

Tool #47: Volunteer Management Tips

There are many excellent sources on volunteer mobilization and management (see, for example, fastennetwork.org; churchvolunteercentral.com; Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church, Serving Together to Transform Lives* [Zondervan, 2001]; and Marlene Wilson, *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers* [Augsberg Publishing House, 1983]). Here are ten simple tips to get you started.

1. Know the mission of your ministry, and put it in writing, so volunteers can clearly understand it.
2. Write out "job descriptions" for the various volunteer positions. Include the desired mix of spiritual gifts, interests, resources, skills, and/or previous experiences that might best prepare a person for this service. State what training or orientation will be provided.
3. Clearly define the ministry's expectations (time commitment, role, responsibilities). The more specific you can be, the better: e.g., "Tutors work 90 minutes each week from 3:00-4:30 on either T, W, or Th from Sept. 15-Dec. 15." You may want to use a "Volunteer Covenant" that puts in writing the commitment the volunteer is making to the ministry.
4. Help prepare volunteers by describing profiles of typical program participants. In cross-cultural situations, provide training that helps volunteers understand the people they will be serving among and that challenges any unhealthy stereotypes they may have.
5. Try to connect new or potential volunteers with experienced volunteers from similar ministries in other churches to talk about their experiences and answer questions.
6. Appreciate your volunteers! There's an old saying: "What gets thanked gets done." Hold an annual Volunteer Appreciation Banquet, highlight volunteer teams and their work in the church's newsletter, send thank-you notes, give out certificates of achievement, etc.
7. Solicit volunteer input. You can design a questionnaire that asks volunteers for suggestions for improvement. Conduct "exit interviews" with volunteers at the end of a ministry season to solicit volunteers' suggestions and constructive criticisms.
8. Communicate regularly with your volunteers — never let them feel they have been forgotten! You may want to create a special publication / newsletter for your volunteers, with information and testimonies about "success stories" that can excite and inspire.
9. Provide spiritual support for volunteers: times for sharing and prayer among volunteers, training to help volunteers understand the theological foundation for their ministry, discipleship materials that help them connect their service with their faith, one-on-one mentoring with more established Christians in the ministry.
10. Celebrate! Give volunteers opportunities to testify about how God has worked through their ministry experiences, in worship services, Sunday School classes, or church publications. This not only affirms volunteers but strengthens the vision in the rest of the congregation.