

# Chapter

# 5

## BUILD A VOLUNTEER NETWORK

**PURPOSE** *To develop a network of individuals who volunteer at your library.*

### In this Chapter

RECRUITING AND KEEPING VOLUNTEERS

SAMPLE LETTER FOR VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER TRACKING FORM

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

**PURPOSE** *Develop volunteer positions and policies that keep volunteers engaged.*

### **Step 1 — Define why you need volunteers.**

Identify specific reasons why volunteers would benefit your library. Do you have too many activities and not enough staff? Would you like to start new projects? Establishing desired outcomes at the beginning of a project will help to define your volunteer needs.

### **Step 2 — Design volunteer activities and position descriptions.**

It is important that you provide specific responsibilities, expected outcomes and goals for volunteers. Challenging and motivational activities provide an atmosphere in which your volunteers can succeed.

Volunteer job descriptions should specifically outline the responsibilities of each volunteer. They should also describe the requirements and skills that you need in a volunteer. As a result, a job description can be very useful in your recruitment process.

Below are suggested components for volunteer job descriptions:

- **Position title** — Be specific and descriptive.
- **Work location** — Is this a job that must be done at the library or could the volunteer work from home?
- **Responsibilities** — List what will be expected of the volunteer. Be specific about administrative as well as programmatic tasks associated with this position.
- **Qualifications** — List all qualifications expected or preferred for the position. Include work/other volunteer experience, education and other skills required, such as writing ability.
- **Commitment required** — If the position requires a time commitment, include the minimum length of service, hours per week and any specific days on which you need the volunteer to be available.



#### HELPFUL HINT

**See the “Meet Your Technology Needs” chapter**, page 145, for details about recruiting and managing volunteers for your technology needs.

### **Step 3 — Recruit volunteers.**

After you have identified your volunteer needs, carefully recruit individuals who are appropriate for the job. Be honest about the work required and the time involved for the project.

Below are examples of where to recruit volunteers:

- AmeriCorps ([www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org))
- RSVP, a local Senior Corps program that connects older Americans with volunteer opportunities ([www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org))
- Employment assistance programs
- High schools (service-learning programs)
- Colleges
- Job training programs
- Parent groups (local PTA)
- Real estate agents (new-resident welcome packets often include volunteer opportunities)
- Retired executive organizations (e.g., SCORE, [www.score.org](http://www.score.org))
- Religious groups
- Senior centers
- Service organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, Junior League)
- Sororities and fraternities
- United Way ([www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org))

Don't forget to look within your own network. Ask friends, family, staff and other individuals with whom you are acquainted if they have time or if they know individuals who might want to volunteer.

See the sample letter on page 36 for ideas on how to ask organizations for volunteer support.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**View sample volunteer descriptions online at [www.co.arlington.va.us/lib/index.htm](http://www.co.arlington.va.us/lib/index.htm).** Click on "Support your library" on the left side of the page, and then select "Volunteering."

#### **Step 4 — Keep your volunteers interested.**

Volunteer retention requires a great deal of attention. Below are a few tips to keep the volunteers you recruit.

- **Keep them challenged** — Help volunteers acquire new skills. Give them tasks that will help with the success of the library.
- **Make them feel comfortable** — Help them do a good job by providing the tools they need and an appropriate workplace. Introduce them to your staff and make them feel a part of the team. Ensure that they understand what is expected of them.
- **Keep good records** — Keep an updated list of all your volunteers. Keep track of the best time to reach them, activities that they enjoy and the best times for them to volunteer. Add your volunteers to your mailing list to update them on events at your library.
- **Respect their work** — Even though these individuals are not paid staff, their ideas and perspectives are important.
- **Don't overwork them** — Make sure time expectations are clearly understood at the beginning of a project. Volunteers pressured to do more work than they anticipated doing might feel resentful and cease to volunteer in the future.
- **Say thank you** — Recognizing the work of your volunteers goes a long way toward keeping them.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**It may seem easier to get a job done by yourself**, but training volunteers will save time in the long run.



## GOOD IDEAS

**In a town of just 600 residents, Aguilar Public Library in Colorado** has been fortunate to have some of the most committed volunteers around. The library has five regular volunteers who dedicate more than 20 hours per week to the library.

The library uses a variety of creative tactics to recruit volunteers. When the library's board of trustees completed interviews for a new library director position, the staff decided to send out letters to all local applicants thanking them and encouraging them to become volunteers. They received a very positive response from those letters. Aguilar Public Library also retains volunteers by providing other opportunities for involvement in the library, such as encouraging long-term volunteers to apply to the library's board of trustees. Board president Carol Ryan says this allows individuals to expand their service to the library. For more details, contact the Aguilar Public Library, Aguilar, Colorado, 719-941-4426.

**The Veterans' Memorial Library in Patten, Maine,** recruited AmeriCorps members who provide free training for its computer lab. These individuals are part of a national service program and serve a certain amount of hours per year in exchange for living expenses and money for college. The AmeriCorps members at the Veterans' Memorial Library teach classes on basic computer and Internet skills in the library's computer lab. Library director Susan Hess says that the assistance provided by AmeriCorps has been invaluable.

The AmeriCorps members' supervisor visits the library once a week to check up on the members, solve any problems that may come up and give directions and strategies for teaching computing skills. The advisor also helped library staff plan an open house after it received the grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. For information about AmeriCorps, go to [www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org). For more details, contact the Veterans' Memorial Library, Patten, Maine, 207-528-2164.

**Lancaster Community Library in Lancaster, Virginia,** is a not-for-profit organization, receiving more than half of its financial support from the private sector. The library's five full-time employees rely heavily on the support of more than 60 volunteers who handle most circulation, book repair and cataloging activities. In addition, the library has other volunteers who organize community programs.

To reward the volunteers for their dedication, the library offers perks such as copying and faxing privileges. In addition, the library staff holds an annual luncheon for all volunteers. This year, for the first time, they have put together a "goody bag" to be distributed to volunteers during National Volunteer Week. The staff at Lancaster Community Library believes that these small gestures are an excellent way to let volunteers know that the library staff cares about them and the services they provide to the library and community. For more details, contact the Lancaster Community Library, Lancaster, Virginia, 804-435-1729.



**Sample letter to recruit volunteer support**

*(Put on library letterhead.)*

[DATE]

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP]

Dear [NAME]:

[NAME OF LIBRARY] provides free public access to computers and the Internet. This access to digital information is enjoyed by community members of all ages and all incomes, many of whom do not have access to computers at home.

In order to provide this service to the community, we must rely on the assistance of volunteers to get the job done. I am writing to ask you to inform members of [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] of volunteer opportunities at our library.

Volunteers at [NAME OF LIBRARY] work on a variety of different projects. I have included a list of volunteer job descriptions to distribute, if appropriate. [DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE THE VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTIONS.]

I will contact you to follow up on this letter. If you have any questions, I can be reached at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL].

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[E-MAIL]

Enc.



Sample Volunteer Tracking Form

NAME	PHONE	E-MAIL	BEST TIME TO CONTACT	BEST TIME TO VOLUNTEER	CURRENT PROJECT	DEADLINE

To download this template so you can use it at your library [CLICK HERE](#)



**Sample Volunteer Application**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Check the volunteer work you are interested in doing (check all that apply):**

- Clerical     Computer     Mending books     Shelving books
- Book processing     Bringing books to homebound patrons
- I want to know more about my options

**Are you interested in working:**

- Independently at the library     At home
- On community events     With the public

**Available hours:**

- Morning     Afternoon     Evenings     Weekends     Special Events

**How often would you like to volunteer?**

- Regularly. How many hours per week? \_\_\_\_\_
- Periodically. How many hours per month? \_\_\_\_\_
- Work on a one-time or short-term project.

**Do you speak a language other than English?**

- Yes (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_     No

**Employment or volunteer history:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**References:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_