

How to attract more volunteers

Do your school parent group meetings consist of the same four people each month? Does your child's classroom need a volunteer to take on a special project? Are you trying to recruit volunteers to help with the school fete? These tips will help you attract school volunteers and keep them coming back to help.

What volunteers love

- "We're so glad you're here." A warm and inviting welcome can win your volunteer's heart. Introduce them to others. Include them in conversations. If the work environment is pleasant, your volunteer is much more likely to participate again.
- "We're doing this because..." Help your volunteer understand how their role relates to your overall goals and what you hope to achieve. Sometimes having a specific outcome or project will attract more people.
- "Thank you so much." Let your volunteer know you appreciate their help, whether they donated an hour or a week, whether they did the most difficult task or the easiest. Acknowledging what a person does is very important.
- "Whatever works best for you." People have different styles and abilities. Whenever possible, let volunteers take ownership of the process. Give them the goals of the project or the desired outcome and let them choose their own way to get there. Don't say "we do things this way," especially if there's no compelling reason to stick with the status quo.

What volunteers do not like:

- "We don't need you after all." Your volunteer shows up on time and ready to help. But when they get there, they discover there's no work to do. Maybe you have enough help already. Maybe the task changed and you're going to do it a different way at a different time. The reason doesn't matter. The message to the volunteer is: "Not only don't we need you, we also didn't care enough about you or your time to tell you before you drove over here."
- "Good night, and good luck." Being given a job to do without proper instruction or the tools to do the job properly can be very frustrating — especially if you leave your volunteer on their own to figure things out for themselves. Most people won't submit to that kind of experience twice.
- "Just another hour-or so." You ask the volunteer to donate an hour of their time. But it turns out to be the great elastic hour — it stretches and stretches until the job is done. They might stick around to see things through, but they'll think twice before committing to help again.
- "You're doing it all wrong!" It's OK to tell a volunteer when they are doing the wrong thing, but presentation matters. Be helpful rather than confrontational. It could cost you a volunteer — and maybe more if they tell their friends.



Things that keep volunteers motivated

- “That’s a great idea.” Nothing is more motivating than making your own idea a reality. An atmosphere that encourages new ideas not only energizes volunteers; it keeps your group fresh and injects excitement, too.
- “We’re all in it together.” If your volunteers feel like part of a team, they’ll be more motivated to do their part. A team atmosphere means making sure everybody feels wanted and participates. And it’s crucial to break up cliques.
- “You’re really good at that.” Use people’s talents, not just their time. Not many people will get excited about constantly being on the clean-up committee. But if you let the person who loves carpentry build your fete stalls or the one who’s interested in graphic design create your newsletter, they’re much more likely to do a great job and want to continue.
- “How did that go for you?” Check in with volunteers occasionally. Make sure their needs are being met and they haven’t become disgruntled. Personal contact lets them know you care about them individually, and it catches potential problems before they become significant. Never underestimate the power of building relationships.
- “We did it!” When things go right, share your successes with your volunteers. A shared sense of accomplishment can be a powerful motivator.

Five good ways to find new volunteers

1. “Position available.” Write help-wanted ads. Create a flyer or section of your newsletter with descriptions of the jobs you need help for. Include the duties of the position, likely time commitment, and other pertinent information. You’re more likely to find a good match for your position if you publicize it well.
2. “There’s a lot you can do.” You already know that one of the biggest fears of volunteers is that they’ll be sucked into a black hole of never-ending time commitment. One way to address this fear is to create a list of all the things that volunteers can do in one hour to help your group.
3. “Would you help?” The No. 1 reason people say they don’t volunteer is because “no one asked.” Asking doesn’t mean a newsletter ad that says, “new officers needed.” It requires a personal approach, and it works best if you have a specific task in mind. “Jim, we need ticket-takers for the carnival. Can you spare an hour to help?”
4. “Bring your friends!” People are much more likely to participate in a group if they know someone who participates already. You can use this to your advantage by asking existing members to issue personal invitations to people they know.



5. “Thanks for your interest.” Don’t let volunteer surveys sit around for weeks before you respond, even to people who expressed interest in an event that is months away. People are much more likely to follow through later if you make a connection now. Also, this is an opening to ask for more involvement: “I know you said you’d help with the spring carnival, but I wonder if you could spare an hour to help children pick out books at the book fair in October?”

For those of you who have stepped up to your P&F at your AGM, you may find this information pertaining to volunteers interesting and useful. Don’t forget if you have any great ideas for recruiting and retaining volunteers, please let us know so that we can share them.



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