



Promising Practices for Engaging Job Seekers as Volunteers

Job seekers are one of the fastest growing new groups of volunteers. For job seekers, volunteering offers opportunities to keep skills current, build new skills, fill in gaps in resumes, obtain a current reference and gain self confidence. While many job seekers fit easily into regular volunteer opportunities, their time availability and motivation can be different enough to require adaptations by organizations to create a “win win” for both the organization and volunteer. Here are some promising practices contributed by volunteer resource managers and workforce preparation organizations from a year-long project of the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration in Central Minnesota.

1. To be ready to engage job seekers as volunteers, work with the organization’s staff to identify a wide range of volunteer positions and to develop a list of ideas for projects for volunteers that would be advantageous. Assess your readiness to engage job seekers as volunteers.
2. Expect that everyone in the organization might not be enthusiastic about involving job seekers as volunteers. Be prepared to present a case statement of the value the extra volunteer power will bring. If it fits, tie in how involving job seekers as volunteers fits with the organization mission to serve the community, while also increases resources to accomplish the mission.
3. Understand the varied motivations of job seekers for volunteering and the expectations of workforce centers, schools and organizations that refer job seekers for volunteering.
4. In designing how job seekers are involved as volunteers, build in strategies to address the main challenge of job seekers as volunteers at all steps of the process – their time availability may change suddenly if they find employment. Have some volunteer position and project descriptions that are time limited and do not require extensive training. Discuss the scenario of what happens when employment is gained in advance with both the volunteer and supervisory staff. Try to provide flexible options so that the volunteer can continue after finding employment, but do not expect this will always work out.
5. Develop recruitment messages that appeal to the motivation of job seekers for volunteering. Develop partnerships with workforce centers, schools and other organizations that support job seekers in finding employment.
6. When interviewing job seekers for volunteering, offer a formal interview to assist with gaining interview experience. Ask questions on their motivation for volunteering to better understand their expectations and assess if and how you can meet their expectations. If s/he is referred by a work preparation organization, find out their expectations, too.
7. The “win win” for the organization and volunteer happens when there is truly a good fit of the volunteer in the position. This starts with good, detailed position descriptions and partners who know who to refer and takes a careful match of the volunteer with the position or project.
8. Be ready to offer extra support to meet expectations of the volunteer or referring organization, and be prepared to address special situations that might develop with job seekers such as hopes for employment at your organization.
9. Be ready to provide recommendations on the work done and to refer the job seekers to the tools developed by MAVA on how to put the volunteer work on a resume and discuss in an interview.

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