

**T**oday's rapid economic and social changes present families and communities with a variety of challenges. Volunteers often come forward to help meet these challenges. Volunteers may be individuals or members of community organizations, economic development committees, churches, Extension councils or program committees, 4-H clubs and Extension homemaker units, and many others. People most often begin volunteering because someone asked them to help with a project or program. They often feel motivated to continue because they like what they do and feel their contribution is worthwhile.

Volunteerism can be defined as people reaching out with their individual talents, skills, and interests to help organizations or communities meet needs, solve problems, and assist others. The types of work volunteers do, and their motivations, are diverse. However, they seem to share a common reward, an internal satisfaction from helping others.

To recruit an individual to join your team, you have to tune in to his or her priority needs and interests. Find out what motivates a person by listening and by asking. For example, you can ask members of a group what they like to do or what they do well. Then see if you can match up the tasks that need doing with each person's needs.

Motivation is a complex topic. Internal motivation comes from within a person. Understanding and support-

# Motivating Yourself . . . And Your Volunteers

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ing the motivation of the individual volunteer is vital. Your own enthusiasm and commitment also are crucial to success.

Leaders and managers of volunteers can provide incentives and set the stage for people to become motivated.

Sources of motivation are usually divided into five categories: achievement, power, affiliation, recognition, and altruism.

Volunteers who are motivated by: **ACHIEVEMENT** — strive for success in accomplishments, a high level of involvement.

**POWER** — aim for having impact or influence in dealing with other people and/or project results.

**AFFILIATION** — like being with others, enjoying mutual friendship, belonging to a group.

**RECOGNITION** — desire recognition for work performed and are concerned about status and visibility in the group or community.

**ALTRUISM** — prefer doing things for the general good or public interest, working with other groups with shared values and goals.

The suggestions here are practical, common-sense ideas, but they are points that are often overlooked or forgotten. Using them requires some conscious effort on the part of the leader or manager of volunteer programs.

## Provide a reason to participate

Potential volunteers must perceive a reason for becoming involved. The reason must be important and beneficial to them, not just to the recruiter or persons already active in the group or cause. Individuals will participate in different activities and organizations to the extent that their personal needs and interests are

appealed to and met. Successful group leaders identify and tune into these individual needs and interests. A major motivating factor is the opportunity to participate in problem solving and decision-making, not just stuffing envelopes.

Recruitment is most often successful when you tell an individual in specific terms why his or her combination of knowledge, skills, interests, and experiences are vital to the success of the group, meeting, or leadership position. Success in recruitment usually requires a clear statement of the time frame and duties.

## Show recognition and appreciation

To be appreciated, to feel important and needed, is a prime motivator for all of us. Encouragement and recognition are essential to stimulating and maintaining active involvement in volunteer groups. Both leaders and members should use recognition to motivate one another.

Spontaneous, on-the-spot recognition is most effective. When you feel it,



say it. The longer you wait to pay a compliment, the harder it is and the less effective. The best compliments are specific statements about what the person has done and why it was important. Focus on actions and accomplishments, rather than inborn attributes or appearances. “Thank you for getting the flyers in the mail on time” is a more effective statement than “Thanks for being a great helper.”

### **Define your goals**

Goal setting can bring new life to your club or organization. People are motivated by goals, ideas, programs and results — not just membership. A group with a set of goals that are clearly understood and mutually accepted by its membership has the potential to “move mountains.” Many groups, however, lack a clear sense of direction. Much time and effort is spent in aimless discussion or socializing, with limited accomplishment.

Goal setting should be an interesting, enjoyable and motivating experience. It should be an annual exercise the officers and members look forward to. Leaders should try to attract potential volunteers who share the group’s goals and/or find ways to help everyone support the goals.

People are not as willing to do the legwork if they are not also involved in the planning. Members work hardest for those group goals they have helped set and which fit their personal interests. Goals that have been imposed on the group by its leadership or some outside influence are less actively supported. Group goals are meaningful only when developed and “owned” by the members themselves.

### **Identify objectives and expectations**

Many groups talk about broad overall goals without dealing with the practicalities of what the first step should be and what specific accomplishments might be achieved during

the club year. Both actions are needed to set the ground work for discovering members’ resources—including time commitments as well as skills or experiences.

Make your objectives simple, specific, and in line with your broad goals. Make them meaningful to the group. Be realistic. Your program of work should spell out well-defined tasks you can expect to accomplish during the coming year. Start where you are. The program should spell out how you expect to get from where you are now to where you would like to be.

Set priorities. Goals lose their meaning unless priorities are set. By setting priorities, a group concentrates its limited time and resources on the most important actions. Without priorities, a group tends to undertake too much. Members tend to go in many different directions rather than pulling together, and frustration soon results.

A contract or job description helps pinpoint specific roles a member will carry out — and eliminate the frustration that “everybody’s business is nobody’s business.”

### **Make your meetings count**

Few things are more discouraging than a poorly organized, rambling, unproductive meeting. Yet many meetings are exactly that. Effective meetings require more than powerful leaders and parliamentary procedure. Meetings can be made more stimulating and productive by having specifics planned in advance — time, place, agenda, purpose. Today’s volunteers don’t want to go to a meeting just to be going to a meeting.

It is helpful to get the agenda out at least a week in advance so people can think about the specific topics to be discussed. The purpose of the meeting should be clear. A bonding or group building activity builds trust and facilitates communication. At the start of the meeting, the presider should state the purpose of the meeting, ask

for additions to the agenda, and agree on how the group will accomplish their tasks. Be sure everyone has a chance to participate. Ask questions and summarize the discussion at appropriate times. Meetings should start — and end — on time.

### **Practice good time management**

Both leaders and members of a group can become more productive by following the basic principles of time management. Identifying problems with time use and developing strategies to solve them is time well spent. You can help volunteers learn to schedule their time and delegate some activities to avoid overload.

Volunteers also suffer from a “time crunch.” Many find it difficult to manage their multiple roles. Most volunteers work full-time. They often want short-term, task-oriented jobs with clear expectations, rather than a long-term commitment.

In volunteer organizations, delegating means making decisions about sharing the work. It does not mean that the person in charge just tells others what to do and when to do it. A long-term time line with short-term check points is helpful on major projects.

### **Say what you think**

The way we express ourselves can either “turn people on” or “turn them off.” It can either gain their support or discourage their participation. Speak clearly, positively, enthusiastically — and briefly. Avoid jargon that others might not understand.

People are motivated through one-to-one, face-to-face contact. Most people get involved in volunteer work because a friend, relative, business associate or neighbor asked them to. Inactive persons frequently have never been invited to participate.

Get out and talk with people. With face-to-face communication, your personal commitment and enthusiasm will show through.

**And listen to others**

Each of us can become more effective in how we communicate by remembering that communication is a two-way process. It's not just "I speak; you listen." Much of the dissatisfaction people feel from volunteer work stems from a lack of communication. People want to be heard. People are motivated to achieve when they feel their ideas and suggestions are listened to and respected. A frequent cause of group apathy is the failure of others to really listen.

Officers, committee chairs, and group members should practice the techniques of active listening. It helps to listen for ideas and feelings, not just facts. Try open-ended, direct questions (What do you think about...?); they indicate you value the other person's opinions. Encourage and express interest in what others have to say. Be open-minded and receptive to feedback.

**Manage conflict creatively**

Disagreement and conflict can be destructive forces if not dealt with constructively. Open free-for-all can split a group. But, suppressing disagreement discourages new ideas and robs the group of needed vitality. It's good to have different views on a subject.

Everyone can learn ways to effectively handle conflict within a group. Don't let conflict turn into personal criticism; focus on the issue. Encourage negotiation and compromise.

Differences of opinion and conflict occur in any group, especially when people of different backgrounds and interests come together for group decision making and action. Differences of opinion are to be expected. Conflict can be valuable to a group. It can stimulate new thought, lead to more creative solutions, and keep a group alert to the various interests of its members. Conflict brings internal

dissension and dissatisfaction out in the open where it can be used in making the group more responsive to its members.

**Reduce the risks of participation**

There are hazards involved in group participation — being imposed on by others, feeling insecure, being criticized, taking responsibility for decisions, etc. Simple actions, such as thorough explanations, matching of people to jobs, and coaching or mentoring, can remove many of these hazards and thus encourage greater participation. If you must criticize, do so constructively and privately.

Provide both verbal and written information about time schedules, expectations, etc. Some volunteers are more responsive to hearing, others to written forms of communication.

**Follow group process techniques**

Most volunteer groups do not give enough attention to how they work together. Do you begin with a bonding activity? Although sometimes we feel it's important to "get right down to work," time is used more effectively when a group building activity is carried out at the beginning.

Some other important processes to think about are decision-making

**Your Personal Action Plan**

*Select one important idea in this fact sheet. Think about ways you can put this idea to work as you carry out your own volunteer activities or work with other volunteers.*

State the idea here:

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I will use this idea in these ways:

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I will gain these things from its use:

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I will evaluate the usefulness of the action by:

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methods — do you vote or do you try to achieve consensus? Is there some method used to encourage quiet members to express their views? Do you take time-outs if discussion becomes heated? And take breaks before everyone is overly tired of sitting?

### Handling burn-out

Many volunteer groups attempt more than they can accomplish. Their goals may be so broad and vague that they create frustration in volunteers, leading to rapid turnover. "Burnout" often occurs when people feel overwhelmed or can't see any accomplishment. Achievement — even on a small scale — leads to a feeling of success, a major factor in sustaining volunteer effort. Other temporary solutions mean little unless members feel they are

progressing toward an achievable goal. People like to learn, and to advance in levels of responsibility. Volunteer opportunities should include continued personal development and meaningful service.

Remember, volunteers are just that — volunteers. If a person wants to change tasks or committees or even "take a vacation," treat this in a positive way. It doesn't mean the group or its leaders have failed. Effective groups thrive on change and build on their own enthusiasm and success.

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