



BEST PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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Overview

In public health, the success of complex initiatives often depends on the people working together to reach shared goals. One of the fundamental elements of any successful prevention effort is a strong volunteer base. Generation On is an example of a high-performing service organization that provides volunteer opportunities for young people; they have found that youth reap a number of important benefits from volunteering: *“Not only did they develop the capacity to become engaged citizens, but they also developed the emotional, social, and intellectual skills that enabled them to be leaders and innovators in the 21st century careers of their choices.”*

Successful youth volunteer programs are those that serve the community while also increasing the emotional, social, intellectual and civic capacities of young people. This introductory document details important best practices for developing and maintaining an active volunteer management program that benefits the community, while also providing positive experiences for young adult volunteers.

I. Engage Young People

- 93% of young people aged 14-18 are online, and so using popular internet-based media (especially social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) may be a particularly effective way to communicate and connect with young people.
- The Youth Service Agency (YSA) recommends posting once per day on Twitter and twice per week on Facebook. Remind people to “share” posts with their friends, followers, and other contacts to make sure your message spreads.
- Remember to “tell your story” as you participate on social media. Think about ways you can share your organization’s passion or goals for the community and how volunteers can contribute to making this goal a reality.
- Remind young people how they can benefit from volunteering; while they may not be earning a wage, youth will still learn new skills, make connections, improve their community, and have fun. This review will first present a table that displays all the articles found in this review at a glance.

II. Youth Advisory Board

- Consider establishing a youth advisory board that provides input and direction about the trajectory of the project or initiative. An advisory board allows young people to see that their voices are heard while also providing structure and guidance.

III. Volunteer Responsibilities

- Identify a range of roles that youth can participate in, from tasks and responsibilities that require less effort/commitment to those that require more intensive time/labor. If you have a range of ages or developmental levels, make sure that the activities are developmentally appropriate. Begin by developing simple job descriptions that guide and inspire volunteers.

IV. Create a Volunteer Plan

- As you think about the ways in which youth volunteers may help you achieve specific project goals, you may want to consider writing a Volunteer Plan. This Plan will provide a guide not only for staff and leadership, but will also demonstrate to volunteers where they fit.

Questions to ask include:

- What responsibilities will volunteers have?
- How many volunteers do I need?
- How much time are volunteers expected to commit?
- How will our organization demonstrate its commitment to recruiting diverse volunteers?

V. Recruiting Volunteers

- As you work to develop the Volunteer Plan, you can think about where you will recruit youth members. You may have to initiate new relationships or maintain existing ones in order to become visible and attract volunteers.

These spaces may include:

- Schools
- Local youth-serving organizations and meetings
- Faith-based organizations
- Sports teams

In addition, you may want to post a flier online:

- Craigslist.org
- VolunteerMatch.org

VI. An Inclusive Way to Recruit

- Remember to develop plans that lower barriers to volunteer participation, rather than erect new barriers. For example, some potential volunteers may feel concerned that they do not have experience or are not “qualified” for the job. Try to make your recruiting efforts as inclusive as possible by recruiting in multiple ways; while social media is popular with the majority of young people, recruitment efforts can be supplemented in traditional media (for example, in a local newspaper, during school announcements, or with a direct mailing). Also, remember to use inclusive language as well; crafting messages in languages spoken by community members is a great way to do this.
- Business cards and fliers listing the goals of the volunteer program, with critical information about how to become a volunteer, may be created in order to attract potential volunteers.
- Note that graphic design can be an important recruiting tool for your prevention initiative as well. Visually appealing designs (often with large, bold graphics) may generate interest among young people.

VII. Retain Youth Volunteers

- According to Li Zhen Huang, a youth volunteer with Asian Americans for Equality, described five elements that help to retain young people her age:
 1. *Flexible schedule.* It is important to remember that young people often face constraints on their time, which can be compounded by limited transport opportunities. Flexible volunteer opportunities encourage young people to be active and demonstrate that their time and effort matters.
 2. *Personal interest.* Volunteers are often more invested in projects they feel passionate about. Help volunteers to follow their interests to reach positive outcomes.
 3. *Supportive, social environment.* Creating a caring, friendly environment that encourages young people to connect with others will go a long way toward retaining youth volunteers.
 4. *Learning new skills.* Volunteering provides young people with important opportunities to learn new skills, such as communication (public speaking & writing), leadership skills (like creating an agenda & running a meeting), and strategizing (developing, implementing & evaluating an initiative).
 5. *Positive impact.* Creating a lasting positive change encourages youth volunteers to keep coming back. Small victories that allow volunteers to feel successful may prove to be more beneficial than long-term, major campaigns.

VIII. Recognize Volunteers

- Psychologists tell us that recognizing people for their hard work and accomplishments makes people feel more motivated and self-confident, and develops their sense of connection to the organization, community, and other participants. While it is a best practice to recognize volunteers for their hard work *after* a particular initiative or campaign, an equally effective strategy may be to recognize people as they are beginning to become active in the group, activity, or initiative.
- Recognition should be frequent and personal. Remember, before you thank youth volunteers, please discuss with them appropriate forms of recognition. For example, some young people may feel proud at being recognized as a volunteer on Facebook, while others may not.
- Community serving organizations often hold annual events or celebrations. This may be an appropriate occasion to recognize volunteers (and their mentors) for their participation.
- In order to provide a way for volunteers to see the impact of their work, create opportunities for them to reflect on their accomplishments as volunteers. This time for reflection can help volunteers (even those who may not return) create a lasting connection to the community and to their efforts.
- After the project is over, remember to thank volunteers for their time. A simple “thank you” card can help volunteers to feel valued, as well as serving as a link to the organization.

Author Information

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Additional References

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Sources

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