

# RECRUITING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

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**WFH**

WORLD FEDERATION OF HEMOPHILIA  
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# Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers

Mohamed Aris Hashim

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## Introduction

Volunteers play a key role in not-for-profit organizations. They provide their time free of charge which allows the organization to expand its services and activities. They provide valuable skills or talents that the organization lacks. They also bring valuable perspectives, since they themselves often directly benefit from the organization's work. Volunteers can inspire and motivate paid personnel, presenting an open, participatory image of the organization, and spreading the word about its work and its cause.

Volunteers are self-starters who are not only willing to sacrifice personal leisure for challenging tasks but also enjoy doing them. Some of these people are so committed that they champion their specific cause passionately throughout their lives, or eventually become a leader of the organization.

Today, there is a declining interest in volunteering. Why is this happening? Many explanations have been suggested. Some say that people, especially young people, are more self-centred now, or that volunteer work is not valued in our modern, materialistic society. Others say that voluntary organizations themselves do not make a serious effort to attract, motivate, and retain volunteers. Another contributing factor is the lack of government policy to encourage and sustain greater public involvement in their communities.

In short, people are not attracted to volunteering, and voluntary organizations do not inspire people to work for free. The purpose of this monograph is to help hemophilia organizations attract and keep volunteers.

## Why People Volunteer

People volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some volunteer because they believe in the cause or want to help people. Others volunteer for social reasons or to learn new skills.

### Reasons why people volunteer

- Belief in the cause
- Personal satisfaction/feel good
- Meet new people
- Be part of community
- Build self-confidence
- Gain training and experience
- Improve job prospects
- Use skills and abilities
- Satisfy spiritual obligation
- Make a difference/help people
- Enhance knowledge
- Share knowledge
- Pass time
- Follow family tradition
- Organization has helped them and they want to help others
- Need the support of the organization

It is important to know why someone is volunteering, because it can help you maintain the volunteer's interest. If a person is getting what he or she wants from volunteering (whether it is learning more skills or a sense of satisfaction from helping people), then it is likely that he or she will continue to work for your organization. If a person's expectations are not met, then his or her dedication and commitment will gradually decline and your organization will most likely lose that volunteer.

If the reasons someone is volunteering are identified and understood, it is easier to find a particular task that the person enjoys doing. This will increase the likelihood that the volunteer will complete the task and avoid conflict.

## The Pre-Recruitment Stage

Before recruiting volunteers, your organization must do some preparation to ensure that its internal management is in order and is ready to handle volunteers. This includes developing a volunteer program, identifying tasks that

volunteers can perform, and ensuring that the organization is attractive to volunteers.

### **Develop a volunteer program**

Including volunteers in your organization's work is a project unto itself, and a plan needs to be put in place to ensure that the volunteer program is successful.

The plan to include volunteers should be discussed and approved by the leaders of your organization before recruiting begins. This is the time to address any doubts, fears, and resistance to the idea. There should be consensus within the organization regarding the positive role played by volunteers. A volunteer coordinator should be assigned to manage the volunteers.

It is useful to develop guidelines on the volunteer program. The guidelines should include policies on:

**Recruitment:** searching for prospective volunteers and encouraging them to seek voluntary posts.

**Screening:** evaluating candidates to identify those with desirable characteristics and qualifications (finding the right person for the job).

**Orientation:** providing a realistic overview of the organization to selected volunteers.

**Placement:** matching each volunteer to a suitable task or collection of tasks.

**Supervision:** assisting, motivating, and guiding each volunteer to help them develop skills that will improve performance.

**Evaluation:** determining the value of the quantity and/or quality of task performance against a mutually agreed-upon outcome.

**Recognition:** acknowledging the services of the volunteers in a continuous and consistent manner.

**Retention:** keeping and inspiring able, experienced, and motivated volunteers in the organization over the long term.

**Task evaluation:** measurement of specific work-output based on a mutually agreed-upon target.

### **Identify needs and tasks**

It is important that the organization identify the jobs and tasks that need to be done. One of the first things potential volunteers will want to know is the availability and types of tasks. Your organization will look bad if it recruits a volunteer but is unable to offer any specific task because the task inventory is nonexistent or incomplete. Creating a task inventory will also make finding the right volunteers much easier.

#### **Common tasks for volunteers**

- Recruiting members
- Fundraising
- Publications and translations
- Organizing workshops and meetings
- Publicity and public relations
- Counselling
- Photography
- Updating web site
- Building mailing list
- Updating memberships
- Generating greeting cards
- Bookkeeping
- Organizing summer camps
- Translating foreign materials
- Doing outreach activities

A detailed description of each task should be prepared. It should spell out the objective, budget, time required to complete it, location and frequency of effort, skills required, number of people involved, tools and working conditions, expectation, responsibility, and accountability (see Appendix 1). In short, the clearer the picture of the task, the easier it is to match it with a potential candidate, and the better the success rate.

You should circulate the task inventory to all potential volunteers and allow them to choose their respective tasks as best as possible. This will certainly help match tasks to the interests, technical skills, experience, and confidence of a volunteer. It will help avoid a poor match that could result in an unhappy, frustrated volunteer and unsatisfactory work.

### **Ensure attractiveness of the organization**

All potential volunteers are attracted to a well-organized, credible organization rather than a disorganized, troubled one. Thus, the executive officers and staff must ensure the internal management is in order and is *seen* to be in order before making attempts to recruit volunteers or seek general support from the community.

Factors that affect your organization's attractiveness to volunteers include:

- Good public image/publicity
- Proven track record
- Association with reputable people
- Well-identified goals
- Infrastructure in place
- Legal entity
- Legitimate constitution
- Transparent operations
- Audited financial accounts
- Politically independent
- International links

## **Recruiting Volunteers**

Once everything is in order within the organization, you can start recruiting volunteers.

The most common place to find volunteers is within your organization. Most of them will have some knowledge of and some commitment to the cause. In hemophilia associations, volunteers are usually people with hemophilia, members of the extended family, health care providers, interested persons, and others who support the cause.

However, you may need to look outside the organization as well. Other sources for volunteers include: local businesses, service clubs, high schools, colleges, and universities, seniors' homes/clubs; churches/synagogues/mosques; volunteer bureau community groups, etc.

### **The appeal**

Basically there are two ways to invite people to become volunteers: the general appeal and the targeted appeal.

#### *The general appeal*

This is a general call to all current members as well as the general public to become volunteers. The appeal is usually made as widely as possible, using various media, such as radio, television, newspapers, newsletters, notice boards, flyers, direct mail, web site, and word of mouth. The objective is to get a large number of volunteers willing to do tasks requiring relatively low skills, such as mailing letters, selling tickets, being concert ushers, distributing flyers, photostating copies, sorting greeting cards, preparing cakes and coffee, etc.

#### *The targeted appeal*

This is a specific call to a particular individual or a "qualified" volunteer with particular skills or expertise. The recruiter calls, e-mails, or arranges a face-to-face meeting to solicit the person's support to perform a challenging task.

This approach is recommended when you are looking for a volunteer with a specialized skill or ability. Examples of tasks requiring special skills include auditing and managing financial accounts, writing and editing newsletters, translating documents, counselling families, organizing camps, and specific voluntary medical care services from medical and allied health experts (normally solicited beyond their normal working hours). These people are generally highly qualified and very busy. They tend to be older, and are settled in jobs or have family commitments. It is not easy to recruit such people so you must be persuasive, courteous, and tactful to attract them to be committed volunteers.

### **Selecting volunteers**

When meeting with a potential volunteer it is very important to create a good first impression. Make sure you are honest and enthusiastic and that the organization and its values are presented as clearly as possible.

Questions the recruiter can ask include:

- What activities are you most interested in doing?
- What skills or capabilities do you have?
- What would you like to get out of working with this organization?
- What would be an ideal volunteer job for you?

Questions the recruiter should be prepared to answer include:

- What does the task involve?
- How much time will it take?
- What support is available?

It is important to gather information on new volunteers: their tastes, abilities, preferences, former volunteer experiences (were they positive or negative), and availability. You can do this by having them fill out a volunteer information form (see Appendix 2). This information will help you match the volunteer to the task.

Once the candidate agrees to volunteer, the volunteer and his or her supervisor should review the job description together to make sure that responsibilities and expectations are clearly defined, and make any necessary changes.

A formal agreement to accept and confirm the offer should be made in writing. It should include the volunteer's rights and obligations.

These include:

- Meet the agreed-upon schedule and time commitment.
- Give notification if the volunteer is unable to attend a previously agreed-upon meeting.
- Assume the organization's mission as his or her own.
- Ask for and accept advice and guidance in his or her work.
- Take the time to understand the organization's structure, to learn, and to participate.
- Do not use the information and tools provided by the organization inappropriately.
- Use the time dedicated to the organization seriously.
- Present him or herself in public as a volunteer and get prior authorization to express an opinion on behalf of the organization.
- Notify peers and the coordinator if he or she decides to leave the program.
- Accept decisions made by the group/team.

## Orientation Program

The next step is to orient new volunteers before sending them into the field. The purpose of

orientation is to make them feel worthy and welcome, develop a positive perception of the organization, confirm they have made the right decision, build enthusiasm, ensure a mutual expectation of the task, and instill understanding of the dos and don'ts of the job.

### Orientation should include:

- History and development of organization
- Range of services provided by organization
- Mission, vision, and goals
- Meeting key people in the organization
- Constitution
- Sources of funding
- Organizational chart and policies
- Working hours
- Training and development
- Code of conduct
- Honorarium (if any)
- SOS contact for emergency/hotline

There are several benefits to an orientation program. It presents the organization as a caring employer that recognizes the importance of its volunteers. It provides an opportunity for volunteers that are about to retire to transfer their tasks to new volunteers. This ensures a harmonious transition that is critical for long-term projects. It is also an opportunity for existing and new volunteers to meet each other to share information, experiences, and skills.

## Keeping Volunteers Motivated

Once volunteers have been recruited, the key is to keep them. The best way to ensure that volunteers maintain motivation is to make sure that they get satisfaction from their volunteer work and do not feel taken for granted. If volunteers do not get what they want, they will eventually quit and go to another charitable organization that better meets their needs. Unsatisfied volunteers may even tell others of their negative experiences or discredit the organization, which may hurt your organization in the long run.



There are several factors that affect volunteers' motivation:

- Work environment
- Personal needs
- Recognition

### Work environment

The work environment or atmosphere has a significant effect on volunteers. More often than not, grievances by volunteers concern the work environment and leadership. Complaints include:

- Poor role models
- Unclear task
- Boring task
- No feedback on performance
- No support
- Little sharing of information
- Little training
- Poor orientation
- Little work or no work
- Lack of guidance
- Little communication on the job
- No recognition
- Financial promises not kept
- Bossy attitude

When assigning tasks, make sure that:

- Tasks are explained clearly.
- Training is provided.
- Volunteers understand how their task will benefit the cause (not the organization).
- Work is interesting and useful.
- Success is attainable.
- Guidance and feedback is provided.
- Praise is given.

If the volunteer lacks interest or aptitude for one job, focus on re-assigning them to another task that is better suited to their interests and skills.

To create a positive work environment, your organization should ensure that:

- An atmosphere of dedication, commitment, and sincerity, exemplified by the leader, filters through the ranks of the volunteers.
- Respect is shown to volunteers for the job they are doing.
- Each volunteer knows that he or she is an essential part of the whole.
- Volunteers' opinions are requested and considered.
- The amount of time volunteers agree to contribute is respected.

- Staff and leaders know volunteers personally and use their names.
- Volunteers' time is not wasted through bad planning.
- Activities are rotated so that a volunteer is not always stuck doing a dull job.
- Volunteers are treated the same as paid staff.

Many volunteers indicate that one of the things that gives them the most incentive to continue being involved is feeling as though they are part of a serious, well-run organization that really helps people.

### Personal needs

Another important motivator is whether or not the volunteer's personal needs, or motives, are being met. This refers to the individual's reasons for volunteering. If the volunteer wanted to learn new skills but is stuffing envelopes, then his or her needs are not being met.

Needs are met when:

- An individual is doing a job he or she likes to do.
- An individual is doing a job he or she is capable of doing.
- The motivating factors that brought the individual to your organization are being addressed.
- The tasks are adjusted to meet needs and to provide new challenges as the individual grows and changes.

### Ways to recognize a volunteer:

- Say thanks.
- Smile!
- Give praise or supportive remarks.
- Give pins.
- Give certificates, plaques, trophies.
- Send a thank you card.
- Put an article about the volunteer in the organization's newsletter.
- Provide a free meal during a project.
- Increase responsibility in accordance with a volunteer's commitment and abilities.
- Provide a letter of recommendation for a job.
- Provide an opportunity to attend training.
- Honour him or her at a banquet or special event.

A perceptive volunteer coordinator can identify volunteers' motives – both known and hidden ones – and channel them by giving each person an appropriate task. Identifying and satisfying personal motives prevents conflict and desertion.

### **Recognition**

Recognition, or ensuring that volunteers feel acknowledged and appreciated, is a great motivator. Organizations that provide recognition are attractive places to work.

For many volunteers, there is no better form of recognition than to know how their work has contributed to the cause. This can be done by sharing the outcome of a project with volunteers, such as how much money was raised from an event and how that money is going to help people with hemophilia. It could mean sharing the story of a child who participated in a summer camp, and how the experience affected him.

It is very important for organizations to recognize the contribution of volunteers. How you provide recognition can range from a few words of praise to an award or other public acknowledgement. Whether personal or public, the type of recognition will depend on many factors including how long the volunteer has been involved, your organization's style and financial capacity, and the judgement of the volunteer coordinator.

Sometimes volunteers say that they don't want any acknowledgement, perhaps because they don't want any resources used on them, or because they feel that what they do has no value. In this case, your organization should still acknowledge their contribution, even if it is a simple thank you card. What volunteers do has great value, and it is important to acknowledge this.

### **Evaluating the Volunteer Program**

Evaluation is a key part of the volunteer program. Your organization should review and learn from its successes and failures in the past in attracting, retaining, and helping people develop their skills.

Volunteer coordinators and supervisors should sit down with volunteers on a regular basis to get feedback on their volunteer program. You can get valuable ideas on what is working and what needs to be changed.

Another way to gather feedback from volunteers is to have exit interviews to find out why people stop volunteering.

Possible reasons include:

- Task completed
- Reached retirement age
- Poor health
- Relocation
- Children have grown up
- Death
- Developed other interests
- Joined another organization
- Frustrated with delivery of services to target groups
- Fed up with attitude of indifference toward volunteers from leadership

### **Conclusion**

Volunteers can play a very important role in an organization. Putting an effort into recruiting and retaining volunteers can have great benefits for the organization in terms of volunteer productivity and commitment. The shortage of volunteers today makes it even more important that an organization be sensitive to the needs of its volunteers.

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**Appendix 1**  
**Sample Task Description**

Task title: \_\_\_\_\_

Task objective: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Activities involved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skills required: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Time required: \_\_\_\_\_

Frequency of task (monthly, yearly, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Tools and working conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Authority/reporting (Who does the volunteer report to? Who reports to the volunteer?  
How much authority is needed to complete the task?)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Results expected (How will we know if the job is performed well? What are the performance  
criteria?)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix 2**  
**Sample Volunteer Information Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (evening)

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Experience and/or Education: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Skills, interests, hobbies: \_\_\_\_\_

Past or present volunteer activities: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer work desired: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for volunteering: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How were you recruited? \_\_\_\_\_

Time available: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3

#### Sample Agreement for Undertaking a Voluntary Assignment (This is a sample only. Please change as you see fit.)

1. This Agreement is made between \_\_\_\_\_ (herein after called The Society) a legally established society of the one part and Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ residing at \_\_\_\_\_ (hereinafter called The Volunteer) of the other part for the following appointment.
  
2. The Volunteer is engaged and has agreed voluntarily to perform the following task/s for The Society:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. The Society shall pay an honorarium at an agreed hourly rate (if any) for each hour worked during the assignment, to be paid monthly subject to deductions bound by any laws or regulations.
  
4. The Volunteer shall:
  - a. Cooperate with the staff of The Society and accept the direct supervision and instruction of any responsible person appointed by The Society or its official representative during the assignment period.
  - b. Observe rules and regulations of The Society.
  - c. Not engage in any conduct detrimental to the interests and reputation of The Society.
  - d. Take all reasonable steps to safeguard his/her own safety and the safety of any other person who may be affected during the performance of any assignment whatsoever.
  
5. The Volunteer shall keep confidential and will not at any time divulge to any person, nor use for his or her own or a third party's benefit, any information of whatever nature related to The Society including any information on its past and current office bearers, members, and supporters.
  
6. The Volunteer shall not, during the continuance of this assignment, embark or engage in any activity that would constitute a conflict of interest with The Society.

7. On termination of the assignment, the Volunteer shall immediately return to The Society all correspondence, documents, papers, and property belonging to The Society which may be in his/her possession or under his or her control.
  
8. Should either party decide to end the assignment earlier than the agreed-upon duration, either party must provide notice of termination of not less than 14 working days.
  
9. This agreement shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of \_\_\_\_\_ (state/country). The Society reserves the right to make changes or amendments to the terms and conditions stipulated in this agreement of assignment.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of representative of hemophilia society: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of hemophilia society: \_\_\_\_\_



