

Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Retention Strategy

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

The heart and soul of volunteer driver programs!

The literature tells us that many people volunteer in response to a request from a friend, an advertisement in the newspaper, a message in the church bulletin, an announcement on the radio or TV, or a presentation at a meeting. Volunteer driver programs across the country use some or all of these and many other recruitment methods.

They are said to be hardest volunteers to recruit!

“Volunteering with children, puppies and ‘pretty’ causes is an easy recruiting process because who doesn’t love children and puppies? But, ask someone to drive, and in many cases the hackles come up.”

Recruiting someone to drive a passenger is not always simple. Prospective volunteer drivers are known to offer a variety of excuses for not volunteering: a reluctance to use their own car or to drive people they don’t know; concerns about the cost of gas; and fears related to liability (the possibility of a crash, cancellation of insurance, and increases in insurance premiums). These and other concerns must be addressed when recruiting volunteer drivers.

It also is said...“Once you’ve got them, you’ve got them!”

High volunteer retention rates appear to be related to activities that focus on the volunteer or what programs do, so their volunteers will have a good experience. Such activities include recognition, training and professional development, screening and matching. In other words, create a climate that welcomes and encourages volunteers. Also, programs that use volunteers to recruit other volunteers and enlist them as “spokespersons” appear to be better able to retain volunteers.

Thousands of volunteers are recruited to drive passengers and in many instances they drive them in their own vehicles. What recruitment and retention challenges do volunteer driver programs face? What recruitment methods, venues and tag lines do they use? Why do volunteer drivers continue to volunteer? These are some of the questions addressed in this Fact Sheet.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

This fact sheet was adapted from Beverly Foundation and NVTC publications in 2021 by Dr. Helen Kerschner.

The Information in this Fact Sheet also can be found in **Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Retention Handbook: Experience and Practice (2016)**. Of special value are the exercises for students and professionals interested in “how to” recruit and retain volunteer drivers. The Handbook was prepared by the NVTC in partnership with Toyota, and is available on the SCA website.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

Some volunteer driver program managers say the size of their program and number of rides they can provide depends on the number of available volunteer drivers. They also say they face challenges recruiting and competing for volunteers because of concerns about risk, preference for driving food, inability to reach potential volunteers, and time and money limitations. Below are ten recruitment challenges included in the *Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Handbook*.

TOP 10 VOLUNTEER DRIVER RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

- ...reluctance to use personal vehicle
- ...unwillingness to drive a stranger
- ...concern about the cost of fuel
- ...worry about the possibility of a crash
- ...time required for giving assistance
- ...preference for less frequent commitment
- ...preference for not driving in an urban area
- ...alarm about insurance being cancelled
- ...potential liability for injury or death
- ...fear of what to do in an emergency

The real problem may be multiple obstacles. The fact is that many older people who once were the “go to” volunteer drivers no longer retire and younger families tend to depend on two-incomes and often have their own caregiver needs and demands. Another problem is that many programs experience “seasonal” volunteer involvement due to volunteer “snow birds” and “sun birds.”

VOLUNTEER DRIVER RETENTION CHALLENGES

The literature points to a number of challenges organizations face in retaining volunteers. These are often associated with personal issues related to volunteers or volunteer program management practices that impact negatively on volunteer retention. Examples are: poor use of a volunteer’s time or talents, poorly defined volunteer tasks, lack of infrastructure support or administrative practices, and/or poor supervision and communication. Another reason for poor volunteer retention is said to be related to changing personal or family needs. And finally, organizations that have a large percentage of volunteers under age 24 also are said to have low rates of retention.

TOP 10 VOLUNTEER DRIVER RETENTION CHALLENGES

- ...declining health of driver or loved one
- ...relocation, sometimes to a milder climate
- ...medical limitations that end ability to drive
- ...drivers who become passengers
- ...car accidents or insurance costs
- ...reluctance to use personal vehicle
- ...unwillingness to drive a stranger
- ...family concerns
- ...discovery of different interests
- ...person no longer wants to volunteer

We know that poor retention can be related to poor use of a volunteer’s time or talents, lack of clarity in defining volunteer tasks, lack of infrastructure support or administrative practices, and poor supervision and/or communication. What also has been discovered is that volunteer drivers who stop driving often do so because they: 1) received a point on their driving record and were not eligible to continue as a volunteer driver, 2) wanted something temporary, 3) did not want to commit their time to driving, 4) were over-committed in other aspects of their life, and 5) went north or south for the season.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER RECRUITMENT WORKSHEET

Volunteer drivers may be the hardest volunteers to recruit, but many programs are quite successful in recruiting them, and they recruit them from countless methods, venues, and tag lines.

According to the 2015 STAR Awards applicants, successful recruitment methods include: meeting with community influencers, board involvement in recruitment activities, emphasizing “pay it forward,” driver involvement in the “sell,” scheduling flexibility, volunteer orientation, and the reputation of the program. Please identify your “go to” methods below.

Your “Go To” Methods

Examples of successful recruitment venues include: retiree groups, community and older adult service organizations, social clubs, volunteer centers, educational institutions, local police departments, local town boards, local governments, chambers of commerce, local real estate agencies, and the general public that know volunteers or passengers. According to the 2015 STAR Awards applications, the most successful venues include churches and faith communities, RSVPs (Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs), health and senior fairs, civic organizations, public events, senior centers, and volunteer centers. Please identify your “go to” venues below.

Your “Go To” Venues

Quite often it is the “tag line,” catch phrase or group of words that seem to attract the most attention from prospective customers. Almost all corporations have catch phrases, slogans or tag lines. Examples include: “The Happiest Place on Earth” (Disneyland), “Just Do It” (Nike), “The Pause That Refreshes” (Coca Cola), “Reach Out and Touch Someone” (AT&T), and “Let’s Go Places” (Toyota). Volunteer driver programs also use tag lines: “Its more than just a ride,” “We drive Ms. Daisy,” “Neighbors helping neighbors,” and “Give the gift of a lift.”

Examples of tips for creating successful volunteer driver recruitment tag lines are: keep it simple, speak directly to the benefit, tell a story, explain the service, paint a picture of what you do, say enough but not too much, and get some outside help. How could you use these tips in creating your tag line, and what will be your tag line for recruiting volunteer drivers? Please create your tag line or tag lines in the space below.

Your Recruitment Tag Lines

VOLUNTEER DRIVER RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

Volunteer organizations develop volunteer recruitment strategies that include campaigns and single purpose recruitment activities. The recruitment strategies identified in the Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Retention Handbook include: word of mouth, media communication, direct appeals to congregations, community presentations, one-on-one community outreach, cause-related recruitment, brief and positive presentations, the involvement of volunteer drivers as story tellers; and volunteer recruitment during the holidays. The recommended strategies also included creating flexibility in volunteer assignments, on-going communication with drivers, enabling driver/passenger bonding, recognizing volunteer drivers, and providing management support.

Please describe your strategy or strategies for recruiting volunteer drivers in the space below.

Your Volunteer Driver Recruitment Strategy

VOLUNTEER DRIVER RETENTION STRATEGY

It was noted in the *Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Retention Handbook* that personal issues and management practices can impact negatively on volunteer driver retention. At the same time, rates of high volunteer retention appear to be related to efforts of programs to create a climate that welcomes and encourages volunteers and ensures that they have a good experience. Examples include volunteer driver recognition, training, screening and matching; providing mileage reimbursement to drivers; flexibility in driver assignments; activities that encourage driver satisfaction; enabling bonding between passengers and drivers; demonstrating an appreciation for driver involvement; and ongoing communication with drivers. Successful management approaches said to promote volunteer driver retention include management support that offers an office as a “no-guilt zone,” personally knowing each driver, recognizing their volunteer “job,” and ensuring the “job” is easy for them to accomplish. And now, please describe your strategy or strategies for retaining volunteer drivers in the space below.

Your Volunteer Driver Retention Strategy

***To review the complete
Handbook of Volunteer Driver Recruitment and Retention
please go to the SCA website: www.ShepherdCenters.org.***