



# Are You Giving Volunteers Their Money's Worth?

> BY LESLIE SHIVERS

**T** Volunteers' contributions aren't monetary, but they're certainly valuable to any association. For many small organizations, the work of volunteers is all there is. Your volunteers' time is valuable to them, too. If the experience of volunteering is boring, unorganized or unproductive, fewer will be willing to sign up.

So how can you be sure that your volunteers are profiting from the experience? Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- How much time are volunteers likely to be willing to devote?
- Are there a variety of opportunities to fit different schedules and interests?
- What location? Is travel required?
- Do the rewards fit what potential volunteers are looking for?
- Are your volunteers satisfied with their experience?
- How can volunteer satisfaction be measured?
- Is each volunteer opportunity a potential win/win situation? Or is someone losing?

Figure out how your volunteers' passions, preferences and expectations

can fit your needs. People may volunteer to help a worthy cause, give back to their industry, network, gain new skills or experiences, get recognition or status, fulfill a leadership role, or advance their career.

Communication is key. Listen to your volunteers, and train your staff to do the same. Learn what volunteers are looking for, how they prefer to communicate, and how they expect to contribute—as active participant or passive adviser? Follow up to ask about their experiences, and make changes when practical to make their contribution more rewarding for both the volunteer and the organization.

## From the Other Side

Have you ever taken on a volunteer task or role, only to learn that the time needed or out-of-pocket costs were more than you expected?

You let your volunteers know what the opportunities and rewards are for their efforts, right? Be honest with them also about what the costs are, and do it before they've made any commitments. Let them know how much time it will take, what the out of pocket expenses might run,

whether a loss in business may be involved, etc. Try not to scare them, but be realistic.

What do you need to ask yourself before putting up your hand for a volunteer job? Try to consider those questions for your own volunteers.

## How to Improve the Volunteer Experience

- Give options for volunteering, including the type of work, the time commitment, and the location where the work needs to be done.
- Welcome volunteers and their ideas, even if you've heard the same ideas before.
- Steer volunteers into areas where their skills are needed, but keep in mind that they may not want the same work in their free time that they do every day for a living.
- Provide clear direction. Have someone available to answer questions.
- Hold an orientation, whether as a group or as an informal chat.
- Offer a vision of the goal, and let volunteers know why their contribution is important to reaching that goal.
- Thank your volunteers. Recognize them publicly.

## How to Attract Volunteers

Once you've evaluated your program and made changes to ensure a valuable volunteer experience, you've already done much to help you attract the people you need. Here are a few tips on how to recruit them.

- Ask current volunteers who they know who might be interested in getting involved. Ask them to follow up or give you contact information.
- If possible, talk to potential volunteers in person, and ASK. You'll get a better response rate than by relying on e-mail or a broadcast request.
- Invite potential volunteers to attend a few meetings and learn more about the organization and the opportunity before making a long-term commitment.
- Contact new members to offer opportunities for them to get involved. This will make your new members feel engaged and appreciated, and it offers a perfect opportunity to ask them why they joined and what they're looking for from their new membership.

### Communication is key.

Listen to your volunteers, and train your staff to do the same.

Volunteers like to feel that the time and talent they contribute are being used efficiently, for a worthwhile cause, and that their efforts are appreciated. By offering interesting opportunities in a format that fits different schedules and budgets, you'll make your volunteer program rewarding for all concerned. ■

BY LESLIE SHIVERS, AN ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONAL WITH 15 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS. CONTACT HER AT SHIVERS@LBTMAIL.COM.



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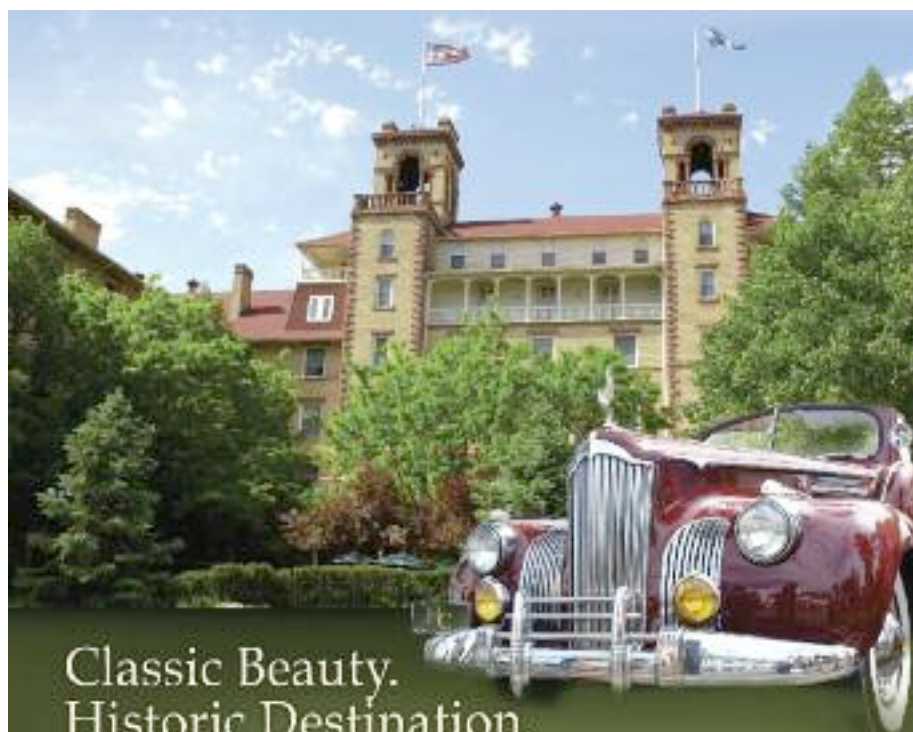
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