciated by the organization
- have a voice in what happens
- do things their own way
- feel respected

If the organization fails to show that it cares, there are plenty of other organizations that would welcome this potential volunteer.

In general, people want to feel welcome, have a sense of belonging within the organization, know they are valued and have opportunities to learn new things and be exposed to new opportunities. This support and appreciation can be demonstrated by offering:

- An environment in which they feel they can call, phone, email, text or stop by with questions or ideas, or just keep in touch
- User-friendly resources that are easily accessible
- Meaningful orientation and training
- Ongoing support, encouragement and recognition
- Timely sharing of upcoming events and information
- Help in dealing with problems and challenges
- The opportunity to be a part of a caring group that enjoys what they do
- Opportunities to meet new people and do interesting things with family and friends

As you seek volunteers, consider bringing together a group of those currently involved in the organization and ask for their ideas about how best to involve others. Ask what made them decide to get involved and rely upon their wisdom and suggestions. In addition to those currently volunteering, begin to seek out those who are not yet involved in the organization. Ask around to see who might be able to help with this new outreach.



Share your Appreciation

A heartfelt thank-you goes a long way in conveying your respect and gratitude for the selfless donation of time given by volunteers. Honor them by getting to know them and what is happening in their lives. Creating a sense of belonging and community with others is not limited to youth in a youth development organization; every one benefits from connection with others. Surprisingly, small items of recognition can be meaningful (a handwritten thank-you note or a thank-you through social media, organization t-shirts or treats). An informal gathering after an event encourages people to get together over a shared purpose and to visit and get to know one another. These gatherings become opportunities to build and strengthen friendships and community partnerships. As people reflect on the event, they may come up with ideas for next time/next year, opening up avenues for new ways of doing things and suggestions of new people to get involved. For more ideas on recognition, see Extension publication CRD-00032, *Volunteer Recognition: One Size Does Not Fit All*.

All of your marketing and recruitment efforts may go nowhere if a prospective volunteer does not feel welcome by your organization or if your organization conveys disorganization to prospective volunteers. If you are unsure of the impression conveyed to those seeking your organization, ask someone you know to call or stop by as a potential volunteer.

What was their impression of the organization? If they did not know you, would they go further with their inquiry? Use this feedback in meaningful and respectful ways to improve your organization.

In keeping with the basic framework of 4-H – Do, Reflect, Apply, think about the following:

- The best volunteer we ever had was _____
- He or she stands out because _____
- We found this person by _____
- If we had more time, what would we do that we are not currently doing?

Now, put this knowledge to work finding people you need to support and grow your program.

References

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www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

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