

## 2023 – The Year of the

# VOLUNTEER

While the silver linings of COVID are rare, one that we can certainly appreciate is the impact it will have on volunteering.

- *After having been deprived of involvement with the causes many find near and dear to their hearts because of COVID restrictions, there is great fervor among those finally able to return and engage.*
- *The "Great Resignation" has created a new audience of potential volunteers who are eager to join others in advancing missions and ministries they value.*
- *During the lockdowns, many found themselves seeking new frontiers that brought more meaning to their lives. For some, this led to career changes. For others, it was high-level volunteering—taking on specific tasks that in the past would have been handled by staff—for organizations serving those they wish to assist.*

These impulses and the increasing emergence from COVID limitations predict to make 2023 the Year of the Volunteer and an opportunity not to be missed among Catholic entities.



### **How Valuable?**

Depending on your use of volunteers, they could be one of your most valuable constituencies. Research indicates that those who volunteer and take an active role in your organization are more likely to support it financially as well. In most environments, volunteers represent a significant portion of your donor, or potential donor, audience.

A strong, well-conceived and managed volunteer program offers substantial advantages to the institution and the volunteers. As with everything, it comes down to audience and objective: What are you trying to achieve and with whom? The more it can be tailored to address the needs and interests of the volunteers and those they will serve, the greater the success and pleasure.

### **Structure**

The best volunteer programs focus on four areas:

- 1 identification of need,
- 2 recruitment/enlistment,
- 3 orientation/training,
- 4 motivation/recognition.

Together they add up to an increasing number of individuals who bring considerable talents to your ministry, enjoy the roles they play, and stay engaged over time, further cementing their relationships.

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# Mission Advancement

## 1 Identification of Need

Before you seek the assistance, wisdom and hard work of prospective volunteers, make sure that your needs are clear. Ask staff and leadership about all the ways in which volunteers could be employed so that you can accurately describe each task and its requirements. Gather as many specific details as possible.

This is an opportunity to be creative, to dream, and to imagine a different way of operating. Perhaps you won't be able to fill each and every option at the start, but it is always good to know what is desired and why.

While there will be no end to the minor or time-consuming tasks we can ask volunteers to undertake, remember that they can play bigger roles than busy work. What is most important is that there is a clear understanding of what the "job" is, what it requires, what need it addresses, whom it helps. Be as clear as possible about duties/responsibilities, contact person, schedule, benefits, priority.

Once determined, you are in a position to offer opportunities that can more readily match the interests, abilities and availability of your volunteers.

**CHRISTIAN BROTHERS SERVICES** Job Description

<b>POSITION:</b>	Communications Writer and Social Media Specialist Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>DIVISION:</b>	Marketing
<b>EMPLOYEE:</b>	Laura Katauskas
<b>FUNCTION:</b>	Plan, organize, develop and create a wide variety of Company communications that will be used in a variety of mediums including written, internet, audio/web conferencing and live presentations. Act as social media specialist to research, develop and create content for social media outlets.
<b>REPORTS TO:</b>	Senior Writer

**RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:**

	% of time:
• Research, develop and write content for internal and external company publications, including but not limited to newsletters, educational pieces, flyers, brochures, magazines, website, social media sites, internal newsletters, etc. Ensure each piece meets all deadlines and Associated Press guidelines. Work with assigned divisions to keep copy for all materials, including website, up-to-date.	20
• Act as the social media specialist by building and executing social media strategy through competitive research, platform determination, benchmarking, messaging and audience identification for both CBS and CSM. Create an annual company-wide social media calendar and submit to the manager of marketing/communications each September (featuring social media strategy and plans for the following year.) Research, develop, create and share content for CBS and CSM social media outlets that builds meaningful connections. Work with all CBS divisions, CSM social media specialist and vendor/s' collaborator's social media teams to develop content and messaging calendars for CBS/CSM social media outlets. Provide monthly reports on followers, clicks, retweets, follower growth, influencer report, volume of posts, reach rate, total engagement and engagement per post.	20
• Demonstrate creative and analytical skills with the ability to set priorities, meet deadlines and handle multiple projects. Ability to work effectively under deadlines.	15
• Coordinate schedules and timelines to ensure communication materials are delivered on time.	15
• Work with department designers to maximize the use of our customer based website, printed materials, social media outlets and collateral items.	10
• Effectively participate as a Marketing & Communications team member to ensure consistency of message and accurate strategic positioning of all projects, with	10

## 2 Recruitment/Enlistment

We always want to cast a large net for volunteers, so don't limit to only those who can take on specific roles. List your volunteer activities but give more than the standard option of "I could do this." Maybe this is something that requires preparation, i.e., "I could do this with training." Perhaps your prospective volunteer is not equipped but has many connections and therefore, "I could find someone else to do this." With this range of involvement, you'll likely get current volunteers moving to new areas as well as new volunteers that others have identified for you.

Depending on your type of organization, you may have employment info on a prospective volunteer that indicates he/she possesses the very skills you need for a specific task. If so, recruit directly and demonstrate the link. Be ready, however, for those who want a very different role from what they do all day.

### Enlistment

The move from defining needs and interests to enlisting volunteers is best pursued in person. Often we can send letters, distribute flyers, make announcements and get little in response.

This is not a case of people refusing to take a role; perhaps they just don't think you're referring to them. These efforts remain necessary, however, because they send a clear signal that all are welcome. But for those volunteer roles vital to your organization, additional methods must be developed.

The more you can individually approach a prospective volunteer, the more successful you will be. The key is to have the person to whom they can't say "no" extend the invitation. Of course, the "recruiter" must have the right attitude; it can't be done under duress—the prospective volunteer will know.

In the world of volunteerism, there is the phenomenon known as the "warm body vs. specific need" recruitment. Are you merely seeking anyone with a pulse, or do you require specific skills? What is the volunteer's area of interest? What level of volunteer responsibility are they willing to undertake? These are key considerations.

Your website should provide an easy way for a volunteer to indicate his/her area of interest, availability, and provide contact info for follow-up. Don't forget the "where needed most" option for those who want to help but don't have a role in mind.

### 3 Orientation/Training

Provide each volunteer with an orientation—tour, materials, introductions, opportunity to ask questions, etc.

Based on the role taken, the training may be as simple as "this is how we do it" to something more specific involving formal preparation programs, role-playing, etc. It's one thing to ask a volunteer to read stories to third graders from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Fridays and quite another to chair the auction which is already incorporated into the operating budget.

The orientation and training must suit each situation in order to ensure a meaningful and successful experience for everyone involved. Once the project is complete, follow up to determine if the earlier prep was adequate and/or how it can be improved. Conclude the orientation with a clear statement about the next step—date, time, place, activity.

### 4 Motivation/Recognition

When someone volunteers, do not hesitate, do not pass GO, do not collect \$200 before acknowledging and thanking him or her for this commitment.

#### *The Ignored Volunteer Syndrome*

If you've ever wondered "Why don't we get more volunteers?" check first with how they are handled once they make their interest known. If you have a big volunteer sign up at the ministry fair, and then the future volunteer never hears back, that not only diminishes interest but also stimulates word of mouth that "they don't really need/want us." Before you promote and recruit, make sure that you are ready to respond in a timely manner with thanks, enthusiasm and next steps.

While one of the greatest disappointments to prospective volunteers is to offer to become involved and then to be ignored, a close second is the volunteer who brings specific expertise, offers it and is underutilized.

Perhaps there are reasons why you wouldn't want to engage a volunteer in the capacity he/she initially indicates. This might have to do with confidential information, relationship issues, etc. This is your prerogative. However, to dismiss the offer without recognition is to create a very negative experience for that person, which may have significant ramifications.

#### *Saying Thank You*

Some tasks undertaken by the wonderful human beings called volunteers are enormously interesting and fun. Others are repetitive, dull and often downright dreary. Both are necessary.

In the world of motivating volunteers, it's helpful to think about the nature of the jobs. Often we praise, thank and acknowledge the one-time act more than the ongoing, less dramatic involvement. Group events to thank all volunteers are certainly worthwhile, but can't substitute for ongoing individual reinforcement and appreciation. The methods by which we express our deep thankfulness are only limited to our imagination. Letters, phone calls, plaques, dinners/parties ... the list could go on and on. Ultimately, it comes down to good manners and the fundamental basis for all institutional advancement activity—relationship building.

#### *More Than Thank You*

It's just not enough to show appreciation and recognize your donors. You also need to check in (especially with ongoing volunteers) and see how they are faring in the roles they have chosen. What did they like best about their involvement? Least? Was it a rewarding experience? Did they see ways to improve our operations and, if so, how? What advice would they like to offer? Do they wish to renew? Would they like to consider other volunteer avenues?

This not only provides you with understanding of the volunteers themselves and their experiences, it can also be a tool for recruiting new volunteers. Stats and testimonials can prove highly motivating for those who are considering such a move.

#### *Catch and Release*

The wonder, the beauty, the delight of a phenomenal volunteer ... it warms the heart and it GETS THINGS DONE. A renewing, effective volunteer who truly extends the reach of the staff and requires minimal supervision is the ideal come to life. Therefore, it can be ever so tempting to retain that individual long past their natural interest in the role. Yet turning them into indentured servants or creating a sense one must move or die to get off a committee is hardly the note we wish to strike.

We often lament that, "It's the same people who do all the work." But it may also be true that by keeping the same folks at the helm, others feel less wanted. Make sure your volunteers know they are supported if they choose to shift areas of interest or take breaks from the world of volunteering with your ministry.

A vital volunteer program can significantly strengthen your organization and provide substantial benefits to the volunteers and all members of the community IF it is designed and managed effectively. Those who volunteer live longer, happier, healthier lives, and your institution can provide those benefits. Add to that the incredible power, force and impact that Catholic organizations offer, and it is a profoundly rewarding experience. ☀