

# THE EVENT

# VOLUNTEER



## ROLE - DEFINED

By Florence May, Virginie McNamar, Joelle Baugher & Kathryn Paige May

I recently met with a new volunteer manager. She looked at me with pleading eyes. *"I am so overwhelmed. I have so many volunteer positions to fill. Where do I start?"*

The top responsibility of the volunteer manager is to recruit team leaders and volunteers who are truly helpful, dependable and productive. Unfortunately many volunteer programs operate under the short-term aim of recruiting the most volunteers possible simply to fill positions. The pursuit of sheer numbers without an emphasis on volunteer leaders and volunteer job specifics (e.g. skills, restrictions, schedules) tends to be poor use of organizational resources and rarely helps with volunteer retention.

Begin by tackling the hardest piece first, plan your team leader and volunteer needs. It is critical that you work as a team to identify team leader (a volunteer leader who manages small teams of volunteers) and volunteer position descriptions. Sit down with the operations and events staff to plan your event volunteer needs.

Team leaders are volunteers who oversee small team of volunteers. They are the volunteer manager's eyes and arms during the event since the volunteer manager can hardly be at every place at the same time. A team leader may be responsible for all the entry gates or just a few very busy concession stands or a section of a parade route. Volunteer managers need to hand pick team leaders based on their skills and invest time in training them in order to have smooth operations onsite. Team leaders need to be people you trust to carry out tasks with respect to you and the organization.

There is core information that needs to be clearly communicated to all prospec-

tive volunteers. Take a look at the two screenshots from a sample online registration system. Which information is critical?

- Volunteer position name with detailed (and honest) position description
- Position restrictions and requirements
- Available position shifts (including date, start/end time, and location for each)

Follow this step by detailing shift schedules and the number of volunteers needed per shift on a master volunteer grid.

### Sample

**Position Title:** [Greeter]

**Position Description:** [Greeters will be positioned outside at key entry points to event in pairs. Greeters will be trained to assist guests with venue directions, event schedule, ticket purchase details and other frequently asked questions.]

**Position Restrictions/ Requirements:** [Greeters should be prepared for all weath-

er conditions (e.g.: Sunscreen, umbrellas/ rain coats). Greeters will stand during their entire shift but will receive a 10 minute break each hour from a team leader. Greeters may eat or drink during their 10 minute break but not in front of guests.]

### Realistic Job Descriptions

It is critical to clearly define and communicate job requirements (e.g. technical skills, stamina/strength) and expectations (e.g. friendly, mobile, flexible, works well in high-stress situations) if you expect to recruit the appropriate people to advance your mission. Some volunteers will be patient with "seat warmer" positions; but younger volunteers will be more interested in jobs that make an impact and help people directly. Younger volunteers also are most likely to expect good use of their time and talents. Talented volunteer managers will categorize and describe volunteer positions in a way that is easy for volunteers to select positions that

### POSITION SHIFTS

LOCATION	DATE	TIME	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED
Gate A	Tuesday, March 8	8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	2 people
Gate A	Tuesday, March 8	11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	2 people
Gate B	Tuesday, March 8	8:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.	2 people
Gate B	Tuesday, March 8	11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	2 people
Gate C	Tuesday, March 9	8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	2 people
Gate C	Tuesday, March 8	11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	2 people
Gate C	Wednesday, March 9	8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	2 people

match their skills, interests, capabilities and availability.

### Shift Scheduling

Similarly, it is important to be realistic with volunteer shift expectations. Need a few tips?

- Shifts should be neither too brief nor too long. Normal shifts should be 3-4 hours long.
- Weekend shifts, and those scheduled around the workday, rather than during the workday, will likely be the most popular. Shifts located inside often fill more quickly.
- Longer shifts need greater attention to rotations and breaks. Difficult positions (e.g.: weather, heavily trafficked areas) also require greater attention to rotations and breaks.
- Determine minimum and maximum number of volunteer shifts. (e.g.: minimum 2 shifts, maximum 5 shifts) How many consecutive hours are too long for volunteers to work in your event? (e.g. maximum 2 shifts per day)
- Consider start and finish times. Do you have proper lighting, parking and security available if the hours are extremely early (before dawn) or late (after dusk)?

### Operations/Events Staff

The operations/events staff must be informed (in the most congenial terms) that volunteers will be treated as a part of the event team. It is the job of the operations and event staff to coordinate

and communicate with team leaders and encourage volunteers. They need to be friendly, reliable and supportive; when this occurs, volunteers and staff mesh to work as a single team, rather than as opposing forces. The volunteer manager may need to train/inform staff on how to work with volunteers, which can be done in a fun productive way with role play of interactions or issues.

### Final Step: Volunteer Manual

Many volunteer managers want to start by pulling together the volunteer manual information, (e.g.: Expectations, benefits, uniform details) but this job is so much easier after you define the positions. The volunteer manual should be made available to all volunteers on the registration site and/or your website. Specifics should be reviewed during volunteer training. A few items to include:

- **Benefits** – Will you provide parking? Food and/or drinks?
- **Communications** – Specify the volunteer point of contact for each venue.
- **Expectations** – Arrive 15 minutes prior to shift? Attend training? Check in location and process?
- **Safety/Security** – If a volunteer suspects or sees a safety or security issue, with whom do they communicate? Is there an emergency phone number that is published for the event?
- **Uniforms** - Specify the type of pants/skirt that are acceptable. Clothing should be clean and well kept. Specify shoes (e.g.: Color, closed, comfortable soles).

Quality is key. Remember, your volunteers are people, not cattle. Not all of the volunteers will have the same ability or desire to carry out their assigned tasks. Successful volunteer managers take the time to coordinate with their event staff; define the volunteer opportunity and communicate expectations clearly.

### Bottom Line

My bottom line advice for the overwhelmed volunteer manager? Get organized. Recruit the 'Right' people for the 'Right' positions on the 'Right' days.

#### The Registration System (TRS)

team of Florence May, Managing Member; Virginie McNamar, Product Manager; Joelle Baugher, Account Manager and Kathryn Paige May, Marketing Intern are pleased to share their volunteer management lessons learned with IFEA members.

Clients use TRS ticketing, event registration and volunteer systems to run the best events. Clients include the 500 Festival, Kentucky Derby Festival, Memphis in May, Celebrate Fairfax!, Kansas City Irish Fest, Waco Cultural Arts Festival, Indy Jazz Fest, Detroit International Jazz Festival, and so many others! Contact Florence at [fmay@theregistrationsystem.com](mailto:fmay@theregistrationsystem.com) or +1-317-966-6919 with additional questions.

VOLUNTEER MANAGER	OPERATIONS/EVENTS STAFF
<b>PRE-EVENT</b> Responsible for creating team leader and volunteer job descriptions, developing volunteer schedule, recruiting team leaders/ volunteers and overseeing database.	<b>PRE-EVENT</b> Responsible for identifying needs including positions, quantity of people and time required for the event. Critical that needs are realistic.
<b>ON-SITE</b> Responsible for event wide allocation of volunteers and oversight of team leaders.	<b>ON-SITE</b> Coordinate and communicate clearly with volunteer manager and team leaders.
<b>ON-SITE</b> Conduct quality control walk through. Talk to volunteers, ask how they are doing, and thank them.	<b>ON-SITE</b> Encourage and thank volunteers.
<b>ON-SITE</b> Responsible for making sure people are getting in the right places, dealing with problem volunteers, backing up/supporting operations and event staff.	<b>ON-SITE</b> Coach volunteer manager, team leaders and/or volunteers if the volunteer responsibilities are not being completed correctly. Report any problem volunteers.
<b>POST-EVENT</b> Survey team leaders and volunteers. Wrap up session with team leaders, event and operations staff. Evaluation of volunteer needs; numbers, times, etc.	<b>POST-EVENT</b> Share volunteer support pros, cons and recommendation comments with the volunteer manager. Evaluation of volunteer needs; numbers, times, etc.

## VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT TIMELINE

TIMING	ITEM	WHO
12 months prior	Sign up "Interested Volunteers" online	Volunteer Manager
10-12 months prior	Identify volunteer position descriptions, shifts, restrictions	Volunteer Manager with Operations and Events Staff
10-12 months prior	Create volunteer manual	Volunteer Manager with review by COO/ Event Director
11 months prior	Check volunteer liability form	Volunteer Manager with Attorney and Insurance Company
9-12 months prior	Start process for volunteer shirt design and vendor quotes	Volunteer Manager
6-8 months prior	Build online registration site	Volunteer Manager
6-8 months prior	Organize your training sessions – locations, handouts, parking passes, badge/uniform distribution etc.	Volunteer Manager
6-8 months prior	Identify team leaders; replacing any if appropriate or necessary.	Volunteer Manager and Team Leaders
6-8 months prior	Recruiting	Volunteer Manager
4-6 months prior	Test online registration site	Operations Manager, Event Director and team leaders
3-6 months prior	Take volunteer online registration site live	Volunteer Manager
3-6 months prior	Coordinate details related to refreshments, securing check-in locations and parking,	Volunteer Manager with Operations and Event Staff (Must be coordinated)
2-3 months prior	Team Leader Coordination	Volunteer Manager with Operations and Events Staff (Must be coordinated)
1-3 weeks prior	Volunteer Training	Volunteer Manager
2-4 weeks prior	Work on filling open shifts and key positions	Volunteer Manager
7-14 days prior	Schedule Reminder to volunteers	Volunteer Manager
Event Day(s)	Event Volunteer Oversight	Volunteer Manager
Shortly after the event	Event Volunteer Wrap Up	Volunteer Manager with Team Leaders
Shortly after the event	Survey of Team Leaders and Volunteers	Volunteer Manager
5-10 days after the event	Thank you to Team Leaders and Volunteers	Volunteer Manager
2-4 weeks after the event	Evaluate	Volunteer Manager with Operations and Events Staff