



Volunteer Management

Where to find them, how to engage them, and how to handle training and tracking

It doesn't matter how long your program has existed, there is always a need for new volunteers. Finding those companies and individuals who are willing to volunteer time, staff, and possibly resources can be challenging. Where do you begin? How do you find them? How do you get them, prepare them, and keep them committed?

Where do you begin?

Before you begin recruiting volunteers you need to be prepared for them. You must be able to answer their questions about your program, expectations, and benefits if you want them to join your efforts.

What are your mission and vision statements?

What are the program's long and short term goals?

What are the volunteer's responsibilities? How do you coordinate events? Is there one contact within the business or a contact for each department? What works best for that partner?

Is there paperwork involved; if so, how much? Is there a background check?

Be prepared to tell them how they benefit by volunteering.

How do you find new partners to recruit?

Recruitment is all about networking: who do you know, and who do they know? Start with the personal and professional contacts already in your network, as they are the most likely to support you. Then branch out by asking your current contacts for their contacts. Then ask yourself:

Who are the community movers and shakers?

Who are the largest employers?

Which careers are the fastest growing among employers in your area?

Which industries feature careers that are unique to your area?

What careers are students most interested in?

One of the most natural connections into the business community are business organizations such as the area Chamber of Commerce, workforce board, unions, and other professional and industry associations. These are not always easy to locate. Begin by talking with someone in that profession who is already in your partnership. Find out if there is a local association and who is leadership positions within that organization. Your chamber contacts may be helpful as well.

How do you get them and keep them committed?

You need to figure out what is important to each business, what motivates them. Once you know that, then you know how to approach them about your partnership.

Are they focused on education?

Are they concerned about future employees being prepared for the workplace?

Are they concerned about the youth in your community?

Be selective in recruiting. You are looking for volunteers who are professionals in their fields, and who will provide opportunities that are professional, educational, and whenever possible hands-on.

You also do not want to over-recruit in a particular aspect of an industry sector. For example, if you run a health careers program or an engineering/technology program, you don't want all your volunteers to be just one career field, such as just nurses or just civil engineers. Rather, for health care you want a mix of volunteers, such as nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists and radiology technicians; for engineering, you would like to have civil, electrical, mechanical, and aviation engineers, among others. This broad approach will give students a better sense of career options within a particular career pathway.

Retaining volunteers in your partnership means keeping them happy, and that is all about customer service. With that in mind, heed the following:

Volunteers who are not contacted regularly may conclude they are not needed.

Scheduled events that have low or no attendance will discourage volunteers.

Are there specific dates and times that work best for them? If so, use them solely.

Arrange each volunteer with the type of event which best suits their career field and schedule. You may want to provide an interest survey early on so the volunteer can designate to you the activities that are the most interested to him or her.

If they have a specific dress code or additional paperwork is required, let the students know about it when they're going on-site.

Students coming to events unprepared, late, or dressed inappropriately may discourage volunteers. You may want to create an activity sheet with questions that the students should ask the

host, and then have them turn in the sheet to you for grading. This will bring a greater sense of educational purpose to an off-site event.

Match the student, what they tell you about themselves, with the business's persona. If personalities clash, neither the volunteer nor the student will enjoy the event.

Make the volunteer commitment time-limited (for example, six months or a year) and ask volunteers to re-commit when their current term is coming to close.

If a volunteer requests a break from volunteering, ask when you should check back with them and contact them again at that time.

As the Administrator or teacher managing the partnership, it is your responsibility to address issues that may come up, such as the ones above. Volunteers may use any one of those discouragements to discontinue volunteering. To retain them, you must:

Empathize with their concerns.

Thank them for their involvement. (If possible, make sure they hear thanks directly from the students).

Encourage them.

Remind them of why they volunteered.

If there is an issue, assure them the next event will be trouble free and make sure it is.

Training your volunteers

Your volunteers are professionals in their own fields and they know more about their area of expertise than you do. Let them guide you as to what they need. Be flexible as to how you train volunteers. Some need only be supplied the paperwork with a brief explanation of what they need to do. Other volunteers will prefer a formal training session along with suggestions on how to set up the events, what to show students, what to tell them, etc. Depending on your actual knowledge in that career field you may suggest things that may be of interest to students. Nevertheless, there are several basics that always apply:

Stress that safety is the first priority.

Express trust in their judgment, they are the professionals in that field.

Suggest they include education and skill requirements.

Recommend the volunteer share their story with the students.

Probably the most important thing to remember is keep it simple. If there is too much for volunteers to remember, too much paperwork, or too many steps they will not continue with the partnership for long.

Treat them with courtesy and respect and they will be committed to your program. By applying these principles you too can strengthen and expand your business-education partnership.

This article was written by Brett Pawlowski and Hans Meeder of the National Center for College and Career Transitions. It is one in a series of articles and resources developed for the CTE Employer/Education Engagement Project, sponsored by the CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York.