Because I Said So

Ten Tips for Finding Volunteers and Keeping Them Happy

Featuring

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Tip #1
Throw a Party

What To Do
- Host a volunteer orientation party (or two or three)
- Email everyone on your list
- Explain volunteer opportunities

Bonus Points
- Educate at the same time
- Schedule around the holidays
- Tie to a new program
Tip #1  Throw a Party

How It Worked for Us

- Beginning of a major collections inventory project
- 2 Orientation Sessions
- Record-breaking response
- Highlight collections-focus
Tip #2
Give them a project

What To Do
- What projects do you want them to work on?
- Develop training materials before they start
- Educate on why you need something done

Bonus Points
- Match volunteer with projects
- Team based?

Image courtesy of the Stearns History Museum.
Tip #2

Give them a project

How it worked for us

● Projects
  ○ Collections, oral histories

● Skills
  ○ What are they handy at
  ○ Found volunteers or student-workers with those skills

● Personality

Image courtesy of the University Archives at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Students working on typewriters at Mankato State College, 1962-01-22
https://arch.lib.mnsu.edu/islandora/object/MSUrepository%3A146651
What To Do
- Reach out to unexpected sources for new volunteers and interns
- Schools and universities in the area? Special interest groups?

Bonus Points
- Be open to new, unique and unusual partnerships
- Be ready to convince the board

Tip #3
Be creative with your recruitment network
How It Worked for Us
- On-going St. Thomas University partnership, which keeps growing and evolving
  - Internship candidates
  - Projects using our collection

How It Didn’t Work for Us
- MCAD opportunity
  - May find a photographer?
- Sent cold emails

Tip #3
Be creative with your recruitment network
What To Do

- Local colleges and universities
- Off-campus Community Service opportunities
- Develop training

Bonus Points

- Can’t hurt to ask
- Level of interest will depend on the student
- Pay your interns!
Tip #4  Hire student workers and interns

What To Do
● Internships
  ○ Provide academic credit (120 hours)
  ○ Specific training program

Bonus Points
● Teach new skills
● Prepare them for future careers

Image courtesy of the Stearns History Museum.
Tip #4  Hire student workers and interns

How it worked for us
- Had a great relationship with local colleges while at museum
- Accomplished projects while developing career skills
  - At least four went onto museum careers
- Data entry, scanning, ingest help University Archives complete our tasks!

Image courtesy of the Stearns History Museum.
Tip #5

What To Do
- Be up front and firm about roles and boundaries
- Have clear expectations and repeat them often
- Have a clear, unchanging schedule

Bonus Points
- Stick to your guns
- Take time to explain “why the no”

Be crystal clear
How it worked for us

- Helped with our preparation
- Knew what to expect (at least in terms of who was coming)
- They knew what they could and couldn’t do

Tip #5  Be crystal clear
Tip #6
Be your (happy, engaged, passionate) self

What To Do
● Demonstrate how you do techniques or processes
  ○ Encourage questions
● Engage them regularly

Bonus Points
● Be open and receptive (passionate)
● Read body language

Image courtesy of the Stearns History Museum.
Tip #6

Be your (happy, engaged, passionate) self

How it worked for us

● Training went easier and volunteers were more engaged as well
● Easier to correct issues up front
● Improve training guides
● Improved my process!
Tip #7  Encourage agency

**What To Do**
- Have a project interns can own from start to finish
- Have tasks volunteers can do independently

**Bonus Points**
- Enjoy watching your volunteers grow in their role and love what they do with you
Tip #7

Encourage agency

How it worked for us

- Interest and buy in
- Independent research led to them teaching me things!
Tip #8  Get to know ‘em

**What To Do**
- Learn about who your volunteers/student workers are and what’s going on in life
- What they know might surprise you

**Bonus Points**
- What’s going in life affects their performance
- Encourages them to return

Image courtesy of the Carver County Historical Society.
Tip #8 Get to know ‘em

How it works for us

● Higher student-worker retention
● Provide direction for what they might need
  ○ College campus and away from home
  ○ Prod them to seek help
● Support for your volunteers

Image courtesy of the University Archives at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Student worker helping a student go through maps, Memorial Library at Mankato State University. 
https://arch.lib.mnsu.edu/islandora/object/MSUrepository%3A7263
Tip #9

Let ‘em have fun

What To Do

● **Think big picture:** Idle chit chat isn’t necessarily wasted time
● If your site is their social outlet, volunteers will always come back

Bonus Points

● In the immortal words of Harvey Danger: “If you’re bored then you’re boring”
Tip #9  Let ‘em have fun

How it worked for us

- Distinguish: Community volunteers vs. educational volunteers
- Remember: 5 items cataloged (or 5 photos digitized, or 5 records created) is 5 more than yesterday
Tip #10
Tell them “thank you”

What To Do
● Say “thanks”
● Recognition
● Food’s always good (at least for college students)

Bonus Points
● Say “thank you” often
● Come up with an award program

Image courtesy of the University Archives at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Two volunteers pour coffee for gentleman at MSC, 1960-02-24. https://arch.lib.mnsu.edu/islandora/object/MSUrepository%3A64356
How it worked for us

- Who doesn’t like a party?
- Often appreciative of the recognition and know that they are providing a service to you and their community

Tip #10
Tell them “thank you”
Tell us thank you!

(food and awards also works for us)