

Are You Scaring Away Volunteers?

5 Recruitment Tips that Treat, Not Trick

Your organization is great, right? You serve a worthwhile cause and do many exciting things. So why don't more people want to volunteer with you? Halloween is a great time to ask: Are we scaring away potential volunteers?

Susan J. Ellis, president of Energize, Inc., the internationally-renowned volunteerism training and publishing firm, notes that there are many things organizations do or say that can "haunt" prospective recruits! According to Ellis, author of the best-selling *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*: "It's hardly surprising that people shy away from desperate pleas for unlimited help in unknown situations."

She offers these five simple recruitment tips to en-"treat" volunteers without "tricking" them:

- Don't just ask for "help" or "volunteers." This vague approach leaves everything up to the prospective volunteer's imagination¹ and YOU ought to be frightened at that! Design a different recruitment message for each specific assignment you need to fill-including an appealing job title. Give potential recruits enough information to be able to say "that's for me." Challenge people and they'll rise to the occasion.
- Specify up front how many hours a week or month a volunteer assignment requires-and for how long you hope the volunteer will remain in the position. Be honest! Then someone who applies to become a volunteer already knows what you expect. (Besides, you may surprise some people by being reasonable and flexible!)
- Be perceptive about what someone might fear about your work and address these things in your recruitment message. Is personal safety a concern? Note the well-lighted adjacent parking lot or the buddy system you use. Are there unknowns about how your facility looks? Add lots of photos showing bright spaces and smiling faces. Might there be some out-of-pocket costs? Explain your reimbursement policy.
- Talk about the training you give all newcomers, so that no one has to worry about not being skilled enough or unprepared. Assure prospects that they'll be supported while learning how to be a good volunteers and even after.
- Show that volunteering can be fun! It's ok to enjoy community service activities ... or the other participants ... or the experience itself. If people are going to

choose volunteering for you in their spare time, it ought to sound like something that wouldn't want to miss.

Editor's note: For more information about volunteer program development and management, visit the Energize Web site "For Leaders of Volunteers" at: energizeinc.com This free site offers more than 1000 pages of practical, up-to-date material.