

# Volunteers

There are many publications on volunteer recruitment and retention. At the end of this article you will find link to a few of them. This article will focus on the aspects of volunteer recruitment and management that are relevant to villages.

Let's first begin by stating the simple fact that villages heavily depend on volunteerism. The village founders are, with very few exceptions, volunteers. Even after a village hires staff, a large share of its success is dependent on volunteers. Thus the ability to recruit, nourish and replenish your volunteer base is at the heart of your ongoing work.

## **1. Who can be a volunteer?**

There are two kinds of volunteer activities in a village:

1. leadership and operations
2. Hands-on help to members

When recruiting for your village, make it a point to let people know there is something for everyone, both in terms of the type work performed as well as in the amount of time invested. A volunteer can be someone who needs rides from your village, but can still make phone calls on behalf of the village for friendly check-in with other members, or a volunteer can be someone who works full-time but can shovel the neighbor's snow a few times a year. Creating manageable tasks, you will make it easier for people to join in, knowing what is expected of them. One village for example, offers a ride to their office and brings in a frail member who helped with stuffing envelopes.

## **Content:**

1. Who can be a volunteer?
2. How to recruit
3. Background checks
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## **2. How to recruit**

The initial recruitment you will need to invest in is for leadership and committee work. You will need lots of worker bees to help the planning stages of the village. Villages have implemented three strategies:

1. Rope in your friends and neighbors
2. Cast a wide net using community channels
3. Hand pick people with skills and talents you need.

The fact that you are a hyper local organization can be your advantage when recruiting volunteers. In your recruitment highlight the point – people do not need to travel far to help and they are doing something for their own neighbors, investing in the community. This local and personal experience is usually what draws people in and what keeps them involved.

When recruiting for committee work, a committee job description is a helpful tool to clarify expectations and attract the right kind of people.

Village leaders who took part in a Volunteer Drivers Roundtable organized by Shawn Brennan, Montgomery County Mobility Manager (April 2017), suggested the following ideas about what motivates people to volunteer:

- Keep busy/maintain some “structure” in one’s schedule
- Fulfill a passion
- Give back
- Share life experiences/expertise
- Help someone
- Pay it forward—make a cosmic investment (someone may help you in the future)
- It’s rewarding and provides meaning to one’s life
- Meet people/get to know neighbors
- Learn something new
- Achieve a more balanced life
- Gain a sense of accomplishment
- Have impact locally
- Explore interests/potential careers

- Be part of a solution
- Meet a spiritual need
- Receive health benefits
- Stay engaged/decrease isolation
- Have fun
- Feel appreciated

You can use this list when developing your recruitment strategies.

Village leaders also proposed successful strategies for recruiting volunteers:

- Take advantage of the resources of the Montgomery County Volunteer Center including its online database and newsletter <http://www.montgomeryserves.org/>.
- Volunteer Match (data base) <https://www.volunteermatch.org/>
- Remove barriers to volunteering. Make the process of getting involved as easy as possible.
- Conduct outreach in public locations and with partner organizations. (Example: set up a table in a community center before and after a program for seniors takes place.)
- Set up a table outside fitness centers or at farmer's markets, community fairs/Oktoberfests.
- Ask volunteers to help recruit other volunteers, serve as ambassadors.
- Come up with incentives to volunteer or to recruit other volunteers (discount on oil change or such).
- Keep track of people who say "not now." Ask them if you can reach out to them in the future.
- Provide job descriptions so folks are clear about what is involved/expected.
- Use social media.
- Hold "meet and greet" and other social events.
- Publish a free "Beacon Bit" in the Beacon Newspaper.
- Beacon online calendar
- Personalize the mission and the volunteer experience. Use stories.
- Ask someone. The #1 reason anyone does almost anything is that someone asked them to.

- Use list servs and e-mail.  
Nudge regularly. People sometimes need that.
- Create flyers with phone numbers that can be ripped off. Post on community bulletin boards in places like Starbucks, Panera, Pot Bell, grocery stores etc.
- Envision your target volunteer and create messages that might motivate him/her to volunteer. Go to places where your target volunteer might go. Example, if you are looking for someone who enjoys driving, go to Advance Auto Parts.
- Put a car magnet on cars of existing volunteers to increase the community's awareness of your organization and to give volunteers a sense of belonging.
- Include cars with magnets in community parade
- Ask volunteers to bring brochures/flyers recruiting both clients and volunteers into the doctors' offices they travel to.
- Washington Post Local Living section (need to give 14 days' notice)

### **3. Background checks:**

Some village planning groups grapple with the need for background checks. They feel it is a waste of money as well as a cumbersome practice. In addition, they worry that this requirement will drive away potential volunteers who will not like the idea they are going to be vetted in order to help a neighbor. Most villages eventually choose to vet their volunteers for the following reasons:

1. It is a standard practice for nonprofits. Many insurance brokers require it.
2. Villages send volunteer to homes where potentially vulnerable people live. It is the safe and responsible measure to take.
3. Members will feel more comfortable asking for a volunteer if they knew they were vetted, trained and supported.
4. Background checks communicate a certain level of organizational competency.

The chapter **Risk Management and Liability Concerns** contains an in-depth discussion of this issue as well as the larger liability concerns a village may have.

#### **4. Should volunteers pay dues?**

Villages have different approaches to this issue. Some require that all volunteers become members (and pay dues) while other do not. Some volunteers may feel that their work is their contribution to the organizations while others will see the value of financially supporting the village.

In some villages, the categories of members and volunteers do not exist and everyone is a village participant. This helps to eliminate a dichotomy that is often artificial. Your planning group should discuss how your volunteers would feel about this issue.

#### **5. Orientation and Training**

The importance of orientation and training cannot be emphasized enough. Your volunteers will need initial training as well as on-going support. Training volunteers helps them feel confident and ensures services are offered in a safe and respectful fashion.

There are many volunteer training manuals available online. You do not need to reinvent the wheel. For Montgomery County villages, Chevy Chase at Home offers its training and volunteer manual free of charge. Programs such as JCA's Village Rides and The Senior Connection offer specific volunteer driver training. EveryMind's Friendly visitor program will help with training friendly visitors. Whichever way your village chooses to go about this, training is key to ensuring volunteers are safe and confident when working for the village members.

Here are a few examples for volunteer manuals available online:

[Riverside Village Volunteer Manual](#)

[At Home on the Sound](#)  
[Marin Villages](#)

**Note: If you choose to use text from manuals other villages created, make sure they give you permission and give them credit.**

## **6. Volunteer Coordinator/s**

A key role in the day to day operations of the village are the volunteer coordinators. They receive volunteer applications, make sure people go through background check, match requests with volunteer and supervise the volunteer work. They often facilitate the volunteer training. This work is often in the hands of one or two village leaders who have experience managing volunteers. But if your village does not have someone like that, you can seek the support of neighboring villages to receive advice on how to develop a volunteer coordinator position.

## **7. Volunteer retention**

Last but not least, volunteer retention. This is a perennial challenge for all nonprofits and villages are no different. No sooner than your new cohort of volunteers are trained and ready to go, you find yourself saying goodbye to a few of the older ones. Some volunteer coordinators describe this as the pail that never seems to get fuller.

The reasons people do not stay on for too long are many: some have health issues or declined physical stamina. Others choose to go back to work, move out of state or become primary caregiver to a loved one. These are reasons beyond your control. What is in your control is how people feel when they work for your village. The lists below were compiled at the volunteer driver roundtable held in 2017:

### **Why do volunteers leave:**

- Not used enough/not engaged
- Feeling unappreciated

- Overextended/burdened/burned-out
  - Bad experience
- (Specific to volunteer drivers)
- Difficult passengers
  - Traffic
  - Long waits at doctors' offices
  - Cost of gas

**Strategies to retain volunteers:**

- Recognize and reward what they do.
- Give choice/flexibility. (Ride scheduling software provides this.)
- Hold "exit interviews" Goal: understand volunteer's experience/potential problems; increase likelihood they will return to the organization and volunteer again.
- Periodic conference calls with volunteers provide opportunity to connect, share successes and other experiences, solve problems. Rotate days of the week and times of day to maximize the number of people able to participate. Consider trying [freeconferencecall.com](http://freeconferencecall.com).
- Send thank you notes.
- Hold volunteer appreciation events. If you have 75 or more, Cabot cheese will offer "Gratitude Grills."
- Offer professional development opportunities.
- Negotiate benefits such as discount oil change for drivers.
- Appeal to volunteers' competitive spirits: Publicly acknowledge folks volunteering most hours/trips/miles, etc. Track numbers and celebrate.
- Be clear up front and periodically about what is expected.
- Provide a personal touch: periodically reach out with a phone call, note or e-mail.
- Create mentorship/leadership opportunities.
- Build community.
- Invite volunteers to talk about their experiences; write up in press releases, etc.

**8. Additional Links**

In 2015 and 2016, Montgomery county Villages came together to exchange ideas and experiences. The workshops on volunteer training and recruitment produced additional resources. You can find them [here](#).

Additionally, the links below were provided by Kathleen Meaney Stobie, Montgomery County Volunteer Center. You can find her contact information at the end of the section.

#### Literature:

CTAA – Community Transportation Association of America:

<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=776>

[http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Recruitment\\_Volunteers\\_Transportation\\_Programs.pdf](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Recruitment_Volunteers_Transportation_Programs.pdf)

National Center on Senior Transportation:

<http://www.n4a.org/files/NCST%20Volunteer%20Transportation%20Info%20Brief.pdf>

National Volunteer Transportation Center:

<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=3767&z=132>

Volunteer Driver Program – Mass.gov:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/hst/volunteer-driver-programs.pdf>

Volunteer Best Practices:

Energize: Volunteer Management Resources for Directors of Volunteers

<https://www.energizeinc.com/>

Points of Light Foundation

<http://www.pointsoflight.org/get-resources>

Montgomery County Volunteer Center

[www.montgomeryserves.org](http://www.montgomeryserves.org)

- --Become a registered nonprofit/agency
- --Post volunteer opportunities



- --Monthly e-newsletter (currently over 27K subscribers)
- --Make a Difference (monthly County Cable program focused on volunteering)
- --Free training/networking series for registered nonprofits/agencies

CONTACTS:

Kathleen Meaney Stobie

RSVP Director

Montgomery County Volunteer Center

Direct: 240-777-2612

[Kathleen.stobie@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Kathleen.stobie@montgomerycountymd.gov)

Deborah Missal

Manager, Pro Bono Consultant Program

Montgomery County Volunteer Center

Direct: 240-777-2609

[Deborah.missal@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:Deborah.missal@montgomerycountymd.gov)