



Slowing the Revolving Door: Getting and Keeping Volunteers

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Volunteers: The Joy and the Pain

It’s part of the credo of the nonprofit world: volunteers are the lifeline of an organization. Whether you have 100 paid staff or none, volunteers have a huge impact on our organizations. That said, having a productive volunteer program that is able to recruit and retain volunteers is difficult. With so many organizations that need help and time a precious commodity for everyone involved, how do you market your program to potential volunteers and once you get them, how do you keep them?

So Much Work, So Few Hands

According to *Volunteering in America 2007*, more than 61million Americans volunteer, including 190,000 Alaskans. Of those volunteers in Alaska, nearly 27 percent of them spend their volunteer time collecting, preparing, distributing or serving food. A pool of 51,000 people sure seems like a lot, but how can you affordably and easily attract these volunteers to your agency?

Websites:

www.1-800-volunteer.org National database of volunteer opportunities.

www.volunteer match.org Online database for both volunteers and nonprofits.

Word of mouth:

As they say in sales and marketing, if a customer has a good experience, they’ll tell one person, a bad experience and they’ll tell 20. Make sure your volunteers have great experiences and they will pass on the word.

Community Service Workers:

Many people have to complete community service as part of a probation or misdemeanor charge. Contact your local courthouse to inquire.

Children’s Groups

Depending on the job, many organizations offer volunteer opportunities for kids under 18. Take advantage of scout troops and other service-affiliated clubs geared around kids. Make sure your organization has a written policy for allowing children to volunteer and that you make all volunteers sign a liability release form.

Strengthening Alaska's Anti-Hunger Network

Special Needs Volunteers

Organizations that work with developmentally disabled individuals are often looking for outlets for their clients to get involved in the community. Depending on the project, your organization might be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Special Projects

Have a large project coming up? Many civil service organizations and businesses are looking for projects that can handle 25+ volunteers at a time. This may be an opportunity to get a one-time push of lots of free hands to help out.

Slowing the Revolving Door

Now you know a few ways to find new volunteers. How do you keep them coming back?

Job Descriptions

Give your volunteer jobs the same respect that you would a paid position. A job description makes the work real and creates expectations and goals for volunteers.

Orientation

Have interested volunteers fill out a basic application and spend a few minutes finding out what they are interested in doing for your organization. Create a handbook with basic policies regarding timeliness, dress, age requirements, safety and the basic rights they can expect from you e.g. instruction, information, respect and thanks. When training volunteers, take the time to connect them to the mission, give detailed instructions and be open to questions and concerns.

Schedule

Depending on your target volunteer audience, you may have to adjust your schedule to fit your volunteers. Many people who volunteer also work during the day, so be sure to have opportunities at night and on the weekends. Work toward a consistent schedule of volunteers that allows for flexibility when a volunteer doesn't show.

Say Thank You and Say it Often

It doesn't always have to be elaborate. Verbal and written thanks mean a lot. Handwritten notes make impact. Sending your director or other important figure to give a personal thanks to volunteers can make the volunteer important. Small gifts and/or volunteer appreciation events are all ways to recognize the work that your volunteers contribute to the organization.

Need More Detail?

Have a specific question about the volunteer program at your organization? Contact the Alaska Food Coalition at afc@foodbankofalaska.org and let us help you connect with the answers you need for your particular issue.

Next
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