

Part of Volunteer Management Series #7

Growing Your Volunteer Base

Need more volunteers? Looking for new recruiting sources? Consider these tried and true options recommended by volunteer management experts.

by Joelle Baugher

Corporate Social Responsibility

More corporations are launching volunteer programs to grow their corporate image and employee loyalty. Companies want to show that they are committed to their home communities while providing volunteer opportunities for their employees to give back.

Your first task? Work with your existing event sponsors to extend volunteer opportunities to their employees. Corporations often have internal communication sites specifically geared to share volunteer opportunities. They may look for options to “own” a specific shift or area, such as information booths, water stations or food booths by staffing completely with their corporate volunteers.

Your second task? Work with your internal event sponsorship team to share their contacts or have them ask their contacts who might be in charge of their employee volunteering. Getting a company involved in your organization on the volunteer level will strengthen their sponsorship and connection to your organization. If the company is a sponsor prospect, having them volunteer (and enjoy their volunteer experience) can only help sell the sponsorship package by building the relationship between the company and your event.

Your third task? It is all about networking. Get involved in your local chamber to meet business people in your area. Talk to friends and family who work for large corporations. Do they know who coordinates volunteer activities for their business? Look around at other community events and charitable activities. Which corporations are actively represented through the volunteers? And “mine” your LinkedIn account to see if any of your friends, colleagues or associates are “contacts” within businesses in which you seek to recruit volunteers.

Many companies seek employees who are active in the community but they

don't always make it easy for organizations seeking volunteers to find the right contact person. The titles of people in charge of employee volunteering can range from specific (Community Outreach Liaison) to vague (Project Manager). It always helps if you can find someone in the company or a personal contact to make introductions.

The Millennial Generation

A postcard is a waste of printing and postage for this younger crowd. Keep your efforts green and low cost with social media. Take it virtual.

The younger the potential volunteer the more likely their use of social media, but to get their attention, you need to speak their language and connect with them in a meaningful way on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Post pictures of the volunteers from the event(s) wearing event t-shirts or participating in fun event activities to get a buzz going online.

Get volunteers and potential volunteers involved early. Engage them with short, fun polls on your Facebook or Twitter sites. Hold a contest for best shirt design and have your 'fans' vote for the winner on your Facebook page. Or have your 'fans' pick the event theme for the year or the theme for the volunteer appreciation day event. Put out a call for specific volunteer jobs and make it creative and fun. If you need volunteers for an info booth, ask for "those people who always have ALL the answers."

And don't forget the value of referrals! Once a volunteer has registered to participate, suggest that they post the volunteer registration link to their personal facebook page or on their twitter account to help bring this fun volunteer opportunity to the attention of their friends and family.

Other Tips for Overall Recruitment

Begin by Consolidating. Make certain your database is clean and up to date. Do you have all of your existing volunteers in your online database? Include those volunteers without email who cannot be contacted electronically. Check with your event staff to make sure you are not working from multiple lists. Eliminate stray spreadsheets and scraps of paper with volunteer information.

Utilize Existing Volunteers. The best source for new volunteers is your network of existing volunteers. Actively work to ensure your volunteers have a great experience. Make them feel they are a part of the event team and they will return year after year. As a by-product, they will encourage their friends, family and col-

leagues to join them if you just ask. Provide recruitment reminders and volunteer registration links to your volunteers early and often.

Create Incentive Programs – Reward volunteers for registering early, or for registering for multiple activities or numerous hours. Volunteers working the most hours and the most difficult jobs could receive a simple volunteer recognition gift, such as \$5 giftcards or event merchandise like t-shirts. Invite current volunteers to a volunteer appreciation party and use this as a recruiting opportunity by allowing them to bring a guest. Hold drawings for additional prizes to keep people connected to your event. Consider rewarding volunteers who have worked hard for you by giving them the first opportunity to select jobs and shifts.

Newsletters – Create a volunteer newsletter to stay in touch year round. This will help keep your volunteers engaged, interested and up-to-date with your event happenings. You can use the newsletter to announce new volunteer opportunities or new and exciting happenings within your organization. This communication will create an "insider" atmosphere.

Board Members – Ask your board members to get you in front of the groups, businesses and organizations with which they work regularly. Board Members have an interest in your organization and they will often serve as an advocate for your efforts and can help you promote the volunteer opportunities. Remember they have a direct interest in your success. They just need to be asked to help.

Work With Other Organizations – Work with your CVB or Sports Commission and ask them to send a message that you create to their volunteer database advertising your volunteer opportunities, including a link to your registration site. Do the same with other major volunteer organizations, organizers of large sporting and music events, marathons, etc., even the local United Way. Such groups may simply help you or they may be interested in reciprocal sharing of volunteer databases. If you think there may be such a reciprocal request, make sure you have permission from your volunteers. Include a question on your volunteer site that indicates each individual's willingness to be contacted by other organizations.

Community Websites – Post your info and registration link on your local community "things to do" websites. Many news outlets have such a page on their websites and they want this information.

Newspaper – Submit short notices to the newspaper at regular intervals regard-

ing volunteer opportunities. For sporting event volunteers, send your notice to the sports editor. For civic, charity and fundraising events, submit it to the editor of the most appropriate section.

TV and Radio – Submit notices to broadcast stations. They may include your call-out for volunteers on a slow news day or during a time allotted to such information. When doing this, it is extremely important to have an easy way for volunteers to respond, as they will not be able to write down a web address. One option is to get a link in advance on the station's web site, allowing the station to drive more traffic to its own site.

Good Match – What type of person or group would want to volunteer for this event or specific job? Target and reach out to those affinity groups that would naturally be drawn to the event you are organizing. Going beyond the obvious -- music students who could help with a jazz festival, adult soccer leagues that could help with a soccer tournament -- think about the connection between the volunteer and the activity. If you need to set up at 4:00 AM, why not ask a military group to help? Need volunteers at 1:00 PM on a school day? You won't want to target high school students, even if the event is otherwise of interest to them. Does a shift require lifting or other physical strain? You may have a lot of tasks for your older volunteers, but you probably won't want to recruit them for strenuous work.

Most importantly, do take time to make sure the volunteer and the volunteer job opportunity is a good match. This step will help ensure a good volunteer experience for everyone.

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