

12 TIPS FOR CREATING A TOPNOTCH ACCESS PROGRAM ARE YOU KEEPING UP?

The desire to serve is at the heart of the volunteer experience. It is with pleasure that I've signed on to write about the driving factors related to recruiting, managing and retaining the right people. The people who want to serve.

The right people? Yes, the right people. The people who choose to spend their free time working long hours for your event. The people who volunteer to do hard and often thankless jobs. The people who feel so committed to your festival or event that they come back year after year.

It is my business to watch and report on volunteer recruiting and scheduling trends that impact our event clients.

The Competition is Hot

In my community, there were 4 festivals and 2 marathons over the past two weekends! I didn't make it to any of these because of volunteer obligations with a Zumbathon fundraiser; working a PTO event and interviewing young women for a scholarship program. My community is not unique. The growth of community activities requiring volunteers – festivals, endurance events, large venue events, school functions, church events and many others – are creating increased competition for all resources and especially volunteers. And that competition is creating major changes.

Are You Keeping Up?

As the competition grows, there are substantial shifts taking place in the volunteer recruitment world.

1. Corporate community engagement has become very popular with employees.
2. Event managers are making donations to charitable and education related groups to fill key positions.
3. High schools and universities are requiring students to participate in community service projects.
4. The largest US generation, the Millennials, are the future of your volunteer base.

Why Should Events Care About Corporate Social Responsibility?

Many corporations work to create connections for their employees to participate in volunteer programs. This is a mechanism to give back to communities and/or for causes around the world. Corporations typically have a corporate social responsibility or community outreach manager who collects and communicates volunteer opportunities with a corporate online network. Some corporations want to make connections and let employees choose which opportunities are appealing

from a long list. They may allow or encourage employees to take time off to support community organizations. Other corporations work to create corporate group volunteer activities for employees to make an impact in a team building mode.

Assessment:

- Are you making connections with the corporate social responsibility managers for major corporations in your community?
- Many corporations have online registration systems to track volunteer hours and the number of organizations they are impacting. Is your event represented?
- Is your event reporting the number of hours worked by the employees of specific organizations as part of your event wrap up? Do you report these hours back to local organizations?

Should my event be partnering with Charitable Groups?

Obviously, many organizations have budget concerns about moving from unpaid volunteers to making donations to other organization in-order-to fill key positions.

There are two prime issues driving this change.

1. Competition for volunteers. Simply consider the sheer volume of events in your city on the week and month of your event(s). Are your volunteers increasingly overloaded? Do you have major gaps in filling your needs?
2. Concerns about potential lawsuits. Are your volunteers being used in positions where people are generally employed/paid? (Look for a future column on this issue) Increasing numbers of For-profit and Nonprofit events are partnering with charitable organizations (e.g. Dad's Clubs, Churches, Rotary) and School Clubs (e.g. Band Boosters, Athletic Boosters, National Honor Society) to fill concessions, parking, water stations and other key service volunteer positions. Event managers provide donations to the charitable organizations and school groups based on number of hours and/or number of shifts filled.

Assessment:

- Talk with other event managers who have taken this step. Would they recommend this approach? What were their lessons learned?
- Talk with your attorney. Are you at risk for a lawsuit?
- Could your event grow with more assistance and committed support?

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Are You Reaching the Next Generation of Volunteers?

There has been substantial growth in required community service programs in high schools and universities. Community service requirements are expanding. The requirements are often tied to a class, graduation or for a specific diploma or certificate program. Opportunities for youth to gain experience; share experiences with friends; learn about NFPs and begin life-long volunteer commitments are valued. Colleges are aware and understand that their graduates are more employable if they graduate with experience.

Assessment:

- Do you have volunteer opportunities that are appropriate for students under the age of 18?
- Does your event insurance allow volunteer under the age of 18?
- Do you have proper supervision (e.g. background checks) for youth volunteers?
- Have you tested the waters? Reached out to your high school's National Honor Society? Or a college program that has potential affiliation with your event?

Not Important to Your Event?

Think again. These three trends are important because they represent a shift in volunteer demands and patterns. In addition;

these trends should be closely watched because Millennials, the largest generation, show tremendous interest in giving back to their communities and working for cause based projects in both their free time and in conjunction with work opportunities. It is likely that the Millennial volunteer's first touch with your organization will happen via one of three options listed above.

I, **Florence May**, love volunteers. Maybe it is the 15 years spent managing events with Visit Indy, Simply Hospitality and the United States Grand Prix (F1). Or maybe it is the 16 years delivering online volunteer management systems for many of the largest and most complex events in North America.

Over the past year my company, TRS – The Registration System, has provided volunteer management systems for the 500 Festival, the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Republican National Convention, the Democratic National Convention, Celebrate Fairfax, the Gilroy Garlic Festival, the US Mayors Conference, the Azalea Festival, USA Special Olympics National Games and hundreds of smaller events. In the process of supporting events, I study and discuss the trends that make certain events successful while others struggle.

Do you have a volunteer management related question? Please contact me at fmay@theregistrationsystem.com.