

VOLUNTEER RECRUITING: What Motivates Volunteers

by Florence May

It is not uncommon to see four generations of volunteers (and staff) come together in support of events. Volunteers come with a wide variety of motivations, skills and expectations. Carefully consider the skills, unusual demands or personal traits required for the volunteer position before you start filling slots. The goal is to recruit volunteers with a long-term relationship in mind.



Five years ago, volunteer managers were telling potential recruits, "This is how you can help." The tune has changed. Now, the message is, "This is how your skills, interest and social commitment are important to making this event successful." Volunteers want to make use of their practical skills and talents. Volunteer managers must communicate during the engagement stage that the volunteer's time will be valued, productive and impactful. Engagement is even more likely to occur on one of the many online activities than it is in person.

There is no doubt that recruiting can be difficult. You have to constantly look for new angles and connections to recruit volunteers who have the skills and dedication the organization is seeking.

Motivation

What motivates people to give their time, talent, and sometimes even treasure to event organizations? Clary et al. (1998) identified six motivations for volunteering.

- **Values Function** – The person is volunteering to express or act on important values, such as humanitarianism and helping the less fortunate.
- **Understanding Function** – The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world and exercise skills that are often unused.
- **Enhancement Function** – The person is seeking to grow and develop psychologically through involvement in volunteering.
- **Career Function** – The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.
- **Social Function** – Volunteering allows the person to strengthen one's social relationships.
- **Protective Function** – The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.

Bang and Ross (2009) identified additional motivations specific to sport volunteerism.

- **Community Involvement** – The volunteer has pride in the local community hosting an event.
- **Extrinsic Rewards** – The volunteer is motivated by tangible rewards such as clothing, food, accommodations, and tickets.
- **Love of Sport** – the volunteer is motivated by their passion for a particular sport or competition.

If volunteers are satisfied and their motivational needs are met, then they will likely return as a volunteer in future years (Farrell et al., 1998). As a result, it is important to understand what motivates volunteers so event managers can create a meaningful experience (i.e. assigned roles, rewards, feedback) that fulfills the volunteers' motivation.

Keep in mind that the motivating factors will change depending on the type of event (i.e. mega event, community event) and volunteer (see sidebar for discussion of age). While exploring research findings based on these factors is beyond the scope of this article, it is important for volunteer managers to understand the unique, defining characteristics of their event. What gets everyday people to come out and volunteer for your event? Volunteer managers have found that this can differ widely based on what generation these volunteers fall into.

This is a lot to handle, especially with large events, but take heart, there are some commonalities. Based on seven years of research, Jennifer J. Deal 2006

narrowed this bundle down to discover what all four generations want from their volunteer experience:

- To feel valued..... (85%)
- Recognition and appreciation (74%)
- A supportive environment..... (73%)
- A capable workforce..... (72%)
- To be part of a team (68%)

THE SILENT GENERATION, born 1922-1945, is the oldest and most experienced age group. They look for opportunities to keep busy and connected. These volunteers are dedicated to their jobs, follow the rules, have a deep respect for authority, and are very patient.

BABY BOOMERS are the second-largest generation of the four. Born between 1946 and 1964, they are beginning to seek active retirements that include community volunteer opportunities. They may have workaholic tendencies, support causes that are personal to them, seek self-improvement and growth, are loyal to organizations and are hard workers that want gratification from their work.

GENERATION X is the smallest of the workforce population, born between 1965 and 1980. This population volunteers to organize events, becomes participant fundraisers or helps promote their favorite nonprofits via social media and their personal networks. They seek balance between their work, volunteerism and personal life; are loyal to people and self-reliant; want to have fun at work and in volunteer activities; like to work with the latest technology; prefer relatively informal "team" work and volunteer style; and think on a global scale.

GENERATION Y, born 1981-2002 is the population emerging as the most massive, and they are overturning volunteer expectations with their emphasis on active participation, effective use of time and achievement. They have strong morals and community service, want immediate feedback, expect the latest technology and an active voice in decision-making and planning, and are self-assured and eager to make a positive impact while volunteering.

Leaders must be trustworthy and respect must be given, though each generation gives slightly different expectations of what respect means to them. Older indi-

viduals, Deal's study clarified, spoke of respect in terms of "giving my opinions the weight I believe they deserve," while younger respondents characterized respect as "listen to me, pay attention to what I have to say." Different generations, however, do not have notably varied expectations of their leaders. Above all else, they must be someone volunteers feel they can trust.

Build a Team

The event management team wants the volunteers to treat event guests well and make the event run smoothly. You must invest time and energy into the volunteer experience in order to have happy, engaged volunteer team members.

There are eight fundamental principles to ensuring volunteers have a great experience:

1. Clearly communicate expectations and process
2. Make the volunteer experience well organized
3. Create an upbeat, fun environment
4. Recognize volunteers who work hard, give long hours and set the example
5. Remove volunteers who do not work or set a negative tone
6. Rotate volunteers in stressful and environmentally challenging environments regularly
7. Treat volunteers and colleagues with the same respect and dignity
8. Survey to ensure volunteers can communicate concerns and recommendations.

Volunteers who have a great experience become part of the event team and are more likely to return the next year. As a by-product, they are likely to encourage friends, families and colleagues to join them. Rather than building a group to understand a purpose, the most successful volunteer managers build a family that believes in a purpose.

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Clients use TRS TIX, TRS EVENTS and TRS VOLUNTEER online registration systems to organize 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. In July 2014, TRS will release the new myTRS products. Contact Florence at fmay@theregistrationsystem or 1-317-966-6919 with additional questions.