

Skilled Volunteers 101

Want to benefit from having skilled volunteers but don't know where to start? Let's change that! There are proven, effective tactics for recruiting and managing skilled volunteers –whether it is a tech-savvy youth group overseeing your social media site or a professional graphic designer creating a poster for a big annual fundraising event.

In order to successfully work with skilled volunteers, you must make sure:

1. You know exactly what you want
2. You find the right volunteer for the job
3. The volunteer knows exactly what you want

What do you want?

Skilled volunteers are much more likely to succeed with specific challenge than a vague request to "get donations" or "help with marketing." Put together a solid, clear list of what you need skilled volunteers to do –then break those lists down to tasks, timelines, and skills, and put together job descriptions.

How do you find the right skilled volunteer?

To be honest, the greatest challenge you face is the above step: sussing out the specifics of what you want. Once you know that, recruiting skilled volunteers is easy: you just need to write a Volunteer Position Description (PD). A good, successful PD lists the specific goals of the job, as well as the requirements and skills needed, in a manner that makes the job sound appealing. Then advertise that position with local businesses and colleges!



Effectively recruiting and managing skilled volunteers will make **your job less stressful and you will feel less overwhelmed.**

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER POSITION DESCRIPTION

It seems rudimentary that when asking any volunteer, “Is the work you’re doing here what you expected it would be?” the best answer you can get is, “Yes.” Skilled volunteers tend to be professionals, and they need to be treated professionally --this means from a managerial standpoint, your skilled volunteers need to know ahead of time *exactly* what they’re volunteering to do. This is most effectively done through the Position Descriptions you write in order to recruit volunteers. If you don’t use PDs already, you’ll need to develop your PD-writing skills if you want skilled volunteers.

Effective Position Descriptions have 8 important parts:

1) Position Title

Be clear and concise: “Graphic Designer,” “Food Drive Coordinator” or “Social Media Manager.”

2) Purpose of the Position

How will the volunteer's work affect your mission or clients? Skilled volunteers are more likely to add their volunteer work to their resume, and what you write here can be the hook that lures them in. For example if you write as a purpose, “Increase by 30% the number of clients able to receive free Thanksgiving meals, through development of a social media campaign focusing on increasing food donations from local schools and churches,” what volunteer wouldn’t love to put that on their resume?

3) Work Location/Hours

Where/when will the individual be working? Can the work be done at home at the convenience of the volunteer? If the volunteers need to be at a specific site, during which hours should they be there? Will they have everything (computers, specific software, phones) they need there?

4) Commitment Expected

How many hours per week/day will the volunteer need to work? For how many weeks/months? By asking for a specific commitment you are making it clear you value your volunteer’s time and want them to be able to fit your needs into their sometimes busy schedule.

5) Responsibilities and Duties

What *specifically* will the volunteer do? List 3-6 primary duties of the volunteer. Daily social media postings? Development of four 11x17 campaign posters? Attend monthly meetings? (Whatever it is, make sure it is a reasonable list of duties in relation to the time commitment you are asking for –which can be a challenge if you’re not sure how long certain skilled tasks take, like graphic design or database development. Feel free to ask a professional for advice!)

6) Qualifications

Be VERY clear and concrete about the skills you want applicants to have. Include education, personal characteristics, skills, abilities and/or experience required. Ask for samples of their past work.

7) Training

If you will be providing Orientation/Training to your volunteer, say so here.

8) Application process

Provide information about how to apply and who to call if there are questions about the position.

SAMPLE POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Adult English Language Tutors (ESL)

By tutoring just 2 hours every week at your local library, you will be helping an adult learn to read to their children, improve communication with children's teachers, read labels at the grocery store, or understand directions from a doctor. All tutoring is done in English so volunteers are not required to speak any other languages. This is a 6 month commitment. Tutor duties:

- Writing weekly lesson plans that work toward the student's specific goals
- Scheduling weekly, 2-hour tutoring sessions with their learner
- Submitting a monthly Tutor Report (we have an easy [online form](#))

To qualify, volunteers must:

- Have 3+ years of experience as an educator (teacher, trainer, or tutor)
- Fluently speak, read, and write English
- Attend one 8-hour Tutor Training session

For more information or to apply, contact volunteer@litnetwork.org

Graphic Designer

Are you creative and experienced with graphic design and illustration? We are looking for someone to create 18 simple illustrations for an online Volunteer Orientation video, as well as some infographics for our social media accounts. Deadline for this work is August 31. Applicants for this position must be:

- Able to work independently and effectively, with great respect for deadlines
- Experienced! 3 samples of your past work will be required. (Jpegs preferred)

This volunteer opportunity can be fulfilled remotely/online. If interested send letter of interest and samples of your work to shawn@litnetwork.org

Bake Sale Coordinator

Our goal is to raise at least \$500 for our Healthy Kids program so they can get the food they need to stay healthy. The Bake Sale will be held 11am-3pm on Sunday, June 23 at the Goodman Community Food Bank (1118 S. Park Street) and we are looking for someone to dedicate 5 hours per week between now and the event to:

- Develop guidelines for donations (packaging, ingredients, when/where to drop off donations)
- Reach out to the community (bakeries/grocers /private citizens) to procure baked goods
- Develop advertising (flyers, press releases, etc) promoting the event to the community
- Oversee 4-5 volunteers assisting with planning logistics

Requirements: you must be highly organized, enthusiastic, outgoing, and have event-planning experience. You may work from home or from our office between 9-5 Mondays or Tuesdays. Contact Sheila at (608) 244-2391 for more information or send a letter of interest to sheila@foodbank.org

You, the Manager

Volunteer Coordinators rarely think of themselves as managers, but we are –we hire, train and/or oversee workers (albeit volunteer, not paid). Good management skills are VERY important when working with skilled volunteers. Think about the qualities *you* want from your supervisor: attentiveness, helpfulness, encouragement. Offer those same things to your skilled volunteers on a regular basis.

When you give all the information a skilled volunteer needs up front (in the PD or Training), you will find **you do not need to do much to manage them**. Answer the occasional question, offer the occasional bit of wisdom –but it is not your job to watch their every move. (And if you find yourself needing to, either you were not clear enough at the start or you hired the wrong volunteer.)

Set aside at least 30 minutes every week or two to meet with your skilled volunteer. Use this time to get updates on their project, ask if they have any questions, and tell them you appreciate their help. Too many volunteer managers recruit skilled volunteers then merely set them free to do their task/job with no management –and the end result can be catastrophic. In my early days as a volunteer manager, I had volunteers disappear, drop projects, or take projects in completely wrong directions –and by the time I found out, it was too late! That wasted everyone’s time.

Managers without proper management skills often find themselves running around micromanaging volunteers and dealing with a constant stream of small emergencies. Managers who have good management skills fill their time checking in with skilled volunteers and using the feedback of those skilled volunteers to improve the volunteer program through better recruitment and management.

SAYING THANKS

Imagine sending a family member money in a birthday card and never receiving a call or letter of thanks. How does that feel –like you or your gift is not important? What if you finished a tough project at work and got no “good job” or “thanks” from your boss or coworkers? Perhaps you would think, “Next time I won’t work so hard.”

You don’t need to bring out the parade floats to show your skilled volunteers how much you appreciate them. **Just say thanks!** Give encouragement through gratitude. Turn your agency into a culture of thanks –it’ll do wonders for everyone’s mood, for their generosity, and their ability to work more effectively. Practice saying these things to volunteers, coworkers, supervisors, friends, and family:



“You are doing a great job.”

“I really appreciate your help with this.”

“I’m proud of the work you are doing.”

“Thank you.”

Questions? Want further assistance? I'm happy to help! Feel free to contact me:

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Ms. Shawn Steen has more than 15 years of volunteer program management experience and currently recruits and helps manage 250+ volunteers for Literacy Network of Dane County. She also serves as Board President for Dane County Administrators of Volunteer Services, and is a member of United Way of Dane County speaker's bureau. She has presented workshops on Social Media for Nonprofits, Conflict Management & Dealing with Difficult Volunteers, and Skilled Volunteer Management. Ms. Steen also volunteers with several agencies, including Madison Area Urban Ministries, where she is a counselor to women newly released from prison, helping them explore ways to build a happy, safe, and healthy "life outside."