

Introduction

Volunteers can provide significant support by enabling programs to offer their students more one-on-one and small group support. In order to be effective, however, volunteers need training, management and support.

Overview

Below are some best practices for recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers in your program.

- Determine Volunteer Needs
- Recruit Volunteers
- Train Volunteers
- Provide Ongoing Management and Support
- Show Appreciation

Determine Volunteer Needs

- Organization mission and needs:** To use volunteers effectively, think about how they can best support your program. Here are some questions to ask as you prepare to bring in volunteers:
 - What do your direct service sessions look like, and what role would a volunteer play in them?
 - What kind of time commitment do you need from your volunteers? (SEA recommends requiring that volunteers agree to a minimum weekly commitment.)
 - What skill levels and/or prior experiences do you need from your volunteers?
- Volunteer job description:** Create a volunteer job description(s) that addresses the following topics. Tailor the description to meet the specific needs of the position (ex: academics vs squash).
 - Expectations - commitment levels, roles and responsibilities
 - Required and/or helpful skills and prior experiences
 - Any incentives you provide (college credit, stipends, etc.)
 - The reason for / importance of the role and what volunteers will gain from the experience (i.e. strong positive relationships with young people)

Recruit Volunteers

- Focus on your needs:** Search for volunteer applicants, organizations, and groups that fit your needs. It's harder to try to fit the needs of someone else into your program.

- ❑ **Look at potential volunteer sources within your community:** Depending on your location, you may decide to focus on different volunteer communities.
 - ❑ **College students:** Look into work study programs, scholarship programs, and undergraduate classes with volunteer requirements; students who have a requirement to volunteer are more likely to show up consistently. Look for classes with a focus that matches your program interests (youth development/education, math/science focus, physical education, etc.). Explore clubs or other groups on campus whose interests align with your organization (black student union, fraternities/sororities, etc.). Talk with professors and university leaders about volunteer partnership opportunities, such as allowing students to get course credit for their volunteer hours, or helping transport volunteers to/from your facility.
 - ❑ **Neighborhood groups:** Connect with local churches, community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, or other youth-based organizations to see if you can share resources and/or recruit from them.
 - ❑ **Squash clubs:** Connect with local squash clubs to spread the word about the need for volunteers.
 - ❑ **Local high schools:** If you work with younger students, local high school students can be helpful in the classroom and/or on court.
 - ❑ **Local businesses:** Some companies actively encourage their employees to volunteer in the community. Search for individuals and programs to connect with at these companies.
 - ❑ **Alumni:** Local alumni from your own program can volunteer to support and mentor future generations of students.
- ❑ **Create volunteer applications** that include the following:
 - ❑ Personal information (name, address, phone, email, emergency contacts, etc.)
 - ❑ Questions about their experiences and interest in volunteering with you
 - ❑ Written permission and personal information required to run a criminal and sexual offender background check.
 - ❑ A copy of your Student Protection Plan with a signature page where volunteers acknowledge they received and reviewed the plan.
 - ❑ Staff/volunteer waiver to participate in your organization
- ❑ **Respond quickly**, within one business day, when you hear from an interested volunteer.
- ❑ **Track peaks/valleys** in your recruitment/retention calendar, and start recruitment efforts early.
 - ❑ Recruiting volunteers early will help you establish a strong volunteer group before your students arrive for the new school year. (ex: If your program starts in October, begin looking at volunteer sources in August. September is a big month after school starts - people know their schedules and commitment levels.)
 - ❑ Having your volunteer group ready will help in scheduling trainings and orientations for new and returning volunteers.

- ❑ Knowing the commitment level and schedule of volunteers will help you plan your annual recruitment schedule (e.g., if you know a large portion of your volunteers are only volunteering for one semester, begin a new recruitment process part-way through the year, before the current volunteers leave).

Train Volunteers

The purpose of trainings is to set people up for success. Here are some things all volunteers need to know in order to be successful in your program.

- ❑ **Organization information:** Share your mission statement and goals, overview of programs, staff member roles and contact info, participant demographic information, etc. If possible, give volunteers photos of the students with their names so they can practice learning them.
- ❑ **Logistics:** Share specific, concise program logistics and expectations.
 - ❑ **Arrival/departure:** What time are students/volunteers expected to arrive? Where do they go and what should they do when they arrive? When should they leave? Where can volunteers park?
 - ❑ **Rules:** What is the dress code, cell phone policy, computer usage policy, food/drink policy, etc.?
 - ❑ **Schedule and routines:** What is the daily schedule? What are program routines and rules they should be aware of? How do students move through the program, and what is the volunteer's role during transitions?
 - ❑ **Important dates:** Share any significant dates, such as days when practice is cancelled or program-wide celebrations..
- ❑ **Student safety:** Share information about how your organization keeps students safe, and how this applies to the volunteers' roles and responsibilities. For example, review policies about appropriate conduct with students, mandated reporter responsibilities, and healthy boundaries with students.
- ❑ **Best practices for working with students:** Share models and guides to increase volunteers' comfort and skill in working with students. For example, you might review some practice scenarios of common challenges volunteers encounter, give information about adolescent development, share a list of "do's and don'ts" (ex: do learn every student's name, don't threaten students with punishments, etc.), or show videos that help volunteers understand your approach to youth development (ex: the [impact of praise](#) in encouraging a growth mindset).
- ❑ **Handbook/Guide:** Give each volunteer a handbook or guide to refer back to after the training. Consider having volunteers sign off that they have read and understand the handbook to increase their accountability.

As you plan your volunteer training, here are some additional things to consider beyond the pure content of the training.

- ❑ **Create a positive atmosphere:** When trainings begin, people are often reserved or shy about getting involved. Start with some icebreakers that help volunteers open up and become more comfortable talking.
- ❑ **Inspire, Educate, Connect:** Keep these three goals in mind for your training. Too often, trainings focus just on the education - i.e. what volunteers need to know. Make sure you also include ways to get them feeling excited about the work, and to build your relationship with them so that they see you as a resource.
- ❑ **Have a variety of speakers:** Think about who else can contribute to the training so the messages come from more than just one staff member. For example, the Executive Director might lead the welcome (sharing the missions and thanking volunteers for their time) and an experienced volunteer might share tips for working with students.
- ❑ **Make trainings interactive:** Trainings should include a mixture of ways to engage with the content. Consider some of the following options:
 - ❑ Small group discussions
 - ❑ Role plays
 - ❑ Practice walkthroughs
 - ❑ Videos
 - ❑ Written resources

Provide Ongoing Management and Support

- ❑ **How you communicate with volunteers:** Consider how you will communicate with volunteers on a regular basis. Here are some methods to consider:
 - ❑ A monthly newsletter with program updates
 - ❑ A weekly email confirming their schedules and sharing brief information about what to expect that week
 - ❑ Hand-out to give the volunteer at the practice with specific instructions
- ❑ **How volunteers communicate with you:** Give volunteers clear instructions about how they should communicate with you. Who do they contact if they are going to be absent? If they have a problem or question? When and how is the appropriate time for them to communicate these things?
- ❑ **Ongoing check-ins:** Do informal check-ins with individual volunteers throughout the year to ask how they are doing and to make adjustments as needed. Volunteers should feel that their work and their perspective matters.
- ❑ **Exit interviews:** When volunteers are completing their time with you, lead an exit interview to learn more about their experiences. Use this feedback to help you plan future volunteer recruitment efforts and trainings. You could do these in-person, or could send a survey to volunteers.
- ❑ **Schedules:** Compile weekly and/or monthly calendars that include important program dates (events, program cancellations, etc.) and communicate this information in multiple ways (email, paper copies, text reminder, website, etc.)

- ❑ **Volunteer information:** Have a system for storing all volunteer information. If you collect sensitive information such as social security numbers, ensure that information is kept in a locked, secure location (online or physically).
- ❑ **Daily plan:** Have a plan each day for how every volunteer will be used. Designate at the start of a session what activities and with whom the volunteers will work.
- ❑ **Support:** Constantly show support and care for your volunteers, and commend them for the good work they do.
- ❑ **Feedback:** Develop a survey that allows volunteers to share feedback formally with the organization.
- ❑ **Interventions:** If a volunteer is not meeting expectations, keep in mind their intent versus their impact. What are they doing that isn't working? What might be the reason for that (e.g., feeling under-utilized or struggling with a student or staff member)? Address the concern with the volunteer and look for the underlying cause so that you can support them in doing more positive work.
- ❑ **Staff support:** Staff members should receive support and guidance in how to manage their volunteers. Many frontline staff have never been responsible for training or managing other adults, and will need coaching in how to set clear expectations, build positive working relationships, and address conflicts with volunteers.

Show Appreciation

- ❑ **Student greetings:** Teach and mentor students to greet volunteers every day and personally thank them at the end of sessions. Thanking volunteers is a great opportunity for students to practice shaking hands and making eye contact with volunteers.
- ❑ **Fun events:** Host fun events to show your appreciation to your volunteers. Events might be volunteer-only or might create the opportunity for fun relationship-building with students, such as opportunities for academic staff to get on court with volunteers, or match play between volunteers.
- ❑ **Program gear:** T-shirts and other program gear are appreciated by volunteers.
- ❑ **Team photo and card:** At the end of the volunteer's time, have students present them with a team photo and card signed by all the students.
- ❑ **Letters:** Ask students or staff members to write a personalized thank you note to volunteers who have been especially impactful. Include a photo of a student with whom they've worked closely.
- ❑ **Professional development:** Where appropriate, invite volunteers to join staff professional development events.

Additional Resources

- ❑ [Developing a Plan for Volunteers](#) - from Community Tool Box
- ❑ [Successful Strategies for Recruiting, Training, and Utilizing Volunteers](#) - by the US Department of Health and Human Services

SEA Shared-Drive Resources

- ❑ [SquashBusters Volunteer Information Packet](#)
- ❑ [Racquet Up Detroit Volunteer Survey](#)

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