Identifying & Recruiting Volunteers

"You are the only person on this earth who can use your ability."

Anonymous

Identifying Volunteers

Once the job description is written and the knowledge and skills required for the job have been outlined, the volunteer administrator (VA) can begin identifying potential individuals or groups that might possess that knowledge or skill. Identifying potential volunteers first allows the VA to focus recruiting efforts, saving valuable time and resources. Questions to guide this process include:

- What sort of people would be able to perform this job?
- Where can I find people with these skills?
- Is this a short-term or long-term volunteer position?
- Who might be interested in this type of position?

For example, you may be looking for a volunteer to teach a course on public speaking to local youth. People that might have this knowledge include:

- A high school/college speech teacher
- A member of Toastmasters International
- A senior student who has successfully competed in University Interscholastic League speaking competitions, or 4-H or FFA public speaking competitions.

If you were looking for someone to teach a photography class to community members, you might look at:

- a local photography club member
- a professional photographer
- a photographer from the local newspaper
- a high school journalism teacher

Many urban areas have a Volunteer Center serving nonprofits in the area. A common service of most volunteer centers is the skill bank. Skill banks are databases of volunteers with specific skills that they are willing to donate to nonprofit organizations. Simply contact the local volunteer center to gain access to their skill bank.
Volunteer administrators can also develop their own skills bank. People often divulge their hobbies or professions during casual conversations. As you meet with civic and community groups, make a note when someone describes a knowledge or skill set that your organization might find useful. Obtain their business card or contact information if possible. Ask that person if they might volunteer their services in that area to your organization in the future. Enter this information into your database.

It is important to involve as many people within the organization as possible in identifying likely volunteers. This includes asking your current volunteers as well. We all travel in different social circles; using everyone’s network can result in the identification of a large pool of potential volunteers. Other potential sources of volunteers include:

- Colleges
- Corporations
- Educational Organizations
- Environmental Organizations
- Hobby Clubs
- Professional Organizations
- Service Clubs
- Sports Clubs
- Youth Organizations

**Recruiting**

Once potential volunteers have been located (identified), they must then be recruited. Recruitment is the process of locating volunteers and getting them to apply for your volunteer positions. An effective recruitment plan gets the right people, in the right quantities, to apply for the volunteer position. A VA’s biggest recruiting fear is either not having enough volunteers or having too many. Strive for the balance - attract just enough of the right volunteers.

The most effective recruiting methods are those that make a direct, personal request of the potential volunteer. According to the Independent Sector’s biannual survey of volunteers (2001), 71% of those people who were directly asked to volunteer did so.

**Recruiting Methods**

There are three basic methods for recruiting volunteers: Warm body recruitment, targeted recruitment, and concentric circles recruitment.
Warm Body Recruitment

Warm Body Recruitment is used when the volunteer positions you are attempting to fill require either a very large number of volunteers or the volunteer job to be done doesn't require any special qualifications--one that most people can do if given minimal training. Special events such as fun runs/walks, community fairs, and some fundraising events may require many volunteers to direct parking, take registration, or direct participants to the activities. These volunteer roles do not require any special skills and volunteers can be quickly oriented to their duties.

Warm body recruiting involves simple dissemination of information about the program. The following methods are typically used.

- Mass media such as newspapers, radio, organizational newsletters or listservs
- Distribution of brochures to large groups or corporations
- Posters
- Speaker's bureaus
- Word of mouth

Warm body recruiting methods will rarely yield volunteers with specific skills that you might need in your organization.

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruiting is the process of consciously planning a campaign, the result of which is the delivery of your recruitment message to a specific audience. It is a desirable method when the job for which you are attempting to recruit requires some special skills or some characteristics that are not commonly found. It involves asking the following questions:

- What skills/knowledge sets do we need?
- Who could provide them?
- Where do we find people with these skills?
- How can we communicate with them?
- What would motivate them?
By answering these questions, you can develop a means of identifying and locating potential volunteers who are likely to possess the qualifications that you need. While this method requires more effort on the part of the VA, it yields potential volunteers who are more likely to fit your needs. For example, if you needed a volunteer to set up a database to track client information, you might target high school or college computer classes and employees of data processing firms. You could recruit these two groups by speaking to a class, distributing brochures, or placing a request in the organization’s employee newsletter or on its listserv.

Concentric Circles Recruitment

Concentric Circles Recruitment involves identifying populations who are already involved with your agency and attempting to recruit them. Imagine your agency at the center of a bull’s eye with concentric circles around it. The first ring represents the family and friends of your current volunteers and staff. The next ring represents your clientele and their families.

**Concentric Circles Recruitment**

1. Friends and family members of your volunteer staff
2. Your clients, their friends and relatives.
3. Alumni of your program
4. People who have been affected by the problem your agency is trying to solve
5. People in the neighborhood in which you operate
There are a couple of advantages to using the concentric circles strategy. The target groups are already familiar with your agency or with the problem you are addressing. They are also being recruited via their connection with a friend or family member. These factors make it more likely they can be persuaded to volunteer.

A disadvantage of this method is that these volunteers are very homogeneous and may not contribute to the diversity of your organization. This is a good method to use when you need a small number of volunteers quickly and the task requires little training to accomplish.

Examples

- If your agency is planning to paint its offices, the staff might recruit family members to assist with the project.
- Schools recruit parents of their students as volunteers to assist with school activities.

Many organizations use the "I'll take any volunteer" approach to recruiting. The "shotgun" approach of disseminating requests for volunteers to multiple outlets rarely attracts the number or type of volunteer needed. However, choosing the right recruiting method for the situation or need will save you time and effort.