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The challenge for any nonprofit organization is to make the most of volunteers. In many cases, the organization could not fulfill its mandate without the generous support of those who get involved in a variety of ways. Ultimately, volunteers could be the essential component in an organization's success or failure.

Recently a client mentioned to us that they wanted to know what would be the best way to recruit volunteers. The truth, which will probably be no surprise to you, is that there is NO one right way to do it. Every organization will have its own qualities that will entice volunteers to participate. Some of these factors might be:

- Ease of task
- Availability
- Locale
- Prestige
- Ambience
- Staff personalities
- And the list goes on...

Regardless of the factors we've just listed, there are several things your organization can do to increase your chances of gaining volunteers that will not only be helpful but will also share your message with everyone they know.

1. **The most powerful way to recruit volunteers is to cast a compelling vision.** Learn to concisely express the reason your organization even exists. What tangible benefits does it offer to the community or to the world? What need does it meet? How are lives being changed? Nothing can attract quality volunteers like a compelling vision. Because you will need to express this vision in a variety of circumstances, develop a one minute, a five minute, and a twenty minute statement of your vision. Your vision should not sound "canned," but you should be able to clearly express it whether you are talking to someone in the checkout line, meeting over coffee, or speaking before a live audience.
2. **Another vital component to recruiting volunteers is to make "the ask."** A compelling vision will accomplish nothing unless you also offer a way for volunteers to get involved. Invite people to actively participate in what you and your organization

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are doing. Let them know what the expectations are, what training and support is provided, and how much of a time commitment will be required.

3. **Entrust your volunteers with important activities.** Granted, you will need to monitor their activities to maintain security and quality. But do not limit your volunteers only to “busy work.” Let them perform tasks that really matter, and for which they will see results. Your natural tendency may be to not ask too much of volunteers, but the truth is that volunteers want to contribute to you and your organization in significant ways. So do not be afraid to have meaningful expectations and high standards for your volunteers.
4. **Then, once you have volunteers in place, be sure to treat them right.** Good volunteers are hard to come by, so give them plenty of encouragement. Regularly express your gratitude, privately and publicly. A short hand-written note from time to time can work wonders.
5. **Understand the personal preferences of your volunteers.** Some will thrive in task-focused responsibilities; others will thrive in more relational settings. Some of your volunteers will prefer regular routines, while others may prefer a variety of activities. Some will prefer to stay behind the scenes even as others may excel in the spotlight. Try to accommodate these different preferences as much as possible and practical.
6. **Consider holding a “Volunteer Appreciation Party” once a year.** This does not need to be an expensive event; it can be a simple social gathering to express your gratitude for their involvement. Take the opportunity to applaud their work and to invest in their lives.
7. **Be sensitive to the emotional and relational needs of your volunteers.** Say, for example, a volunteer is going through a particularly difficult time at home. You may be prudent to offer a sabbatical. A brief break from volunteer responsibilities may be needed and appreciated. Keep in touch with your volunteers, regularly check on how they are doing, and get to know them personally. When volunteers learn that you are concerned about them as individuals, they become more likely to remain with the organization and to give their best effort.

Never underestimate the potential impact of a good volunteer. When volunteers catch a passion for what your organization is doing, set them free to invest themselves fully. Empower them to grow and flourish in their responsibilities. You and your organization will benefit from their involvement, and the volunteers themselves will be enriched through the experience.

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[branding](#), [community outreach](#), [volunteer](#)

About the Author



Daniel Schutzsmith

Daniel is a rare breed - a hybrid of equal parts business, design, programming, and strategy - ready to change the world.

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Natasha Golinsky

This was a great article. I do a lot of work in non-profit and find that these strategies are so critical the successful recruiting and maintaining of volunteers.

9 months ago

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Carol

I found your website through reddit and was really inspired by your "How Charities Can Recruit and Keep Volunteers." I am copying it and putting it in my files for future use. I have had a nonprofit for many years with the recurring problem of no help. Thanks so much for this succinct, thoughtful article.

11 months ago

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Event360

Thanks for this insightful post. Volunteers are a crucial part to any nonprofit effort, and finding ways to retain them is key to keep your organization's efforts up and running.

10 months ago

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