

SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SERIES – TOPIC 2**Recruitment and Marketing – the ‘message’ and the ‘method’**

Volunteer recruitment and marketing is the process of designing and implementing a strategy to identify the right volunteer(s) for your organization and then to communicate the opportunity with the goal of inviting the volunteer(s) to participate.

Various studies, reports and surveys have reached the same conclusion when it comes to recruiting volunteers. The majority of volunteers became involved because they were personally asked. Meanwhile, non-volunteers say that they did not get involved because no one had personally asked them. Extending a personal invitation remains the most effective way to recruit volunteers.

Of course, understanding the skills needed for a particular task and then approaching the right people is also an essential part of volunteer recruitment. A community cleanup campaign or a local food drive may require a large number of energetic but unskilled volunteers for a relatively short period of time. Personally asking as many people as possible would be an effective way to recruit volunteers for such an activity.

But the ‘personal ask’ approach needs to be applied much more selectively if you are seeking volunteers with specific skills to assist the poor with their tax returns, provide comfort to those with long-term illness or disability, or when seeking experienced businesspeople who will make a three-year commitment to serve on a charitable association’s board of directors.

As a general rule, when looking for volunteers with specific skills or when asking for a longer volunteer commitment, a clear set of expectations becomes more important. Most volunteers will consider taking part in a one-day food drive or assisting with yard cleanup without seeing a job description. However, a prospective board member will likely want to know about the immediate issues facing the organization, as well as its 3-5 years goals and plans before deciding if they can make a meaningful contribution.

When presenting opportunities to prospective volunteers, it is important to clearly state the need – not the need of the agency or the organization, but the need of the clients or ultimate beneficiaries. Then, the volunteer must understand how their personal involvement can be part of the solution, and how they can grow or benefit through their involvement. This information will assist the prospective volunteer to assess if their passion and energy is aligned with the goals of the organization, and if they believe they can meaningfully contribute.

Since word of mouth is the most effective method for recruiting new volunteers, seize every opportunity to spread the word. You can never have too many people helping you spread the word. Encourage staff, friends and your network of existing volunteers to get the word out as often as possible.

Even if some of your volunteers are reluctant to speak up and approach others, they may be very receptive to providing a testimonial about their volunteer experience and the benefits it has brought them. Testimonials are an incredibly powerful and effective means of marketing. Testimonials deliver a special brand of 'honesty' – a typical testimonial is not a carefully crafted message where each word is delicately chosen – instead, testimonials give real volunteers a chance to speak from the heart in an unfiltered, unscripted manner. Written testimonials can be used in brochures, newsletters and email, and online postings. Short video testimonials can be posted to social media (Facebook, YouTube) and your organization's website.

Social media is an extremely powerful marketing tool that your organization will want to utilize. Not only does social media connect with more individuals than traditional media, but social media also gets your message to the difficult-to-reach younger audience. Building a following does not happen overnight, but with interesting content, patience and persistence, you can build a network of current and potential volunteers.

Always have your eyes open for new recruitment and marketing opportunities. Some additional marketing opportunities include: community events, volunteer fairs, churches, service clubs and local media.

Make sure that your message always has a clear 'ask' – don't leave it to the reader or listener to presume that you are seeking volunteers – make your request very clear and very specific with a call to action. Whenever possible, make your marketing message as personal as possible, and wrap it with words that convey honesty, energy and enthusiasm. Let volunteers know that not only will they be helping others, but that your organization is committed to making the volunteer experience as positive as possible.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- What are some of the barriers to recruitment within our organization or for the particular volunteer position we are looking to fill?
- How can we reduce or minimize these barriers to attracting volunteers?
- Develop the core recruitment message for your organization, or a particular volunteer position, by addressing: (1) what is the need/benefit from the perspective of the client/beneficiary; (2) how can the volunteer help to address this need; and (3) what are the benefits to the volunteer?
- What are the skills and characteristics of the volunteer(s) we are looking to recruit, and where are we most likely to find potential volunteers?
- Does your organization already have a core of volunteers? If so, how could they be helpful in inviting others to become involved?

ServiceLink is proud to offer the following *Volunteer Engagement* workshops:

1. Identifying and Designing Volunteer Positions
2. Recruitment and Marketing
3. Screening and Interviewing Volunteer Applicants
4. Orientation and Training
5. Supervision and Evaluation
6. Discipline and Dismissal
7. Motivation and Recognition

Please contact us to learn more about available training and development opportunities:



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ServiceLink is the Volunteer Services Program of the Christian Reformed Church in North America