

## Volunteers

### Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation

Volunteering is an exciting, growing and enjoyable experience. In fact, it is a form of recreation for many people. Friends groups are strengthened in a number of different ways when you involve more volunteers. In addition to getting more help, you create a group of people with a connection to your park or forest, and who can serve as a constituent for it.

When recruiting volunteers, be sure to look at what you are asking the volunteers to do, make it manageable (and fun!), make it attractive, and provide them with assistance and training. Remember: Never ask someone to do something you wouldn't do!

#### **Member vs. volunteer**

A member is someone with a defined connection to an organization. A volunteer is someone who contributes time and energy to advance an organization's mission.

#### ***Do you need members or volunteers?***

Members—if you are looking for community input, revenue from membership fees, and numbers.

Volunteers—if you need people to assist your organization.

Remember: A member can be a volunteer and a volunteer can be a member, but it is not always so.

#### **People volunteer for a number of reasons:**

- To help
- Meet people
- To network
- Increase their sense of self
- Assist friends
- Skills development
- Experiences
- Resume enhancement
- Prestige
- Recognition
- Commitment to the cause
- Fulfill a personal need or value
- To give something back

Think about why you (and your fellow volunteers) commit time and energy to a state park or forest. Write it down. This is a starting point for developing volunteer recruitment materials. Share these stories—they are compelling reasons for others to volunteer.

#### **Working with volunteers:**

Working with volunteers takes time, energy and commitment. To get their loyalty, interest, and best effort, volunteers need:

- To be heard
- A sense of belonging
- Fair treatment
- A feeling of accomplishment
- To be praised
- To know what is expected of them

## **Finding and recruiting volunteers:**

Yes, you have to work to find volunteers! Most people with an interest in volunteering won't seek you out—you must approach them.

The type of volunteer also varies. For example:

- Student community service: many schools now mandate that students give a certain number of hours back to the community.
- One day opportunities—with community groups or work places (corporate volunteers).
- Short term assignments—some people are interested in working on projects with a start and a finish. For example, perhaps there is a community member who would be interested in making signs for an upcoming event.
- Family volunteer events
- Virtual volunteers—folks who may have an interest in helping out but can't commit to a set time. These volunteers may be willing to design websites, develop brochures, edit the newsletter, etc.
- Adult recreation volunteer events.

To recruit:

- Design meaningful volunteer projects or assignments that have the potential to attract the kind of volunteer you want. People enjoy having choices, so be sure to have a variety of opportunities available. Be specific about the tasks you have available and the time commitment needed. To take the guesswork out of decision making, list the skills needed for the tasks to be completed.
- Based upon the projects that need to be completed, develop volunteer job descriptions. Be specific about tasks and list skills needed to complete the job.
- Interview potential volunteers to assure a match for your project/organization.
- Brainstorm where to look for volunteers based upon the skill sets that you need.
- Set a goal of a certain number of outreach efforts each month or quarter. Be sure to have materials that you can leave behind if recruiting at public meetings, schools, etc.
- The direct ask is always the best approach when you want someone to volunteer for you.
- Use vocabulary appropriate to the citizens that you are trying to recruit. Perhaps "community service" is a better term than "joining in". Advertise what you need, using volunteers as a descriptor. For example, if you need a photographer to judge a contest, be specific.
- Don't minimize the job of the volunteer—most people enjoy being challenged and like to think that they are contributing to the greater good.
- Respect a volunteer's time—don't invite 25 to work on a trail when there is only work for 10.
- Avoid too many meetings—many volunteers are happy to give their time to a project or event, but prefer not to attend meetings.
- Put volunteer opportunities on website or in your brochure. Have a recruitment list at special events.

## **Developing a Volunteer Job Description**

1. List one of the chapter's goals.

2. List two or three tasks that will need to be accomplished to achieve the goal.
3. Choose one task and write down the details of what needs to be done, how it will be done and when it needs to be accomplished.
4. What skills would a volunteer need to complete the tasks in #3? Is there any special training needed, and if so, can it be provided?
5. Who will supervise the volunteer?

The answers to these questions will create your position description.

## **Recruiting Methods**

It works best to have someone in charge of recruiting, scheduling and motivating volunteers. This could be done through a volunteer coordinator or an outreach committee of the board of directors.

A volunteer coordinator tends to be a single individual whose primary responsibility is managing other volunteers (recruitment is still a team task). The volunteer coordinator provides a single point of contact for the organization, which facilitates record keeping. Conversely, this can be a time consuming position and when the coordinator quits or leaves, a disruption in the flow can become problematic. A volunteer coordinator job description and work plan helps to maintain continuity in the face of changing roles.

An outreach committee spreads the responsibility for volunteer management among a group of interested individuals. While many hands make light work, too many cooks can spoil the dinner.

## **Recruiting**

Look at who currently volunteers or has volunteered in the past—might they be best suited to other volunteer projects? Would they be interested in becoming involved again (if involvement has lapsed?)

Word of mouth—often people volunteer because others have asked them. Start with short-term volunteer opportunities, which could lead to a longer term commitment. For example, staffing an exhibit for three hours at an event versus staffing a visitor center every Monday.

## **Where to Recruit**

- Newsletters
- Articles in local newspaper
- Brochures at park
- Trade shows or exhibits
- Local schools and universities
- Community meetings and groups
- Environmental or special interest groups
- Regional volunteer centers or organizations
- Strategic partnerships
- Volunteer Search sites (internet)
- Referrals
- Special events

Follow up with any potential recruits gained through the above methods.

## **Managing Volunteers**

Once volunteers are recruited, they then need to be managed. All new volunteers should receive an orientation that includes:

- Information on the organizations mission
- Contact information for chapter contact person
- Program and event brochure
- Training for the tasks in which they will be involved—no matter how simple the task!

A buddy system can make a new volunteer feel more welcome and provide them with a contact to direct questions. It also increases a sense of connection with the group.

It is important to correctly match volunteers to assignments. This can be done initially through the volunteer interview, which is similar to a job interview. Next, get to know volunteers' interests and skills by giving them short term assignments. Maintain a continuous feedback loop with the volunteers—keep them apprised of how they are doing, how their work is benefiting the group, ask how they enjoy the work, etc.

Remember: Volunteers have the right to say “NO” to volunteer assignments.

## **Recognizing Volunteers**

To keep volunteers motivated and engaged, a small investment of time and resources in recognition can pay off in big dividends.

- Provide refreshments at volunteer tasks and assignments
- Have a special area designated for volunteers where important information can be placed, announcements displayed, etc. This “Volunteer Lounge” creates a sense of belonging to the organization.
- Picnic/cookouts
- Awards/plaques/trophies
- Trinkets: key chains, mugs, water bottle
- Letters for free camping at other parks
- Outings with the ranger/naturalist/special programs
- Volunteer of the month/volunteer of the year
- Party—from formal to informal
- Verbal and handwritten thank you notes
- Providing continuing education opportunities
- Progressive thank you programs—1 year, two year, etc OR 100 hour, 200 hours, etc.
- Service pins
- Potluck dinners
- See [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com) for other ideas.

## **10 Mistakes To Avoid When Working with Volunteers—Lasalle University**

Talking more than listening

Asking too much

Asking too little

Asking people to volunteer and then not having anything for them to do; not having job descriptions to define expectations  
Failing to recognize changing volunteer needs  
Keeping volunteers out of the loop  
Passing up volunteers who can only make a short-term commitment  
Failing to fire poor volunteers  
Failing to promote good volunteers  
**Not saying thank you!**

### **Things to do When Working with Volunteers—LaSalle University**

Delegate!  
Focus on Fun!  
Know what you need volunteers to accomplish  
Watch out for too many meetings  
Avoid leadership burnout  
Start with people you know  
Jump start recruiting with a special event  
Put someone in charge  
Be welcoming to volunteers  
**Say thank you!**

Websites:

[www.lasallenonprofitcenter.org](http://www.lasallenonprofitcenter.org)

[www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com)

[www.ozvpm.com](http://www.ozvpm.com)

[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)

[www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org)

[www.takepride.gov](http://www.takepride.gov)

[www.volunteermatch.com](http://www.volunteermatch.com)