

How to **ATTRACT** the Best Volunteers

To find and keep the best volunteers, you must compete for them.
Here are the tools you need.

BY MARK ANDREW MITCHELL & DONALD YATES

Today's nonprofit organizations must compete with one another to recruit and retain the volunteers they need. Here are some ways you can adjust your staffing activities to attract the best possible volunteers for your organization.

The Four M's of Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment consists of four vital components: management, marketing, motivation, and mission.

One—Management

First of all, you must prepare staff to recruit and manage volunteers. Be sure that *all* staff members are committed to having volunteers as part of the organization and that they understand how to work with volunteers.

Do not skimp on providing training for staff. This training should not only explain how to supervise volunteers but should also explore staff members' attitudes. Be sure they do not undervalue volunteers simply because they work without pay. Stress the importance of teamwork between paid staff and volunteers.

Because volunteers lack the monetary incentive of the paid employee, they can simply terminate their relationship with the organization if they have an unpleasant experience. This fact makes it

doubly important to treat volunteers with respect and courtesy.

Two—Marketing

Second, you must market your organization to potential volunteers as a worthwhile outlet for their energies. The most effective marketers are satisfied volunteers already working for your organization. Encourage them to reach out enthusiastically to other potential volunteers.

Three—Motivation

Third, you must determine the motivations of potential volunteers. Don't assume that their motives are altruistic. It has been well established that volunteers have multiple motivations, with altruism only a minor factor. Other motivating factors include: fellowship, discontent with primary vocation, personal recognition, desire for marketable work experience, social interaction, and the lessening of a sense of debt or obligation.

Most volunteers want positions that provide self-expression, personal challenge, visible achievements, and an

opportunity to develop specific abilities and skills. In designing your recruiting effort, keep in mind these general motivations for volunteering as well as each individual's personal motives. You must seek a "fit" between your organization's needs and the volunteer's aspirations.

Four—Mission

Your organization's mission is a visible tool you can use to recruit volunteers. You cannot enlist volunteers until you know exactly what you wish to accomplish as an organization. Likewise, your stated goals will influence the types of volunteer you attract. The organization that truly believes it offers something of value and substance will be more aggressive—and successful—in attracting volunteers than the organization that perceives itself as asking for a "favor" or a "handout."

Do not take lightly, therefore, the task of formulating and publicizing your organization's mission. Continually reinforce your mission to existing volunteers, and share new goals and objectives with them to maintain their commitment.

The Three Components of Assessment

Volunteer assessment is as important as recruitment. To properly address volunteer assessment, it is useful to differentiate three closely related concepts:

1 One

Effectiveness concerns the quality or impact of a program's output—that is, the relationship between outputs and outcomes. In other words, are you doing good things?

2 Two

Efficiency deals with the relationship between inputs and outputs. The focus is on the amount of resources necessary to produce one unit of output.

3 Three

Productivity occurs when both effectiveness and efficiency are present. In other words, are you doing good things inexpensively?

This separation of effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity is vital to discussing volunteer assessment. It's important to note that efficient use of resources does not necessarily translate into effectiveness in providing services. Nor does success in managing volunteers automatically lead to success in satisfying clients' needs.

It is crucial, therefore, to weigh the needs of volunteers against your organization's purpose and your need for efficiency. Only if you're meeting both volunteers' and clients' needs in a cost-effective way can you say that your organization is productive.

Thus, you need an on-going, well-designed productivity assessment system. You should assess volunteers' satisfaction as well as their impact on the organization's overall performance. You should address any discrepancies between volunteers' desired and actual outcomes, and make the necessary changes to insure their continued support. If volunteers are unhappy, consid-

er other tasks they may find more rewarding. Reassess their reasons for volunteering, and be sure you are giving them what they are looking for.

As part of your assessment efforts, pay particular attention to volunteer-staff relationships. Evaluate paid staff's work with volunteers as part of your regular performance reviews. Be sure that volunteers feel they are an integral, valued part of the organizational team.

The key point is not to forget that volunteers are indeed "customers" seeking an exchange with you: their donation of time in exchange for opportunities to achieve their personal goals. Satisfied customers become loyal customers. Satisfied volunteers become loyal and productive volunteers. ■

Selected References

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

Volunteer Management Software

Volunteer Information Management software, BWB Associates, Ltd., 10-A South 7th Street, Akron, Pennsylvania 17501 (717-859-6642 or 800-234-4846).

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How to Build Volunteer Relationships

If you nurture your volunteers and build relationships with them, you'll increase their level of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. Here are a few ideas that can go a long way in building successful volunteer relationships.

- Ask volunteers for suggestions on how you, your staff, and your organization can improve. Actively and regularly solicit their ideas and opinions.
- Invite a volunteer to join you for lunch.
- Keep records of your volunteers' birthdays, then send a birthday card with a personalized note from you and the staff.
- If a volunteer does an exceptional amount of work for you (such as during a time-intensive special event), write a sincere thank-you note.
- Send copies of any media coverage which mentions your volunteers.
- Tell volunteers how much you value the expertise they bring to your organization, whether that expertise is legal advice, public speaking, or fundraising.

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