

# **RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS**

Source: *Hands on Network* [www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org) & *The New Breed of Volunteer*

## **Recruitment Basics**

Recruitment is the process of enlisting volunteers into the work of the program. **Because volunteers give their time only if they are motivated to do so**, recruitment is not a process of persuading people to do something they don't want to do. Rather, recruitment should be seen as the process of showing people they can do something they already want to do.

People already know that there are problems in the world, that people, the environment and animals need the support of people who care. As a volunteer recruiter it is your job to enroll people into knowing they are that person who cares, give them incentives to volunteer, and point out exactly how they are capable of helping.

## **Ways to Recruit**

Here are just a few ways of recruiting volunteers:

- The personal ask is always the most compelling!
- Post your volunteer opportunity on your Website.
- Strategically post flyers or brochures in the community.
- Utilize local media (e.g., newspapers and radio) to spread the word about your volunteer opportunities.
- Network with community groups and leaders.
- Use on-line forums and/or blogs to spread the word.

## **The Dating Method**

- **First date:** A tour, an opportunity to serve, a chance to experience your mission, a lunch where they hear your passion.
  - *Goal:* Give them a taste, gather information, get a second date.
- **Second date:** Listen to their heart, find a fit, share roles and responsibilities, avoid “Oh, by the way” moments.
  - *Goal:* Recruiting, building relationship for future recruiting, or securing a future date.
- **Future dates:** Understand that “no” doesn't always mean “never.”
  - *Goal:* Recruiting.

## **RETAINING VOLUNTEERS**

The best way to increase your volunteer base is to retain current volunteers. Retention is simply a matter of making volunteers feel good about themselves and their service. It includes motivating volunteers before the project, engaging them during the project, and leading them to reflect on the project.

From the very beginning of volunteers' involvement in your service activities, you should maintain good communication with them. Motivate them to stay interested and involved in your program with a few simple steps:

Be prompt in your response to phone calls/e-mails. Return volunteer calls or e-mails within 24 hours.

Be thorough in your explanation of the volunteer duties. Volunteers will be more likely to sign up if they know exactly what they will be doing, and they will know what to expect at the project. Use this opportunity to teach potential volunteers about the issue area, the community service organization they will be serving, and the potential impact of the project.

Use their names often; this helps develop a personal connection.

Keep the commitments you make. People will not support you if you don't provide information requested, address issues they bring up, and/or miss scheduled appointments.

Continue to be in contact with your team. Keeping volunteers motivated and excited about your project is the best guarantee for success! The more contact you provide, the more engaged your volunteers will be, and the more motivated they will be when they arrive. Also, respond to people's inquiries in a timely and thorough manner.

Make sure to confirm project details with them. Contact volunteers with a phone call or e-mail that:

Introduces you (or another staff person, partner, or volunteer) as the project leader

Thanks them for volunteering

Provides the date and time of the project, service site address, directions, and parking information

Describes what will occur at the project

Lets volunteers know what to wear or not wear to the project

Encourages volunteers to bring supplies they may have

Tells volunteers whom to contact if they have a change in plans

## **Common Recruiting Mistakes**

### *Number 1*

#### **Expect Announcements to Get Volunteers**

Announcements, newsletters, testimonials, and special mailings are all forms of marketing. If you make positive statements, such as, "we have this great opportunity," these methods can be an effective marketing strategy to demonstrate how your organization is accomplishing its mission. However, don't *expect* marketing like this to get volunteers. Announcements can't be a substitute for recruiting. Sin Number 1 is *not* saying, "Don't make announcements." It's saying, "Don't *expect* announcements to yield volunteers."

Sure, it'd be nice if recruiting were as simple as making an announcement. But unfortunately, the classic announcement method looks like this:

- **Step 1:** Make an announcement (in a meeting) or advertise to get volunteers
- **Step 2:** Put the few who volunteered immediately to work.
- **Step 3:** Begin fielding phone calls from volunteers who are late, can't show up, or are rethinking their whole commitment.
- **Step 4:** Stress over all of the vacancies you have to fill.

If you desire a lot of turnover with your volunteers, rely on the announcement method. The announcement method won't bring in many volunteers—and even if it does bring a few, it won't always bring in the right people for the job.

### ***So what will work?***

Volunteer managers need to realize that most people don't want to volunteer. Instead, they want to be asked. We need to change our perception of the word *volunteer*. We can't see *Volunteer as a verb*. *We aren't looking for someone to VOLUNTEER! When you make an announcement, what they must do to help you out is contact your or VOLUNTEER*

I learned an important lesson 20 years ago that I've never forgotten. I went to lunch with a man who was a mover and shaker. I asked, "Why didn't you volunteer for this project? I could see your name on it all the way."

I'll never forget his response. Chuck said, "If you wanted me, why didn't you ask? I'd be happy to work with you on this project, but I'd never *volunteer*."

Many people will never *volunteer*. Why? They're concerned that if they volunteer, they might not really be wanted. Again, they want to be asked.

Recruiting is an important process. Consider the old rule of communication: "You need to communicate the same message five times, five different ways, and the fifth time people often say, 'I never heard that before.'" You need to use announcements, written letters, testimonials, and write-ups in newsletters. But most of all, when you recruit, you need personal invitations.

## ***Number 2***

### **Go It Alone**

So how do you not go it alone? The answer to the question is one word: Bev. You find a Bev who helps you find more Bevs, and eventually you have a bunch of Bevs! Bev not only stands as a shining example of a volunteer recruiter; she also represents the exact kind of individuals you need as members of a recruiting task force. **BUILD A TEAM OF RECRUITERS.**

Go to Bev—that person in the church who already has a passion for your organization and invite them to share and talk up your programs..

## **Building An Effective Network**

The key to an effective network is finding people with the following characteristics:

- A passion for your organization
- 2. Already actively volunteering for you
- 3. A clear communicator
- 4. A visionary

A recruiting task force is a great way to avoid the sin of trying to go it alone.

Look for a dozen BEVs. Each Bev is a source of 10, 50 or more volunteers. Bev makes this work and if you give Bev the credit instead of you, it is amazing what you will accomplish.

### *Number 3*

#### **Recruit Only Volunteers Who Make Long-Term Commitments**

The junior high pastor of your church sits across the table and jumps right to the point: “Would you like to spend the next 10 years of your life volunteering three hours each Wednesday night, three hours each Sunday morning, a weekly two-hour staff meeting, and—oh yeah, a once-a-month event?”

How would you respond if someone tried to recruit you like that? Maybe fake that you were stung by a bee? That always works for a quick exit.

Rewind. Try again.

“This Saturday morning, we really could use some drivers for our service project.”

“Sure, I can help this Saturday.”

#### **Find special project to get people to volunteer for.**

Recruiting people to be part of a short-term project rather than what seems like a lifelong commitment works particularly well with younger volunteers. Many people fear getting tied into a job for a lifetime and never being able to get out of it. They get burned out, sometimes even quitting the organization as a way to quit their volunteer role.

Short-term projects, however, not only open doors to longer commitments, they also expose volunteers to your leadership. Always use one of your organization’s most effective leaders to lead your short-term project teams. Volunteers will have the opportunity to catch the vision of the organization as they work alongside a passionate leader.

## Number 4

### Assuming that No means Never

- No, I have too much on my plate right now.
- Sorry I just can't

**So what will work?** As you can see, timing is everything. When you get the courage to recruit someone and that person says no, you might feel rejected. Instead, try to think of a “no” as an open door to listen carefully to the reasons. Sometimes the “no” just means “not now.”

Of course, sometimes the “no” means that the prospective volunteers would rather do something else. When the answer is “no,” from time to time you might ask if any positions in your organization interest them, including ones that they were never asked to consider. You might be surprised at what people say.

## Number 5

### Recruiting the B.I.C.

As volunteer recruiters, it's also easy to fall into the trap of following the B.I.C. syndrome. We desperately need a volunteer, so we plead our case to anyone with a pulse. We lower our standards, and at the last minute we get someone to be a B.I.C. A B.I.C. is a “Butt In the Chair.” However, most times we realize that the chair would have been better empty than filled with the wrong butt. Most of us have had a few of these “butts” on our teams!

Another variation of the B.I.C. method is just to say, “Please come and be a part of our group. We have a great time and we need your expertise.” But we don't tell the prospective volunteers what we want them to do.

**So what will work?** R&R. Not rest and relaxation, but roles and responsibilities. Effective recruiting demands a very clear, complete, and brief presentation of the roles and responsibilities of the position you're recruiting for. This not only helps people know what to do once they get started, it also helps them evaluate if they're a good fit to begin with.

Think about this for a second. If we can help volunteers understand the, what and why of what they'll be doing and help them fit where they can really make a difference, our retention will increase exponentially.

For short-term projects, the presentation of roles and responsibilities might be a simple but clear explanation of your expectations. (After all, volunteers picking up trash on the side of the highway for three hours once on a Saturday probably don't need a lot of parameters.) But even short-term projects that last a week or two can benefit from clearly explaining roles and responsibilities of the volunteers involved. Long-term positions demand this.

Roles and responsibilities look different in different organizations. A small service organization might have a one-page “Volunteer Expectations” sheet that details the purpose, the time commitment, and a few guidelines.