

Volunteer Recruitment Strategy

Recruiting volunteers for your Softball Association; is there a more frustrating task?

One of the most common problems reported by Softball Associations is recruiting volunteers. Many Associations rely on asking parents or players to indicate on their registration forms if they are interested in becoming a volunteer, and assume anyone who does not check the box is not willing to volunteer their time. As a result, many of the positions on local Softball Association's volunteer positions remain vacant from season to season, leaving a small group of dedicated volunteers to run the Association.

The situation described above is all too common in the softball community. Instead of creating a volunteer recruitment strategy, Softball Associations wait passively for people to indicate their interest in 'becoming a volunteer' on registration forms. The problem with the passive method of volunteer recruitment is that checking the 'volunteer' box can be intimidating! The prospective volunteer has no idea what they may be signing up for.

According to a 2004 article titled *The Volunteer Spirit In Canada: Motivations and Barriers*, by David Lasby written for the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and Volunteer Canada, thirty seven percent (37%) of people surveyed reported that they do not volunteer simply because they had not been personally asked. The figure jumps significantly when considering the potential volunteer's age, with 49% of those aged 15 to 24 and 43% of those 25 to 34 who do not volunteer because no one has asked them to get involved.

Certainly, there must be a better way to get people involved with your Softball Association! The answer is to create a volunteer recruitment strategy for your Association.

Why define a recruitment strategy for your Association?

A Softball Association should define a volunteer recruitment strategy for the same reason that businesses have a recruitment strategy for paid staff – to find the best person for the position. No one would consider hiring for a paid position without soliciting a number of qualified applicants, so why should hiring a volunteer be any different? Without defining a process for recruiting volunteers, you are not able to take into account the needs of your organization. Recruiting a volunteer – especially for your Board of Directors – is just as important as recruiting for a paid position, and should be approached with the same care.

Step 1 – Determine What Positions Need to be Filled

Before you can begin to recruit volunteers, you need to determine what positions need to be filled. Failing to outline the available positions is the first place that many passive volunteer recruitment efforts begin to fall short.

Make a list of all volunteer positions that are available within your Association – both filled and unfilled. Depending on your Association, the positions may include:

- President
- Vice-President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Umpire-in-Chief
- Fundraising / Sponsorship Coordinator
- Marketing Coordinator
- Public Relations Coordinator
- Equipment Director
- Divisional Coordinators

- Tournament Coordinator
- Coach
- Assistant Coach

Ensure that there is a written job description for each role, and include a list of term expiry dates so that your Board will know when the next position will ultimately need to be filled. Using the job descriptions, create a list of qualifications that you would like the volunteer for each position to possess. At minimum, include the following categories:

- **Experience:** Which may include areas like general board experience, specific role such as chairperson, skills in a defined area such as finance, or practical experience in a field that compliments the position (i.e. a volunteer who works in the Media would be a great fit for the Public Relations or Marketing Coordinator position)
- **Personal Attributes:** Such as team player, results-oriented, decision maker
- **Technical Abilities:** Including computer skills (great for a volunteer Webmaster), NCCP Coaching Certification, or a specified level of Umpire Certification

Step 2 – Where to Start Looking for your Volunteer

Once you know what positions are available within your Association, and what positions may be opening up in the future, you can begin the process of recruiting volunteers. While you can continue to solicit volunteers passively through your registration forms, combining this approach with an active recruitment strategy will bring in the best results.

Existing Board Members should be encouraged to network with potential candidates – which in the case of a Softball Association include both the players themselves and the players' parents for leagues who provide playing opportunities for minors. A great place to begin the volunteer recruitment process is at the registration table. Remember, 37% of people do not volunteer because no one has asked!

Aside from networking with potential volunteers, a Softball Association should always publicly advertise the availability of their volunteer positions. The perfect volunteer may be living in your community, but does not know that you are looking for him or her. Send News Releases to your local Newspaper, as well as local Television and Radio Stations. Take advantage of Softball Ontario's News Release Service on the Play Softball Web Site by posting your open volunteer positions, and make sure to include information on your positions in your various communication tools (including your web site and newsletters).

Step 3 – How to Ask Someone to Volunteer

Asking someone to volunteer is not simply a matter of pointing out the check box on the registration form. Make conversation with your potential candidate while they are registering; ask questions about their background, what they do for a living, and then direct them to the position that may best fit their skill set.

Make sure to have the job descriptions of any available positions on hand, so that you can provide potential candidates with the details of the position while you have their attention. Prospective volunteers will find comfort in the fact that your Association is well organized and be more confident in the possibility of becoming a volunteer when they have a job description laid out in front of them.

If your potential volunteer is responding to one of the advertisements that you have distributed to your community, make sure to ask similar questions. Find out where their interests are, how much time they can spare, and what kind of experience they are looking to have.

Step 4 – Selecting a Volunteer

You have done a fantastic job so far, and you have been able to find candidates for some (or all!) of the volunteer positions that you need to fill. Now, you have to start the process of selecting the right person for your Association.

A good selection process usually includes the following three (3) steps:

- 1. Application** The application should include contact information, a statement about why the candidate is interested in the position, and a resume outlining relevant experience.
- 2. Evaluation** Compare your candidate's resume and experiences to those outlined in the Job Description for the position. Are they a good fit?
- 3. Screening** Depending on your Softball Association's by-laws and risk management policies, you should conduct volunteer screening by asking your candidate to submit a Police Record Check (PRC) with a Vulnerable Sector Screen. Although it varies by location, some Police Departments offer free Police Record Checks to volunteers, while other Softball Associations cover the cost of obtaining a PRC for each of their volunteers.

Step 5 – Welcome Aboard!

Congratulations! You have selected a great new volunteer who should fit in well with your Association. Make sure to have your new volunteer up and running as soon as possible by providing them with the following documents as soon as they have been approved as a volunteer by your Board of Directors:

- Policies & Procedures Manual
- Contact Information (depending on the position, contact information required may include the Board of Directors contacts, Coach contacts, Umpire contacts, etc)
- Contract to sign outlining duties, terms of service, time commitment, etc
- Conflict of Interest Statement
- Code of Conduct

Make sure to review the documents with your new volunteer and to provide any hands-on training that is necessary. A great idea is to start a binder for each of your volunteer positions that is kept at your clubhouse which contains samples of what has been done in the past, as well as any best practices that may have been learned by previous years' volunteers.

References

Lasby, David. "The Volunteer Spirit in Canada: Motivations and Barriers." Giving and Volunteering. Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004. Web. 22 Apr 2010.
<http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/reports/volunteer_spirit.pdf>.