



Volunteer recruitment is a marketing effort with three main goals:

- Promote a program that attracts people who represent the full diversity of a community on an ongoing basis
- Generate visibility and credibility for the program within the community
- Find financial support

Recruiting, screening, and selecting volunteers is an ongoing process. A great deal of time can be spent focusing on how to get the most qualified volunteers and keep them once they are screened and trained. No matter how organizations decide to handle volunteer recruitment, this time-consuming task is one of the most important—and most visible—jobs it will undertake.

The reality of volunteer recruitment is that what worked in the past is no guarantee for success in the future. There are specific factors that affect and influence how and from what pool organizations recruit volunteers. They have to create opportunities—and excitements—that convince volunteers to get involved.

This era of volunteers demands tangible payback from their experiences, as well. They need opportunities that guarantee career and skill advancement, personal development, or connections. This ideology is quite different from the past mindset that volunteers get involved because “it felt good.” The “What’s in it for me?” volunteer needs a program that promotes and demonstrates accomplishment. This principle forces organizations to reevaluate their recruitment strategies by developing strategic marketing plans.

## What Goes into Recruiting?

Recruiting efforts should be thoroughly researched and documented to include a clear outline of goals, what the organization intends to do to reach those goals and when, realistically, the organization can expect to accomplish them.

To find and retain the best volunteers for your program, follow these steps prior to recruitment:

- Determine the kind of volunteers a program needs.
- Determine the quantity of volunteers needed.
- Develop a written job description for each volunteer position.
- Create a recruitment plan.
- Develop a volunteer application.



Distribute this information to the public in ways such as general information brochures, newspaper articles, public service announcements, posters, speaking engagements, direct mail, newsletters, press releases, special events, display booths, celebrity endorsements and audio-visual materials.

The Internet is another lucrative approach to recruiting volunteers quickly, efficiently and inexpensively. It also helps in targeting nontraditional volunteers and people who are underrepresented, such as seniors, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. While online recruitment should not replace offline methods, you can supplement by including opportunities on your organization's web site, promote through social media outlets or post opportunities to web sites that match volunteers with projects.

Develop "hooks" to invite and engage people to volunteer through excitement and intrigue, representing an organization's unique appeal. A hook should show the volunteer why your organization is the best place to volunteer. Focus on current trends to appeal to the market. The hook should reveal a bigger picture and not be limited to immediate needs.

Update and review your recruitment plans on a regular basis. One way to assess the effects of quickly changing demographics and trends is through an internal evaluation. Major components of recruitment such as targeting, marketing and message development, assessment, and planning should be questioned and updated in every review. Once revised, prepare for these changes by informing staff and updating technology.

## Retaining the Recruits

After recruiting, retaining volunteers for further involvement is essential. An organizational climate that attracts and retains volunteers does not happen accidentally. Factors that organizational researchers have identified as important to today's volunteer include:

- Structure in an organized group, which allows for flexibility,
- Responsibility for making their own decisions,
- Rewards for a job well done,
- Challenges and permission to take calculated risks,
- Good fellowship in the project environment,
- Mutual support from managers and others in the group,
- Ability to display opposing opinions,

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- Feeling of belonging and value, and
- Realizing a feeling of growth through the process.

Organizations should develop creative solutions to community problems that draw from the talent and resources offered by volunteers. Just as research about a target audience will assist planners in program development and evaluation, marketing research improves the efficiency and effectiveness of volunteer recruitment campaigns. Marketing information companies can help organizations leverage what they know about volunteers. They can identify and reach others like them to determine the best allocation of marketing dollars toward programs, promotions and media placement. The system allows them to score donors and track and measure success brought forth by the volunteers.

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