

Community Composting Volunteer Engagement & Retention

Adapted from Vermont Community Garden Network and “What do Your Volunteers Want? 10 Ways to Make Them Happy,” by Joanne Fritz

Have you ever volunteered before? Picture your least favorite volunteering memory. What was it about the experience that didn't work for you? What would you have changed or wanted more of? Now, picture your most favorite volunteering memory. What was it about the experience that worked so well for you? What kept you coming back?

This exercise is intended to put you in the shoes of your volunteers. While different people look for different types of volunteer experiences, there are some key elements that tend to be universal in making a volunteer experience memorable (in a good way) and that will make your volunteers want to stay involved.

What Do Your Volunteers Want?

1) They want you to be prepared for them.

- Provide what's needed: the right tools for the job, instructions, visual guides, etc.
- Prepare a job description: include what they will be doing, what to bring, how to dress, how long the job will take, etc.

2) They want to feel welcomed.

- Foster a warm, friendly, hospitable environment.
- Get to know your volunteers and give them a chance to get to know each other by sharing something about themselves.

3) They want good training.

- Hold an on-site orientation for volunteers. Make it fun and interesting so that people remember things (e.g. scavenger hunt).
- Provide clear expectations on what the job entails as well as the end-result.
- Offer support. Be available for questions. Pair experienced and inexperienced volunteers.
- Have educational tools and instructional signage available on-site.

4) They want to do interesting work.

- Many volunteers are looking for a meaningful experience. Explain the impact of their work.
- Match volunteers with jobs they'll do well and enjoy.

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- Keep it fun by rotating jobs, playing games, allowing people to work together, if desired.
- Combine work with the opportunity to learn something new.
- Allow long-time volunteers the opportunity to try new things or expand into leadership.

5) They want to know the commitment involved.

- Offer a variety of opportunities with different time commitments--project-oriented vs. ongoing, weekly vs. monthly, weekday vs. weekend, etc.
- Consider offering opportunities that fit into people's existing lifestyles and schedules. For example, family-oriented work days on weekends or after school hours.

6) They want to be appreciated.

- Recognize your volunteers in-person and publicly.
- Personalize your thank yous when possible and appropriate.

7) They want you to communicate with them well and often.

- Keep up a regular connection with your volunteers, communicating such things as announcements, thank yous, progress, opportunities, expectations, feedback, etc.
- Make sure there is a simple way for volunteers to communicate with project leadership and with each other.
- Find ways of communicating that are most useful for your unique group of volunteers (e.g. phone, email, bulletin board, meeting, social media, newsletter).

8) They want to be socially connected.

- Offer social work opportunities by pairing volunteers and scheduling group work parties.
- Consider how to make volunteer opportunities more than just work. For example, combine work days with social potlucks or other community events.

This resource was produced with funding from a grant by the USDA Rural Utilities Service.