



RECRUITMENT & Retention Guide



Understanding Volunteerism Today and for the Future



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INTRODUCTION

“I must say that I have seen Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public welfare, and I have noticed a hundred instances in which they hardly ever failed to lend faithful support to one another.” It was more than 170 years ago that Alexis de Tocqueville observed that a defining characteristic of the American people is their commitment to service. Today, this commitment to service remains strong, and volunteers of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities are helping to strengthen communities and meet the growing needs of our nation.

The fire and emergency services offer one of the most long-standing forums for volunteering in America. Today, fire and emergency service departments across the country rely on volunteers not only for emergency response, such as fighting fires or responding to emergency medical calls, but also to assist in their many non-emergency functions, such as teaching fire safety in schools, installing smoke alarms for residents that need assistance, or raising funds to buy much-needed equipment.

Fire Corps was launched in 2004 to assist all fire and emergency service departments (career, volunteer, and combination) in meeting increasing demands for service while facing increasingly limited resources. Through Fire Corps, departments are able to connect with community members who share this spirit of public service and are able to perform many of the non-emergency functions that would otherwise fall to first responders. In doing so, first responders have more time to train, prepare for, and respond to emergencies. Together first responders and Fire Corps volunteers are helping local communities become safer, stronger, and better prepared.

As in any volunteer program, the retention and recruitment of volunteers is critical to the success of the program, yet both can pose significant challenges to the organization seeking volunteers. This *Guide* will help fire and emergency service departments understand volunteerism today and provides ideas and suggestions for retaining and recruiting volunteers for Fire Corps programs. In the following pages, you will learn which demographics are often overlooked as a potential goldmine of willing volunteers and find tips and strategies to most effectively reach each of these demographics. In addition to this *Guide*, you can find further volunteer retention and recruitment resources on the Fire Corps web site at www.firecorps.org.

VOLUNTEERISM TODAY

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service's report *Volunteering in America: 2008 State and City Trends and Rankings*, the United States boasts a national volunteer rate of 26.2 percent. In 2008, nearly 62 million volunteers across the country provided approximately 8 billion hours of service to community organizations.¹ Based on the Independent Sector's estimate that the value of a volunteer hour in 2008 was \$20.25, these service hours are worth \$162 billion.

There are many reasons why people choose to volunteer, and furthermore, why they choose to continue volunteering. Understanding these reasons is key to finding, recruiting, motivating, and retaining volunteers.

Who Volunteers?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people aged 35 to 44 are the most likely to volunteer, while those in their early twenties were the least likely. Women volunteer at a higher rate than men, and people who are married volunteer at a higher rate than their unmarried counterparts. Interestingly, parents with children under the age of 18 are significantly more likely to volunteer than those without children. Additionally, those with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer than those with less education.²

Why Do People Volunteer?

One of the greatest benefits people derive from volunteering is the satisfaction of knowing they are making a difference in their community and their country. Through volunteerism, people are able to solve problems, strengthen communities, connect to others, and enhance lives. Other reasons that people volunteer include:

- > Achievement
- > Recognition and feedback
- > Personal growth
- > Friendship, support, and a sense of belonging

In addition to the social benefits of volunteering, recent research indicates that there are many health benefits, such as lower mortality rates and decreased rates of depression.³ There are also many other factors that influ-



ence the decision to volunteer. There is a strong positive relationship between homeownership rates and volunteerism. In communities where residents tend to reside in multi-unit housing, such as apartment buildings, volunteer rates tend to be lower due to a more transient population. Metropolitan areas with shorter commuting distances to work also tend to have higher volunteer rates, as do areas where education levels are higher.⁴

Perhaps most important to note, however, is the fact that 44 percent of volunteers began volunteering because they were asked to volunteer by the organization.⁵

How are People Volunteering?

According to www.volunteeringinamerica.gov, the nation's top volunteer activities include fundraising; collecting, preparing, or distributing food; general labor; and tutoring or teaching. In addition, data shows that religious organizations have consistently remained the most popular organizations through which volunteers serve, closely followed by educational or youth service organizations.⁶

Public safety organizations currently have the lowest percentage of volunteers among all types of organizations, with 1.3 percent of volunteers (compared to 35.1 percent for religious organizations). Men are more likely than women to volunteer in the public safety sector. Interestingly, people in their early twenties are more



likely to volunteer in public safety, whereas this group is least likely to volunteer overall.⁷

Why Do Some People Choose Not to Volunteer?

While many people do decide to volunteer and derive great benefits from it, there are various reasons why people choose not to volunteer. Some of these barriers include:

- > Lack of time
- > Language gaps
- > Childcare responsibilities
- > Financial obligations
- > Lack of transportation
- > Misconceptions about volunteering
- > Fear of inadequacy, not fitting in, or being taken advantage of

Implementing an effective retention and recruitment campaign will help you overcome these barriers and find volunteers that are suited to your needs. This *Guide* will assist you in reaching out to various target populations as you recruit new volunteers for your Fire Corps program, as well as provide you with ideas and methods for retaining existing volunteers.

¹ Volunteering in America, 15 Oct 2009, www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/national.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Volunteering in the United States,” Spring 2008, 6 Feb 2009, www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm.

³ Corporation for National and Community Service, “Benefits of Volunteering,” 6 Feb 2009, www.nationalservice.gov/about/volunteering/benefits.asp.

⁴ Volunteering in America, “Factors that Influence Volunteer Rates,” 2007, 6 Feb 2009, www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/factors_generic.cfm.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Volunteers on how they became involved for the main organization for which volunteer activities were performed and selected characteristics,” September 2008, 2 Feb 2009, www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.t06.htm.

⁶ Volunteering in America, “Research Brief: Volunteering in America Research Highlights,” July 2008, 15 May 2009, www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/assets/resources/VIA_Brief_FINAL.pdf.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Table 4: Volunteers by type of main organization for which volunteer activities were performed and selected characteristics,” September 2008, 15 May 2009, www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.t04.htm.

RECRUITMENT

Whether you are just starting a Fire Corps program or trying to expand an existing program, effective volunteer recruitment methods will be critical to your success. You need to understand the needs of your department, as well as the makeup of your community, to determine how to be most effective in your recruitment efforts.

Make a Plan

Before you start the process, you should develop a recruitment plan to ensure that you remain on track and focused. Determine your department's needs, what skills or abilities you will need from your Fire Corps volunteers, and who comprises your target audience. If your community is primarily made up of senior citizens, you'll likely implement a much different recruitment plan than if your community consists primarily of college students. Your plan should include key, concise messages you want to convey to this target audience. For tips on developing a recruitment plan, visit www.volunteeringinamerica.gov, and click on "Tools and Training."

Be Creative

There are a number of resources you can tap into when recruiting volunteers. Consider the demographics of your community and how to best reach prospective volunteers within each demographic area. Youth, senior citizens, and people with disabilities all have unique skills and abilities that could benefit your department. Local schools and universities may be an excellent resource for volunteers, and many require that their students participate in service activities in exchange for educational credits. Senior centers, religious organiza-

tions, and even local businesses may provide an excellent way to reach large groups of prospective volunteers with your recruitment messages.



Be Prepared

When reaching out to prospective volunteers, be prepared to clearly explain your organization's mission and needs. Prospective volunteers will want to know how they can help, what is expected of them, and what the time commitment will be. Have policies and procedures for your volunteer program in place before you begin your recruitment efforts. Establish application procedures for prospective volunteers and know how they will be screened and selected. Refer to the *Fire Corps Resource Guide* for additional information about needs assessment, policies and procedures, screening and selecting volunteers, and more.

Recruit!

The Fire Corps national office has already created many of the tools and resources you'll need to develop effective recruitment messages in your community. Visit www.firecorps.org to access brochures, public service announcements, ads, customizable press releases, and more that you can use to recruit volunteers for your Fire Corps program. The ideas provided below may help you reach out to various target populations with your recruitment messages. Remember, everyone has a skill, talent, or knowledge that could help your department achieve more. The goal of your recruitment campaign is to harness these abilities to benefit your department, your volunteers, and ultimately, your community.



Youth

For the purpose of this document, “youth” refers to young adults of either high school or college age. This demographic can be a great asset to departments as long as the age and maturity levels of the youth appropriately match the projects and tasks at hand. When utilizing volunteers who are minors, it is advisable to obtain parent or guardian consent for them to participate, especially if they are not participating as part of an organization or school group. Before doing so, however, you should be familiar with child labor laws in your state. Refer to the [Fire Corps Liability Guide](#) for more information.

Following are some common locations and organizations where you may be able to successfully find and recruit dedicated youth volunteers.



High Schools

School groups can provide an excellent resource for getting assistance for projects requiring multiple people at one time, such as a large-scale fundraiser. The National Honor Society (NHS) is a high school organization which challenges students to be active in school and in their communities. Many local chapters host or participate in service projects on a routine basis. Check with your local high schools to determine if a partnership with NHS or other service-oriented clubs is right for your department.

Both girls and boys often participate in various scouting organizations. Generally, youth involved in these organizations are required to participate in activities that develop leadership and responsibility, which often include service projects. [Boy Scouts](#), [Girl Scouts](#), [Campfire USA](#), and [Frontier Girls](#) are examples of some of the most common scouting organizations. Each of their web sites will direct you to councils in your area, which you can contact to learn more about any possible opportunities.

Boys and Girls Clubs nationwide include branches known as Key Clubs. The main activities for Key Clubs are service projects which are chosen, planned, and implemented by the youth participants, ranging from 14 to 18 years of age. Search the [Boys and Girls Club](#) to find a location in your area or call 1-800-854-CLUB.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities in your community can be another excellent source for finding and recruiting Fire Corps members. In fact, more and more colleges and universities are beginning to require service projects or internships and often provide college credit in return. Students may be able to assist in areas that



relate to their interests or fields of study, such as computer programming, marketing, accounting, and many others. Their contributions are mutually beneficial, providing an opportunity for the students to put their classroom skills into action while offering your department specialized knowledge in areas where you need help.

While a student intern or volunteer may require additional supervision, he or she may have more time and demonstrate a greater commitment to the mission of the department. Contact your local college's student life department to find out how to recruit volunteers, keeping in mind that large universities often have a special volunteering center or division specifically for the students to locate opportunities to serve in their community.

Faith-Based Organizations

Many temples, churches, mosques, and other places of religious worship have high school and/or college-aged programs that encourage group activities that benefit others. By connecting with the leaders of these groups, you may be able to arrange one-time or ongoing service projects for the youth, such as cleaning the station or hosting a bake sale. Talk to your department members to find out if any of them attend a house of worship and may already know people whom you can contact.

Junior Firefighter Programs

Your department may already have an established Junior Firefighter Program and some or all of these Juniors may be interested in doing more to help your department. Consider utilizing these youth volunteers to assist in other non-emergency areas such as: support staff at a department open-house or community parade, teaching fire prevention and life safety to their peers or in local elementary schools, or holding a fundraiser, such as a car wash, for your department. Learn more by visiting the National Junior Firefighter Program web site at www.nvfc.org/juniors.

Any volunteer program that utilizes volunteers in a non-emergency capacity, such as junior firefighter programs, Explorer posts, or auxiliaries, can register with Fire Corps and utilize Fire Corps tools, resources, and branding to solidify and enhance their efforts.



Senior Citizens

Senior citizens are generally considered adults over the age of 65. Often, this demographic is retired and no longer have children at home. Senior citizens' schedules can be much more conducive to volunteering, and they can be a great asset to your department. Senior citizens can help with many activities including fundraising, cleaning, bookkeeping, answering phones, or teaching fire prevention and life safety – especially to their peers. Many of these individuals possess a lifetime of learned skill sets that could benefit your department. Consider capitalizing on those skills to enhance existing activities or create new activities for your Fire Corps program.

Senior Corps' RSVP

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a national service initiative dating back to 1969. RSVP is part of the Senior Corps, a key component of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), and constitutes America's largest volunteer network for people 55 and over. Through RSVP, Senior Corps provides grants to qualified agencies and organizations to engage seniors in volunteer service. An office on aging or a similar office within the local government may coordinate RSVP opportunities in your community. An added benefit to recruiting volunteers through RSVP is the provision of accident, personal liability, and excess automobile insurance coverage for the volunteer by the RSVP sponsoring agency. More information about RSVP can be found at www.seniorcorps.gov.

Senior Centers

Many towns have either a senior center or a community center with a special division geared towards senior citizens. Leaders of these centers may be able to assist you in developing a plan for reaching out to this population, identifying tasks that would be appropriate for them, and possibly even helping to connect you with seniors in your area.

Skilled Retirees

Retired Teachers

Many states have associations for retired teachers, who can be a great resource if you need assistance in establishing or implementing a public education campaign in your community. Consider reaching out to the retired teachers association in your state to see if they can help connect you with prospective volunteers. Many state association web sites have a section devoted to posting local volunteer opportunities and many promote local community service among their members.

Additionally, these statewide or regional organizations often have newsletters, e-news, and message boards where they would be happy to announce a department's need for a retired teacher. These retirees may jump at the chance to visit local schools and help with teaching fire safety and prevention messages. A simple Internet search should help you locate your state's retired teachers association.

Retired Journalists

If your department is looking for someone to compose a newsletter, whether it's monthly, quarterly, or yearly, retired journalists can be an excellent connection. Similarly to teachers, this aging group may have all the necessary skills to perform the job. In addition to newsletters, retired journalists could prove very helpful with media relations and keeping the community informed through press releases about events. Those who have a photography background may be interested in attending your events to provide visual documentation.

Visit www.journalism.org for a list of journalism organizations. Use this list to find an organization that may work best for you and contact them to learn more about ways that you might be able to recruit some help.



People with Disabilities

People with disabilities may be one of the most untapped resources for volunteer recruitment. There are many organizations with a focus on promoting the involvement of people with disabilities as volunteers, including the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#), [ServiceLeader.org](#), the [National Disability Institute](#), and more. Visit these web sites for tips on reaching out to and engaging volunteers with disabilities. In addition, local organizations may be help you to reach out to this audience, including local schools that work specifically with disabled populations, assisted living centers, vocational rehabilitation agencies, or various disability service groups.



General Public

Are you frustrated by your efforts to recruit volunteers through placing ads in the local newspaper, hanging flyers in public venues, or posting your needs on the marquee? While the general public is the focus of many volunteer recruitment efforts, there are more unique ways that you can generate interest for your organization. Below are some examples of successful ways to reach the general public.

Post available positions online

Whether the members of your department are tech savvy or not, it is highly likely that prospective volunteers in your community are on the Internet quite often. If they decide they want to volunteer but are not sure where, it is likely that volunteer web sites may be one of their first stops in the quest to find a place they belong. Two examples of popular web sites for volunteerism are www.1-800-volunteer.org and www.volunteermatch.org.

Very few people will ever volunteer their time unless they are aware that you have a need for their help. Due to the technology boom, many people are more comfortable obtaining information online than they are stopping by your department to talk to someone. Use this trend to your advantage by advertising for volunteers in general or provide specific titles for volunteer positions that require certain skills. Review the [Fire Corps Resource Guide](#) for examples of Fire Corps volunteer titles and position descriptions.

State Government

Since 9/11, government officials have been working hard to make community involvement a priority. As a result, many governors or other state officials have initiated volunteerism web sites. Most of these leaders also understand the strain that is placed on fire and emergency service departments and the need for help, so they may be even more willing to list your department's current volunteer needs. To find out if your state has such a site, you can do an online search or browse your state government's web site.



Keep in mind that these volunteer sites are often considered a special initiative and may have their own name. For example, Massachusetts' state program is called "Connect and Serve." Examples of state volunteer sites include the following:

California:

www.californiavolunteers.org

Florida:

www.volunteerflorida.com

Utah:

<http://justforyouth.utah.gov/social.htm>

Virginia:

www.vaservice.org

Massachusetts:

<http://volunteer.united-e-way.org/mass-service/volunteer/>

Corporate Recruitment

One of the newest benefit trends for corporations is to include paid time off for volunteering. Corporations seem even more interested in having employees involved with volunteer work that utilizes the skills that they need on the job. For example, Microsoft employees are encouraged to offer computer expertise to organizations in need. Such a relationship benefits both sides as the employees enhance their skills and build goodwill toward their employer, while the organization hosting the volunteer receives expert assistance at no cost.

Additionally, many of these companies match dollar for dollar any amount that an employee donates to a non-profit organization, while others may make a monetary donation to organizations supported by their employees through volunteerism. The following large corporations are just a few examples of those that offer special benefits to their employees in terms of volunteering time and making donations.

Microsoft

One of many corporations to embrace the idea of social responsibility, Microsoft encourages its employees to get involved in their communities and makes it easy for employees to volunteer their time. In many locations, Microsoft provides three to five days of paid volunteer leave each year for full-time employees.

In addition, Microsoft participates in a charitable matching benefit – which matches employee donations up to \$12,000 every year through gifts of money, stock, and Microsoft products. When employees volunteer their time in the community, Microsoft also donates \$17 per hour to the eligible organizations they serve. To post volunteer positions for Microsoft employees, visit Idealist.org. Visit the Microsoft web site to learn more about their employee giving programs.

Hewlett-Packard

Like Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard (HP) also supports global citizenship among its employees, providing staff with paid time off to volunteer. Typically, the company may allow up to four hours off per month for this purpose and prefers that employees volunteer in positions that compliment their professional skills in order to bring the most benefit to both organizations. In addition to paid volunteer time, HP supports organizations in which their employees are involved, either through gift-matching, product donations, or grant programs. Visit the [HP](#) web site to learn more.

Advanced Micro Devices

An essential element of Advanced Micro Device's (AMD) approach to community involvement is employee volunteerism. AMD encourages its employees to volunteer and supports their efforts in a variety of ways – by coordinating company-sponsored volunteer events, connecting employees with volunteer opportunities in their local communities, and matching employees' charitable gifts. In 2007, AMD employees donated more than 25,000 hours of volunteer time and more than \$600,000 through the AMD Employee Giving Program to strengthen communities. Visit the [AMD](#) web site to learn more.

Symantec Corporation

Symantec Corporation fully supports employee engagement in the community, with the belief that the communities where Symantec offices are located should be healthier and more vibrant because of their presence. Since its employees are best positioned to understand the needs of their own communities, Symantec organizes volunteer-led community relations committees at each of their major locations worldwide. These volunteer committees make grant recommendations, organize volunteer events for employees, and provide input on the issues most affecting community members' quality of life.

Symantec's Dollars for Doers Program encourages and rewards sustained volunteerism by making a monetary contribution to organizations where employees volunteer their time. Symantec will make a \$15 donation for every hour of volunteer service that an employee contributes (with a minimum of five hours at an organization). In addition, their Employee Matching Gift Program matches employee donations to eligible charities dollar for dollar. The Dollars for Doers and Matching Gift programs share a combined maximum cash donation of \$1,000 per employee per calendar year. To learn more, visit the [Symantec](#) web site. If you would like to suggest a volunteer opportunity through your Fire Corps program, send an email to community_relations@symantec.com.

Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo is another company that supports social responsibility through volunteerism. In 2008, Wells Fargo employees donated 14 million volunteer hours in all 50 states. In addition, 20 Wells Fargo team members volunteered a combined total of 43 months with the nonprofit of their choice through one of the nation's few fully paid sabbatical programs for community service. Wells Fargo also provides financial support to organizations where their employees volunteer through their Volunteer Service Award program. Visit the [Wells Fargo](#) web site to learn more.

No matter what age group or demographic you choose to target in your recruitment campaign, remember that the best recruitment agent you have is a satisfied volunteer. Volunteers who share their positive experiences with others play an important role in recruiting others. Some studies show that more than 25 percent of volunteers learned about the opportunity from a relative or friend involved in the activity. The second half of this *Guide* focuses on how to ensure your volunteers are satisfied so that they choose to continue volunteering for your organization.

RETENTION

While recruiting volunteers is a necessary component of any volunteer program, it is only half the challenge. The retention of your volunteers is critical to your program's ongoing success.

According to Campaign Consultation, Inc., there are several volunteer retention principles that can be implemented to strengthen your volunteer program and encourage volunteers to stay. These principles include:

- > Volunteers stay if their tasks and procedures are clear.
- > Volunteers stay if they feel welcome and appreciated.
- > Volunteers stay if they bond to someone within the organization.
- > Volunteers stay if they receive feedback that connects their job to program success.
- > Volunteers stay if they have a voice in the organization.
- > Volunteers are motivated by opportunities to learn new skills.

- > Volunteers are motivated by opportunities to “change the world.”⁸

Volunteer retention may be directly affected by how your volunteers were recruited, how fairly they are supervised, and how effectively they are rewarded for their service. Below are several ways you can address these principles within your own organization to encourage your volunteers to stay, making your Fire Corps team both successful and strong.



⁸ Corporation for National and Community Service, “Resource Center: Tools and training for volunteer and service programs,” 1 July 2009, www.nationalserviceresources.org/node/17598



Organization

While it can be easy to dismiss, a strong sense of organization and structure can drastically effect a person's decision to continue volunteering. People want to donate their time where they feel it is valued and best utilized. Here are tips to make your department a hospitable environment for volunteers:

- > Clearly define the volunteers' roles and tasks.
- > Set boundaries.
- > Plan ahead and have everything ready for the volunteer when they arrive.
- > Provide advance notice for meetings and events.
- > Start on time.
- > Establish a chain of command.
- > Develop a notification system should an event be cancelled at the last minute.
- > Maintain frequent contact with your volunteers; let them know they are not alone.

By following these simple steps, you will ensure that your volunteers are clear on their roles and responsibilities while also making sure that they feel as though they are an important part of your team. Planning ahead and being prepared for your volunteers shows them that they are integral to the success of your organization and are valued and welcomed.

Mentors

As previously stated, volunteers are likely to stay if they bond with someone within the organization. One way to facilitate this bond is to assign a mentor to each of your volunteers. The mentor should be someone that the volunteers can trust and whom they are comfortable approaching with questions. Teen volunteers, for example, may benefit most from a young department member of the same gender. Consider the volunteer's personality traits and try to match them with someone from your department who is similar so they will have an easier time establishing a good rapport.

The mentor may also be determined based on a volunteer's area of interest. For example, if you have a volunteer that is interested in public education, encourage your public educator, or the person most experienced in this area, to teach the volunteer the necessary skill sets to perform the activities. If a volunteer will be spending the majority of the time on a particular activity, it is logical that the mentor would be involved with that same activity as well.



Training

Working on the principle that volunteers are motivated by opportunities to learn new skills, training is a great way to ensure retention of your Fire Corps volunteers. In fact, your department may already have some of this training in place for first responders, and offering this same training to your Fire Corps volunteers could provide great motivation to stay while also making them feel like part of the team. In addition, you may consider offering classes just for Fire Corps members that will allow them to increase their general knowledge of the fire service or specific tasks that they may undertake as part of your Fire Corps team.



Basic Training

Fire Corps members may benefit from very basic training which can increase their knowledge and feelings of competency, making them more willing to participate. Basic CPR and first aid training is a great place to start. Your department probably already offers this training to your first responders so making it available to your Fire Corps volunteers may be as simple as inviting them to attend. Consider other basic skills that may be of interest to volunteers. For example, a short session on proper fire extinguisher use could be a morale booster for Fire Corps members. If possible, allow members to practice using a small extinguisher.

Specialized Training

Consider offering training to Fire Corps members that will benefit your department as well, such as smoke alarm installation, effective delivery methods for public education, fire prevention and safety guidelines, or even incident command systems. Such training will allow Fire Corps members to handle tasks that might otherwise go undone (installing smoke alarms for the elderly or conducting fire prevention education in local schools), fill in when department members do not have sufficient time (lead fire station tours), and add manpower to events (providing canteen services at a lengthy emergency call). In these roles, Fire Corps members do not have to take over control of projects, but can act as a supplement to forces within your department that are already stretched thin.

Flexible Schedules

If possible, allow your volunteers the freedom to choose when they donate their time. By setting a certain day and time that you want volunteers to help, you may isolate some members who have a conflicting schedule. For stay-at-home parents, for example, volunteering on weekdays during school hours may be best, while those in the workforce may only have time available to volunteer in the evenings or on weekends. If supervision is an issue with flexible scheduling, have volunteers decide as a group which times are most convenient for the majority. If your department's doors are typically locked except for meetings and calls, consider whether any tasks that you need done could be accomplished offsite, such as web site development or fundraising.

Family-Orientation

On occasion, volunteers may not donate as much time as your department would like simply because they do not want to sacrifice time with their families. However, if your department can identify projects that can be tackled by volunteers of a large age range, families may volunteer together, increasing their likelihood to continue volunteering. This result can be a huge benefit for your department that leads not only to more hours volunteered, but more volunteers in general. The fol-



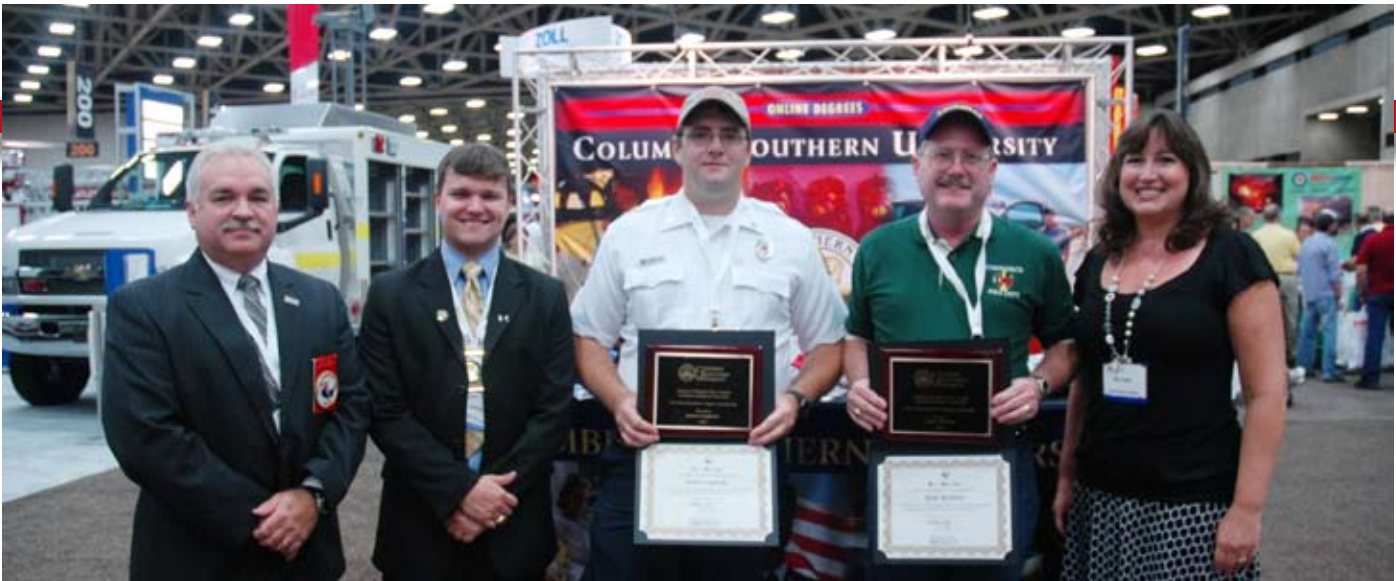
lowing are just a few examples of activities that entire families (depending on ages) may be able to participate in together:

- > Fundraisers
- > Cleaning the station
- > Cleaning apparatus or equipment
- > Distributing fire safety information at local events
- > Providing support at special events, such as community parades or a department open house

Transportation Assistance

Depending on the composition of your volunteers, transportation assistance may increase the amount of volunteers and the number of hours that they donate. Youth, for example, may not have a personal mode of transportation. If they are relying on public transportation or on their parents to take them to and from your station, they may be at the mercy of the others' schedules, which could reduce the number of days or hours that they can help. In the case of volunteers with disabilities, they may also be forced to rely on outside transportation. While this inconvenience may not deter them from volunteering at first, over time, arranging a ride may become too much of a hassle or an imposition.

If your department can provide transportation to and from schools, senior centers, or other locations within the community when necessary, volunteering may become much more appealing. While this will require a small time commitment on behalf of your organization, you will gain countless volunteer hours and expertise in return, while also letting your volunteers know that you appreciate them. Check with your legal counsel prior to offering transportation services to ensure the driver and department are protected from any liability issues that may arise.



Recognition and Rewards

Recognition does not need to be time-consuming or expensive to be meaningful. You should acknowledge your Fire Corps members regularly for their service through sincere expressions of gratitude. Simple ways to accomplish this include:

- > Verbal expressions of thanks
- > Letters of commendation
- > Certificates of appreciation signed by local elected officials
- > Fire Corps member of the month awards
- > Fire Corps member of the year awards
- > Personal notes
- > Posted photos of members “on the job”
- > Letters to the member’s employer
- > Gift certificates donated by local businesses
- > Highlighting members on your department’s web site
- > Working with your local media to publicly highlight member contributions
- > Regular award and recognition banquets/events
- > Providing pins, plaques, or other tokens of appreciation to acknowledge a certain number of total hours volunteered

In addition to internal methods of recognizing your volunteers, there are many national opportunities to let your volunteers know that they are valued and appreciated, including opportunities provided through the national Fire Corps office, such as the [Fire Corps Award of Excellence](#).

National Volunteer Week

National Volunteer Week was established through executive order by President Nixon in 1974. Every President since then has signed a proclamation recognizing National Volunteer Week as an annual celebration of volunteerism. Many states, localities, and agencies schedule recognition events to coincide with National Volunteer Week, which typically occurs in April. For information on National Volunteer Week, including free downloadable resources and a list of upcoming dates, visit the Points of Light Foundation web site at

www.handsonnetwork.org/programs/more/nvw.

Use this week as an opportunity to let your volunteers know how important they are to your organization.

President’s Volunteer Service Award

The President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation (the Council) was established in 2003 to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making in our communities and encourage more people to serve. The Council created the President’s Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.

Recognizing and honoring volunteers sets a standard for service, encourages a sustained commitment to civic participation, and inspires others to make service a central part of their lives.

The President's Volunteer Service Award recognizes individuals, families, and groups that have achieved a certain standard – measured by the number of hours of service over a 12-month period or cumulative hours earned over the course of a lifetime. Depending on which award the volunteer is eligible for, they may receive:

- > An official President's Volunteer Service Award lapel pin
- > A personalized certificate of achievement
- > A congratulatory letter from the President of the United States
- > A letter from the President's Council on Service and Civic participation

Fire Corps is a certifying organization for the President's Volunteer Service Award and can assist you in nominating your volunteers for this distinguished award. For more information on the President's Volunteer Service Award, visit www.presidentialserviceawards.gov.

Fire Corps Award of Excellence

The Fire Corps Award of Excellence can serve as an excellent way to recognize your entire team's efforts. This award annually honors a Fire Corps program whose remarkable achievements in the fire and emergency services and the community exemplify outstanding performance. To be considered for the award, nominated programs must be registered with Fire Corps and must be part of or affiliated with a fire/EMS department. More information, such as dates and award criteria, can be found at www.firecorps.org/award.



Not all volunteers need awards or gifts to know that they are appreciated. A sincere thank you may suffice and may go a long way in letting that volunteer know that you value the time, commitment, and expertise they have contributed to your organization. No matter how you choose to recognize your volunteers, try to make feedback as specific and as personal as possible, spelling out what that person has accomplished or achieved. General volunteer recognition activities or events are well received; however, periodic, personal recognition may be more meaningful to your volunteers.

By being organized, providing appropriate training and support for your volunteers, and recognizing the contributions they make to your organization, you will foster happy and satisfied volunteers who will continue to contribute to your organization for months and years to come. Volunteers with positive experiences to share may also become a fantastic recruitment tool for your volunteer program, helping your department overcome both the recruitment and retention challenges faced by volunteer programs worldwide.



CONCLUSION

There are many methods to recruiting and retaining volunteers for your Fire Corps program. Understanding the demographics of your community and why people volunteer is the first step in developing a successful recruitment and retention campaign. Know who your target audience is and how they can contribute to your Fire Corps program. Understand what motivates them to volunteer and develop incentives and recognition based on these factors.

Keep in mind that what works for your department and program may not be what works for another department or program; however, there are several common principles to any retention and recruitment campaign. Universally, volunteers need to have a sense of achievement and accomplishment; therefore, you should provide them with opportunities in which they can succeed. Volunteers seeking personal growth will benefit from the opportunity to learn and make discoveries, and others will thrive by being made to feel that they are an important part of your team, while forming bonds with those they serve.

For tools and resources to assist in your retention and recruitment campaign, visit www.firecorps.org or call 888-FC-INFO1 (888-324-6361).



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