

Attracting Volunteers

Maybe you've seen the T-shirts that say, "Stop Me Before I Volunteer Again!" Those are the same people sit on the association board, are active in the soccer league, scouts, church committees, school functions, and fund-raisers time and time again. The minute they move into a new community, they're asking how they can help. And while this may be accompanied by frayed nerves and time-management challenges, these folks feel genuinely rewarded by their volunteer contributions.

On the other hand, sometimes those same volunteers stay because there doesn't seem to be any interest by others to step in. How can you attract new volunteer blood to your community?

Attract New Volunteers

- **People volunteer for things they feel good about.** Communities that promote a positive image of their community are much more likely to attract volunteers. Newsletters, websites, billboards, and notices all reflect a sense of your community. Utilize these communication tools to publicize the charm and unity of your community to stimulate volunteer interest.
- Do board and committee members interact in a manner that is respectful with one another and of all opinions? **Most people shy away from conflict and interactions that appear awkward and/or stressful.** There are simply too many other places volunteers can donate their time comfortably.
- **Are your meetings organized and are participants prepared in advance?** Community meetings are typically held in the evening. Meetings that are prolonged by poor organization or lack of preparation to discuss and act on the issues will discourage potential volunteers from feeling they can regularly commit such a large amount of time. Boards with meetings lasting more than 2 hours should seek ways to be more efficient to be respectful of everyone's time and encourage greater resident participation.
- **Reach out for volunteers - don't wait for them to sign up.** Many people are shy or never seem to get around to filling out the recruitment paper the board has sent - but they often respond to a personal invitation. Neighbors, residents who've approached the board about an issue, or owners who've expressed interest in an activity are prime candidates for a personal appeal by current volunteers.
- **Don't ask for long-term commitments.** Ask residents if they would be willing to participate in a short-term project, such as an ad-hoc committee focused on landscaping the front entrance. Look for people that seem to have an interest because their own lawns may be beautiful! Other short-term projects might be working on a community policy, planning a community event, or flipping burgers for the association's 4th of July activity. Short-term involvements build relationships where residents become more comfortable with one another, are connected to the community, and are more likely to volunteer again.
- Residents often do not understand the role and responsibilities of a board member. **Think about holding periodic "new resident orientation" meetings.** Have refreshments, let them get to

know other volunteers, talk up your community and discuss the roles of the volunteers. People who have volunteered in another capacity within the community are much more likely to run for the board later - and they're a bit more knowledgeable about the association. So, recruit them right there for a committee or short-term project!

- **Welcome new volunteers with open arms.** It's not always easy to join the 'old-timers' who already seem to know everyone and everything. Help them to become active - give them background information so they can be knowledgeable too ... perhaps heading-up a new project will help them become integrated.
- **Don't dismiss newcomer suggestions because "it's already been tried before and didn't work."** Explain the last approach and determine if they have a different one - or maybe the timing wasn't right the last time, and the climate is better now. Most volunteers want to feel that they're making a difference.
- **Publicly recognize and thank your volunteers.** This can easily be accomplished through newsletters and websites. As they say - 'a little thanks goes a long way!' Some communities hold an annual Volunteer Appreciation dinner - the costs of which may be covered by local merchants - or a potluck dinner in which everyone shares. Special ball-caps or T-shirts with your association's name on it in a color that's reserved and recognized in the community for volunteerism is another approach.

We live in a fast-paced world where family members have limited time to volunteer. A positive environment and active recruiting is your best approach to achieving more volunteerism and representation of all community residents!