

The process to attract and select volunteers

Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Dm, 11/11/2014 - 12:34

The **searching for volunteers** is a long process that requires knowing first who you are, what you do and what do you want those volunteers for. And, in doing so, the process should end up concluding with the integration and adaption of the newcomers in the working teams within your association.

1. How to carry out the process of attracting volunteers?

First of all, even before starting a selection process, the association must have already designed a “**Volunteering Project**”: volunteers’ role, structure, organization, posts, responsibilities, rights, duties, etc.

Only after defining these **key-points** within your Project, you may be able to start the search.

To attract volunteers doesn’t mean just to call for them so they come to the association and start working. The searching for volunteers is a **long process** that requires knowing first who you are, what you do and what do you want those volunteers for. And, in doing so, the process should end up concluding with the **integration and adaption** of the newcomers in the working teams within your association.

In order to carry out this process, we offer you some **guidelines** for you to adapt and to go into in depth according to the needs of your association:

- **Planning:** it is important to invest some effort in planning the right searching process. In many cases, the people you'll find will become the base upon which to build the project you want to carry out. To plan means to organize the resources available according to the aims you pursue. These aims are defined by a) the analysis of the needs present in the social reality you address, and b) the ideology that inspires your association. The resources we refer to are economic but also human, material, in terms of space or time, legal aspects, etc.
- **What are we looking for?** Taking the association’s philosophy and the goals it pursues as a starting point, you should draft a scheme showing the profile that would best fit the tasks to be carried out by the volunteer (age, sex, skills, knowledge, experience, etc.)
- **To select or to train?** Prior to the design of this candidate’s profile, you must decide whether to take up everybody and make them undergo a training process, or to select only those that have the conditions required, so there’s no need to train them after that.

2. Searching strategies

- **One-time research:** to think of a specific eye-catching activity at the start or at the end of each season or course.
- **Ongoing research:** to ask somebody to do the call for volunteers on an regular basis.

Some useful techniques you could try when searching for volunteers are to publish calls for volunteers in posters, banners or magazines that are commonly present in the field you are interested in, to organize a festival or an open event making clear the intention of attracting volunteers, etc.

This is the reason why you need:

- To transmit very clearly what kind of association you are, what profile are you looking for, what kind of work will the volunteer do.
- To use direct methods, avoiding impersonal messages.
- To take care for the public image of your association.
- To acknowledge and to show the advantages and the chances offered by joining your association as a

volunteer.

- To identify the sources that may provide you with volunteers: secondary schools, youth associations, the elderly and retired people, etc.
- To identify the right spaces where to make your searching calls or advertising: youth information centres, notice boards in schools, civic centres, etc.

Other possible proposals:

- To get in touch or exchange with neighbourhood or local associations, NGOs, trade associations, etc.
- To contact other associations focused on the same or similar issues as you are.
- To take advantage of the services offered by public institutions.

3. The selection of volunteers

Once the attraction of the candidates is done, the next step is to select the one/s who will join you. This means to choose the most suitable person regarding **personality, abilities, training, experience, motivation**, etc. to develop the activity to be done in the association.

Before starting the selection, there are **some points** you must bear in mind: on one hand, the tasks the volunteer will have to do and, on the other, the personal profile that is required for the post to fill.

Information is central to the selection process. It is very important to inform the candidates about the entity, to inform yourselves about the volunteer and to finally decide whether to accept him/her or not.

Of course, to make a selection means to choose some people but also to **discard the rest**. Thus, you will have to think very **carefully** about what to do with these other candidates.

One option is to hold them in reserve. You may possibly find somebody who fits in your association but doesn't have the profile required for that specific job. That's why you should always keep record of the contact data of all candidates, in case you may need to update the choice and call for another one.

Another option is to simply forget and permanently discard the ones that have not been chosen because they don't fit in your association. In this case, it would make no sense to give them hope.

It is also important not to lose sight of the time lapse between selection and the definitive candidate's incorporation. This should ideally be as short as possible, so as to keep the best global record of all candidates. In doing so, the final decision will be easier to make, and you'll be able to communicate it as soon as possible. If you let too much time go by, the availability of each candidate may have changed "drastically".

4. What criteria apply when selecting candidates?

Being an association, you must specify as clearly as possible the features concerning the post to fill. This will ease the precise definition of the conditions required and the clarification of the profile you are looking for.

In order to make the right selection it is very important to be clear about the goals you are pursuing. If the association is not that clear about those aims, the process may result in a great loss of time and no results at all.

We would basically recommend you to bear in mind following goals when selecting candidates:

- To find volunteers with the fitting profile to meet your association's needs.
- To provide the potential volunteer with information about your association.
- To collect enough information about the candidate in order to get to know him/her in depth.
- To advise the volunteer to allow him/her making the most out of the available resources (whether in your association or elsewhere)
- To succeed incorporating the new volunteer to your association.

While making the selection, you may prioritize some aspects rather than others, depending on the importance you attach to each of these aims.

5. How to carry out the selection of volunteers?

We basically recommend you two kind of proceedings:

1. **The meeting**
2. **The interview**

1. The meeting will allow you informing the candidates about the association. It only makes sense if you manage to call all of them together on the same day. Personal talks are not very effective. The attendants may have come to you without knowing what you do or who you really are. To inform them collectively may act then as a “natural selection” criterion.

You could make good use of this meeting to collect their CVs and to let them answer a short questionnaire that may allow you to make a first selection.

It is important to provide the attendants with a written summary of the issues discussed at the end of the meeting (the association's leaflet, advertising material, etc.). Once leaving the meeting, they may want to check again what has been said.

You should organize the meeting in two different parts: first, the presentation of your organization and then, the Question Time.

2. The interview will allow you knowing the volunteer's skills, attitudes, motivations and interests. You may prepare two kinds of interview: an initial one, to let the candidate explain or clarify the contents displayed in his/her CV or the answers given to the questionnaire; and a definitive one, where the volunteer may discover the possibilities of action within the association, while you check his/her suitability to perform the specific role of the post to be filled.

We would advise any association to promote a **casual atmosphere** for the interview. This would allow you to check the candidate's spontaneity, without losing sight of a minimal structure so as to get enough information about that person.

Finally, we would like to stress that this process loses its meaning if it's not carried out on an ongoing basis. So, once the attraction and selection of the volunteers is done, your association should take into account further aspects as, for instance, the reception and advising of the newcomers. These contents should always be understood as being part of the same whole process.

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Resum:

What strategies apply when it comes to look for volunteers? To attract volunteers does not mean just to call for them so they come to the association and start working.



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