

WHY VOLUNTEERS?

There are many reasons to include volunteers in your organization. Your staff may be overloaded and need some extra hands, or you may want to expand the base of support in your community. You may also be interested in training members of your community to address their own issues and in empowering them to speak out, or in developing the next generation of leaders.

It is important to have a good system for recruitment and management of volunteers so that the organization's needs are met, and the volunteers feel that they have a good learning experience. A well-managed volunteer program enables volunteers to feel successful and enhances your organization's reputation.

THE PROCESS

How do you find volunteers? You can promote your volunteer program in social situations, distribute flyers, send out emails, post an ad on your website and other recruitment websites, and hold volunteer recruitment meetings. To get a wide pool of volunteer candidates, we suggest doing all of the above.

You should have an internal system for interviewing and hiring each volunteer. It should be a systemic approach: the steps you take should be a procedure that is the same for each person, whether the volunteer is someone you just met on the street, or a friend you've known for 20 years. Making everyone follow similar steps for recruitment, and having everyone begin and start at the same time, creates an ethic of fairness in the organization and avoids the impression that the organization is run by cliques (more about that in our section on management).

Keep in mind that the people you are asking to volunteer have needs too, and they may be different from yours. They could be looking for a supportive community, a chance to contribute something positive, and a way to empower and express themselves. They could also be looking for work experience, a recommendation for a future employer, or a way to get into this professional field. You need to have a way of assessing whether their reasons are compatible with your organization's methods, mission, and work environment.

STEP-BY-STEP

Job Description: You should create some short job descriptions that you can show to potential volunteers. It is best if these are tailored to specific programs, so that it is clear what you expect volunteers to do. You can also include any special skills or experience required, and how much time volunteers commit to giving. This helps the potential volunteer to decide whether one of the jobs is appropriate for her.

Application Form: We recommend creating a simple application form for volunteers to fill out which includes the basic information you need to follow up with people: name, address, phone number(s), email address, areas of interest, skills to offer, hours of availability, some relevant work or volunteer experience, and emergency contacts. This will make it easier for you to assess the right person for each job, and will also make it easier for you to find someone if a volunteer doesn't show up when she is supposed to, or if there is an emergency.

Very Important Never just bring someone into your organization without thinking it through. We've learned this one the hard way: it ALWAYS matters who it is. An organization is a living organism made out of people, and every single person in your organization is important. In a few months, when you are stressed out over managing a difficult person, you might regret that you weren't more careful. Be objective during your interview, and don't let yourself be charmed too easily just because someone has a nice personality. If you're not sure, ask another colleague to give you his/her opinion.

Sample | Volunteer Job Descriptions

Title | Give the position a short title that indicates what the volunteer will do.

Major Objectives | Describe the goals that the volunteer will work towards.

Major Responsibilities | List specific duties and responsibilities, including any regular volunteer meetings.

Qualifications | List any skills, education or personal qualities needed to perform the job.

Time and Place | The number of hours and days of the week the volunteer is needed, and the place where the volunteer will perform the job.

Length of Commitment | Give the start and end date for the volunteer position. If you both want to extend it, you can always do so later.

On-the-job Supervision | State which person each volunteer reports to, and how often the volunteer will see each supervisor.

Benefits | List any expenses that will be paid or materials provided.

Interview: A short interview, one on one, gives you an opportunity to talk to the potential volunteer about her interests and experience and assess whether or not she are the right fit for your organization. You should also take the opportunity to really listen to the person and hear what her concerns and interests are. Listen to see if she sounds reliable and sensible. Does the person really understand and care about the mission of your organization? What is it that she needs or wants from the experience? Can she explain how she would implement a difficult task? Does she have a good understanding of what your organization does, and how she can help? Give her a chance to ask questions too. If you're not sure about whether or not to bring someone into the organization, ask one of your colleagues to interview her too. Also, some organizations that work on political issues may need to be careful about troublemakers who come in with the intention of disrupting the work or inciting conflict. This is an old tactic used by many countries, and is yet another reason to start off new volunteers with very minimal levels of responsibility, so that you can learn about new people and build trust gradually over time.

References: If the volunteer job involves any special responsibility or experience, especially handling money or working with vulnerable people, ask for references, and call the references to ask about the person. The references can be a former boss, colleague, or someone else who can speak to the candidate's relevant experience. Listen for what the referee does not say, as well as what she or he does say. If your program provides services or help to children, find out what the legal requirements are for volunteers who have contact with children in your town or state. In many countries, staff and volunteers who work with children may need to go through background checks and register with the authorities.

Decision: Once you have made a decision, inform the applicant quickly. If you find someone good, get them involved early and often. The longer you take to involve them, the greater the chance that they will change their minds about volunteering. Even if you don't have a volunteer orientation right away, maybe you have some events coming up that volunteers can participate in.

For more of the Nonprofit Survival Guide, visit:

www.asiacatalyst.org