



Fish's Guide to Recruiting & Organizing Volunteers

*"Hi, I'm Fish,
and I'm a Peace First Fellow!"*

When you know how to mobilize volunteers, you'll know how to turn a project into a movement. Bringing other people's time, energy, and talents to your project will make it infinitely more effective. Plus — it's more fun and fulfilling to be doing this work as a team, rather than alone.



1 Story of Success

I started a program at my high school that trained peer anti-bullying educators: we gave youth the power to change the culture of bullying themselves. When we started training students at other schools around the country, a lot of young people were interested — more than I had expected. I couldn't manage it all on my own; I needed help. (And that's OK - in fact, it's an important part of peacemaking).

So I reached out — not just to my friends, but to people I had never met, through Facebook and in-person outreach. I tried to inspire them with a message about what we did and why it mattered — and offered them specific volunteer opportunities they might be interested in. I ended up building a team of nearly 20 students who wanted to change the world, all working on different projects — writing curriculum, organizing teams of peer educators around the country, raising money.

It wasn't easy at first. Some volunteers quit. Others made promises and didn't deliver on them. But over time, we built a stronger organization in a few ways:

- We made sure volunteers were matched to roles that they loved and that were helpful to the project,
- We met with volunteers one on one as often as possible to let them know that they were appreciated, and
- We made sure that volunteers felt celebrated and connected to one another as part of a community.

Eventually, the volunteer structure organization was strong enough that when I stepped away from the project for a while, the volunteers kept it going!

2 Resources to Help You

Resource #1

50 Tips for Organizing Volunteers - Betsy Biederstedt
<http://www.signupgenius.com/nonprofit/volunteertips.cfm>

This resource has 50 quick ideas for how to recruit and celebrate volunteers. Even folks who have been recruiting volunteers for a long time will see ideas they haven't tried before!

Resource #2

Basics of Managing Volunteers - Volunteer Maine

http://www.volunteermaine.org/shared_media/publications/old/E245B0A4d01.pdf

A longer, in-depth resource for professionals that explores different aspects of building a volunteer program. In particular, it has great strategies for how to train and retain your volunteers.

3 Tips to Keep In Mind

Tip #1

Always have a clear ask for volunteers.

People are much more likely to agree to help out if you ask them to help out with a specific task (especially if it's a task they're excited about and skilled in!), rather than if you generally ask them to be a volunteer. When someone knows exactly what they're committing to, they're more likely to commit!

Tip #2

Leave no stone unturned.

Make sure to reach out to everyone who might be interested - even those you don't know very well. Even if they can't commit, everyone will feel honored to have been asked. For every person that says "sorry, I don't have time right now," there will be someone who is happy to help - who might contribute in ways you've never expected.

Tip #3

Make space for leadership.

Give your volunteers the opportunity to assume greater responsibility, invite them into planning discussions that involve their work, and, when it's appropriate, offer them freedom to try new things in their work. When volunteers feel like they have the opportunity to lead and make unique contributions, rather than just "following orders," they are more likely to stay involved!

4 Strategies

Strategy #1

Map Your Needs

Before you recruit volunteers, you'll need to have a clear (and exciting!) description of what you'd like them to do. Think about what your project needs in order to be able to succeed. What tasks could volunteers do that could help you achieve your goals?

- 1** Write down all of the things your project could do if you had more people to help you. Are there clear tasks that volunteers could help with?



- 2 Write down all of the things you are currently doing for your project. Could volunteers help with these things?
- 3 Think about how many volunteers you need to carry out your vision. What roles should they have?
- 4 Use these lists to write out descriptions for different roles that volunteers can play.

Strategy #2

Map Your Networks

Get in touch with everyone you know — and I mean EVERYONE. The person who sits behind you in class? They might be really interested in your issue, and be a fundraising or web design whiz to boot. Think about how to share this opportunity in communities you're a part of — like a place of worship or a Facebook group — where people can see it and get involved.

- 1 Make a list of everyone you know — classmates, family, facebook friends, phone contacts — and note anyone who has a special skill or might be particularly interested in helping.
- 2 Make a list of the organizations you're a part of — groups at your school or in your town, online communities — where you can share volunteer opportunities.
- 3 Think about the best way to contact each of these people. Phone? Email? In person?
- 4 Identify a small group of people who are REALLY supportive of your work, and ask if they'll share the opportunity with folks they know, too.

Strategy #3

Reach Out — & Make It Personal

The most effective way you can recruit volunteers is to have a one-on-one conversation with them, and show them that volunteering with you is a great way to put their values into action in a way that they'll enjoy.

- 1 Reach out to every single person and organization on your list, through the ways (email, phone, in-person) that you think would be most effective. Give people a clear understanding of what you're doing, why it matters, and how they can help.
- 2 If people are interested, meet them one-on-one if person — or by phone, if necessary.
- 3 Don't jump right into asking them to help. Take some time to understand why this issue matters to them, what they care about, and what they like to do.
- 4 Directly ask people to take on volunteer roles that are directly related to the things they care about and are good at. That's the best way to have happy, effective volunteers!

Strategy #4

Build Community & Accountability

You want volunteers to keep coming back and supporting your work, again and again and again — so you need to make sure that volunteers feel welcomed into your group and valued for their contributions. Volunteers who feel a personal commitment to the organization will be more helpful!

- 1 Set up regular meetings, even virtual ones, with your volunteers to check in on how they're doing (and make sure their tasks are clear!)
- 2 Bring your volunteers together for meetings and social events, so that everyone feels like a part of the team.
- 3 Make sure to celebrate volunteers — personally and publicly — when they do a great job.
- 4 Above all, be approachable, friendly, and thankful! Remember, volunteers are making a sacrifice for you by giving their time for free — so honor their contributions!

Conclusion

Alone, you are powerful. With ten volunteers, you're ten times more powerful. Each person brings unique skills, experience, and ideas to the table — and those insights can cover the gaps in your own thinking to make sure you're making the best change possible. Plus, when you give others opportunities to get involved and lead, you might be the spark that starts them on a peacemaking journey of their own!