



PALM BEACH COUNTY
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Palm Beach County
Board of County Commissioners

RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



MODULE 3
BUILDING YOUR VOLUNTEER BASE



Contents

Introduction	1
Why Are Volunteers Important?	2
What Motives People to Volunteer?	2
Reasons Why People Don't Volunteer.....	3
Selling Your Organization to Volunteers.....	4
What Works to Attract Volunteers	6

Introduction

We all want a healthy and beautiful community, a peaceful place where people live and work together in harmony and can proudly call home. However, to achieve this you need volunteers. Every neighborhood association relies on volunteers to perform various duties and tasks. Volunteers are the key to creating a healthy community.

The more connected to a community people feel, the more likely they are to take responsibility for it and feel pride and a sense of commitment. Mobilizing community resources and expanding capacity through volunteers also enhance an organization's general profile, which can attract more volunteers, program participants, and funds.

How can you appeal to your neighbors to get them to volunteer? First, you have to make it fun, interesting and in their best interest. You also have to be aware that not every volunteer is right for every project or task. Continually asking the same handful of people to handle all the neighborhood volunteer work is going to lead to burn out. Keep expanding your network of volunteers. Remember that people move, get sick or have other life events that may prevent them from volunteering.

People volunteer for different reasons. Your role as a neighborhood leader is to discover what motivates residents and what they like to do. In this module, we will provide you with tools and tips to recruit and retain volunteers. Remember, you cannot do it all so build your volunteer base!

Why Are Volunteers Important?

The majority of neighborhood associations do not have paid staff and generally rely on a small handful of residents. If you have big plans for your neighborhood, you will need more help than just a few volunteers. It is easy to get frustrated with the outreach, recruitment, organization and management of volunteers, but you will most probably not be able to do the important work you do without the power of volunteer work.

You may think that volunteers are too much trouble that they are not reliable, or it takes too long to train them, and once you do, they just leave. However, consider some of the advantages of using volunteers to assist you with community projects and your association.

- **Volunteers save money** - The "dollar value" of volunteer time in 2018 was \$25.43 per hour¹. Many organizations, such as the Red Cross, function almost entirely on volunteer labor--and by doing so, they can do a lot of good work without a lot of money.
- **Volunteers bring needed skills** - Many volunteers have specialized knowledge, such as computer programming, advertising, or project management that your organization may find useful on an as-needed basis.
- **Volunteers bring renewed energy and excitement** - Volunteers can bring a fresh perspective and enthusiasm for the work of the organization. This can help move the organization further, and faster.
- **Volunteers increase community ownership** - The more community members are involved in your organization, the easier it will be to gain support for your work. Having a cross-section of residents who volunteer also ensures that the organization's goals are in tune with what the community wants, and not just what board members think they want.

What Motives People to Volunteer?

In order to build your volunteer base, it is important to understand why people volunteer. By understanding the motivations of volunteers, you can develop an effective recruitment and retention program. Everyone has a motivation behind his or her desire to volunteer. Below are some examples:

- **Altruism**- The desire to volunteer can be driven by a cause that is close to their heart. This gives volunteers a feeling of fulfillment as they donate their labor and/or skills. Simple examples of causes that appeal to people's sense of charity are hunger relief, animal rights, the environment, etc. Many of the non-profits that work on these causes design their volunteer outreach efforts to tug at the heartstrings of people to get them involved.
- **To Expand Their Social Network** - Dedicating time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills. Life changing events like retirement, divorce or moving can lead to a sense of loneliness and boredom. Volunteering is a way to meet new people with similar interests. Friendships can be forged while helping others. Volunteering also strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your

¹ Value of Volunteer Time: Independent Sector. <https://independentsector.org/value-of-volunteer-time-2021/>

support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood resources, and fun as well as fulfilling activities.

- **Career Advancement** - In many companies, employees are encouraged to volunteer in the communities where they do business. This helps companies improve their image. The employee also gets to practice important workplace skills, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organization that helps them to advance in their field. In exchange, the non-profit gets a board member or volunteer that has the ability to bring knowledge and resources towards achieving their mission.
- **Community Service Hours** - Most high schools require students to perform a set number of community service hours to graduate. Colleges give higher priority to applicants who have been involved in community service. Community organizations can capitalize on these students by getting the word out earlier and often about opportunities to earn community service hours.
- **Personal Growth**- Doing good for others and the community provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Volunteering can also give you a sense of pride and identity. Volunteering makes you happy. Studies have shown that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. The more we give, the happier we feel. People who volunteer tend to live longer than those who do not. Volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills.²

Reasons Why People Don't Volunteer

Now let's look at why people don't consistently volunteer. It is easy to complain that you don't have enough volunteers but, to change this, you have to analyze why your residents are not volunteering.

- **Lack of communication** – The number one reason people say they don't volunteer is because no one asked them or they were unaware of the opportunity. As community leaders, we often fail to communicate the needs of the organization to our residents but at the same time complaining about having to do everything.
- **Commitment** - The reality is that the majority of volunteers will drop in and out of volunteering. Some people may be regular volunteers and then stop for a while perhaps due to health or family reasons. Respect their reasons. Rather than fight this fact, work with it.
- **Lack of confidence** – Some people think that they do not have skills to offer as volunteers but there are many tasks that need to be done in a volunteer-based organization. Giving these people small tasks that they can accomplish will increase their confidence and encourage them to take on greater responsibility.

² Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits, Help Guide. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm#>. July 28, 2021

- **They feel like they will not make a difference** – Sometimes, the issues a neighborhood face can feel overwhelming and people may feel that one person cannot make a difference. Residents need to be inspired and shown how their contributions can indeed help make a difference.
- **Disorganization** – If volunteers show up on time and they are ready to help, but when they get there they are told there is enough help already, your volunteers will get frustrated. The same will happen if your organization is not prepared to provide proper instructions or the tools required to do the job properly. In these instances, the message to the volunteer is, “We don’t care enough about you or your time to keep you in the loop and informed.” Most people will not be subject to that kind of experience twice.

Think of your neighborhood organization as a small business. A business cannot grow and thrive without workers. Volunteers are workers who get to choose where, how and when they will work. Volunteers are not financially compensated but they should have a fulfilling experience and be made to feel it is worth their while to volunteer.

If you had to tell someone why he or she should volunteer his or her time with your organization, how would you do it? Most people would just say something about need; e.g., “We need people to count streetlights tomorrow.” It might be very clear to you why this needs to be done but it would not be to someone who has not been involved in the organization or may not even be aware of it. You need to “sell the organization” and the benefit of being a volunteer.

Selling Your Organization to Volunteers

We might think it is obvious that people should want to contribute to their neighborhood. However, if they do not understand the mission, goals and objectives of the organization, they may not feel compelled to help. To get people on board with the mission, you have to be able to sell the organization and its mission quickly and concisely.

You should be able to communicate your organization’s vision and mission in a 30-60-second description in a way that grabs people’s attention. First, deliver a solid introduction that states who you are, the value of the organizations work, and the impact it has made (e.g., “Hi, I’m your neighbor, (name) and I’m *the president of the Sleepy Hollow Neighborhood Association.*”). Keep the information about yourself to a minimum.

After introducing yourself, give an example of a positive outcome of the organizations work, e.g., “*Did you know that the Sleepy Hollow Neighborhood Association was able to get streetlights on ten of our streets?*” This sets a positive tone, gives a hint to the basic mission of the organization and says to the listener that the organization is active and effective.

Now, create a simple statement of the purpose of the organization using your mission statement. For example, if the mission statement is, “*The Sleepy Hollow Neighborhood Association seeks to improve the quality of life for all residents by advocating for investment in the neighborhood and*

its people.” break it down to something more concise like, *“The Sleepy Hollow Neighborhood Association works to improve our community.”* This is a succinct description of what the organization does -- without getting into too much detail.

Next comes your pitch to volunteers. It should only take up about 30 to 60 seconds. Here, you need to be specific about the benefits the organization bring to the community. Give examples of the work that has been done so far and what the organization is looking to achieve in the future. This part is not “I or we do this.” It is “this is what we do for the people we serve, and this is how you can be a part of that important work.” Now wrap it up by bringing everything together with your specific request. For example, “can you volunteer for our clean-up?”, “would you join our board?” or “would you share our work on your Facebook page?”

To be convincing, you need to become very familiar with your elevator pitch. Your delivery is critical—people need to hear, see, and feel your emotional connection to the work you do. Without that, they may not care about what you are saying.

Remember that if you can say something in five words you should say it in five words. Short and simple is more effective than long and complex. Remember this is a 60 – 90 second first contact. You will have time at a future interaction to provide more detail.

Craft an elevator pitch for your community. Try to convey the important points as concisely as possible.

What Works to Attract Volunteers

Most nonprofits rely on volunteers to achieve their mission. It is estimated that volunteers contribute 100 million hours per year with a value of \$150 billion to nonprofits. Almost all neighborhood associations rely on volunteers since they generally do not have large budgets. So how do we get our neighbors to see the importance of volunteering and how they can contribute?

Good Communication

How are you letting your residents know about opportunities to help their neighborhood? Do they even know that there is a neighborhood organization? If residents were interested in helping, how would they go about it? Do you have a way to track who volunteers for what task? If you cannot answer these questions, then it is time to figure out how to reach out to residents to encourage them to get involved.

If the majority of residents do not know that your organization exists or its purpose, the first order of business is to change that by consistently putting your message out to the neighborhood and letting them know that volunteers are needed. Frame your volunteer outreach as a “Help Wanted” in your outreach efforts. Some ways to communicate to your neighbors about the organization and volunteer opportunities are:

- **Flyers** – They are a relatively inexpensive way to spread the word. Even if you are promoting a neighborhood event, make sure that you include the name of the organization, its mission, the website address (if you have one) and your Facebook page. If you have a logo, include that as well.
- **Website** – We have all become used to looking up websites for businesses, organizations and people to find out more information. If you do not have a website, see if you can find a resident who can set up a simple website for the organization.
- **Newsletters** – A quarterly newsletter is a very good way to reach every home in the neighborhood. It may only be two pages but it helps increase awareness about the organization, its mission and projects.
- **Events** – Events are great places to promote the organization. People are more open in a social setting and get to experience some of what the organization represents. See if you can get a banner for your organization to display at events that includes the logo, website and Facebook page.

Did you know? You can apply for a NEAT grant from the Office of Community Revitalization to develop an outreach plan that includes software, printers, signage, etc.

In your outreach efforts, explain to residents how volunteering impacts the community and how it can benefit them as well. Volunteering allows them to connect to their community and make it a better place. Let them know that even helping with the smallest tasks can make a real difference in the quality of life of the neighborhood.

Be Organized

Is your neighborhood association ready to utilize volunteers? Do you have a list of volunteers with their contact information? Do you know what their skills are and the days and hours they are willing to work? If residents are consistently asked to do things on the days/hours they cannot volunteer, if they are asked to do things at the last minute or to do things that they do not have the skills or interest in, they will lose interest in volunteering. To develop a team of dedicated volunteers requires organization.

To help you organize and best utilize volunteers, use a simple spreadsheet that includes the residents names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mails, when they are generally willing to volunteer and what kinds of things they are interested in doing. You can also track the activities and hours they volunteered so you can recognize their contributions.

Did You Know? The Office of Community Revitalization can create a database for your neighborhood association. The database would allow you to organize your volunteers and many other projects. If you are interested in seeing how this program can help your neighborhood, contact Vivian Ryland at 561-233-5318 or vlbrooks@pbcgov.org

Have a Reason

People are more likely to volunteer if they know the reason your organization needs them and their impact on the mission. It is important that you are able to easily respond to residents' questions like "Why do you need volunteers?" or "Why do you need me? Think about the rationale for your organization having volunteers in general. Is it to increase the quality or amount of services you provide? Is it to increase community involvement? There are many good reasons for welcoming new volunteers into your organization.

Example of rationales include:

- "Volunteer involvement helps us become a stronger and connected community."
- "We have a large community and we need help reaching out to all our neighbors. "
- "Our organization has a lot of neighborhood improvement projects we would like to complete but we need more help."
- "You will meet new people and have fun."

Help your volunteers understand how their role relates to the overall goals and mission of the organization. Your rationale doesn't need to be specific, and remember that as your organization grows and develops, your rationale can evolve.

Have Defined Jobs and Tasks

Many organizations say they need volunteers but potential volunteers often fall through the cracks because there are no defined jobs, tasks, times posted, or advertised. You need a firm plan for what you want volunteers to do and what skills are needed.

It is important that when you are planning a project or event, you think about how many volunteers are needed, what tasks they will be doing, and what the timeframe will be. Being clear about these details helps volunteers understand what they are committing to and ensure things go smoothly. Below is a simple outline as an example of what a plan for a neighborhood event, including the event’s description, the tasks to be undertaken, and the number of volunteers needed to implement the event. Having an outline such as this one can help you plan the event and provide your volunteers with all of the pertinent information.

Annual Neighborhood Holiday Event	
Family-friendly event with food, entertainment and children’s activities	
Date	12/12/20
Time	1:00 - 3:00 pm
Location	Peppy Park
Number of Attendees	400
Planning Tasks	# of Volunteers Needed
Promotion	2
Entertainment	1
Children’s Activities	2
Food	1
Sponsorship	1
Site Plan - Layout, trash cans, number of tents, tables and chairs	1
Event Tasks - Day of	# of Volunteers Needed
Set-Up - Tents, Tables and Chairs	4
Sign-In	2
Run Raffle	1
Oversight of children’s activities	2
Oversight of food	2
Floater	2
Break down and clean up	4

As you can see, the volunteers for this event have distinct tasks. Prior to the event, either e-mail, or have a meeting with, your volunteers to go over their tasks, the time they will be working and where they will be stationed. Ask if they need clarification or any other information. Have at least two volunteers who will serve as floaters to troubleshoot and relieve volunteers so they can have breaks.

Make sure that you match your volunteers to the right task. Older persons and persons with disabilities should be given tasks that they feel comfortable doing. If you are disorganized, people will not be as likely to volunteer in the future.

Be Accommodating

If you want people to volunteer, you have to respect their time limits and abilities. Do not turn up your nose at someone who wants to volunteer but cannot do certain physical activities. This would exclude older residents and persons with disabilities. You want to be inclusive of everyone to the extent possible so, if you have residents with these restrictions, find other ways they can contribute.

Some people will only volunteer on an irregular basis. This is particularly true for neighborhood events. Accept this and just notate that in your database. Other people will only volunteer for tasks that they are interested in. For instance, some residents may want to make sure the neighborhood is clean and will lead and work regular neighborhood cleanups.

A common problem is not providing advance notice and asking for volunteers a few days before they are needed. Most people cannot drop what they are doing to volunteer. Not providing advance notice send the message to volunteers that you are not organized and do not respect their time. If you have an upcoming project, try to plan not to start it until you have recruited volunteers.

Whatever a volunteer's time or physical limitations are, try to accommodate them. Remember, there is plenty of work to be done in your neighborhood so be creative when planning how to use volunteers.

Express Gratitude

Even if people volunteer without the expectation of reward, it still feels good to be recognized for your contributions. After all, volunteers could have spent their time doing something for themselves or their family.

Some ways to express gratitude to your volunteers are:

- Always greet your volunteers during projects or events with a warm "Thank you for helping us. We really appreciate it."

- Have a coffee and dessert party for your volunteers. These types of gatherings strengthen the bond between volunteers. Ask your volunteers to bring a friend that may be interested in volunteering.
- Present gift cards to the volunteers who accrue the most hours in the year.
- At one of your regular meetings, present certificates of appreciation to your volunteers. Being recognized in a larger gathering is impactful.
- Give letters of recommendations to your teen volunteers. These will help them apply for jobs and to college.
- Offer community volunteer hours to your teens who need them to graduate high school.
- Write personal thank you notes.

Incorporating gratitude and recognition into your volunteer program will help you retain volunteers.

Have Fun!

Being a volunteer in your community should be fun and rewarding. After all, that is why many people become volunteers. When volunteers show up, introduce them to the Board, other participating entities, and other volunteers. If possible, pair them with another volunteer so they can help each other. Remember, these are your neighbors and you want them to be encouraged to volunteer again.