

Motivating People to Volunteer

- Be motivated yourself. Sincerity succeeds over technique every time.
- Be clear on what you want people to do. Use written job descriptions whenever possible so that you are telling the same thing in the same way to each potential volunteer.
- The more specific you can be, the better. If you ask, "Who wants to volunteer?" how can someone decide on the basis of no information? On the other hand, if you ask, "Who wants to prepare for the legislative hearing next month?" you allow people to self-screen their interests.
- Use titles for volunteer assignments. The word "volunteer" is a pay category, not a function! Would you apply for a job called "employee"?
- Do not speak with a 'forked tongue.' Do not suck people into assignments by minimizing the work to be done. Be careful of phrases like: "this will only take a few hours a month" or "try it for a while and then we'll see." If you need someone with availability several hours a week or for a full year, say so. It may take longer to find someone to say yes, but once you have that person you'll have the right person.
- Share deadlines. When does the work have to be finished? What are the internal deadlines prior to the final one?
- Define the training and supervision the person will have. Many people are cautious of being thrown in to sink or swim. If they believe they will have help while they learn the ropes, they may be more likely to give something a try. Also, it is reassuring to know that you do not expect them to start the job fully informed or trained.
- Identify and express the benefits to the volunteer from accomplishing the task. Every job has "payoffs" and it is legitimate to discuss these. In fact, in the best volunteer situations, the giver receives as much benefit as the recipient does.
- Explain why you are approaching the particular person -what skills or personality traits he or she has that makes her/him a good candidate for the position.
- Paint an upbeat picture of the work. Volunteering is a leisure time activity. You are not competing with salaried employment when you recruit volunteers; your competition is jogging and time with the kids! So the volunteer work should be fun at some level (and remember that everyone defines fun differently).
- Don't have mental conversations. The way to recruit volunteers is to ask people!

From Susan Ellis and Energize