

Volunteer Driver Recruitment

Drivers often are referred to as “the heart and soul” of any transportation service. The reason is that, in addition to taking passengers from point A to point B, drivers play many other roles such as friend, listener, communicator, and advocate. Services that use paid drivers say that driver salaries can constitute 50% or more of their operating expenses. Although, volunteer driver programs may not pay salaries, their leaders say that volunteers are not free and require considerable resources for recruitment, involvement, and retention. Thus, it is crucial that volunteer driver programs practice efficient and effective driver recruitment, training, and retention.

Recruitment Opportunities

Communities that have a history of supporting volunteer activities often have a greater potential for recruiting volunteer drivers than do communities that have no such history. However, regardless of the location and history of recruiting volunteers, volunteer drivers are not easy to recruit. In fact, there is a saying among volunteer driver program staff that “volunteer drivers are the hardest volunteers to recruit.” It should be mentioned that the saying concludes with the phrase, “but once you’ve got them, you’ve got them.”

Recruitment Barriers

Why is the recruitment of volunteer drivers such a challenge? Many people volunteer to drive 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. However, recruitment is not always that simple. People give many excuses for not volunteering, and especially not volunteering to drive:

- a reluctance to use their own car
- unwillingness to drive people they don’t know
- concern about the possibility of a crash
- hesitancy because of the cost for gas
- time requirements for driving people
- fear about not knowing what to do in an emergency

Marketing

The volunteer literature suggests that marketing the need for volunteers is an important recruitment strategy. The comments below may be helpful in planning your recruitment message. They were included in responses to a question in a Beverly Foundation survey that asked volunteer drivers to describe the best part of being a volunteer driver.

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is knowing you are helping those who depend on you to go to a doctor’s appointment, the grocery store, or a recreational activity.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is helping people remain independent.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is the satisfaction I derive from extending a helping hand to those who have nowhere else to turn.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is the sincere appreciation reflected in the positive attitude and kind words of thanks from the passengers when they participate in the transportation program.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is the people you meet...especially those who live alone and enjoy talking about their family and their memories...”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is being able to help others and give back a service to the community that is so needed and so appreciated by the riders.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is the endless variety of challenging experiences and wonderful people encountered each and every day on the job.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is feeling that what I do is greatly appreciated by those who I transport...and those I work for.”

“The best part of being a volunteer driver is knowing that perhaps I’m helping the parents of someone in a similar situation who can’t help their parents with as much care as they would like to.”

Please see these and other comments about “the best part of being a volunteer driver” in the information sheet and book, Stories from the Road. Both are resources in the TurnKey Kit.