

Recruiting and Supporting Volunteer Youth Leaders

Volunteers for youth play an important role in the health of programming and in nurturing the faith of youth in the Church. However, as a staff person or ministry leader it is not uncommon to face burnout while trying to recruit volunteers year after year. Below are ideas, not only to get volunteers invested, but to make sure volunteers feel supported so that they'll want to return.

Volunteer Recruitment Preparation

Before searching for volunteers spend some time thinking about what you need. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the roles I need to fill to live out my programming for the year? *Think about how many teachers, meal providers, trip leaders, confirmation partners, game implementers, etc.*
- How many volunteers would be ideal for each of these roles? *Think about rotation schedules, partnering, and the ability to have backups to make sure things are covered in any situation. Take into consideration the Child Protection Policy at your church.*
- What qualities am I looking for in each of these roles? *Are you looking for someone comfortable teaching? Are you looking for people great at coming up with activities and games? Are you looking for someone capable of bringing visioning and strategy elements to the ministry? Be sure to think about diversity in volunteers – genders, outgoing/reserved personalities, life contexts, age range, etc.*

After doing your preparation you can now communicate your needs for volunteers more effectively. Thinking through your calendar year ahead of time will also keep you from having to search for volunteers multiple times a year. You can organize and schedule everyone ahead of programming to avoid your own burnout.

Recruiting Volunteers

This is a process that can be dreaded, especially in a context where people have been overworked and are overstretched. If being able to identify gifts and strengths in church members comes easily to you, do one-on-one conversations to invite people to volunteer. If you're stretched for how to stir up new energy in your congregation, try out the following process:

1. Identify people in your congregation who are well-connected and love talking to people. They do not necessarily need to be previously connected to the youth ministry, though at least identifying two or three youth would be helpful. Think about deacons, greeters, ushers, bulletin folders, front desk volunteers, etc.
2. Invite these people to be part of a team to help you identify potential volunteers for the youth ministry.
3. Gather the team and explain to them the needs the ministry has for volunteers in the year. Refer to the work you did during the preparation process above. Send them out with the goal of identifying potential volunteers, talking with the potential volunteers about why they would be a good fit for the youth

ministry role, inviting them to informational meeting, and collecting their phone number so they can be reminded about the meeting closer to the date.

4. Text the potential volunteers once or twice to remind them of the meeting. This method will help your meeting stand out during a time where there are several emails going out in the life of the church and while school starts back up.

There are several benefits to trying out this process for volunteer recruitment.

- You spread the task out among multiple people and it the process doesn't just rely on yourself.
- You have other people beside a staff person recruiting volunteers. It can seem to be a more genuine ask or people may just respond differently to another congregation member identifying them.
- Pointing them to an informational meeting will give you more of a platform than trying to pull someone aside after worship, an email, or a phone call to talk about the importance of the volunteer roles

Informational Meeting

The goal for an informational meeting is to bring excitement about the youth ministry and investment from the volunteers. As you plan your meeting consider:

1. Creating a slideshow or video from past youth experiences.
2. Getting youth, volunteers, parents, and staff to talk about the impact the youth program has on their faith and lives. Tell them how God is moving in this ministry.
3. Explaining your hopes and vision for the next year.
4. Think of creative ways to answer the question, "Why should people care enough to volunteer?"
5. Talk about the roles that need to be filled for the year.
6. Talk about the expectations and logistics.
7. Break the potential volunteers into smaller groups. Ask them to talk about their answers to the following questions:
 - What led you to attend this meeting today?
 - What hopes do you have for the youth ministry?
 - Where do you see yourself being able to plug in?
 - Why is youth ministry important to you?
8. Ask participants to share highlights of the conversations with the larger group. Having these conversations will not only invite people to think about how they could volunteer, but it also allows them to hear the excitement and commitment of other people. During a time where people are vulnerable to burnout or just hesitant to make a commitment, energy can be gained through the immediate realization that the investment in the ministry is shared.
9. Make sure there is a way for the volunteers to commit to roles. You could go ahead and do it at the meeting (have them check off the roles they're interested in on a sheet or mark their availability in a calendar of events, etc.). If you feel like you want to give them more time to consider, let them know how you or the recruitment team members will get in touch with them later to ask them about their thoughts.

Supporting Volunteers

Now that you have your volunteers set up for the year it is important to make sure that you are intentional about supporting them. It's easy to get caught up in the chaos of programming, but there are a few ways to get ahead of the common problem of volunteer burnout.

- *Take the time to train your volunteers.* Set them up for success by giving them insights on things like using inclusive language, bringing in quiet youth to the conversations, or what to do with hard theology questions. Make sure they have all their teaching materials or know how to get them. Have a conversation about expectations and the Child Protection Policy.

- *Having regular meetings with your volunteers.* Make sure to have a clear purpose to the meetings. Is the purpose to bounce ideas off each other? Go over lesson plans? Get feedback on how things are going? This will give a set time for you to be able to check in on how things are going, an opportunity to change strategies as needed, and for them to feel part of a team. Only have the volunteers who need to be a part of that conversation come. One of the most precious resources from volunteers is their time, so instead of trying to have a longer meeting covering multiple roles and purposes, set up multiple shorter so those attending are spending their time on things that involve them.
- *Have a clear communication system set up.* Make sure your volunteers get reminders and know what form those reminders will come in. Make sure volunteers know who to contact and when if they have issues, concerns, or need to ask questions (ex: Mary will be available through email to answer your questions Sunday through Thursday. Friday and Saturday are her Sabbath days. Otherwise, see if another volunteer can help you by looking up their information on the youth leader contact sheet).
- *Involve them in the ministry evaluation process.* Give them a chance to talk about what worked and what didn't work. Get their feedback and ideas for the following years.
- *Celebrate them!* Make sure there is a way to acknowledge their work – even the small things. Give them a small gift of appreciation at the end of the year. Get the youth to write thank you notes. Host a dinner just for them. Send prayers of thanksgiving to them throughout the year. Recognize them in worship or in the church newsletter.

Coming up with a system to support your volunteers and making sure they are heard will help the volunteer retention rate year-to-year. The best recruitment tool is volunteers telling other congregation members about their meaningful experiences with the youth ministry!

