

FEDERATION NEWS

Recruiting New Volunteers: Highlights from the Federation's Spring Workshops

It's amazing what you can get done with volunteers," said Kay Mitchell-Thomas at the start of the Federation's first spring workshop. As an example, she noted that volunteers had helped set up the room where the workshop was being held, had made the refreshments, and were going to share their stories throughout the day.

During the workshops, Thomas, director of the Murfreesboro Historical Association, and John Woodard, president of the Murfreesboro Historical Association (MHA), offered suggestions for recruiting and keeping new volunteers.

Both Thomas and Woodard know from their experience working with the MHA how crucial volunteers are. The Murfreesboro Historical Association has just one paid employee and almost 200 volunteers. With the help of these volunteers, the association offers festivals, guided tours, and other programs and also maintains a museum and more than a dozen historic properties.

Recruiting New Volunteers

Thomas and Woodard offered a variety of suggestions for recruiting new volunteers.

The Basics: Before you start recruiting volunteers, Thomas said, you need to know several things: why you want volunteers; what they will be doing; what type of people you are looking for; how you will select/screen potential volunteers; and how you will support them once they start volunteering for you.

Emphasize the benefits: To attract volunteers, show people the benefits of volunteering. Communicate both the importance of volunteers' contributions to your organization and the social, educational, and other benefits that volunteers will enjoy. For instance, you could emphasize that your volunteers will learn new skills, make new friends, and have an impact on the community.

The North Carolina Museum of History does a good job expressing the benefits that its volunteers will enjoy. In a press release seeking new volunteers, the museum says, "Discover the rewards of sharing North Carolina's rich history with others. As a volunteer

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docent at the N.C. Museum of History in Raleigh, you can meet people from around the world, work with other enthusiastic docents and learn more about our state. . . . Docents enjoy benefits such as field trips to historic sites, an annual luncheon and lectures by guest speakers."

Be flexible. Because people have many demands on their time, some people may not be able to help you during the work week. John Woodard suggested thinking of other ways that potential volunteers can help you. For instance, some MHA volunteers help at just one special event a year; others bake food at night for upcoming special events. Woodard described a local businessman who donated three lawnmowers to the association and who pays for the lawnmowers to be serviced or repaired.

Consider recruiting students. Local schools and colleges can also be a good source for volunteers. Thomas noted that the MHA has benefited from the work of high school seniors who are required to do volunteer work to graduate.

Some historic sites also create volunteer internships to attract undergraduate and graduate students. The N.C. Museum of History, for instance, offers several unpaid internships a year. These internships have specific job descriptions, job titles, and work requirements, and students are required to work 100 hours in a semester. The museum is willing to talk with students' professors to see if course credit can be assigned for the internship. More information about the museum's internship program can be found at <http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/vol/index.html>. In addition, Museum Ed's web site, www.museum-ed.org, offers

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information from other museums about their internship programs.

Be willing to take a risk. Thomas noted that one obstacle to recruiting new volunteers is a fear of approaching new people, the risk of being told no. As a result, many organizations tend to rely on the same people over and over, which leads to burn out—and to difficulties when those volunteers eventually leave. Organizations must constantly recruit new volunteers and must be willing to reach out to unfamiliar groups.

Consider some non-traditional volunteers. Woodard noted that MHA benefits from the work of people required by the courts to do community service. Woodard said that the community service workers are non-violent first offenders and do not have contact with the public. These “involuntary volunteers” are supervised by an association volunteer on weekends as they mow and maintain the lawns of the association’s historic properties. Anyone interested in having community service workers do similar work at their sites can contact their local court system to learn more.

Workshop participants offered more suggestions for non-traditional volunteers, such as approaching garden clubs to help maintain plantings and historic vegetable gardens and working with Scout groups or an Eagle Scout to complete a project.

Consider looking into low-cost options, such as hiring students through federal work-study programs. Contact your local college or university to see if they have a work-study program that is open to local non-profits. Duke University, for instance, allows local non-profits to participate in its federal work study program. Through this program, the Duke Homestead Education and History Corporation (a support group for a state historic site) is able to hire Duke students to work part-time at the site. The corporation pays the students each month and is reimbursed 75% of the cost each month.

Spreading the Word

Thomas noted that there are many ways to spread the word about your volunteer opportunities.

Print advertising Sending out a press release; posting an announcement on your Web site; posting a flyer at



The Murfreesboro Historical Association recruits a variety of volunteers, including students from local high schools and colleges. Kay Mitchell-Thomas noted one of the benefits of recruiting young volunteers: by capturing these volunteers’ interest when young, you may gain a life-long volunteer.

local libraries, schools, and community centers; displaying a flyer at your site; and including an article in your newsletter are common ways to seek out new volunteers.

Sponsoring a history class or speaking at meetings Some organizations also co-sponsor a history course or workshop at their site; these groups make a point of mentioning their volunteer opportunities during their classes. Other organizations contact local groups such as Rotary Clubs and Lions Clubs to offer to speak at an upcoming meeting; this gives history organizations a chance to tell their story and to seek new volunteers.

Taking part in community events. You may also want to consider taking part in a community festival or event. Historic Salisbury, for instance, takes part in several “Friday Night Out” events each year. These events are sponsored by the town of Salisbury and feature live music, shopping, children’s activities, and more. Historic Salisbury maintains a booth at some of these events and runs a slide show with pictures of historic buildings they have saved. The organization also offers a raffle to attract people to their table. When people stop to learn more, staff members talk to them about the society and about volunteer opportunities.

Word of mouth Old-fashioned word of mouth is also crucial to recruiting volunteers. Thomas encourages historic organizations to ask their own volunteers to help recruit new volunteers. Your volunteers could

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talk to their friends themselves or could recommend someone who might be interested.

The internet. It may be especially important to use the internet to attract younger volunteers. You may want to consider posting your volunteer opportunities on free sites such as www.volunteermatch.org, networkforgood.org, and <http://volunteer.united-e-way.org>.

Keys to Keeping Volunteers

Thomas offered a variety of important tips for keeping volunteers: make a volunteer feel welcome, appreciated, and useful, and make sure that volunteers have fun.

To help new volunteers feel welcome, be sure to introduce them to others. Thomas often asks a new volunteer to handle registration at a volunteer event—this ensures that the new volunteer meets everyone. Thomas also suggested using icebreaker activities at meetings to help people get to know each other better as well as having social activities before or after a meeting.

To help volunteers feel appreciated, be sure to thank them often and sincerely for their help. Thomas and workshop participants offered a variety of ways to thank volunteers, such as sending a written thank-you note; writing about them in newsletters; recognizing them during meetings; thanking them in person; having an appreciation luncheon; sending a press release to local media highlighting volunteers' work; giving them a Presidential Award (available from the Points of Light Foundation); giving them discounts to site merchandise; and giving gifts and certificates.

Thomas noted that even small gifts can be meaningful and can be as easy as pairing an inexpensive item with a card of thanks. More ideas for recognizing volunteers can be found through a search on the Internet. energizeinc.com and positivepromotions.com are just two sites with interesting ideas.

To help volunteers feel useful, it is crucial to make sure volunteers know how important they are. For instance, Thomas said that after a fundraiser, she'll call volunteers to tell them how much money the association made. She wants to be sure volunteers see the big picture and understand how important they are to keeping the organization going. Thomas also described a basic but important point. Don't ask a volunteer to help unless you have some-

“Thomas offered a variety of important tips for keeping volunteers: make a volunteer feel welcome, appreciated, and useful, and make sure that volunteers have fun.”

thing specific for that person to do; otherwise, that volunteer will feel like you are wasting his or her time.

To help volunteers have fun, be sure to match volunteers' interests and skills with the tasks you ask them to do. Thomas also suggested planning social events for volunteers. As Thomas noted, “Endless work will drive people away.”

For instance, one year Thomas and a group of volunteers needed to make 12,000 hand-made crafts to give away at MHA's annual Christmas tour. Thomas and the volunteers met once a week for a year to make the crafts, and after each meeting they went out to lunch together. “We became good friends,” Thomas said. What could have been a daunting challenge became a fun activity that everyone looked forward to.

For more information

There are a number of books and web sites available on recruiting and managing volunteers. Some of the publications include *Transforming Museum Volunteering: A Practical Guide for Engaging 21st Century Volunteers* (available from www.authorhouse.com) and *Establishing a Volunteer Program: A Case Study*, a technical leaflet from the American Association for State and Local History (www.aaslh.org/leaflets.htm).

In addition to the web sites mentioned previously, some useful web sites include Alliance for Nonprofit Management (www.allianceonline.org), The Resource Center (www.nationalserviceresources.org), and Management Library, www.managementhelp.org. More resources can be found on the Federation's web page at www.fnchs.org/fund/news.htm.

In addition, Kay Mitchell-Thomas is happy to talk with anyone to provide more information or to answer questions. You can call her at (252) 398-7702 or email her at heritage@murfreesboronc.org.

**Handouts from Spring 2009 “Recruiting New Volunteers” Workshop
Offered by the Federation of N.C. Historical Societies**

Useful Resources: Web Sites

Volunteering in America, <http://volunteerweek.org>

Volunteering in American offers ideas on recruiting, training, and recognizing volunteers.

Alliance for Nonprofit Management, www.allianceonline.org

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management offers articles on a variety of topics including volunteer management. You can find these articles by entering the word “volunteers” into the search box. One especially interesting resource is a list of articles related to recruiting and working with baby boomer volunteers.

Recruiting Volunteers Online, www.volunteermatch.org

Because so many people today depend on the internet for information, you may want to consider posting your volunteer opportunities on the Web. Tax-exempt non-profits are eligible to list their volunteer needs on the Volunteer Match Web site for free.

The Resource Center, www.nationalserviceresources.org

Sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Resource Center offers online tools and training resources to strengthen your volunteer or service program. The Resource Center contains online training tools, event calendars, and effective practices, as well as a catalogue of printed publications.

Management Library, <http://www.managementhelp.org/>

The Free Management Library offers extensive resources on volunteering.

Energize Inc., <http://www.energizeinc.com/>

This Web site is focused on leaders of volunteer programs and offers a variety of resources such as articles, lists of conferences, and a bookstore. Items available for purchase at the bookstore include books on volunteer recruitment, screening, retention; creating volunteer manuals; and more.

Museum Ed, www.museum-ed.org

Museum Ed is a Web site for museum and historic site educators that offers tools and resources provided by other educators. Useful resources include information about training docents and managing interns.

Publications

Transforming Museum Volunteering: A Practical Guide for Engaging 21st Century Volunteers, by Ellen Hirzy. Written for the American Association for Museum Volunteers, this book covers topics such as managing a volunteer program; recruiting, interviewing, and placing volunteers; volunteer training; supporting, retaining, and recognizing volunteers; evaluating effectiveness; legal and ethical issues; and more. Available from the publisher at www.authorhouse.com or (888) 519-5121.

The (Help!) I Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management, by Katherine Campbell and Susan Ellis. This book is available through interlibrary loan from the State

Library; its library registration number is GC 302.14 C188h. It is also available from Energize Inc. Bookstore at <http://www.energizeinc.com/store/1-139-E-1>.

Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs, by James C. Fisher. Available from the State Library through interlibrary loan; GC 361.37068 F5341. Also available through Amazon.com.

Establishing a Volunteer Program: A Case Study (1990), a technical leaflet available for purchase from the American Association for State and Local History at www.aaslh.org/leaflets.htm.

Other options for recruiting volunteers as well as part-time employees (at a low cost)

- Create **volunteer internships** for undergraduate and graduate students. The N.C. Museum of History, for instance, offers several unpaid internships a year. These internships have specific job descriptions, job titles, and work requirements; students are required to work 100 hours in a semester. The Museum is willing to talk with students' professors to see if course credit can be assigned for the internship. Students today are eager to gain experience, and having an internship with a job title on their resume can help them find employment in the future. More information about the museum's internship programs can be found at <http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/vol/index.html>. In addition, Museum Ed (www.museum-ed.org) offers information from other museums about their internship programs.

To advertise volunteer positions to college students, consider sending an email to the secretaries of the history departments at local universities and colleges and asking the secretaries to pass along this information to history students. Some colleges also have online databases of local volunteer or part-time job opportunities posted by their career centers; consider contacting the centers to see if your positions can be posted. You can also ask if the school has job fairs or volunteer days, when local nonprofits can come on campus to promote their opportunities. You can even arrange to visit the campus and offer a presentation to students. Duke Homestead, for instance, joined forces with two other Durham historic sites to offer a 30 minute presentation about their sites and their volunteer opportunities. The program was advertised by a small classified ad in the UNC college paper, where it ran for a week, and by fliers sent to the secretaries of the history, English, and communications department and to the career center. Approximately fifteen students attended the presentation.

- Contact your local college or university to see if they have a **work-study program** that is open to local non-profits. Duke University, for instance, allows local non-profits to participate in its federal work study program. Through this program, the Duke Homestead Education and History Corporation (a support group for a state historic site) is able to hire Duke students to work part-time at the site. The corporation pays the students each month and **is reimbursed 75% of the cost** each month. The work study program provides the money for the reimbursement. To advertise these part-time work opportunities, the Duke Homestead includes its positions in the Duke work-study program's list of jobs and also participates in the annual work-study fair held on the campus.