

Main Street Volunteers

Every downtown revitalization organization needs volunteers outside of those who serve on the board of directors. You have committee slots to fill plus you need additional volunteers for the organization's various activities.

Volunteers are an important part of the human resources of the organization. They help to sustain an organization. That volunteer who helped with the BBQ event last fall could be a future board member, bringing new ideas, talent and energy to the organization. Volunteers and the hours they commit to the organization are a trackable resource contributing to its bottom line and aid the organization in telling its story. Recruit and utilize your volunteers effectively so they can recruit others – the most successful recruiters are satisfied volunteers.

Recruitment

So, where to start? Your volunteer recruitment efforts should relate back to the organization's annual plan of work. You remember, that's the detailed plan you do each year for running the organization that relates back to the vision and mission of the organization and demonstrates how each project and activity contributes to achieving that vision. The most successful volunteer recruitment and retention efforts will all relate back to this plan. People's time is a valuable commodity, and there is no point in haphazardly recruiting volunteers just for the sake of having them. It doesn't benefit the organization or the potential volunteer.

- Identify each activity for which you will need volunteers. Estimate the time commitment for that particular activity. Be realistic about the time people are willing to commit and if necessary break an activity down into more manageable parts. Write committee and volunteer job descriptions to give to potential volunteers so they know what the expectations are.
- Create a volunteer recruitment form. Make it as professional as possible with your logo on it and have the organization's vision and mission on the form. Along with all the usual contact information, ask what skills, interests or hobbies the potential volunteer has and the amount of time he or she can commit. Also ask about any other volunteer experience.
- Put the word out. You have many possible avenues to utilize for this: Personal contact, presentations to other civic groups, tours and open houses, mailings, social media, media appeals. Make sure, if necessary, to target your appeals to what your volunteer needs are, for instance with a media request, be specific about what type of help you need.
- Interview the volunteer. Try to match the person's interests and personality type to any current openings. Don't assume a banker wants to be on the economic vitality committee.

The volunteer may be looking to broaden his or her interests beyond what they do in their daily work. Give the volunteer several options and let the individual choose what he or she prefers. Some volunteers are interested in short-term assignments such as helping at a festival or event; others will be happier involved with ongoing tasks.

- Have a clear understanding of how much time the volunteer can commit.
- Allow for some flexibility if possible. Could something like stuffing envelopes be accomplished from home as long as the task is completed in the specified time?
- Didn't have a suitable opening for someone? Keep the name on file for future opportunities and maintain contact. Maintain your volunteer database!

Training

Committee members will need to have an orientation similar to that of a board member.

- Have the committee chair be responsible for training the committee members.
- Put together a committee member handbook that outlines the history, policies and procedures of the organization.

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Include committee descriptions of all the committees, a board member list and the current work plan.

- Working within the organization's budget of course, offer the committee members opportunities for additional training such as a design workshop for the design committee or having the organization committee attend a workshop on IRS non-profit accountability.

Volunteers for activities such as special events or administrative duties will need training too.

- Don't assume that they will just know what to do; so be sure to allow time for training. This is your best strategy to empower them for success!
- Utilize board members and committee members to help with training. Give a brief rundown on the organization, and then review procedures and expectations with an emphasis on those most likely to affect the work the volunteers will be doing. Clear communication goes a long way in achieving the desired results.
- Make sure they know who their point person is for any questions and if it is an event, have that person or persons readily available if there are questions or if an issue should arise.

Also, it is vitally important to keep your volunteers busy once they agree to help. The quickest way to lose volunteers is to have them show up for an event and not have a job for them to do.

Appreciation

Every volunteer, from your board chair down to the clean-up crew of your signature event, wants and needs to feel appreciated. They want to have a connection to the

organization and to see how their efforts have helped to move the organization forward. Beyond that, from an organizational standpoint, efforts have helped to move the organization forward. Beyond that, from an organizational standpoint, keeping your experienced volunteers happy and motivated is easier than recruiting and training new people.

The following are just a few ideas for how an organization can thank and recognize the importance of their volunteers.

- Give volunteers the opportunity to offer feedback about the organization and its activities.
- Personal thank-yous and public thank-yous are equally important. Another thing to keep in mind is that a personal thank you is a better strategy for some volunteers, while others may crave that public recognition.
- With your long-term volunteers, recognize them throughout the year. A note, a small gift, even if it is just something like flowers cut from your garden is much appreciated. Involve your board members in this too. Take a few minutes at each board meeting (and committee meetings) to recognize volunteer contributions.
- In your organization's newsletter or on the website, have a volunteer "spotlight" to highlight a volunteer or group of volunteers.
- During an event, try to personally thank as many of the volunteers participating as possible and if it is feasible and appropriate, consider having a day-of, post-event activity to thank volunteers for their efforts or give them a small token of appreciation for participating.

After an event, consider using social media (i.e. Facebook or Twitter) to post immediate thanks and recognition of your volunteers and what they accomplished. Additionally, you should write or call each volunteer to personally thank them for their contribution.

- Do you write a column for the local newspaper? Do a piece on your volunteers and their importance to the organization as a submission.
- Leverage National Volunteer Week as one opportunity to recognize your volunteers.
- If you do a general volunteer recognition event, create an opportunity for some of the volunteers to talk about why they chose to give their time to your organization and for some of the stakeholders to relate how the organization has made a difference, connecting it to the efforts of all the volunteers.
- Have some fun with this event; consider some tongue-in-cheek awards, a fun theme, an icebreaker or fun activity such as karaoke, etc. A big part of the reason people volunteer is that they want to have fun. You want to increase the feelings of connectivity and inclusivity that people have with the organization in order to sustain their interest over time.

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ECONOMIC VITALITY focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

Your EV Volunteer Team:

Realtor

- Business recruitment
- Property availability
- Market trends/rental rates

Banker

- Financing
- Business plan review
- Investor connections

Local Business Owners

- Consumer spending knowledge
- Needs of small business owners
- Health of the local economy
- Liaison to other business owners

Marketing Professionals

- Market study knowledge
- Identify businesses needed

Data Collector

- Building/business inventory
- Consumer Survey

Economic Developers

- Recruitment strategy for outside of area
- Developer relations

Planner

- Parking patterns
- Code review to support local business owners

Architects/Engineers/Builders

- Building assessments
- Historic preservation knowledge

Community College Staff

- Small business training
- Business plan development
- Interns

Chamber of Commerce

- Business support

DESIGN supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.

Your Design Volunteer Team:

Interior Designer

- Façade improvements
- Interior improvements

Merchandising Expert

- Window displays
- Store displays

Garden Club Participant

- Planters
- Landscape needs

Horticulturist

- Appropriate trees/shrubs
- Health of landscape

Artist

- Window enhancements
- Street art
- Color knowledge
- Creative ideas

PROMOTION positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

Your Promotion Volunteer Team:

Communication Expert

- Communication plan

Social Media Coordinator

- Manage content

Website Designer

- Create and update website

Involved Citizens

- Event volunteers
- Volunteer recruitment
- Getting the word out

High School Students

- Event volunteers
- Volunteer recruitment

Church Member

- Event volunteers
- Volunteer recruitment
- Getting the word out

ORGANIZATION involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

Your Organization Volunteer Team:

Board of Directors

- Financial needs of program
- Community connections to future sponsors
- Sponsorship recruitment
- Budgeting
- Long range cost projections
- Sponsor appreciation

Volunteer Coordinator

- Civic group partnerships
- Local school partnerships
- Identify needs
- Volunteer instructions
- Online sign ups
- Volunteer appreciation

Fundraiser

- Capitol campaigns

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Sign Up Time

You work with various age groups so it is important to market your volunteer needs in different ways.

Online sign up:

Popular with all age groups.

Volunteers can sign up in less than 5 minutes. By creating a detail list of duties for each sign up, the volunteer will have a clear understanding of what they will be doing. Auto reminders allow less staff time.

Volunteer hour tracking is built in!

<https://signup.com/volunteer-scheduling>

Civic groups:

A great way to let the community know what is happening in the community and how they can get involved. After you speak, send around a volunteer sign up sheet and leave a business card with each person.

Volunteer opportunity signs:

Create a 5x7 sign with a “we need you” type statements. Provide information on how to sign up as

Volunteer opportunity signs:

Create a 5x7 sign with a “We Need You” type statement. Provide information on how to sign up. Place the sign in an acrylic stand at downtown business cash registers

Church bulletins:

Churches are always looking for ways to engage with local citizens. Work with local pastors and ask if they would include volunteer needs in their church bulletins

High school students:

Many clubs at the high school require service hours from their members. Meet with teachers/councilors to develop a relationship with them. Send the school staff the volunteer needs so they can forward to their students. Include the online sign up link in the email.

Non profit fundraising:

Non profit's are always looking for ways to fundraise. The non profit could provide volunteers for an event and your group could provide a sponsorship/donation to them as a thank you.

Retirement communities:

Many former engaged citizens reside in retirement communities. Their desire to make a difference is still vibrant. They have dedicated time for activities. If you have a cook off or any other event that requires assembled items, work with the activity coordinator and take all the items you need to be assembled in tubs and let the seniors stuff bags, etc. The seniors will love it! In addition, senior centers have buses. Volunteers can be brought in from the facility to volunteer during an event.

Social media:

Social media is a HUGE source for volunteer recruitment. Once the online link for signups is created, select an engaging image and create a “calling for volunteers” post. Include the sign up link, ask that the post be shared and watch the volunteer sign ups roll in!

Social media groups:

Create a “group” specifically for volunteer opportunities. People can sign up to be members of the “group” and be able to comment on needs. Spend time thanking and recognizing volunteers on the group page. Positive breeds positive. When people feel valued they will do more!

Welcome baskets/mailers:

People that move into an area are looking for ways to connect and meet new friends. Create a post card, inviting them to become involved. Include the link for signing up online on the card and contact information, website, etc. They will thank YOU for giving them an avenue to become engaged.