

Volunteer Motivations: Getting and Keeping Your Volunteers



Lineage Journeys

www.LineageJourneys.org

Judy Nimer Muhn
4006 Emerald Park Drive
Milford, MI 48380

judynmuhn@gmail.com

Society management includes so many things beyond hosting presentations or a lock-in at the library. The recruitment of members but especially having enough volunteers to do the work. There are strategies, ways of working, outreach, and recruitment to keep in mind depending on what a volunteer's motivation might be!

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & MAINTENANCE

Volunteers come with five motivations for their service. When you know what their motivations are, recruiting and retaining them is easier and more effective.

Recruiting volunteers can take a variety of forms, methods and appeals. The "usual" ways are:

- Pass around a clipboard at meetings with various volunteer needs listed – ask them to provide their email and phone number(s).
- Watch for responses on membership renewal forms.
- Speak with attendees at society meetings – personal, warm approaches and questions may be enough!
- Reach out to the membership list by telephone
- Working with the Society board members, extend the circle of friends, family, and connections to seek those interested.
- Use social media to give information about volunteer opportunities.
- An article in the society's publications (Quarterly, eNewsletter), on its website.
- Survey volunteers using Survey Monkey, Google Forms or other method.

What ways does YOUR organization use?

VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

From a variety of volunteer-utilization workplaces, genealogy society positions and experience in the volunteer world, there are broadly five "motivations" (reasons, enthusiasm, or impulses) to become a volunteer.

The following represent what CAN appear to be someone's motivation for becoming a volunteer. Please don't assume negativity or a bias toward any of these as they all have a function, an important part to play and truly want to help.

©Judy Nimer Muhn, 2024

Roles, motivations and how to recognize them in a crowd and support them:

Social science research has provided a variety of studies and measurements for different volunteer motivation models. There are two-factor (altruistic and non-altruistic), three-part (altruistic, social, and material), four-factor (affiliation, personal values and beliefs, career development, and egotistical) and six-factor models – all of them are based in some level of altruism, with the six-factor model being based in function theory (satisfying one or more needs or motives), implying that different people can have the same reasons for volunteering in a particular way.

Focusing on the six-factor model to some extent: *Enhancement, Career, Social, Values, Protective* and *Understanding*. [You may download a published version of some of these descriptions directly from the journal (homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01488376.2017.1355867>). Citation: Butt M., Yu, H., Soomro, K.A. and Acquadro Maran, D. (2017). The ABCE Model of Volunteer Motivation. Journal of Social Service Research. Advanced online publication. DOI: 10.1080/01488376.2017.1355867] The *Protective* description will not be discussed.

Sir Sam – *Enhancement*: Wanting a title, a role, a special place as a volunteer is sometimes a motivation. These are leaders who are comfortable in organizing, guiding, and directing the work of a group. Some of them are especially drawn toward having a certain “seat at the table” which is comfortable, where they are experienced and bring value to the group’s work.

Pelumi Pleaser – *Social*: Wanting to help with anything, anytime can be a strong motivation. The “Pelumi” people of the world are most happy when others welcome them, talk to them, and enjoy their company. They are there for the friendships.

Jaiman Joiner – *Values*: This person is very social, energized by learning and takes great joy in belonging. They are always at meetings, happy to help, and motivated to get others to join too. Often a good recruiter as they will recognize others like themselves, and they are growing their own abilities and knowledge along the way.

Sarah Skills – *Career*: In recognizing that they have skills that the organization can use, the “Sarah” volunteers perhaps enjoy managing the organization’s membership database or website. They know how to use webinar formats or computer tools to enhance any group’s work.

Eyana Educator – *Understanding*: Having spent much time in personal and professional study, the “Eyana” people are those who love to learn and share what they’ve learned. Often presenters in societies, they are always wanting more and likely have built a network based in who/what they have learned from and can be great at bringing speakers to the society’s attention.

How to Support & Recognize Them:

Sir Sam: Will want to either move up in the society, holding increasingly important or impactful roles in the society; or they may be a solid leader in their society and find other regional/national organizations to help too. Recognition preferred: Higher and higher roles or responsibilities, networking with other society leaders.

Pelumi Pleaser: Will continue to be kind, helpful and busy as long as others give her encouragement and support for whatever role fits for her. A great “greeter” or “welcomer” for the society, they help others to feel comfortable. Recognition preferred: Noticed by society leaders with public “thank you” from the podium or a sincere hug of thanks, sometimes a certificate.

Jaiman Joiner: They will often have a long list of societies that they belong to, some where they have specific roles, and they often seek out others who share interests in certain ethnic or regional research. Recognition preferred: Often moving toward an “Eyana Educator” persona, they like certificates of completion for courses they’ve taken as they grow toward helping others to learn.

Sarah Skills: With the key role that they play mostly behind the scenes in a society, they may be introverts that appreciate being useful without having to be in front of the crowd. Recognition preferred: Praise spoken from the podium or a write up in the society’s “Member of the Month” or a quarterly publication biography.

Eyana Educator: Loving to speak in public, sharing research tips and helping others to grow in skills, “Eyana” offers content and presentation aspects to the society’s work. Recognition preferred: Varies from a certificate of appreciation, to praise on social media after her presentations, Eyana may also be active in a network of speakers and enjoy special opportunities with speakers she sees as more knowledgeable than her.

Ways to KEEP your volunteers

Keeping your society’s volunteers engaged, energetic, and happy may require some effort. The ways to keep volunteers are nearly the exact same tactics you would use to attract new volunteers. Keep things fun and make sure you appreciate your volunteers.

Also think about these issues:

- Sometimes leaders forget that these societies are being run by volunteers. If you are a leader in your society, make sure you do not have unreasonable expectations from the people who are doing FREE work. Try to make sure your ego isn’t running the show. And if you see someone in your society who has not treated volunteers nicely, perhaps you should have a nice, private chat with them.
- Beware the attitude of “if you want something done right you have to do it yourself.” This is simply not true in life, and especially not when dealing with a group of hard-working volunteers. Perhaps a certain job wasn’t done the way YOU would do it. But did the job get done? Then let it go. This focus on details is really great if you are the “worker bee” but can be detrimental if

you are in a leadership position. Just make sure you keep it in check if this is you. DO NOT MICRO-MANAGE! Realize that this is a “fun” hobby for most and be willing to accept some things as “good enough” for what you paid them.

- Give clear deadlines. Build in extra time so that if a volunteer doesn't meet the deadline, there is still a chance to get the task done. Be clear about expectations and then let them do the jobs before it's too late.
- Don't try to force a job onto someone who really does not want the job, just because your society is desperate to fill the position. This will end in disaster.
- Avoid burnout! If you have someone who is always willing and never says “no,” don't overburden them with tasks. Eventually, that volunteer will get burned out, tired, and ready for a break. Delegate the work; split up larger projects into smaller tasks.

Remember that “many hands make light work,” so be sure to spread things out among the membership.

Award Opportunities for Volunteers

- Consider nominating outstanding volunteers in your organization for local, regional and national awards (check with United Way, national volunteer centers, local government programs, chambers of commerce or city council awards).
- Reach out to local elected officials – obtain resolutions in honor of particularly high-level volunteers (those retiring after decades of service, those who worked on advocating for preserving records, etc.)
- Small items from dollar stores can be thoughtfully presented in April – National Volunteers Week celebrations around the USA – and could be certificates, small trophies, “joke” or “theme” gifts. There are national websites for National Volunteers Week where items are for sale with a theme imprint.
- Certificates are always nice – perhaps using different colors based on the number of hours or years that the volunteers served.
- A personalized gift is always the best – a hospitality volunteer could get a small basket of coffee/tea and a mug; membership chair could receive a packet of genealogy forms; website or newsletter editor could receive a subscription to a publication; officers could receive something representing their office – piggy bank with society logo, customized society-imprinted pens, folios with society logo, etc.
- Don't forget a volunteer's unique style – a cat/dog lover, a bibliophile, someone who always wears a scarf or unique tie, a “genealogy” themed t-shirt or jewelry item.

Corporation for National and Community Service - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/serve/via>

Independent Sector's 2022 report: <https://independentsector.org/blog/independent-sector-releases-new-value-of-volunteer-time-of-31-80-per-hour/>