

COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

WHAT WE'VE FOUND

Never underestimate the value of volunteers! A single volunteer with a strong vision can cause more change in a community than any government agency or organization. We have seen time and time again how important volunteers are to projects, and how they can make the difference between success and failure. Whether they volunteer out of passion or are specifically recruited for their expertise, they are contributing players that should be offered opportunities for training and growth and never be taken for granted.

VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER:

A person who freely gives of his or her time, expertise, and labor for an organization or specific task.



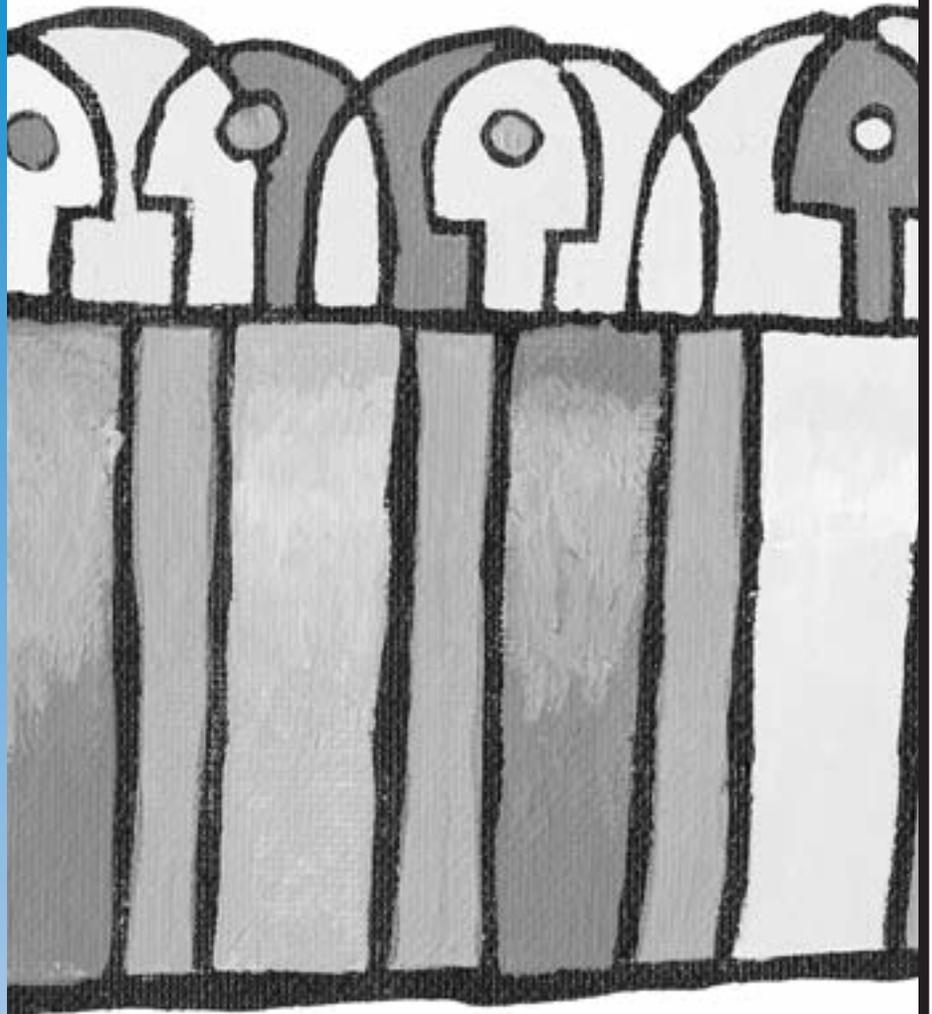
JUST THE FACTS

Volunteers can be young or old, come from any background, have any amount of experience or educational training, be part of the community or be visitors, have a lot of time to give or only a little.

As volunteers they might sit on a task force, run an event, fundraise, contribute pro-bono services, attend a focus group, participate in a workshop, walk in a trail-a-thon or paddle in a canoe-a-thon, manage a database, photograph the resource for an inventory, join a speakers' bureau, clean up a park, produce a newsletter, or any number of jobs that are relevant to the project and its goals.

By seeking out a diversity of individuals, a project stands to gain increased credibility, input of new ideas, and broader community support. By including a large number of volunteers, more work can be accomplished and there is less chance of volunteer burnout. To do either requires time, effort, and good management. Many organizations and government agencies have fulltime volunteer managers.

Soliciting feedback from volunteers is helpful for improving the volunteer program and volunteers' experiences. Ideas are also abundantly available online and in books. In addition, it may be helpful to contact other volunteer groups to coordinate recruitment efforts and get suggestions.



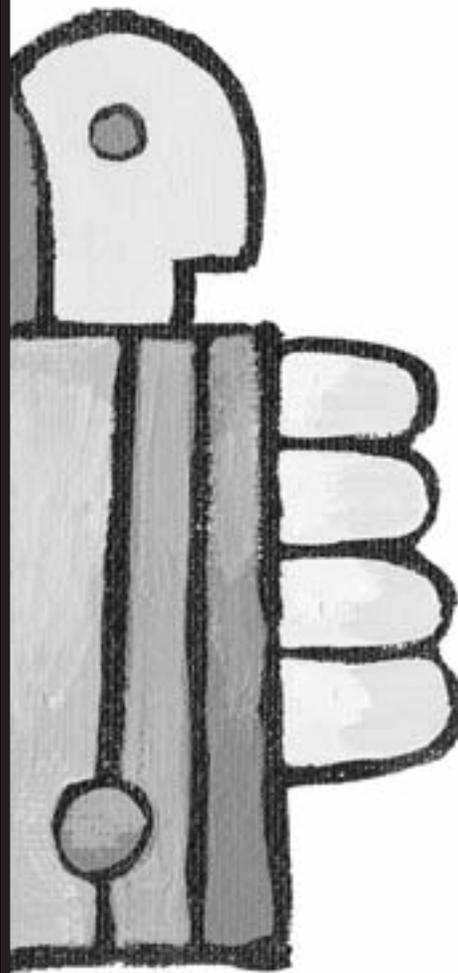
1. Generate a list

- Tap into partner organizations' volunteers and/or membership lists.
- Ask current volunteers for referrals.
- Contact existing volunteer agencies like the National Youth Service Affiliates Program, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Volunteer Talent Bank, local Girl Scout or Boy Scout troops, church groups, and schools including colleges and universities.
- Look through the yellow pages or professional directories to find people

with specialized training such as landscape architects, planners, transportation engineers, park and recreation managers, and other natural and cultural resource experts.

2. Recruit

There are two approaches to follow: **one** is to broadly recruit through signup sheets at public meetings, festivals, and locations where there is a display about the project. Broaden the effort even more widely by advertising in newsletters, web sites, and newspapers and running public service announcements on the radio or cable TV.



3. Train

Volunteers will be ambassadors for the organization or project, so they need to be familiar with goals, philosophies, objectives, etc. Plan to share this information through a formal orientation. It can range from a multi-day session to a short meeting. Orientations give volunteers the opportunities to get excited about

HOW TO DO IT

the group or project, to meet other volunteers, to get questions answered, and to address specific skill areas. This is also a great time to show volunteers how much their contributions are appreciated.

4. Assign meaningful jobs

Any task that a volunteer is asked to perform should be integral to achieving the goals of the project. Try to match up a person's skills and interest with available jobs. Also try to match the task with the amount of time the volunteer has available.

To clarify expectations, provide volunteers with written job descriptions and any other appropriate information such as deadlines, contact numbers, references, supplies, etc. Review the job and answer questions. Be careful of assuming everything is clear and okay.

5. Manage

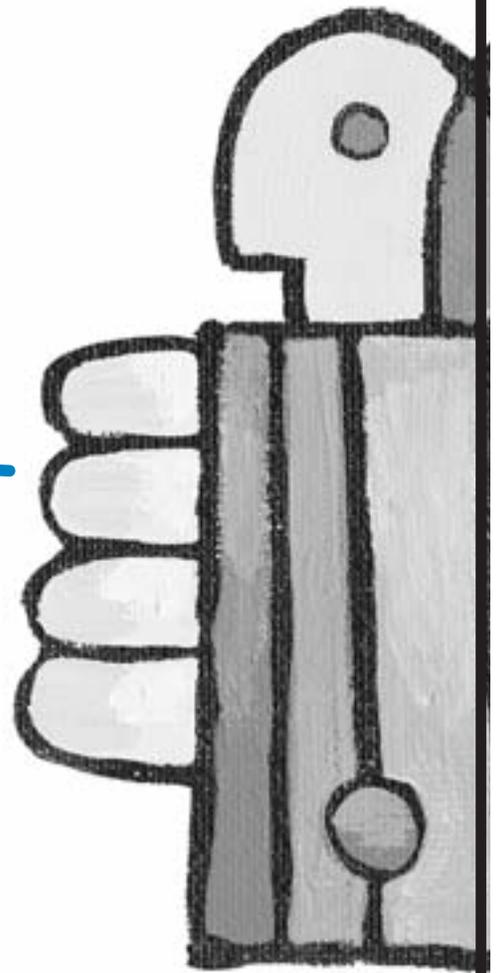
Continuously seek new ways of managing the volunteer program. The best way to do this is to get feedback from the volunteers themselves. Get their suggestions

The **second** is to define specific skills and talents that are needed for a particular task and then search for the people who have those skills and talents.

Whichever method is followed, be sure to answer the volunteer's unspoken question: "Why should I volunteer for you?" Respond to this by including in your recruitment materials the group's vision, history or background information, potential roles for volunteers, time commitments, and how to get more information. The number one reason why people do not volunteer is they are not asked.

for changing procedures, altering job descriptions, improving communication, acknowledging service, and avoiding burnout. If it seems only a handful of people are doing all of the work, figure out why. Rotate people among jobs so that multiple volunteers know how to do the same task in order to avoid individuals from becoming too territorial, to encourage continuous learning of new skills, and to get fresh ideas.

As part of the management program, create volunteer records and reports that show progress such as how many hours worked,



tasks completed, people reached, etc. Share these reports with administrators, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Issue a press release when volunteers have donated 100 hours or achieved an important objective.

6. Recognize, praise, and reward

- Celebrate every volunteer and their contribution. This should be done publicly and often.
- Don't wait until the end to show your appreciation, especially if it is a multi-year project. Send personal notes; write a reference letter and/or letter to a boss or family; give printed shirts or hats; pass out awards; offer full credits in printed, electronic, or film productions; throw a party; issue certificates; or any other tribute that says how much their efforts mean.

Use It If...

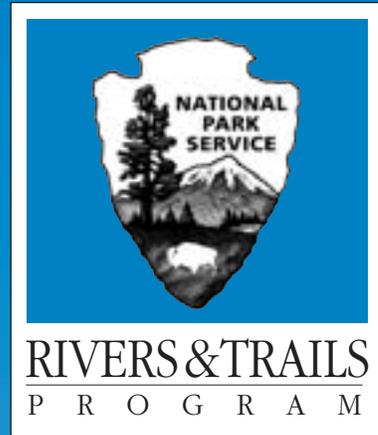
- You need to get work done.
- You are building a strong, inclusive public involvement campaign and want to be able to attract a diversity of people.
- You want to accomplish more work than your own resources can handle.
- You have a clear vision and defined actions.
- You need specialized expertise for a specific task that does not require a large commitment of time.

Forget It If...

- You do not have real jobs for volunteers either because the project is so well staffed or is so simple that everything can be done relatively quickly and easily.
- You cannot find anyone who is interested.
- You have not decided on a vision that can be used to attract volunteers and determine what needs to be accomplished.
- There is no one with the time or the interest to coordinate volunteers and their activities.

Timing is Everything

Use volunteers throughout a project. Continually recruit new volunteers to infuse energy and ideas and help avoid burnout.



National Park Service
Rivers, Trails and Conservation
Assistance Program
1849 C Street, NW
Mail Stop 1010
Washington, DC 20240
www.nps.gov/rta