

Reducing Barriers to Recruit Volunteers

August 2021

YOUTH

Word of mouth

Word of mouth is still the best way to recruit youth. When they feel engaged with your organization, they WILL tell their friends.

Experiences over requirements

For youth, gaining experience is a bigger determinant to volunteering than fulfilling the required OSSD 40-hour requirement. Highlight what they will learn and experience and then follow through.

Accessibility

Youth have limited time due to school, part-time work, and extra curricular activities. They may also have limited funds for transportation to travel to your location or to pay for extras just to volunteer. Build these costs into funding requests and create shifts that will work with their schedules.

Tech-savvy teens

Do not assume that all youth are more tech-savvy than adults, older adults, or seniors. There may be many reasons why that teen you are interviewing has limited tech skills. Focus instead on their desire to learn and be engaged: most tech skills can be taught.

Ownership

Get youth involved in the planning and decision-making activities involving their role(s); if they have a hand in creating it, they will come and they will stay!

Do not ask about their experiences

Youth do not have a lot of demonstrated experiences to offer in the same way an adult might. Ask them about their interests, willingness to get involved, and what they are curious about. Think about how we train and mentor youth to help them learn and have a meaningful experience.



FOR MORE DETAILS

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NEWCOMERS & IMMIGRANTS

Access to digital resources

Technology resources may be shared: a single computer may be used by several family members throughout the day. Include different ways to get involved that are not computer/internet dependent.

Volunteering as an additional role

Newcomers may be filling many roles: caregiver, breadwinner, translator, student, to name but a few. This will impact their ability to get involved or conform to 'set volunteer schedules'. Flexibility in schedules and tasks may increase their involvement in your organization.

Ask about their experiences

Volunteering in the Western world is treated as an un-paid job. The priority for many newcomers is finding paid work to support themselves and their families. Asking about "Canadian experience" is coded language for racism. All experiences are valuable regardless of where they occurred: take time to listen and ask questions instead of making assumptions.



Safe digital spaces

Person who identify as part of marginalized or minority community may be less comfortable volunteering in digital spaces. Ask yourself the space is being used and monitored and what should be in place to create a safe space for everyone. Maybe volunteers work in pairs; it may also mean providing training and having processes in place to respond to oppressive or inappropriate comments in digital spaces.

Word choices

Volunteering is a word, a concept that means different things around the world. The word "volunteer" doesn't exactly exist in some languages but the word charity does. Newcomers may understand the concept of charity but this is separate from volunteering. Take this into consideration when creating recruitment materials.

Mental health & well-being supports

Although not exclusive to newcomers, ensure supports are in place for volunteers doing tasks or supporting situations which could be a trigger of past trauma for them. When roles involve high levels of emotional labour, access to debrief sessions, regular check-in meetings, and building in 'time-away' can help reduce burnout in volunteers and paid staff.

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OLDER ADULTS & SENIORS

Options other than on-line

Seniors and older adults are used to volunteering in person. Learning how to navigate online programs may be overwhelming. The telephone is familiar tech for older adults: is there a way to continue volunteering using just the telephone?

Practice makes perfect

Older adults and seniors may need 'on the job' training to become comfortable using technology which others may find 'easy'. Build training and practice time into shifts as practice makes perfect!

Wealth of experiences

Seniors and older adults have a wealth of experiences to offer. Take time to get to know your older adult volunteers and their experiences: many would love to share their knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned in support of your organization's mission and vision.



Flexible shifts

Be flexible with shift times: some older adults may rely on public transportation or the kindness of family and friends for their transportation needs. When discussing availability, include a question about method of transportation to tailor shifts of older adults to meet their transportation schedules (*to the best of your ability*).

See beyond

Be prepared to engage people whose first language isn't English or French and those with mobility issues. Try to look beyond the walker, the cane, the accent and ask "Can this person do the job" and "What might we have to do differently than we have done before?" The answer might not be as overwhelming as you think.

People helping people

People helping people has always happened - long before the term 'volunteer management' was coined. Informal volunteering, helping neighbours, 'doing a good deed' are part of the life experiences of most older adults and seniors. Think about how roles can recapture this sense of giving as this the 'volunteer' experiences of older adults and seniors.

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