

Nonprofit Event Volunteers: Top 10 Tips to Keep them Coming Back

1. Match a Volunteer's Strengths to the job

Your volunteers want to do a good job for you and the best way for them to do that is if they are assigned a duty that meets their skill set. Do not assign someone who is a bit of an introvert to sell raffle tickets or someone who is uncomfortable around computers to work the check-in table. Making your volunteers comfortable in the job they are assigned to will make them want to return and volunteer for your organization again and again.

2. Tell Volunteers What You Expect

Start by giving each volunteer some training and guidelines. Let them know how many hours they need to be present and what their job duties will be. Make sure that volunteers know of your commitment to making the volunteer experience a positive opportunity for community involvement. Be ready to provide feedback on how your volunteers are doing, particularly if they're trying to develop job skills.

3. Make Volunteering Convenient

Most nonprofits want volunteers to commit to working a certain number of hours per week or month. But creating alternatives to this model can be a good idea. Your best source of daytime volunteers may be freelancers who have spare time -- but not always at the same time each week. Some organizations, for example, ask people to make a general commitment of hours, but then to call ahead and advise the organization of when they'll actually be putting in those hours. Others may recruit heavily for one-time events, or ask volunteers to take on a particular time-limited project.

4. Make Volunteering Fun

You don't have to create a party atmosphere for your volunteers, but understandably some tasks are innately more fun than others. For example, if you work with kids or animals, it's a fair bet that most of your volunteers are hoping for some contact with them too. Of course, how much use you can make of unskilled help depends on the kind of work you do. Still, you can think innovatively about what tasks volunteers can do. For example, one organization that helps low-income girls prepare for college invited student volunteers to give talks about their college experience. Those volunteers weren't stepping into professional staff roles, but they were taking the pressure off the staff, and breathing new life into the program.

5. Don't Waste a Volunteer's Time

There is nothing more frustrating for a volunteer than to donate their valuable time for an event or project and then find out that they are really not needed. If you ask for a volunteer to show up then be sure to have something meaningful for them to do during their shift. Don't "overbook" unless you have other assignments that you can have a volunteer take on if one task is completed.





6. Assign Volunteers Jobs with their Peers.

Many volunteers join an organization mainly to serve, but it's the friendships they make and the social interactions they have that can lock in their decision to stay. Enhance these relationships by assigning experienced volunteers to mentor novices. If you have the financial resources, workshops are a great way to build peer (and staff-volunteer) relationships.

7. Find out what Motivates a Volunteer

Don't volunteers just want to help you because of your mission? Well, yes and no. They no doubt have good hearts and believe in your organization's work, but most volunteers have other reasons for volunteering. They might be interested in meeting new people, developing skills, and feeling needed. If you assign them to stuffing envelopes for long hours, it may not satisfy any of those motives. Ask volunteers from the start what they would like to get from their experience, and look for ways to satisfy that. If, for example, a volunteer is hoping to use photography skills, ask her to build up a collection of photos that you can use in your newsletter, annual report, or website. If you have regular volunteers, try to schedule them so that they overlap and can talk with one another.

8. Communicate with Volunteers Well and Often.

Regular communication is motivating for volunteers while the lack of it is one of the main reasons volunteers become dissatisfied. Volunteers like to have a particular person who looks after them. Assign someone to be the point person for your volunteers before, during and after your event via social media and or your newsletter. Be ready to listen to volunteers and respond to concerns immediately.

9. Show Your Volunteers How They are Making a Difference.

Share success stories about your clients and programs. Bring volunteers up-to-date on progress toward your organization's goals. Highlight your volunteers' successes to show them how their hard work helped the cause. Whether it's the smile on a hungry child's face when they receive the food package a volunteer packed, or the first book a learning disabled child reads after months of tutoring, let your volunteers see the results of their efforts. There's no motivation as powerful as knowing that you made a difference in the world.

10. Appreciate, Appreciate, Appreciate. Treat your volunteers like VIPs. Acknowledge their contributions and make them feel valued. Tangible signs of appreciation, such as a small gift, can go a long way. But, intangible signs of appreciation: sending a thank-you card, praising them at a community event or promoting them to volunteer leadership positions can also be just as important. Some nonprofits highlight their "volunteer of the month" in their online or print newsletter. Remember, there are numerous creative and inexpensive ways to show your volunteers that you hold them in high esteem.

Ready to take your event and event volunteers to the next level? Contact us and we can show you how: gazala@gfsevents.org or 425-985-0208

