

Getting volunteer recruitment right can be hard, but it's an essential first-step to building a volunteering program that thrives. Below are some handy hints to help you recruit the right volunteers for your programs.

Rule #1 Recruit for attitude, train for skill

Many organisations only advertise the roles they need to fill, rather than recruiting people based on their skills and experience. Evaluate talent based on the proposition that who you are matters just as much as what you know. Instead of recruiting for specific roles, try recruiting using a people proposition: find volunteers who are aligned to your mission and values. This will enable you to cultivate a pipeline of talent that can undertake your vacant roles, and add value in ways you might never have imagined.

Rule #2 Create a community

Volunteers want to be a part of something, and they want to see their involvement make a difference. Despite living in an increasingly digital world, the most common way people find out about volunteering opportunities is through word-of-mouth. Further, 92% of people trust peer recommendations over advertising. By creating a flourishing volunteer community based on a common set of values, you can create a team of ambassadors that live and breathe your mission. These ambassadors are your greatest recruitment tool.

Rule #3 The volunteer is your customer

All volunteering roles should add value to your organisation, and be meaningful for the volunteer. If you change your way of thinking to see the volunteer as the customer, you change the way you engage and interact with them. Be creative and flexible in the ways you engage volunteers, and give people the opportunity to craft their own roles. If you spend more time satisfying the needs of your volunteers you can be sure they will be productive, efficient, and happy in their volunteering roles.

Rule #4 Words spark emotion, and emotion drives behaviour

Tell your story. Your primary objective should be to engage with prospective volunteers in a way that allows them to envisage themselves volunteering with your organisation. Share inspiring testimonials from existing volunteers, clients, service users, and paid staff to tell your story. Volunteers want to be a part of the team. Remember: people will first decide whether you're worth volunteering for, and then figure out how they can fit you into their schedule.

Rule #5 Don't appear desperate

Organisations often make desperate pleas for help, highlighting how understaffed they are. Human behaviour is influenced by perceived social norms and peer acceptance. If your message is that your program is languishing, this will cast doubt on whether your program is worth volunteering for. Instead, frame your message so that volunteers feel compelled to join.

Rule #6 WIIFM

People will have both internal and external motivations for volunteering. At the end of the day, people always want to know: "what's in it for me?" Structure your recruitment and advertising around four questions:

1. What is the problem you're trying to solve?
2. What is the solution to the problem?
3. What is involved in implementing the solution?
4. What do you need volunteers to do?

By using positive emotions in your advertising, you encourage an oxytocin response in your audience. A similar response to the "helper's high" people get through volunteering. Be descriptive about what your organisation does and what your volunteering roles entail.

Final Words of Advice

- Don't assume people know your mission! Information on what your organisation does and why it matters should be front and centre in all your messaging.
- Call a spade a spade; don't minimise the task or mislead the volunteer. People want to know the full extent of the commitment you are asking for before they are willing to sign up. Meet people at their desired level of engagement.
- Time is a scarce resource and once it's gone, it's gone. Time is the currency you exchange with your volunteers. It is your responsibility to show them why they should spend their time with you.