

## Recruiting & managing volunteers

### 1 Why might I want to volunteer help for my neighborhood project?

**It's good manners.** It's insulting to live somewhere and just be told, "This is what's going to happen here." You're working where people live! So don't wait until design or implementation; tell them your ideas at the beginning.

#### Residents have good ideas!

No one knows a neighborhood like a neighbor. They can really help you brainstorm and make your ideas better. Ask them what they want to see.

**Buy-in = stability.** When people are involved in—or even just

informed about—a project from the get-go, they're more likely to feel a sense of ownership and support it as time goes on. That could mean giving it their time, their money, or just their vocal support.



### WHO WE SPOKE TO:

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### 2 What are some tasks volunteers do or responsibilities they have in local projects?

It's always person by person. **Ask people what they like to do and what they'd like to learn more about**, then make a list of your needs and try to make some matches.

#### Common volunteer roles in neighborhood projects include:

- Painting
- Planting
- Supervising children while they do those things!
- Passing out flyers
- Manning the sign-in table at events
- Making phone calls
- Introducing the project to their connections in churches, schools, or other organizations
- Building a website or managing a social media account
- Recruiting other volunteers

*Remember that people want to be asked to help! They'll come to meetings and just sit back unless you go up and ask them—then they'll usually jump at the chance. **People just want a personal invitation.***

### 3 Where should I look to find volunteers?

School and church leadership are good leads, as are **neighborhood associations**. If people are involved with those things, they already have an interest in their community. Developing a relationship with school leadership can also pave the way to recruiting student volunteers.

### 4 How do I know who will make a good volunteer?

I'll ask anybody! But if you hear people talking about community issues or see them at meetings, that's a good sign that they'll be receptive. And even if you don't get them to volunteer, always make sure the people in your neighborhood are aware of what you're doing. Regardless of whether they participate, they appreciate knowing what's going on. Plus, many do come out eventually—people like to join a bandwagon! I even like to talk to folks from other areas because they may still have good ideas, come to a meeting, or even move here. You just never know. Cast a wide net.

### 5 How can I prevent or manage conflicts?

Nothing you plan will be perfect, and some people will always criticize and find fault. **Just be diplomatic: say thank you for the suggestion, and you'll think about doing it next time.** If people get bossy with other volunteers, you can remind them gently that everything's okay; this is not that serious. Or you can reassign them: direct them to a task where they're not interacting so much with others. Say, "Let's move you over here. I think you'd be better at this."

Anything else?

**Always get volunteers' contact info!** Make sure all volunteers sign in at your events so you can say thank you and keep them in the loop.

## How do I keep my volunteers happy and engaged?

**Keep 'em posted.** This is the number one way—especially in a place where people have historically felt disenfranchised. When they know what's happening and feel they can express their opinion, that gains you credibility, respect, and trust.

**Don't make assumptions!** Outright ask them: they might know someone or be interested in something you might never have guessed.

**Espouse the benefits.** People want to know that what they're doing is making a difference. Explain that even things that might seem small (like picking up trash) are key steps toward the larger goal (beautifying the neighborhood). Make sure they understand how what they're doing helps the bigger picture, and that without them, your project would not succeed.

**Good old fashioned gratitude.** Always provide food, drinks, and the right tools for the job, and make sure people are comfortable. Thank-you letters, certificates, t-shirts, and volunteer picnics are other inexpensive but important gestures.

**Mark your milestones.** When you've reached a goal or passed an anniversary, celebrate it! Put it in writing in emails, on flyers, with posters... Make sure people know what all their work is adding up to, and let them share the success with you.

