

Volunteer Recruitment

"The inexperienced recruiter prints 5,000 brochures and then muses: 'where can I distribute these?' The experienced--and more effective-- recruiter first asks: 'where might I find the right volunteers for each job,' and then selects the best technique to match each potential source."

--Susan Ellis, *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*

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Recruitment Strategies

Once you have clearly identified your organization's volunteer needs and have created position descriptions that take into account the costs and benefits for volunteers, you are ready to develop a recruitment plan. [For more on costs & benefits, as well as position descriptions, AACT members may visit The Knowledge Base, available on the members-only pages of the AACT website.]

The process of developing a recruitment plan begins with close examination of the volunteer assignment(s) to be filled. For each assignment, ask yourself:

- Who will be qualified for and interested in the position?
- Who will be able to meet the time requirements of the position?
- Where will you find these people?
- What motivates them to serve?
- What is the best way to approach them? Remember: specific messages are needed for specific audiences. There isn't one blanket recruitment message that will successfully entice all potential volunteers.

In general, your recruitment strategy-- who you will ask to volunteer and how will you ask them--depends on the needs of the theatre company as specified in your volunteer position descriptions. When the assignment requires a specific commitment, a high level of expertise, or an ability that is not commonly available, a *targeted recruitment* plan is best. When the assignment requires no special training or commitment and/or a lot of people, *broad-based recruitment* approaches can be used. Most directors of volunteers find it necessary to establish a recruitment strategy that *combines* these two approaches and provides multiple access or entry points.

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment is specific, focused, and addressed to the target audience where you believe that you will be able to find people with the skills, interests and availability needed for the position. It requires you to analyze the position and define, as clearly as possible, the type of person you are seeking and the type of message that will motivate them to serve.

Broad-Based Recruitment

While targeted recruitment is good for identifying people to fill positions that require special training and specific abilities/characteristics, broad-based recruitment can be effective for positions that can easily be done with minimal

training. It is particularly useful when you need a lot of people for a short-term event such as a walk-a-thon or a silent auction.

In a broad-based recruitment plan, the goal is to keep your organization's volunteer needs in the public eye through media campaigns, public-speaking engagements, the distribution of recruitment brochures, and other techniques geared towards the general public. Instead of targeting a particular market sector, broad-based recruitment or "undifferentiated marketing (generally) assumes that everyone is alike in their needs and motivations for volunteering." (Fisher and Cole, 1993, p. 88)

Broad-based recruitment strategies include:

- *Keeping a high profile with the media.* What projects and fundraisers are you involved with that might qualify as feature articles? Who is working with you that might be considered newsworthy? Public Service Announcements (PSAs), while they may generate only limited response, do keep your name and your cause visible. Present a clear and straightforward message and make sure that people are asked to volunteer. Remember: any materials distributed to your target market (internal or external) are a reflection on the image of your program and your organization.
- *Strategic distribution of quality print materials.* Brochures and flyers strategically placed in the community call attention to your efforts. But remember, often the only person who will pick up a brochure with the word "volunteer" on the front, is another director of volunteers or the person already working as a volunteer. Find other, more compelling ways to spark an interest in supporting your organization's work.
- *Use of existing volunteer opportunity directories and referral services.* Be sure to register your volunteer opportunities with existing volunteer referral services in your community such as volunteer centers and university student volunteer centers. Your community library and city web site may also distribute listings of local volunteer opportunities.
- *Networking with community groups and leaders.* Make it your business to know the service groups in your area: what they are interested in, when they meet and the type of programs they offer. Can you provide a program for one of their meetings and promote your service opportunities simultaneously? School fairs, chamber of commerce events and community group gatherings may be good places to have a display. Who are your community leaders? Networking with these individuals provides you with a support system to turn to for special projects and opportunities.
- The best recruitment tool: *word of mouth.*

Things to Remember:

- Volunteers can be male or female (nearly equal percentages of men and women indicate they volunteer,) have a range of abilities, and come from all backgrounds, races, nationalities, religions, political parties, and generations. Do not limit your recruiting efforts.
- Recruitment is a year-round responsibility. Have a plan to keep your theatre's name and your need for volunteers always in the public eye. Cultivate friends, keep a finger on the pulse of your community, network, and keep written materials about your volunteer needs up-to-date and visible. People hear a lot of messages every day and while they may not initially respond to your appeal for support, they may remember your organization when they are ready to volunteer.
- Build a diverse volunteer workforce. To do this, volunteer administrators must actively recruit individuals of different cultural and racial backgrounds and with diverse skills. This includes involving volunteers who have disabilities.

The majority of volunteer coordinators use word of mouth to recruit volunteers (Fisher and Cole, 1993, p. 90), relying on existing networks of volunteers and community stakeholders to attract new individuals to serve. While this can be a very effective recruitment strategy, it will most likely draw individuals who are similar in background and abilities to your current volunteer workforce.

Making Volunteer Recruitment More Manageable

Although easily regarded as an overwhelming task, recruiting volunteers is often less difficult than it seems. In fact, by the time you have developed position descriptions and considered the questions raised at the beginning of this article, you have already done much of the work of recruitment. Listed below are a couple of suggestions to help you get started.

- *Take advantage of your existing network.* When the volunteer manager begins to think about their community, their most common reference point is geographic--their city, neighborhood, county or region. It's easy to overlook the community most available to you and your organization--your organization's existing network of employees, patrons, volunteers and community organizations. Think about your circle of influence beginning with your program, group or organization. What individuals are you in contact with on a regular basis during the course of a day? What groups do you regularly work with? By sharing your volunteer opportunities with these contacts, you may be surprised at the number of recruitment ideas and sources that emerge. Another place to begin your recruitment effort is with your office building, your block, or area businesses and stores within walking distance of your theatre. Who are your neighbors? Do they know what your organization does? Do they share similar concerns with you? Would they be willing and interested in helping with your project? Even if they aren't interested in volunteering, a neighborhood store may be willing to make an in-kind donation to your program of food or parking space. The primary reason people volunteer is because they are asked. So look around and ask.
- *Develop partnerships with service organizations and institutions of higher education.* Community colleges frequently engage students in workforce re-entry training programs. Do your volunteer opportunities offer work-related skills that would be valuable to one of these programs? Colleges, high schools and youth groups often have internship and service-learning requirements. Maybe your group could offer a service placement. Be creative as you explore partnership options. Once established, these relationships can become long-term sources of volunteers. Some of these organizations even provide administrative support and volunteer supervision.
- *Share your recruitment work with others.* Community groups such as corporations, civic, church, or student groups often have existing methods of mobilizing and supervising volunteers. Involving them in one-time and ongoing projects can be an efficient way of meeting your volunteer needs. In addition, many large corporations have full-time community relations staff that will actively recruit volunteers from corporate employees. It is important to nurture your relationship with groups that provide volunteers. Know their timelines and their needs. Work with another community group or organization to staff a volunteer recruitment booth. The collaboration will enable you to cover more territory and learn about other groups and organizations. To ensure the success of such collaborations, however, be sure to carefully outline expectations and duties.
- *Joint marketing and public relations, particularly with an area business.* Companies, small and large, want to be viewed favorably by the community. A local business may be willing to develop an advertisement that simultaneously promotes their service and your volunteer opportunities. They may also be willing to provide volunteer recognition gifts or supplies for volunteer initiatives. The sky is the limit with such joint ventures, but remember that some services and companies may bring "baggage" to the venture as well as possibilities.
- *Collaborate with internal contacts.* Internal collaborations are often overlooked but highly valuable. Make it your business to learn where your executive director has been invited to speak and encourage him or her to mention your recruitment effort. Sending recruitment brochures to such events can yield substantial contacts. Explore ways that you can work together to gain visibility and community involvement.

Secrets of Success

The importance of:

- **S**incerity (be honest and open about your volunteer program - its strengths and opportunities for growth)
- **P**assion (have and exhibit passion for your program or effort. Enthusiasm is contagious, it is your greatest recruitment tool)
- **I**nnovation (be creative and flexible, and always remember to have fun)
- **R**isk-Taking (be willing to break the bureaucratic mold. Let go of control and new management structures.)
- **I**nclusiveness (be inclusive and empowering of others)
- **T**hinking like a Visionary (envision things the way they could be, not just the way they are and think strategically)

Source: Dana Renschler, Waco Center for Youth

Where to Look for Volunteers

Whether you are seeking volunteers to collect tickets at a major charitable event, or an accountant to audit the books of a fledgling grass-roots organization, it helps to have some ideas about where to look within your community for potential volunteers. The following lists are provided to help you begin to think about the wide range of individuals and groups that may want to support your efforts:

- Advocacy groups
- AmeriCorps programs
- Business and professional organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Churches and religious groups
- Community Service Restitution Programs
- Conferences/special events
- Corporations and small businesses
- Employment assistance programs
- Families
- Job seekers
- JTPA and other job training programs

- Military units and retired military personnel
- New residents of the community
- Parent groups
- Public agencies and retired personnel
- Realtors (welcome wagon packages often include volunteer information)
- Rehabilitation agencies/programs
- Retired executives, teachers (associations of)
- Schools, especially service-learning programs
- Scout troops or other youth groups
- Senior citizen groups
- Senior Corps programs
- Service organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary Clubs and Junior Leagues
- Sororities and fraternities
- Students seeking internships and service opportunities
- Student vocational training programs
- Unions and trade associations
- United Way
- University/college/community college organizations
- VISTA volunteers
- Volunteer centers

You can reach people with disabilities via many of these recruitment avenues. However, there are several ways that you can outreach specifically to volunteers with disabilities. Send your volunteer opportunities to:

- schools that work specifically with disabled populations
- independent living centers
- vocational rehabilitation agencies
- disability service groups
- regional offices of rehabilitation services of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare
- statewide agencies and groups that work with persons with disabilities

Your recruitment message should be the same as it is for all volunteers, in that it should explicitly state that the organization is committed to placing individuals into the volunteer setting that best matches their interests with the needs of the organization.

Remember to ask each person that you interview how they learned of your program. Keep track of the information. It will help you focus your efforts in the area with the greatest return on your investment of time and money.

Don't forget to look for volunteers within your own organization or agency. Staff members and their families, current and former agency clients and other people already familiar with the work of your organization can be great volunteer prospects.

Places to Distribute Recruitment Information

- Billboards
- Chambers of Commerce
- Churches
- Clients
- Community centers
- Corporation and utility buildings
- Doctor's offices
- Job counseling offices
- Libraries
- Listservs, electronic bulletin boards and Web sites
- Newsletters
- Newspapers
- Personnel directors
- Pre-retirement seminars
- Public service announcements
- Public transit bus cards
- Schools and universities
- Service clubs
- Shopping malls
- Speakers bureaus
- Telephone books
- Tourist information bureaus

- TV and radio stations
- University job offices
- Volunteer centers
- Volunteer recruitment fairs

Don't forget about the Internet! Look into posting volunteer opportunities on your organization's Web site or on one of the many online resources designed to promote volunteerism. For more information, see the Virtual Volunteering Project's tips for marketing your volunteer opportunities online: <http://www.serviceleader.org/new/virtual/index.php>

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