
Volunteers in the National Forests



Recruitment and Development of Volunteers

NUMBER

5

United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Hi! I'd like to talk with you about how we can develop a dynamic volunteer corps through a positive recruitment and development program.

In the past, volunteer recruitment in the Forest Service has been primarily by word of mouth. Satisfied volunteers have told their friends about the program and it has grown. This booklet provides additional effective ideas about how you can expand your volunteer workforce.

Volunteers add their special talents to our agency projects. In some situations, we can learn skills from volunteers. In others, we have the opportunity to help volunteers develop additional skills to best achieve project goals.

The Forest Service volunteer program helps the public develop a better understanding of our agency through our close cooperation in volunteer projects. Through careful volunteer recruitment and development you can make this a memorable experience for all.



F. Dale Robertson

F. DALE ROBERTSON
Chief
USDA Forest Service

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Steps in the Recruitment Process

Define Your Project

The first step in planning a volunteer program is to define your project. This prework will evaluate your unit's capability to manage an additional workforce and will prepare the groundwork for a quality volunteer experience.

Each project should be outlined as clearly as possible regarding the following:

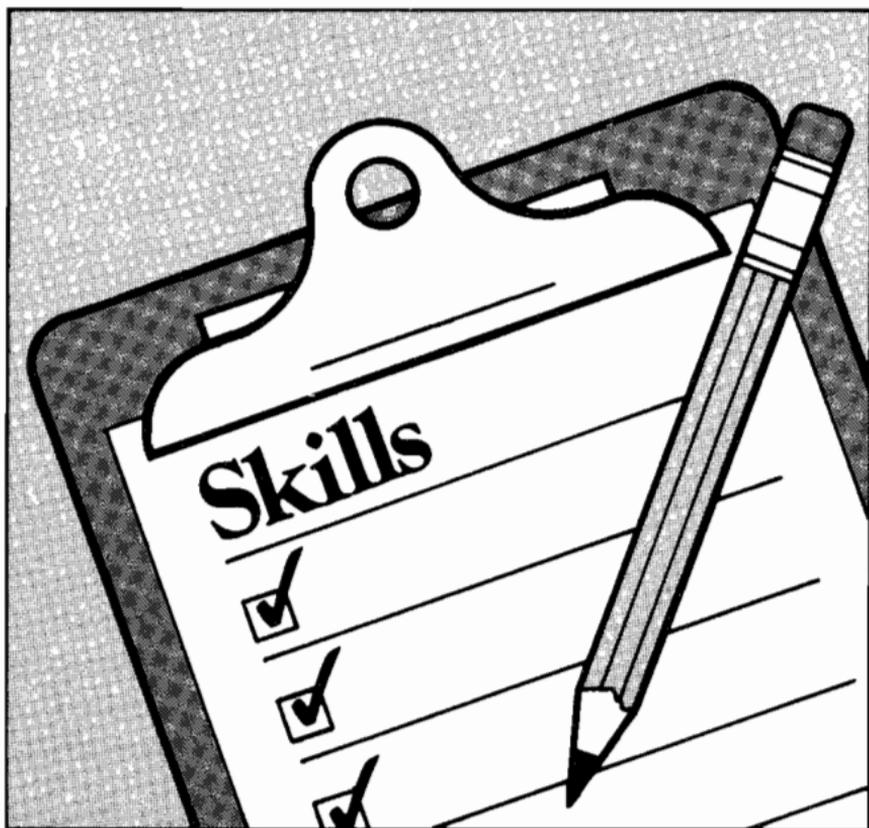
- Location.
- Timing.
- Number of required volunteers and employees (including supervision).
- Type of equipment needed.
- Funding requirements.
- Name of a project coordinator.

List Required Skills

Each project may have a unique list of required skills. If you prepare a complete list of these skills, it will assist you in selecting the best qualified applicant.

For example, for volunteer receptionists, you would look for people with pleasant, friendly dispositions who easily could learn and share information about

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your Forest. For tree planting projects, you would seek people in good physical condition with an interest in rigorous outdoor work. For campground rehabilitation projects, you would look for people with particular construction skills, such as masonry or carpentry.

Keep in mind that you may not be able to recruit a volunteer with all the skills you listed. However, a detailed listing of required skills can provide the framework to prepare a skill development plan for volunteers who meet most of your requirements.

Determine Sources of Volunteers

Volunteers can be recruited from a wide variety of sources. When identifying sources of volunteers, keep in mind the motivation people might have for volunteering for a particular project. In this way, you might target your recruitment effort to individuals or groups with a special motivation to help. For example, a service club recently met an ecological goal set by its national board by building a campsite for people with physical disabilities. All parties benefited from the project.

In addition to the following list of sources, you may find it helpful to hold a brainstorming session with your involved staff to suggest additional sources of volunteers. Consider using local, regional, and national sources for recruiting volunteers, such as the following:

- Individuals who have volunteered before.
- General public.
- Students.
- Business groups.
- Youth organizations.
- Service clubs.
- Conservation organizations.
- Senior citizens.
- Volunteer clearing houses and employment offices.
- Forest Service Human Resource Program offices.

Identify Application Procedures

Use the standard *Prospective Volunteer Application Form* (FS 1800-7). You may wish to supplement this with requests for references, previous work experience or education, personal data, and other applicable information. The closing date for receiving applications should be determined, as should the method of evaluation.

Publicize Your Opportunities

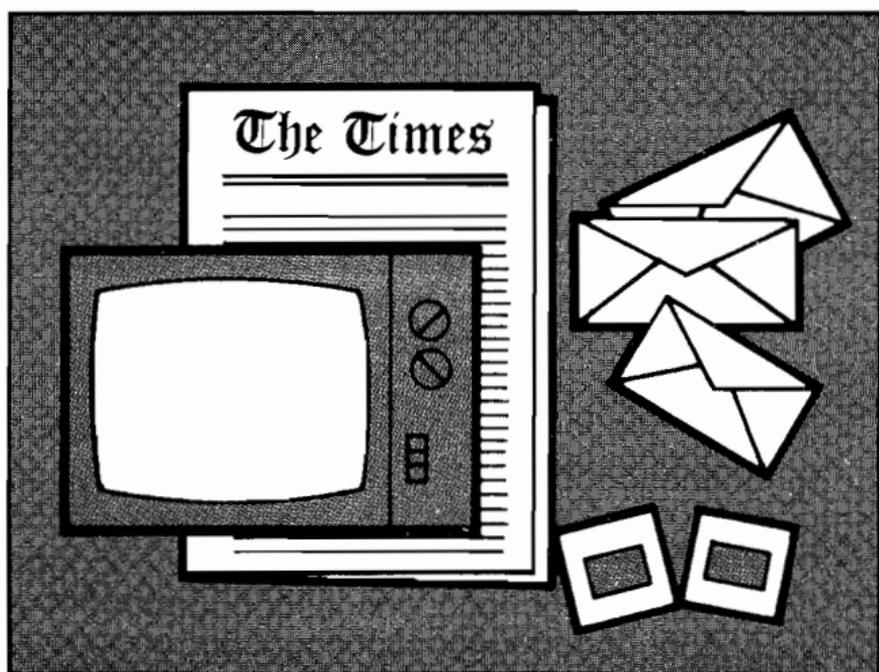
Recruitment can be an annual event, an ongoing process, or both. Try to advertise volunteer opportunities long before you are ready for the work to begin. This ensures adequate lead time and allows prospective volunteers to get an overview of options. Publicize your opportunities again as new jobs and replacement opportunities become available.

Satisfied volunteers are the most effective recruiters: they share their excitement.

A local or national Voluntary Action Center, Volunteer Bureau, or Employment Development Office may publicize your opportunities for you. Other methods for publicizing your opportunities might include the following:

- Letters, posters, and other written materials.
- Radio, television, or newspaper releases.

- Slide or video programs.
- Jointly produced materials with clubs and organizations.
- Presentations at local meetings.
- School and university bulletin boards.
- Local, regional, or national volunteer catalogs.



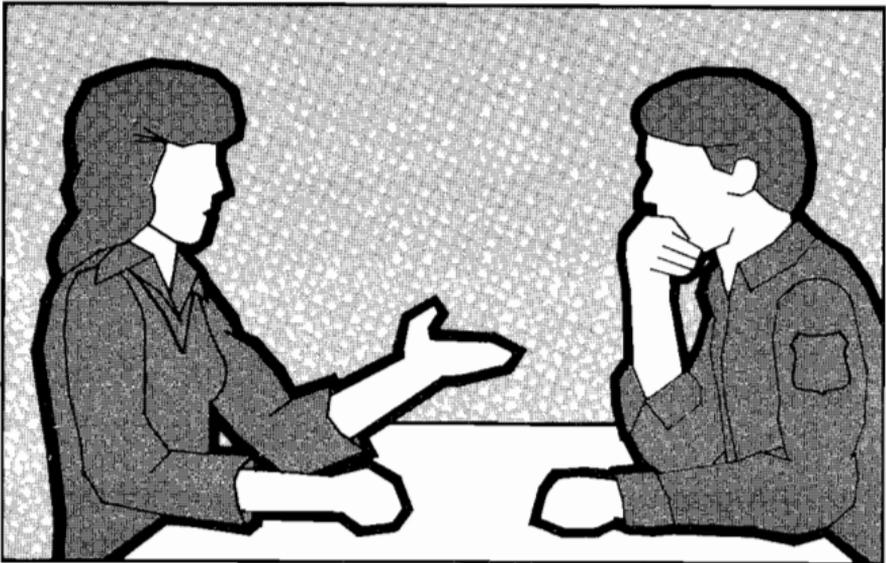
Process Applications

It is important to respond quickly to prospective volunteers. A lack of response to their offers to donate their services is disrespectful and ultimately detrimental to the program. Form letters may be useful when providing information promptly to a large number of applicants. However, followup communication should be individualized.

Select Volunteers

Carefully screen the volunteers' applications based on the selection criteria. It is critical that the *skills* and *interests* of a volunteer applicant match those needed on the project. Do not feel obligated to find a position for each volunteer applicant—only take on as many as you can handle. Your Human Resources Program staff may be interested in receiving the applications that you reject to keep in a prospect file.

A personal interview is an effective means of matching a prospective volunteer to an opportunity to work on a project. If your position requires public contact, it is especially important that your volunteer can project a “good host” image. Volunteer interview techniques are described in book 4 of this series, *Techniques of Supervision*.



Steps in the Development Process

Determine Training Needs

A new volunteer is much like a new employee. Rarely will you find someone who is completely trained in the details of a new job who needs no orientation. Plan to spend time with your new volunteer to determine training needs. Volunteer training and orientation plans should be tailored according to the detail and duration of the position.

Short-term volunteers, such as 1-day campground cleanup or trail maintenance crews, should receive a brief orientation that includes the following:

- Expression of appreciation for their assistance.
- Introduction of Forest Service employees assisting or supervising the project.
- Specific job orientation.
- Safety reminder.

Although it may not be necessary for Forest Service employees to spend the entire day with the group, a beginning orientation and an ending visit are critical to project success. The ending visit should include an evaluation of the group's performance and a thank you. In addition, the project leader can take this opportunity to inform the group of other volunteer activities.

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Long-term or repeating volunteers should receive more substantial orientation. Often, these volunteers have a higher level of interaction with the public and are performing jobs much like Forest Service employees. These volunteers should receive orientation and training much like that given seasonal employees. In fact, it is often cost effective to plan training sessions when both new employees and new volunteers can attend.

The first step in determining volunteers' training and development needs is to compare their qualifi-



cations to the list of desired skills that you prepared during recruitment. Often, this is best accomplished jointly with the volunteers. At this point, you may want to tailor jobs to take advantage of volunteers' particular skills. They can provide insight about their own strengths and weaknesses.

Provide Training Opportunities

Effective training opportunities can:

- Improve volunteers' understanding of the Forest Service mission.
- Increase job satisfaction.
- Prepare volunteers to work independently and better assist others.
- Tell volunteers that you value their time and are willing to invest in them.
- Provide an opportunity for volunteers to interact professionally and socially with Forest Service employees.
- Compensate volunteers for their efforts.

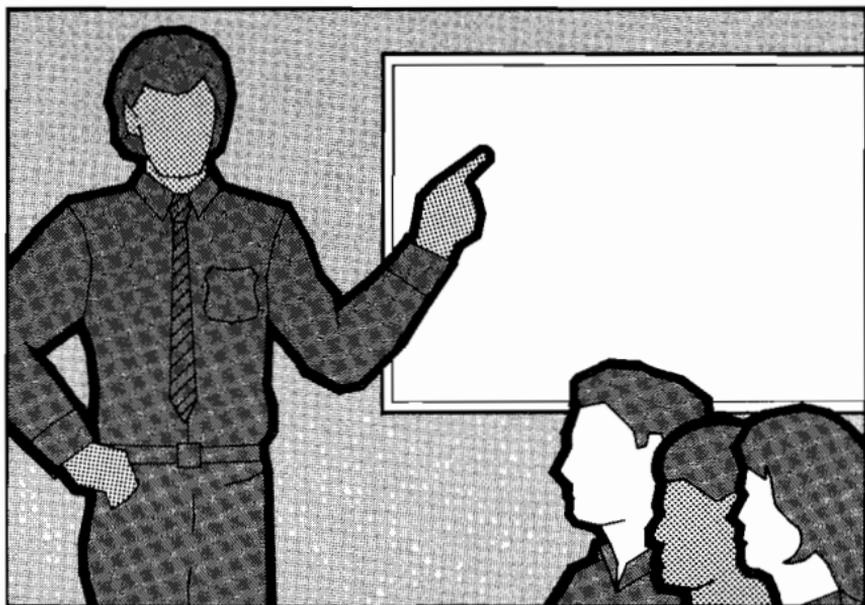
At a minimum, training should be provided to ensure that the quality of work and conduct of volunteers are at a level expected of all Forest Service employees. All training sessions should emphasize health and safety and the HOST philosophy of the Forest Service.

Training can begin even before a volunteer arrives at the job site. Consider sending the following information in advance:

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- Appropriate Forest Service brochures, maps, and other written materials.
- Training and work schedules.
- Checklist of necessary equipment and clothing.
- Confirmation of any expenses to be reimbursed.
- Local Chamber of Commerce information to out-of-town volunteers.

Preservice training provides the basic knowledge and skills needed before starting a job. These include training in the actual task, a description of the volunteers' responsibilities and limitations, the location of equipment or other items needed for the job, and where to obtain additional assistance. People are anxious to get started on a job, so preservice training should be designed to adequately prepare the



volunteers, yet allow them to become quickly involved.

Inservice training offers opportunities for more detailed instruction. Inservice training should be designed to meet the ability and skill levels of the volunteers. On-the-job training and advanced skill development sessions encourage volunteers to grow.

Continuing education opportunities are often general interest topics that may not necessarily relate to a specific job but may relate to the Forest Service in general.

Training for supervisors enables those working with volunteers to increase their supervisory skills and to offer more effective training and leadership.

Evaluate Performance

Most volunteers work better when they get feedback about the value of their contribution. Managers also can benefit from a periodic review of individual volunteers and from the overall volunteer effort.

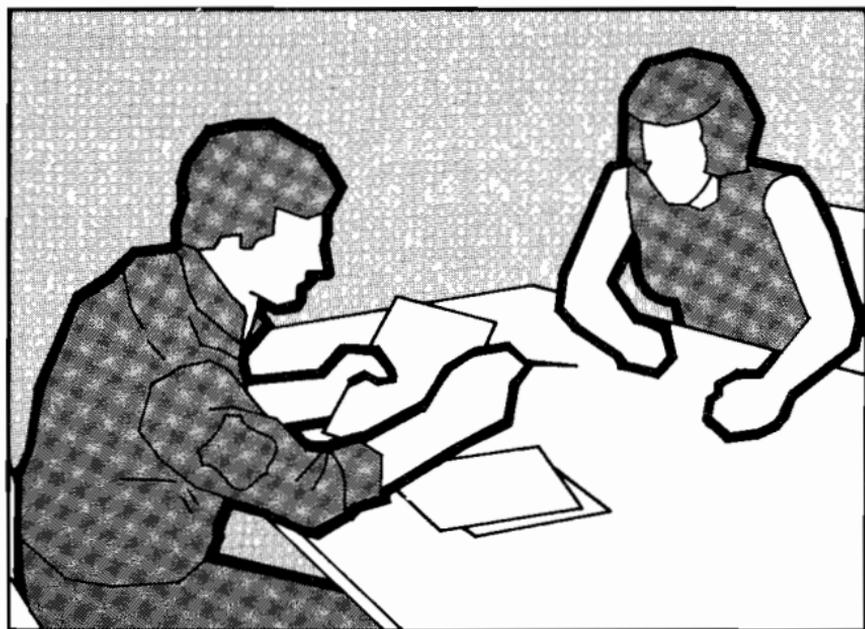
Therefore, performance evaluation can play a key role in ensuring a successful program.

- Monitoring and feedback should be regular, systematic, and, when possible, written. "Monitoring" is *not* the collection of information the day before a project ends. Keep in touch with the volunteer program through personal visits and by maintaining

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open communication with volunteers and their supervisors.

- Each volunteer should be evaluated periodically. In addition, volunteers should be provided with written evaluations of their overall contributions before termination. Evaluations may include constructive criticisms and recommendations for future volunteer positions. These evaluations should be maintained in the unit's file.
- Managers should solicit information from the volunteers about the various aspects of the program and how the program could be improved. Because volunteers are closest to the project they often can be called upon to propose worthwhile solutions.



- Managers should recognize that the performance of volunteers may be a reflection of how well the manager recruited, trained, or supervised.
- After a program is completed, or at least annually, program managers should meet to assess the overall benefits and costs of the volunteer effort, to determine desirable changes, and to assess the need for a subsequent or continuing volunteer program.

Provide Compensation

Compensating volunteers for their contributions is a critical step in the development of an effective volunteer program. Although volunteers cannot be rewarded with money, there are many ways you *can* compensate them for their efforts. Compensation should be directly tied to the reasons the person or groups are volunteering. Fill their individual human needs by designing a creative and flexible compensation package that meets the requirements of each situation. Volunteer compensation is thoroughly discussed in book 4 of this series, *Techniques of Supervision*.

Summary

Recruitment and development of your volunteer workforce are the keys to its success. Remember these important elements:

- Define the volunteer position or project clearly before you begin to advertise it.
- Find the right person or group for the job.
- Familiarize volunteers with both the broad goals of the agency and the specific duties of the task at hand.
- Invest in your volunteers through a positive training program.
- Evaluate the performance of both the volunteers and yourself. Adjust the program and provide further training when needed.
- Compensate individuals and groups by understanding and meeting the needs of your volunteers.

References

Pisgah District Ranger
Pisgah National Forest
1001 Pisgah Highway
Pisgah Forest, NC 28768

Forest Supervisor
Unita National Forest
88 West 100 North
Provo, UT 84601

Forest Supervisor
Superior National Forest
Box 338
Duluth, MN 55801

Boulder District Ranger
Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest
2995 Baseline Road
Boulder, CO 80303

There are many other Forests and Districts across the National Forest System with outstanding programs that can provide you with help or assistance.

Reference List

Supervisor Office: _____

District Office: _____

Emergency Services: _____

State Police: _____

Sheriff Office: _____

Fire: _____

State Forester: _____

The two major traits that American corporations need to better manage their businesses are to pay attention to people and to treat people with dignity and respect, and to treat customers as individualized human beings with personal, individual needs. It's easy to say it, and sometimes when I talk to my students they will say, "Well, gee whiz, that's just common sense," to which my reply is, "Yes, it's just common sense, but only one of twenty companies seems to practice it." It's the people customer principle. People design, make, sell, service, and buy products, and if we get away from the technique focus, and focus back on the human being, be he customer or employee, I think we will be headed down the right track.

THOMAS PETERS

Co-author of *In Search of Excellence*

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