

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT TIP SHEET

Without volunteers, our program would not exist, so effective volunteer recruitment is critical. Think of recruiting as an ongoing cycle; certain times of year will require a big recruitment push, but efforts such as online postings should occur year-round. Start recruiting early and utilize the summer months, be persistent and be creative. Always look for new ways to partner with community groups and businesses, both for ongoing volunteer connections and for one-time events. Remember: for every ten calls or emails you send, you might get one response. That's not bad; be persistent, at least people are learning about the program.

I. RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

A. Your program brochure

Take this with you everywhere you go! The brochure should outline the program and provide contact information.

B. AmeriCorps info sheet

This could be very simple or it could include information about the relationship of AmeriCorps to the host program. This fact sheet can also be handed to persons from the media.

C. Volunteer position description

Let the potential member know exactly what is expected of them. Let them take it away, and mull it over. Or pass it along.

II. RECRUITMENT METHODS

A. Phone calls/emails

Cold phone calls and emails are good ways to initially relate the program to potential volunteer sources. When doing this make sure to speak with the right person and use a standard template. Many businesses have a community involvement-type position, most colleges have volunteer, service learning and community engagement departments, and many middle and high schools have volunteer programs. Come up with a standard phone pitch and keep it short—tell them the basics and then offer to fax or mail more information if they're interested. In all cases, offer clear ways for people to get involved and get in touch.

B. Posting flyers

Posting flyers is a good way to get the word out to larger numbers of people. Make sure all the host site and program information (including logos!) is correct and that the flyer's text and color is eye-catching. Ask for permission when hanging flyers, especially on college campuses.

C. Class visits

Identify college/university courses that are aligned with your service mission, such as education, service learning and sociology classes, and ask professors or department heads if you can do brief class visits. A visit should last no more than 15 to 20 minutes. Give a brief overview of the program, hand out flyers and information sheets and pass around a sign-up sheet.

D. Agency/community visits

An important part of volunteer recruitment is targeting and informing the immediate community. Contact local agencies and businesses. Schedule a meeting with the local alderman. With every visit, stress different ways to get involved with the program, and be mindful that your presence is reflective of both your

program and AmeriCorps at large.

E. Online recruitment

Online recruitment is a relatively easy way to spread the program to a large number of people. Consider using Craigslist, Idealist and local public radio and television websites.

F. Volunteer fairs

Fairs are hit or miss. Some programs have had a very low response rate from volunteer fairs and others do better. When attending fairs, be sure to have a polish appearance, bring brochures, info sheets and a sign up sheet. It would be best to have a banner, blown up pictures of your program work (be sure all people pictured have signed a photo release!), and to have an information sheet clearly stating when and where the next trainings and orientations will be. Most colleges have volunteer fairs at the outset of the year (or each semester), and most neighborhoods have community fairs. Job fairs are another possibility.

III. VOLUNTEER SOURCES

Volunteers come from a variety of places and backgrounds. Consider where each volunteer is coming from and what limitations or benefits that brings. Be sure you tailor your training to meet the needs of all your volunteers.

A. Colleges/Universities

- **Service Learning Students:** Some schools or classes require service learning hours.

The benefits: volunteers need a consistent source of volunteer hours.

The drawbacks: volunteers may stop coming immediately after finishing their hours or may be more focused on getting hours than benefiting the program.

- **Related majors** (education, social work, etc.): Departments may be willing to post information or otherwise promote the opportunity to their students.

- **Service clubs:** Many clubs will allow you to visit a meeting or will pass along information to their members. Be sure to contact clubs early since most decide where they're going to volunteer early in the semester.

- **Greek groups:** Fraternities and Sororities need to volunteer. Again, contact them early before they commit to other programs.

- **Other options:** College honors programs or internships with counseling and other related majors.

B. High Schools: volunteerism and service learning students: Many high schools require students to complete some form of volunteer hours before they graduate. Find out the policies in your area. Make direct school contact with the principal. Ask which teachers or staff are heading up the service-learning or volunteer project and request permission to talk to them and/or visit their classrooms.

C. Businesses

Many businesses are eager to get involved in the community, and some, such as banks, are legally required to. While business professionals tend to be more reliable, they are also harder to match with our program since most work until 5 or 6 in the evening.

D. Volunteer Organizations

Organizations like Chicago CARES (www.chicagocares.org) and One Brick (www.onebrick.org) exist to match volunteers with sites. Many of these organizations are geared more toward one-time opportunities.

E. Community Members

Whenever you're in the community around the shelter, consider it an opportunity to engage and inform community members. It's as easy as setting up a table at a local Starbucks store, attending community

meetings and fairs, and asking the alderman to get you in touch with active locals.

F. Churches/Religious Organizations

Surprisingly, this has been the least helpful for us. But, if you're still interested in getting churches involved, consider hanging flyers on church bulletin boards and submitting blurbs for the weekly bulleting. Oh, and, good luck!

G. Alumni Associations

Most colleges and universities have alumni organizations in major cities, including Chicago. Get in touch with your alma mater's local chapter; they may allow you to attend a meeting, post on the website or include a blurb in their newsletter.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

A. Time and days of commitment

The scheduled time and days of tutoring will greatly influence your tutor base. For example, if your program operates immediately after school on weekdays, most business professionals will be unable to volunteer. We found that college students were our primary source of tutors because of the time frame, but there were always exceptions to that rule.

B. Recruiting is an ongoing process

Recruitment is a cycle. There will be times, such as before each semester, when you'll be focusing all your energies on recruitment, but some kind of recruitment should occur year-round. Maintain online postings at all times, and utilize the summer months to recruit for **all** sites.

C. Marketing of opportunity

The words you use and the way you market a volunteer opportunity matter. Don't overload people with information, make sure your communication is clear and concise and keep the message positive.

D. Community matters: use resources and recognize dynamics

Contact the local alderman. Visit local agencies and businesses to let them know about the program. Hang flyers in local libraries, community centers and grocery stores. Get the word out! If nothing else, it's good for people in the community to be aware of the program. But also be cognizant of neighborhood dynamics and how your shelter fits into that scheme. Remember that the way you promote the program in that community and how your message is received is directly linked to how the shelter is perceived in that community.

E. Be persistent!

Recruiting is hard work—don't give up. For every five interested responses you get, only one might actually end up being a volunteer...and that's ok. Keep getting the word out in new ways, promptly return phone calls and emails and keep your chin up.

F. People want to help, they just need an accessible outlet

By and large, people like working with children and care about homelessness, and they want to help you. But those same people are also juggling busy schedules, so make volunteering as easy as possible for them. That means giving them an easily understandable pitch, communicating clearly with them after they express interest and finding simple ways for them to find their place within the program. Remember—they do want to help!