

Working with Volunteers:

Find Them and Keep Them!

At the heart of most byway organizations are dedicated volunteers. Byway volunteers may serve on your board, write your corridor management plan, create your Web site, design a brochure or build a hiking trail. Unfortunately, people do not usually just show up at the front door offering to donate their time and skills to your organization. How do you find volunteers for your organization?

Volunteering presents an opportunity for people to use their existing skills or develop new skills. Along the way, scenic byways benefit from volunteers who fulfill many important roles and responsibilities, such as:

- Fundraising
- Planning special events
- Serving as board and committee members
- Grant writing
- Web site development
- Corridor clean-up and beautification efforts
- Public relations
- Historical research
- Preparing a corridor management plan
- Building trails
- Managing a project

“Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mold the present into a future of which we can all be proud.”

Helen Dryer



Ask at the Right Time

The best time to recruit adults is:

- In the early fall, after school starts
- In January when they plan a new year
- After your organization has received some positive publicity

Here are some tips to help you in your search for valuable volunteers.

I. Plan for volunteers.

Before you begin your search, you need a clear picture of your volunteer needs. Spend time organizing before you recruit people for the task. Ask yourself questions like:

- How many people do we need?
- How long will we need them?
- Is this a one-time job or will we need volunteers on an ongoing basis?
- What type of skills are we looking for?
- Who is interested in our work?

There is nothing more frustrating for a volunteer than arriving at a volunteer job and finding disorganization. You and your volunteers will find volunteer job descriptions helpful. Job descriptions allow you to foresee how many volunteers you will need to recruit and they will help your volunteers to understand exactly what you expect of them. Other elements to consider when writing job descriptions include:

- Clear description of the volunteer responsibilities and expectations
- Ideal qualifications and personality of the recruit
- Number of hours the volunteer will need to work
- Schedules
- Benefits to the volunteer

2. Recruit volunteers.

The next step is to actually find volunteers. Brainstorm potential candidates. Who has the necessary qualifications? Who lives or works close by? Who is interested in your work? Who is already connected to your byway? Are there any groups that would like to volunteer?

Once you have a list of sources, begin asking people to volunteer. It's important to ask. Most people volunteer because they are asked to do so. In asking, keep these tips in mind:

- Be motivated yourself. Potential volunteers will sense your enthusiasm.
- Try to speak to candidates one-on-one so you can address individual interests and concerns. Match volunteer roles with individual needs and schedules.
- Explain why you have approached them—their expertise, personality, etc.
- Explain the job accurately. If you expect a lot from your volunteers, be up front with them from the beginning.
- Express the benefits of volunteering. Assure them that a volunteer is an integral piece of the puzzle.
- Stress the fun side of volunteering. It is a great way to meet nice people and to work as a team toward a common goal.
- Ask again at a more appropriate time. If a prospective volunteer says “no” because of schedule conflicts, the candidate may say “yes” when more time becomes available.

Talk about Your Byway

Are you missing opportunities to involve people with your byway? Look for chances to talk about your work.

- Wear a T-shirt, hat, or button from your group whenever possible. When people comment on it, you have an opening to discuss your byway.
- At dinner parties, when you are asked what you are doing, tell people how great your group is and how important your work is.
- Consider turning your birthday, anniversary or a holiday event into a fundraiser. Your invitation can say, “Instead of presents, please give a gift to a Good Group (or become a member of a Good Association).”
- Always have newsletters and brochures about your byway with you—in your briefcase, at your house, and in your car.

(Ideas adapted from Kim Klein, editor of The Grassroots Fundraising Journal)

3. Retain volunteers.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to make volunteers feel comfortable. Loyal volunteers are invaluable, so do your best to retain them. Here are some things you can do to keep active volunteers:

- Once you recruit volunteers, get them involved right away.
- Be flexible. Your volunteers are balancing jobs and personal lives as well.
- Give specific assignments that have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Help volunteers understand the importance of the work they do. Explain how their contributions fit into the overall project or mission.
- Outline to whom the volunteer reports.
- Take time to answer a volunteer's questions and concerns.
- Develop a structure so volunteers can take on greater responsibility if they choose.
- Be mindful that there are costs involved in volunteering. Volunteers may incur personal expenses to attend

Byway volunteers appreciate professional types of recognition. Many attend the biennial National Scenic Byways Conference to participate in educational workshops, learn from byway tours and network with peers. The conference has been held in Louisville, KY (1999), Portland, OR (2001) and Albuquerque, NM (2003).



meetings, use vacation time to attend byway events and provide in-kind donations. Use your volunteers' time and donations carefully.

4. Recognize volunteers.

- Give sincere and honest praise for the contributions they make.
- Publicly recognize volunteers in speeches, media, meetings, etc.
- Plan special events, such as parties and picnics, as a way to thank volunteers for their hard work.
- Find professional ways to reward volunteers. For example, provide free registration to a training session or byway conference.

Volunteering can be a very enjoyable and rewarding experience. It's up to you to make each volunteer's experience memorable and worthwhile. Plan adequately and recruit diligently. Help your volunteers understand the importance of the time and effort they devote to your community and your byway. The rewards and accomplishments will bring untold value to your organization and your byway visitors. ★



Volunteers work together on many projects to promote, enhance and preserve their byway's intrinsic qualities. Ownership is created when people are given the opportunity to be involved with both problem identification and problem solving. When they own the tasks and the process, a high level of commitment develops.

Why Do People Volunteer?

And Why Don't They?

Volunteers are a vital part of the National Scenic Byways Program. A 2001 survey by the America's Byways Resource Center indicated that 40 percent of the nationally designated byway leaders are volunteers. In addition, the majority of individuals working within byway organizations are volunteers.

People volunteer for a number of reasons. If you understand why people volunteer, you will be better equipped to make their experience a fulfilling one. Recruiting volunteers is only half the battle; you also need to work hard to keep them. Volunteers will stay involved if they feel their efforts accomplish something, that their talents are appreciated, and that they are making a difference.

Many byway projects require lots of time and lots of volunteers. In July 2000, a two-day celebration along the Historic Columbia River Highway (Oregon) included an airplane flyover, interpretive walks, a time capsule burial, a competitive walk/run and historic highway movies. Byway supporters (shown here) also participated in an antique car parade that traveled through newly re-opened historic tunnels that had been closed to the public for over 50 years.



What Motivates Volunteers?

Value

- To demonstrate commitment to a cause or belief
- To assure progress
- To be an agent of change
- To be able to influence
- To better the community
- To leave a legacy

Social Aspects

- To help others
- To be part of a team
- To make new friends
- To get to know a community

Professional Reasons

- To increase business
- To develop skills
- To make contacts
- To donate professional skills
- To learn something new

Esteem

- To feel better about themselves
- To feel needed
- To feel proud
- To make an impact
- To be recognized

“Volunteering is an equalizer. It finds the common denominator among otherwise diverse people and allows them to work together to meet goals that matter to them all.”

Susan J. Ellis
President
Energize, Inc.



You Never Know Unless You Ask

For your next project, ask core team members to each ask one person to help (volunteer) with a specific task. If possible, the task should be simple and require only short-term commitment. For example, ask for help reviewing a proposal or handing out brochures at the local fair. This produces immediate assistance but also lets the volunteer test the waters before jumping into long-term involvement.

What Stops Volunteers?

People also won't volunteer for a number of reasons. By identifying the factors that stop people from volunteering, you can turn the negatives into positives and have more success in recruitment and retention.

Some reasons why people might hesitate to volunteer:

- The organization and its meetings are in inconvenient locations
- Lack of transportation to attend byway meetings and events
- Group seems disorganized
- Difficulty scheduling time to be involved
- The work is taken for granted and not appreciated
- Do not understand the group's mission and goals
- Incompatibility with personalities of other volunteers
- Do not feel welcome in the organization
- Fear that the work will be too difficult for them to perform
- Reluctant to accept leadership assignments
- Have not been asked

Barriers for potential volunteers vary with each person. The skills and interests that make a particular volunteer appealing to your organization may require extra flexibility on your part. For example, a volunteer from the newspaper might have publication deadlines at 6:00 p.m. that conflict with your 5:30 p.m. meetings. Plug him into a committee that meets at noon instead. An influential business leader might prefer to meet periodically downtown instead of at the byway visitor center. Why not?

Encouraging an atmosphere receptive to new ideas helps to welcome volunteers, and, importantly, keep them.

The Importance of Asking

Being asked personally to give time and money is the most effective way to recruit volunteers and donors. Being asked directly by a spouse, another family member, a friend or a colleague, or through an institution greatly influences the individual's decision to volunteer.

Reasons Why People Volunteer

Feeling compassion for those in need	86%
Having interest in the activity or work	72%
Gaining a new perspective on things	70%
The importance of the activity to people the volunteer respects	63%

An astounding 90% of those asked to volunteer did so, according to "Giving and Volunteering in the United States." *Source: The Independent Sector (1999) ★*

“When members are elected or appointed to an office, they are no longer a volunteer! They have accepted and possibly taken an oath to be responsible for an activity or activities with the organization. They should set an example for the members of the organization by their conduct. They have an obligation to execute their responsibilities and insure the future of the organization. They must take the long-term benefit of the organization into consideration on every decision that they are involved. They should attend all activities in their area of responsibility, and as many other activities and meetings as possible. They will have to recruit, delegate, train, motivate, manage, assist and reward people to help them accomplish their goals. The final responsibility of their term is to motivate and train at least one, but hopefully more than one person to take their job for the next term.”

Richard Battle
 Outstanding Jaycees President of the World
 Past President, Austin Jaycees, #1 Chapter in the U.S.
*The Volunteer Handbook: How to Organize
 and Manage a Successful Organization*