

As I said before I have volunteered in many situations, and I thought volunteering in the library was going to be easy. It wasn't, but it was most challenging! Volunteers fill a void in the community. There are not enough paid positions but the work still has to be done and without volunteers some places would not be able to function.

Pluses for being a volunteer are: you can usually decide when you want to work; you can fit it in around the family. If you don't like the work or the people you can move on and do something different. You meet interesting people and form lasting friendships. It keeps you informed with the world today and modern technology, e.g. the computer. It also helps build self esteem to know you can do a particular job. The only negative aspect I have found is that sometimes you feel used, for example, some people would say "She's a good worker. She'll do it!", so they leave you with everything to do. But you get over that attitude because that can happen whether you're paid or not.

I try to work on the principle of this little saying,

"You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving"

meaning: you can volunteer because you think it's the right thing to do, but if your heart's not in it you'll hate it. But if you volunteer because you really want to and you're a caring person you'll love it.

Louise Talbot

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Getting the work done with volunteers

Edythe Feazel

Why use volunteers?

Christian education and volunteers are traditionally paired. We remember that Harvard, Yale and most other colonial colleges were privately founded and supported with the goal of training pastors and furthering the kingdom of God. These schools were voluntarily financed and guided. Great libraries such as the Boston Athenaeum and the Library Company of Philadelphia were also begun and staffed with volunteer labour. The tradition of volunteer excellence, initiative, and vision is well established.

Many libraries of the 90s have mature collections which require labour-intensive maintenance. They are coping with demand for expensive access tools on CDROM, and are struggling with escalation in serials prices which erode materials budgets. Most libraries have backlogs of special collections which are inaccessible to patrons. At the same time, administrations are reducing staff size, eliminating departments, barely maintaining levels of service, or worse yet, reducing them. As librarians scramble with their backs against the Red Sea to continue to provide the best possible service with limited resources, one solution may be to initiate a volunteer program.

Herb White cautions us that the use of volunteers is a double-edged sword, that your funding body will never give you money for additional staff if you can get the work done free.¹ Using unskilled volunteers may give the impression that library work is easy, that no skills or training are necessary. But experience has shown that there are more positive results than negative when the program is properly administered. Volunteers are used in hospitals and schools all the time, but not to operate on patients or teach classes.

Their work is valuable

Sometimes the belief that anything worth having is worth paying for causes people to devalue the work of volunteers. However, libraries do pay for the services of volunteers by supervising, training, and recognising them. We have already seen the value of volunteer-initiated efforts in the founding of schools and libraries. When we believe in volunteers, we empower them to do their best.

Their work enhances library jobs

The work that volunteers do should supplement, not supplant, that of the regular library staff. Their presence frees the staff from repetitive tasks, allowing staff to use their special training and skills in more productive and creative ways. By understanding how the library works, and how pressured the staff feel trying to deliver quality service, volunteers can be effective ambassadors to the funding community to bring additional support. Volunteers can also be instrumental in solicitation of materials. The Newberry Library's annual book fair netted \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year, and was entirely run by volunteers.² Volunteers can bring a new outlook, a different perspective, and added talents to the work force.

Volunteers raise staff morale

As volunteers perform meaningful duties and assist in providing valuable service, the paid staff recognise the resulting savings in time and effort. They appreciate the lifting of the burden and take renewed energy.

Volunteers enable libraries to maintain and expand services

The tasks that volunteers are currently performing in libraries result in savings of time and dollars that can lead to service not possible without them. The use of volunteers may expand in the future. As we go on to discuss the profile of the typical volunteer, we can see that modern trends toward earlier retirement, limited financial support for educational institutions, lower college enrolments, increased demand for sophisticated tools and services, a more highly educated populace, more discretionary time available, and more people working in unfulfilling jobs point to an increased potential pool of volunteers.

Who are the volunteers?

Volunteer workers are unpaid staff who give of their time and energy to assist an organization or institution to conduct certain kinds of programs or specific services. Volunteers are generally part-time workers, giving time over periods of short or long duration.³

One out of every five persons over the age of sixteen in the United States has been a volunteer according to the Current Population Survey of 1990. The typical volunteer is white, thirty-five to forty-four years old, and most likely a college graduate. The higher the income, the more

likely one is to volunteer. Twenty-two percent of volunteers are women; nineteen percent are men. Most work less than five hours a week. Four out of ten work half the weeks of the year. Thirty percent work *every* week.⁴

The Gallup survey of 1990 showed an average of two hours per week worked. Sixty-two percent of volunteers do so to do something useful; thirty-four percent volunteer to do enjoyable work; twenty-nine percent want to benefit family and friends. Seventy-five percent of the people surveyed said they would not refuse if asked to volunteer.⁵

Often, one hears the lament that the volunteer pool has grown smaller, attributing this to the fact that more women have entered the work force. This is not supported by the recent Gallup poll. Ninety-eight million adults volunteer. Another source states that over half of the United States population is involved in some type of volunteer activity on a regular basis.⁶ The typical volunteer believes that one's actions can make a difference. He works best with short-term commitments and flexible hours. He wants to learn new skills, to develop new relationships. She is interested in being a leader, in helping to make decisions, and in looking for opportunities for personal growth. Volunteers are more likely to work for religious organisations than any other group.

Not only have they something to give, but they also have needs to be met. Reasons that people volunteer include:

1. They want to receive warm fuzzies, to feel useful, needed, and to make a contribution.
2. They want to make social contacts, to get out of the house, to combat boredom and loneliness.
3. They want to renew or learn new skills to enable them to enter the job market.
4. They want to impact and influence others.

The essential management steps

The church is not an institution to be served, but a force to be deployed. We must use tried and true management skills in enabling people to offer their gifts of service.⁷

Without the support of the director and staff, a volunteer program is destined to fail. Some directors are philosophically against using volunteers, but initiate a program to satisfy upper administration. Other directors think that volunteers are OK, but only for menial tasks. The ideal director will be confident in the program and value good volunteers.

Planning

Who will supervise them?

It is essential to appoint a volunteer coordinator whose job will be to do the required preliminary planning, and who will supervise volunteers once they are on the job. This person will be in charge of recruiting, assigning duties, scheduling and rewarding. He will handle conflicts and solve problems. She will decide to what extent volunteers will have autonomy in performing their jobs.

What will they do?

It is important that volunteers be given meaningful work to do. How does one determine that work is meaningful? Ask yourself these questions: "Is it useful, significant?" "Does it serve the mission of the school?" "Does it provide service to your clientele?"

The trend for volunteers is to move away from devoting large blocks of time on a regular basis. Jobs that can be split into tasks are ideal. Necessary skills should be easily learned.

The time and energy to recruit and to train volunteers may preclude their use for some projects. The contemplated programs and services must be planned bearing in mind the possible termination or unavailability of volunteer staff. The use of volunteer persons should be considered as a temporary measure pending the employment of staff. The ALA Guidelines strongly state that volunteers should not supplant or displace established staff positions.

Volunteers should also not do work that is essential, because they are hard to replace. "Useful" is a special project that will enhance. "Essential" includes interlibrary loans and photocopying. Volunteers can be assigned to essential work, but not more than three to four hours per week, the amount a staff person could pick up if necessary.⁸

Brainstorm with your staff and make a list of possible tasks, ideally those with a low priority and no specific deadline which various volunteers can work on over the year.

Following is a list of jobs that volunteers can and do perform effectively:

- Preparing books (including sorting, inserting security targets, shelving, mending, labelling, filing)
- Filing government documents
- Inspecting, cleaning, and/or fixing equipment
- Loading paper and toner
- Recording books for the blind
- Providing Information & Reference services
- Writing grants
- Fund raising
- Preparing overdues
- Helping with PR campaigns (Publicity materials, displays, exhibits)
- Organising historical, archival, genealogical, or other special collections (sheet music, drawings, personal papers)
- Assisting at the circulation desk
- Giving library orientation tours
- Working with clipping and/or pamphlet files and providing crowd control
- Indexing local publications (college, student publications)
- Assisting with conversion projects
- Training other volunteers
- Dusting shelves, caring for plants
- Helping with book sales (sorting, pricing, selling)
- Searching new orders for duplicates
- Sorting and opening the mail (stamping periodicals)
- Pulling card sets
- Preparing bulk mailings

Other questions to consider at this stage are the number of volunteers needed or the number of hours needed per week.

Communicate With Your Staff

Basic to the success of the program are prior planning and approval on the part of the paid staff. They should share in the responsibility for planning, because they can then share in the success of the program. Communicate with them and seek their input in the planning stages. Allay their fears that volunteers will replace them. Build a support framework of acceptance.

Policy, Budget, and Legal Considerations

Prepare a written document to anticipate and forestall problems. Check with your Human Resources Department to see what kind of insurance coverage your institution has for work-related injuries or operating a college vehicle. Establish some funds for advertising and for recognition and reward of the volunteers on a regular basis. Decide what kind of record keeping you wish to establish. Prepare a Policy & Procedures Manual. Plan for training.

Recruiting

Where will you find your volunteers? Libraries with good, established programs rarely need to recruit at all. The need spreads by word of mouth among the volunteers themselves. But if you are just beginning, the big trend now is to recruit senior citizens. Other groups of possible volunteers are graduate students, churches, friends groups, alumni, and international students.

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions enhance recruitment efforts by focusing your search, thus enabling you to select only qualified volunteers. The prospective volunteers themselves can make more intelligent decisions about committing to the project when they know the details. Job descriptions should include the title and purpose of the job, the activities and responsibilities of the job and the scheduling and duration of the job. Establish a definite period of commitment. The volunteer's supervisor should be clearly identified; stipulate that volunteers will be evaluated. Make the main focus of the document the expected results, not the enumeration of duties.

Marketing

You can use specific tasks as part of your advertising notices to create interest. Include some motivation that will appeal to volunteers. Some motivational ideas are:

- Helping others appeals to a need to enhance one's self worth.
- Improving the institution appeals to the human desire for immortality.
- Using your talents, gifts, skills is an outlet for creativity.
- Learning new skills enables one to gain work experience.
- Meeting new people satisfies the need for personal relationships.
- Gaining recognition and influencing others appeals to power motivated people.
- Putting faith into action is an opportunity for Christian service.
- Empowering others appeals to those with high achievement drive.
- Showing that you care is a role model for others.

Select a target group and gear your advertising accordingly. You may seek to present talks to target groups and include an audiovisual component, illustrating the school, students, graduates, present volunteers. Some places to advertise are:

- Churches
- Academic Departments
- RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program)
- Condominium associations
- Large companies' pre-retirement seminars
- Clubs (sororities, service)
- Grocery stores
- High Schools for students or retired teachers
- Newspapers
- Libraries
- Friends groups
- United Way

Interviewing and Hiring

Using an application form will enable you to get a feel for the potential volunteer's needs and suitability for the tasks you have decided to assign. The form should include the kind of work needed, the amount of time available, the specific times the candidate wants to work, and the question, "Why do you want to volunteer?" You may also want to ask for references.

In the interview, express appreciation that the individual is willing to volunteer his time. Make the job duties and the time commitment clear. Explain any policies. Show them your manual. Your goal is to discover what would satisfy the volunteer, then match the volunteer with the task. Ask, "Do you prefer social activity or solitary work?" Senior volunteers often want socialisation. If you put them in a back room sorting all day, you likely will lose them. It is better to put them in a more public area and include them in staff breaks. On the other hand, if they see their volunteer activity as a job after retirement, they will want a set schedule and set tasks, and a no-nonsense attitude. For this type of person, doing the job is as important as socialising. Another good question to ask is, "What would make you feel like you've done a good job?"

Orientation and Training

Your volunteers will only be as valuable as the training they receive. The first day the volunteer coordinator should try to make the volunteer feel comfortable and to anticipate as many questions as possible. Introductions to all of the staff and a tour of the facilities are mandatory. Allow volunteers to get to know you and assure them access to you as they need it. Make sure each one knows where to hang her coat, store her valuables, find the restroom, eat lunch. Go over the mission of the college and the organisation of the library. Talk about your service philosophy, what to do in an emergency, and how to deal with an unruly patron. Give each one access to the P & P Manual so they have a written source they can consult after you have shown them what to do. Go over how they will be evaluated.

Evaluation

Setting up a formal evaluation procedure allows the volunteers a chance to have input in decisions affecting the program. On a regular basis, ask their opinions of their work, and ask if their needs are being met. In return, tell them how they are doing, or how they can improve. After all have had a chance to give input, make a list of the positives and negatives. Move quickly on any problems that surface, such as tardiness, gossiping, failure to work assigned

hours, or inattention to detail. Share your findings with your staff to make adjustments in the program and report successes.

If a volunteer needs some improvement, there are a range of options to choose from:

- Reminder
- New assignment
- New supervisor
- Retrain
- Retire
- Benign neglect
- Fire

Firing a volunteer is admittedly difficult. It should be done immediately in cases of abuse of a patron, or theft of materials. Sometimes, if all other avenues of improvement fail, then a nice speech on how a mismatch has occurred may soften the blow.

When a volunteer decides on his own to leave, use an exit interview or questionnaire as another source of evaluation.

Recognition

Volunteers need lots of attention: coffee, snacks, greetings when they arrive, conversation. But formal recognition is the volunteer's paycheque. Plan to use as many of these ideas as possible, keeping in mind that each person is unique and will respond to different kinds of reward.

- Banquets, complete with entertainment
- Lunches out
- Letters, notes, oral communication, certificates, plaques
- Articles in newsletters, newspapers
- Public chart with hours worked posted
- Opportunities to interact with ranking administrators
- Conferences, continuing education
- Staff meetings and parties, social hours with donuts
- Control over their job
- Pins, smocks, badges, tee shirts
- Use of equipment, a desk, mail box, coffee mug
- Free parking, fine waivers
- Radio interviews
- Gifts (bookmarks, pens, candy)
- Birthday recognition Paid position

Conclusion

Both frustration and elation are emotions which the volunteer coordinator may expect to experience while supervising a crew of busy volunteers. Some may prove slow and tax your patience; others may take charge of a project and complete it efficiently. Doubtless, with good planning and supervision, the library will benefit greatly from the work of volunteers. Avoiding the pitfalls by investing the time and effort required to manage volunteers will lead to a harvest of benefits. Just as with paid staff, when the volunteers feel satisfied and productive, the entire library and its patrons can see positive results.

Endnotes

1. Herbert White, "The double-edged sword of library volunteerism". *Library Journal* (April 15, 1993): 6.
2. Mary Wyly, "Uncommon human resources : the Newberry Library Volunteer Program". *Library trends* 41, no.2 (1992): 322.
3. *Guidelines for using volunteers in libraries*. Chicago : American Library Association, 1971.
4. Howard V. Hayghe, "Volunteers in the U.S. : who donates the time?" *Monthly Labor Review* 114, no.2 (1991): 17-23.
5. Wyly, "Uncommon human resources", p.317.
6. Rashell Karp, *Volunteers in libraries*, Chicago : American Library Association, 1993, p.1.
7. Carole Obrokta, "Media in catechesis." *Catholic library world* 60 (May/June 1989): 247.
8. Rosalind Dudden, "Volunteers : how to keep them coming back." *Colorado libraries* 17 (June 1991): 14

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Before you recruit: Preparing for effective volunteer involvement

Susan J. Ellis

1. Why does your library want volunteers in the first place? e.g. 'volunteers diversify and expand the programs we can offer to our patrons.' 'Involving volunteers allows us to *stretch the budget* way beyond what we otherwise might be able to afford.'
2. Determine what role they will play in fulfilling your mission. Exactly what will volunteers be expected to accomplish? What goals and objectives are you going to set for volunteers?

Task analysis: Examine the many services your library provides, and carve out meaningful assignments that can be accomplished in two to four hour intervals, perhaps weekly. Ask: 'What needs to be done around here? Identify all the unmet needs of clients and staff. List large and small projects that have been on people's "wish lists" for a long time. You are not promising that volunteers can be found to do all of these things, but only when you know what work is required can you develop a strategy for recruiting the types of volunteers able to handle those necessary tasks.

- What are we doing now that we would like to do *more* of?
- What *unmet needs* do library users have that we presently can do nothing about?
- What would *support* the staff in their work?
- What might we do *differently* if we had more skills or time available to us?

The Question of Professionalism:

1. It is possible to identify many tasks done in the course of a day that do not require the training of a librarian, but still are part of the job.
2. If a librarian supervises work, she/he is still involved with it even if someone else does a large part of it.
3. Library work benefits from a combination of expertise in librarianship and knowledge of a world of special disciplines.