

ALASKA



FOOD COALITION

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"It is important to engage those we serve; often we do an adequate job of ministering to the poor, but not with the poor."

- Points of Light Foundation Focus Group Participant, Clarksville, Indiana

Recruiting Volunteers

Selling the Volunteer Experience

Volunteering is the tradition of neighbor helping neighbor. Your recruitment materials should reference how volunteers can help neighbors. Successful agencies capitalize on community resources to grow their programs; consider your volunteers a resource. Provide them with a safe and enjoyable experience. You don't want them to feel like they have 'sacrificed' when they volunteer.

One of the fundamentals in overcoming barriers to finding volunteers in under-served communities is the recognition of the need to engage low-income people in community activities. To overcome barriers, consider creating an exchange system where community members offer what skills they have in exchange for essential help, thus removing the 'stigma' of obtaining free resources.

Sometimes the word 'volunteer' can alienate people; too much commitment, perceived lack of skills, etc. Adapt your language to the people you are talking to, tell them you are looking for someone to help feed families, assist elders or end childhood hunger in your community. Volunteers love to hear "We're so glad you are here" and "We are doing this because". It helps them understand their contribution to your overall goal or mission. Additionally, volunteers can benefit from service to your agency by gaining new job skills or serving as board members.

Tips for Finding New Volunteers

- "Positions available" – post online, in your newsletter, website, send faxes to churches for their weekly bulletins, put flyers up around town at schools, the grocery store, gyms and community centers, any place people gather. Contact your local school board and request permission to deliver your recruitment flyer to teacher's mailboxes. Ask the same of the staff at your local medical center or processing facility. Newspapers, radio and television stations have community calendars where they list volunteer opportunities. Be clear about the job, the kind of work, skills, responsibilities and time commitment. It is essential that you have a good job description. The pay is the good will we share.
- "Would you help" – the number one reason people say they don't volunteer is because no one asked. Don't confuse recruitment with publicity. Asking doesn't just mean a newsletter ad; it requires a personal approach and works best if you have a specific task in mind. Let your passion for your agency show when you talk to potential volunteers.
- "There's a lot you can do" – One of the biggest fears of volunteers is that they have to make a big time commitment. Create a list of all the things a volunteer can do in one or two hours. Childcare is critical, especially for rural families. This can have an effect on the ability of parents to volunteer. Can children help,

or is there a supervised area where they can hang out while their parents volunteer on site?

- “Bring your friends” – People are much more likely to participate in a group if they know someone who participates already. Ask existing volunteers to personally invite someone they know, “Do you have an hour to help us pack senior food boxes?”
- “Thanks for your interest” – Don’t let volunteer applications sit around before you respond, ‘I know you said you can help with holiday food boxes, but do you have an hour to help pack weekend backpacks of food for kids one afternoon this week or next?’ Be honest about the time commitment. If you need someone several hours several times a week, a full year’s commitment, or willingness to drive 25 miles each time, say so.
- Ask a local sports association to advertise your need for volunteers on a scoreboard, or announce your need for help at a sports event. Negotiate an opportunity for current volunteers to ‘work’ a concession stand at a local event; make sure your logo is visible. Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool.

Finding Volunteers in Rural Communities

When identifying potential partners in rural communities, consider local churches and government offices, media, schools and elected leaders. Employment and public assistance offices are other good sources. Schools, diners, grocery stores, bingo halls and other public places are great for posting your recruitment flyers. These sites can also be helpful for mobile projects such as drop-offs for food drives and other activities which build capacity in your community. Agencies will benefit greatly by carefully considering how best they can leverage resources by:

- Addressing the particular conditions of each community when designing volunteer programs
- Celebrating and encouraging innovation to overcome barriers and bridge gaps
- Invest in building and strengthening volunteer support, infrastructure, and capacity
- Strengthen relationships, collaborate and partner with local community stakeholders
- Build upon assets that foster ownership and bridge cultural, social, and economic divides

Effective volunteer efforts must link volunteer engagement to the specific needs of residents, not only in removing barriers to participation, but, most importantly, in targeting efforts to reflect local priorities. Engaging residents makes for locally relevant, targeted programs that address the unique needs of individual communities by tapping into local grassroots efforts. In addition, volunteering can be an effective strategy to build community, cohesion, and resilience. It is a method of connecting low-income residents to their community through the resources and services needed to thrive.

RESOURCES

25 Ways to Catch and Keep Volunteers

<http://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/8-25-ways-to-catch-and-keep-volunteers-right>

Volunteering in Underserved Rural Communities
<http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/94.pdf>

Girl Scout Leaders: Getting to Yes
http://www.girlscouts.org/for_adults/leader_magazine/2003_fall/getting_to_yes.asp

CASA for Children
<http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/pp.aspx?c=mtJSJ7MPIsE&b=57774467&>

The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online: <http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> for additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: afc@foodbankofalaska.org

NEXT MONTH: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act