



Top Proven Ways to Find and Keep Good Volunteers

Plus, a Practical
Tip Sheet for Your
Volunteers



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RECRUITING THAT WORKS

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Top Tip for Volunteer Success: Find a Partner



If you're the leader of a ministry in your church, managing volunteers is just one item on a long list of responsibilities. And you know if you don't have volunteers, then your ministry doesn't happen. **Volunteers are critical!** In fact, it's surprising that Volunteer Leader isn't a more common staff position in churches. But alas, most ministry leaders are left trying to juggle volunteer management and leadership among the many other responsibilities they have.

So don't go at this alone. Find a partner—someone who can take on the responsibilities of volunteer management and leadership so you can focus on your primary responsibilities as a ministry leader. For most churches, this will need to be a volunteer position—but it's the only volunteer *you* will need to worry about recruiting! Now doesn't that sound freeing?!

Once you've recruited your partner, you'll be able to focus on the bigger picture of your leadership role. Be sure to follow the other steps in this guide for recruiting and keeping this individual! Their commitment and fit for the role and your ongoing support and appreciation will be critical. Without this help, you'll get burned out (if you're not already), and your ministry will suffer.

Keep in mind the size of your ministry. You may need more than one person, depending on how many volunteers you need/have. And if you're recruiting a volunteer for this role, they could have limited time to give. So you may need to divide up the job and assign someone to each task based on gifting. For example, maybe you know someone who's a people person—they literally make friends with any stranger they meet. That's a great recruiter! Another person always has something affirming to say to everyone and knows how to make people feel seen and appreciated. That person would be great for retaining volunteers by developing relationships and offering encouragement and thanks. Perhaps a third person is fearless when it comes to speaking in front of groups and is an excellent teacher. They'd be perfect for training volunteers.

Take a few minutes now to list the qualities you want to look for in your partner(s):

Now list 5 people you believe have the qualities/gifts needed to fill the role of your Volunteer Leader.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now let's get ready to invite!

Proven Steps for Inviting Someone to Volunteer

Before we can talk about how to invite someone to volunteer, **here are a few things *not* to do.**

Avoid sounding desperate.

When we need volunteers, we can sometimes come across as...desperate. And while you may very well be feeling that way right now, trying to invite someone to volunteer in a rush of panic isn't going to result in the kind of volunteer you really need. Desperation doesn't honor the gifts people bring and can make volunteering sound undesirable rather than fulfilling. Avoid approaching people in a panic and using words/phrases like "we can't find anyone to," "please help," "we really need," "it's really easy," or anything else that comes across as begging and frantic.

Don't make serving a requirement for anyone (for example, requiring parents to serve in children's ministry).

Not only can this push people away and be off-putting, but you also don't want people to serve in ministry who aren't passionate about it. Why? Because you don't get their best, and their hearts aren't in the right place. Required volunteers may not be gifted for the role, causing a feeling of failure. And volunteers who feel like they're forced and failing will be less committed overall.

Don't be presumptuous in the ask.

Some people have been taught that you don't "get the sale" unless you ask for the sale. But this doesn't work for volunteering. Walking up to people and asking them where or when they're going to volunteer is likely going to make people feel offended, guilty, or pressured. Remember, the goal is to get passionate and committed volunteers—and acting presumptuous isn't the way to do it.

Don't "fill holes" by placing people where they're not gifted or passionate.

No one likes doing (or staying in) a job they feel they're not good at. Taking time to place people in their sweet spot makes it less likely for your volunteer positions to become a revolving door. People serve longer when they feel needed, have a good time, and love what they're doing. You'll spend less time recruiting when you put people in the right position, because they'll want to stay.



Okay, now that we have the “don’ts” out of the way...let’s talk about **how to successfully invite** people to volunteer (not coerce, guilt, or push).

1 Create a list of volunteer positions, including a basic job description, time requirement, and the qualities/gifts needed.

Some people may really want to help, but don’t feel comfortable teaching. So think of all the jobs that need to be done in your ministry, like shopping for supplies, organizing the supply closet, writing a newsletter, managing social media, and so on. Anything that can free up your or others’ time to do things they’re passionate about is a great position to include.

Note: Stating the time requirement is very important. People need to know the expectations as they consider your invite. Avoid being overly flexible or minimizing a role, because it sends a message that the position isn’t really *that* important. You need volunteers who are committed and know what they’re signing up for, so don’t be shy about asking them to sign a volunteer covenant that communicates they’re expected to be there and why.

2 Observe, observe, observe!

Look for people who have the qualities/gifts you want to see in the roles you’re looking to fill. This requires you to talk to people and get to know them, too. (Hint: Developing relationships is the secret sauce to having a magnetic culture. More on that in the next section of this guide.) Then create a list of the people you feel would make a match. Pray for God’s guidance and that the people on your list be open to serving when you invite them.

Here are some other ways to find out people’s interests and gifts: Invite people to fill out an interest survey (see example on next page) or take a spiritual gifts assessment. Group has a resource available on Group.com called *Spiritual Gifts Discovery* to help with this.



3 Personally invite (the right way).

The #1 reason people don’t volunteer is that they’ve never been asked. That means there are people in your church just waiting to be asked. But, as we saw in the “don’ts” section, there are a lot of wrong ways to ask. Skip ahead to the “Tried and True Tactic for Recruiting” to learn more about the most effective way to invite people to volunteer.

Now that you know the steps, let’s move on to a tried-and-true example that puts all these things into practice...

TIP!

When you create your interest survey, consider adding a list of the different volunteer opportunities you have. Many people may not know all the exciting options you have, and simply knowing what’s available can generate excitement and a willingness to get involved.

Volunteer Interest Survey

We're so excited you're interested in volunteering! Please take a few moments to tell us a little about yourself and your interests so we can get you paired up with the best volunteer role for you.

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email address: _____

List three words your friends would use to describe you (go ahead...ask them!).

What kinds of things do you enjoy doing?

Name a few things you feel you're really good at doing.

Is there a specific age group(s) you'd like to be involved with?

Circle any of the ages you'd like to work with:

babies | toddlers | preschoolers | elementary kids | teens | adults | special needs individuals
other (please specify) _____

Briefly tell us why you're interested in the age group(s) you circled:

Is there a specific area/ministry or volunteer role you're interested in? If so, please list it here.

Briefly tell us why you're interested in this role:

How often are you able and willing to volunteer?

If you work, what is your profession?

Tried and True Tactic for Recruiting

The “90-Second Invite” is a proven way to invite someone to volunteer that includes these four components:

1 It focuses on the person, not the task.

Rather than starting with the job/task you want them to fill, you’ll state the specific qualities you see in this person. Be specific. Be affirming.

2 It offers a distinct opportunity.

You’ll invite them to consider serving in the specific volunteer position that you feel matches their unique qualities.

3 It allows you to share your personal story about serving.

You’ll support your invite by sharing why serving has mattered to you and why you find it to be rewarding. It’s a personal endorsement for what you’re asking them to do.

4 It provides time for the person to consider the offer.

Rather than pressuring the person for an immediate yes, you’ll offer the person some time to consider whether this role would fit them well. That means if you do get a yes, it will be a more committed yes!

Here’s what to say...

(Focus on the person, not the task.)

“I’ve noticed you are _____. I’ve seen [or others have told me] that you _____. You have a real gift/ability/talent for _____.”

(Offer a distinct opportunity.)

“Because of the way you _____, I think you’d be in your element volunteering as _____ with _____. You already _____. You’re a natural fit on the _____ team.”

(Share your personal passion for the role.)

“I serve as a _____ for _____, and I love it. It’s really fulfilling because _____.”

(Invite the candidate to prayerfully consider serving or to observe the ministry position.)

“Why don’t you think and pray about this? I’ll get back with you next week to see if you have any questions. Or you could join me _____.”

KEEP:

DEVELOPING A MAGNETIC CULTURE

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- How Healthy Culture Leads to a More Committed Volunteer and Draws Others In
 - How and Why to Foster a Relationship-Oriented Culture
 - Effective Ideas for Creating a Magnetic Culture
 - Why Your Choice of Curriculum Matters for Volunteer Retention
 - Asking for a Commitment Makes for a More Committed Volunteer
- Top 5 Things That Lead to High Volunteer Satisfaction—From *Real* Volunteers



How Healthy Culture Leads to a More Committed Volunteer and Draws Others In



When people share common values, feel accepted, and develop relationships, they find fulfillment and develop a sense of loyalty. When people working in your ministry shine this kind of attitude, others are more drawn to getting involved, too.

A real-life example of this is the staff at Group Publishing. For nearly 50 years, Group has made company culture a top priority. As a result, 60% of the staff has been working there for more than 10 years. These staff members will tell anyone that company culture and “the people” (aka their co-workers) are why they stay.

While this is a “business” example, it also translates to volunteer teams within churches. Why? Because at its core, culture is about people.

A healthy culture starts with shared values. So the first step in developing a culture that leads to more committed volunteers and draws others in is to determine your ministry’s core values, define what they mean, and look for volunteers that share those values. Common values unify people and give them purpose.

How and Why to Foster a Relationship-Oriented Culture

The secret sauce of a healthy volunteer team is relationships. People want to be with people who show they care and make an effort to know them. It helps them feel like they belong.

So befriend and get to know your volunteers. Ask questions about their lives, families, and hobbies. Ask how you can pray for them, and then follow up to see how things are going. Invite them to go to lunch or coffee every so often.

Also, do things to help your volunteers develop relationships with one another. Ask them to come 30 minutes before they serve and spend that time getting to know each other. Have them form groups of four or fewer, and then pose a fun question that helps them get to know each other. When you invite a volunteer to lunch or coffee, include a couple of volunteers at a time so they can also get to know one another.

Host one or two volunteer team-building events a year. These times are for developing friendships, not for training. Take everyone bowling or to play laser tag. Have a progressive dinner and rotate to other church leaders’ homes. Whatever you choose to do, make it a point to relax and have fun. And be sure to include activities that will help facilitate volunteers meeting and getting to know one another so no one feels uncomfortable.



Effective Ideas for Creating a Magnetic Culture

The ideas in this section are proven ways to create a culture that draws people in like a magnet. The best part is, they don't take a lot of effort! And while these ideas have worked for others, we hope they'll get your juices flowing with your own ideas to develop a culture that's truly magnetic within your church!

Look for volunteers that are a culture fit.

This means you're looking for people who share excitement for your mission and believe in and exemplify your core values. Watch for the attitudes that fit your core values and the gifts necessary for the position you need to fill. Invite them to consider volunteering. And then conduct an interview asking questions that will help you confirm they're a fit. While an interview may feel overly formal, it's an important piece of finding people who last.

Display your mission and core values.

Find a wall where anyone visiting your ministry will see them. This serves as a reminder to your volunteers that their roles have a purpose, and it works to attract new people who want to be a part of your ministry, too.

Hang a welcome sign for new volunteers.

Create a welcome sign, and ask other volunteers to sign it with their names and encouraging notes. This immediately makes volunteers feel like they're needed and a part of the team.

Collect a list of each volunteer's favorite things.

This will help you and other volunteers provide small tokens of appreciation and birthday gifts based on what people like. Ask about their hobbies and interests, favorite restaurant, favorite color, favorite beverage, where they like to shop, and more!



Celebrate special occasions.

Recognize birthdays, family milestones, wedding anniversaries, and other important life events. You can do this with a simple card and a cupcake when they volunteer, social media posts, or announcements in the church newsletter. It doesn't need to be grandiose—something simple is all it takes!

Host social events.

This goes back to helping people develop relationships from the previous section. You can host off-site events like a picnic, bowling, or a simple 30- to 45-minute gathering before church starts on Sunday morning. The goal is fellowship!

Provide core value awards.

This is a chance for everyone to participate. Encourage everyone to look for successes in others by sharing stories of how they see others going above and beyond to exemplify your core values. Honor them by sharing their stories in the church bulletin or newsletter, and provide a small token of appreciation from the church.

Honor their years of service.

A part of showing your volunteers you appreciate them is celebrating each year of service. This can be a simple announcement on social media or in the church bulletin. Provide a small gift for big milestones like first year, five years, 10 years, and so on. (When you have a magnetic culture, you'll be celebrating big milestones more than small ones! So plan your budget accordingly.)

Provide a way to give feedback.

You can ask for feedback at set times, or you can set up a feedback box to invite more regular input. Follow up so people know you received their comments, and let them know how you plan to address their input. Also, regularly touch base with your volunteers to see how they're doing and if they're still happy in the position they're serving in. Allowing volunteers to help shape your ministry gives them a sense of ownership and investment that will keep them serving.

Say THANK YOU...often!

Any chance you get, tell each volunteer individually that you appreciate all they do. No need to go beyond the verbal (or written) thank you—they just need to know you see them and value their contribution.

Why Your Choice of Curriculum Matters for Volunteer Retention

Volunteers want to feel effective and see results. A curriculum your volunteers don't like will make them feel unsuccessful, even if you feel it has sound Bible teaching. A curriculum your team likes will result in volunteers who are more fulfilled. Get input from your volunteers during the evaluation process so they feel valued and feel more ownership when they start using it.

However, too many cooks in the kitchen trying to choose a curriculum will be chaotic—so you'll want to do some work up front first. Before you begin looking for a new curriculum, make a list of what you're looking for that will help your ministry achieve your mission. Then start your research. Get samples of the curriculum programs that best fit the list of criteria you created. Then refine that down to two or three options. Now you're ready to get your volunteers' input.

One of the best ways to get input is to let your volunteers try it. Give your volunteers those samples you acquired, and have them use the samples in real-life classrooms. Give your volunteers a list of criteria you'd like them to be looking for. For example: How easy is the curriculum to follow? How well did the participants engage with the lesson? Do you feel the participants understood the lesson? Were the experiences age-appropriate?

Then host a meeting where everyone can have an open dialogue about the curriculum options so you can hear firsthand what they liked and disliked. Explain how their input is going to help guide the final decision. Include any other church leaders involved in the decision so they can hear and ask questions as well.

Some churches require curriculum to be reviewed or chosen by a committee or elder board. If this is true of your church, it may feel like adding volunteer input only makes it more difficult. While this may be true, we encourage you to request that your volunteers have a chance to have a voice. After all, if your volunteers are unhappy, they won't be effective (or stay) either.

Asking for a Commitment Makes for a More Committed Volunteer

Many leaders have told us that there's a lack of commitment from their volunteers. We were surprised to hear the number of volunteers who just don't show up or cancel at the last minute. This must be very frustrating!

If you find yourself in a position where you can't count on your volunteers to show up, it could be because they don't actually feel like their attendance is necessary. Regardless of *why* they feel this way, there are two things we recommend you do.

First, engage in direct communication. Talk to the volunteer(s) and ask them why they didn't show up. Make sure they know how much you value and appreciate them, and explain why you really need them to be there. Ask if they can do that or if they'd like to take a break. And be sure to ask if there's something personal going on that you can pray about. Be compassionate but firm.

Second, require your volunteers to sign a volunteer covenant. This is a document meant to express how essential they are to your ministry and your expectations for them. Walk them through what the covenant says to ensure they hear and understand how much you need them, and ask them to sign it as a symbol of commitment to the role they're taking on.

There's no right or wrong way to create a volunteer covenant. But a few things we recommend you include are...

- The ministry or role they're volunteering for
- Your mission and core values
- Clear expectations for them, including how often they're volunteering to serve and what to do when they are unable to serve

On the next page, you'll find a sample to get you going.



Volunteer Covenant

By signing this document, you acknowledge that **you are absolutely essential to our ministry** and you have read, understand, and agree to all that is written below. We pray you are as blessed by this ministry as we are to have you be a part of it!

I am committing to serve in the _____ ministry as a

_____. I agree to serving _____
(volunteer role)

_____.
(# times per week/month, for how long)

As a member of the volunteer team, I vow to uphold our mission and exemplify our core values as written below. I recognize the importance of this as it relates to sharing God's love with those I will be serving.

Mission: [INCLUDE YOUR MISSION]

Core Values: [LIST YOUR CORE VALUES AND DESCRIBE]

I also understand the church is depending on me, and I will do my very best to...

- Show up on time.
- Be prepared.
- Find a replacement if/when I'm unable to fulfill my duties, except in the case of a last-minute illness, in which case I will notify _____ as soon as possible.
- Attend required training events and meetings.
- Make my volunteer role a priority in my life.
- Ask questions when I don't understand.
- Notify leadership of any safety or security concerns that arise.
- Be committed to working well with others.
- Be a good steward of all the church is entrusting me with.

I can expect my leader(s) to...

- Provide support and encouragement.
- Communicate well and often.
- Facilitate an environment of trust and friendship among the volunteer team.
- Provide opportunities for me to get to know them and other volunteers.
- Provide appropriate training for my role.
- Ask for and listen to my feedback.
- Ensure a safe environment for myself and those I serve.

If at any time I need to step down from my volunteer position, I agree to notify _____ with as much notice as I'm able to give.

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Top 5 Things That Lead to High Volunteer Satisfaction—From *Real* Volunteers

1 Good communication

It's always better to over-communicate than not communicate at all. Volunteers like to feel like they know what's going on. When they find things out through the grapevine, it can lead to feelings of exclusion—especially if they get the feeling they're the last ones to know. So no matter how trivial you think it may be, err on the side of over-communicating.

2 A chance to give feedback

What gets evaluated gets better. Evaluation (aka feedback) is essential to leading a healthy ministry poised for growth. Plus, asking for feedback and adjusting where needed will lead to more satisfied volunteers. When you don't ask volunteers what they think, they don't feel like they matter. But be sure to follow up! The worst thing you can do is ask for feedback when you have no intention of actually listening to what they have to say. So be sure to have an open mind and a willingness to make changes.

3 Good listening

Volunteers reported they don't feel listened to when they provide feedback. Show you heard them and value their input by repeating what you heard them say. Ask questions if you aren't sure you understand what they mean. Even if you don't agree, you can still acknowledge that you appreciate their input. Responding to what they have to say doesn't necessarily mean change, but you show that you respect them when you listen and explain why changes can't be made.

4 Frequent “thank-you’s”

Big gestures aren't necessary. Volunteers told us verbal thank-you's go a long way—they don't need special gifts to feel needed. When volunteers feel appreciated and valued, they'll be loyal contributors to your ministry. Make your thank-you's personal and individual. In other words, don't reserve thank-you's only for team meetings when you address everyone. Give people one-on-one appreciation and recognize them in specific ways for their personal contribution to your ministry.

5 Adequate training

You have volunteers of all experience levels at any given time, from first-timers to veterans. So it's important to think through what volunteers need and when, and then design your training around those needs. Even veterans need refreshers from time to time. And sometimes leaders have a hard time taking a step back and thinking about all that a volunteer needs to know. They forget what it's like not to know everything. That's why we recommend you ask your volunteers what training they wish they had or need. Training on certain topics, like safety procedures, should be covered and practiced over and over. Use the Volunteer Tip Sheet included at the end of this guide to help train your volunteers on effective ministry.

VOLUNTEER TIP SHEET

When volunteers feel they're making a difference, it fuels them. Print copies of the following tip sheet to help volunteers go from "just teaching" to reaching people's hearts.



10 Tips for Reaching Hearts, Engaging Minds, and Developing Relationships

- 1 DO focus on relationships; DON'T focus on rules and regulations.** Friends want to be with each other. They don't fear one another; they trust. Always be moving toward friendship. That's where the good stuff is.
- 2 DO give everyone a chance to talk; DON'T just call on a few.** When people engage with a question by talking about it, they learn more. To involve everyone, have people form pairs and give partners time to talk about the question. Then ask for a few pairs to share with the group. (P.S. You choose the pairs! That way more people get to know each other and you avoid potential discipline issues, too.)
- 3 DO encourage knowing; DON'T just encourage learning facts.** Move from teaching people to know facts *about* Jesus to actually *knowing* Jesus and building a relationship with him. Help them see the heart of Jesus within the Bible lesson, not just the facts.
- 4 DO pause; DON'T talk nonstop.** Good questions take “think time,” so don't be afraid of silence. Although it's tempting to answer the questions yourself due to silence, sit back and wait to give everyone time to think. When you jump in too quickly, you rob others of the chance to grapple with their thoughts and emotions—which is an opportunity for spiritual growth.
- 5 DO be vulnerable; DON'T be inauthentic.** You can't expect people in your group to risk being vulnerable until you've been vulnerable first. Model expectations by sharing your own experience when you ask a question. When you share first, everyone feels safe to share.
- 6 DO welcome doubts; DON'T dismiss them.** Make your class or group a safe place for doubts. If people can't raise their doubts about their faith at church, then where can they talk about those doubts? Invite conversation and admit when you're not sure either. Your faith in spite of not having all the answers is a great model!
- 7 DO accept; DON'T judge.** Acceptance doesn't mean endorsement. Even when you don't agree or know something to be untrue, respectfully help them rethink that belief by continuing the conversation with phrases like “*Tell me more...*” or “*I'm curious about how you came to that conclusion...*” or “*I've discovered that...*” (P.S. Be careful with your tone, too! Ask inquisitively, not judgmentally.)
- 8 DO ask “why” more often; DON'T ask “what” as often.** “Why” questions make us reconsider and explain our thinking, while “what” questions review material but rarely lead anywhere.
- 9 DO listen carefully; DON'T tune out.** Listen with your whole body to show that you care. If people think you don't care about them or what *they* say, they won't care what *you* have to say. A good way to show you're listening is to repeat back what you heard.
- 10 DO focus on them; DON'T just do what's comfortable for you.** People tend to teach the same way they learn, but not everyone learns like you! Make sure to teach and include experiences that reflect other learning styles, too.

Looking for volunteer-friendly resources?

Look no further than Group!



We know finding and keeping volunteers can be a struggle. That's why Group's vacation Bible school and Sunday school curriculums are purposefully created to be volunteer-friendly. Support and tools to build and retain a strong volunteer team are included in each program. When you buy from Group, you can be assured that...

- Your volunteer challenges were top of mind as the program was developed.
- You'll find resources necessary for onboarding volunteers such as job descriptions and training tools.
- The leader guides are designed with easy-to-follow layouts.
- Bible backgrounds are included to help volunteers prepare their hearts for what they're about to teach.
- Simple, one-point learning will make it easy for volunteers to convey the lesson (and easy for kids to learn, remember, and apply—making volunteers feel successful!).

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