

BEST PRACTICES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Recruiting, Employing, and Retaining

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For a successful project, you will need volunteers who bring value to your efforts, who buy into the effort, and who are dependable and hardworking. They must be willing to uphold your organization's values, complete tasks as assigned and on time, be a team player, and display professionalism with stakeholders.

The following guidelines can assist you in finding and maintaining ideal volunteers.

Core Principles for Volunteer Recruitment

1. Determine and understand your project's or organization's volunteer needs.
2. Ask current volunteers to recruit like-minded individuals who they believe might be a good fit for the project. A personal invitation from a friend can be a strong influence.
3. Consider hosting informational sessions to excite potential volunteers about working with the program/organization.
4. Use available resources (website, social media, public bulletin boards, word of mouth) to seek volunteers.
5. Network/collaborate with other groups (school organizations/businesses/community groups) who may have members who could volunteer for your program or provide extra helpers.

Core Principles for Volunteer Employment

1. Bring volunteers together to get acquainted and prepare for an event. A 15-minute pre-meeting training may be sufficient for simpler projects. Larger-scale or more complicated projects may call for an advance training session. For ongoing projects, a yearly or semi-annual volunteer training session may be helpful.
2. Have a clear outline of tasks/expectations/assignments. An effective effort needs leaders and workers. Have an overall "big picture" leader who can guide other team leaders as they oversee volunteers.
3. Make sure volunteers know their specific role/responsibilities and whom to go to if questions arise.
4. Allow for some redundancy in tasks/flexibilities. Events rarely go without unexpected glitches. Be prepared to troubleshoot.
5. Welcome feedback from volunteers. They may have suggestions for improving processes.

Core Principles of Effective Volunteer Retention

1. Value your volunteers' time. If they show up to help, respect that and give them a duty.
2. Assess what drives those who volunteer for your project/organization. Ask volunteers what they can bring to the table and assign tasks that will inspire/excite them, i.e., play to their strengths. You may even find tasks suited for them of which you were not previously aware.
3. Assess and address burnout among volunteers. Try not to overuse volunteers. Rotate volunteers if you have enough interested individuals or offer a sabbatical to long-term volunteers.
4. Express your heartfelt gratitude to volunteers. Volunteers are the backbone of your project's success. Let them know that. Maybe offer snacks or a meal during an event, post thank-yous on social media, give them a small gift card (include these in your budget).