

Involvement – Recruiting Volunteers

Involvement happens when members participate by attending meetings, responding to surveys, helping with projects, and becoming volunteers. Involvement is the natural progression from engagement.

Not everyone will be equally involved. Some people are naturally joiners and will volunteer and actively participate. However, most people will hang back. They will participate passively by attending programs that interest them, attending meetings, and carrying out small tasks when asked.

Recruiting volunteers is a critical task. Not only do you need people to do things, you need the right people. This is not a task to be taken lightly or without thought. Let's begin by thinking the challenges to securing volunteers.

To help members volunteer means answering some questions for them and helping them overcome their fears. And there is a very real fear of volunteering. People fear failure and that they won't be able to do good jobs. They also have some key questions – even if they don't ask them:

- How much time will this take?
- What exactly does the job entail?
- What is expected of me? Of the job?
- Where can I get help?
- How long is this going to last?
- Is the job meaningful – is it worth my time and energy?

A very good place to begin recruiting is to *first decide what tasks need to be accomplished and what volunteer positions are really needed.*

- Do you really need a standing committee to accomplish a task or might a mini task group work as well?
- Do you have some positions you don't need?
- Are there some tasks that you really need some help with (websites, Facebook, etc.)?
- Are there resources outside of your members that can help and support you (possibly a spouse who can help with a specific task)?

Second, write job descriptions for the tasks/jobs that remain on your list. These should be very short (aim for no more than 5 bullet points) and descriptive of the job, not just the title.



Prospective volunteers may not know what titles mean, and it is scary to be asked to chair something. Instead, ask them to take on a task. It can make a huge difference.

Third, outline when the task needs to take place. If this is an ongoing task, identify the heavy and lighter times of the year for involvement. Honestly estimate how much time is involved.

Fourth, identify to whom this position reports and where help and resources can be obtained.

Fifth, provide an end date for every volunteer position. When will this task be accomplished? If it is a one year appointment, state that in the job description. You don't want the volunteer to think the position lasts forever or until she/he is removed.

Mini Task Groups

Many associations and volunteer organizations have found organizing mini task groups to be very helpful in recruiting volunteers, getting tasks accomplished, and keeping volunteers happy. The central idea is that you pull together a group of people to work on a specific task but not as a committee. The assignment generally includes a start date, end date (volunteers will love this part), description of what must be done, to whom the volunteer reports, and parameters that might apply. You will find an example of a task sheet [here](#).

The pluses of mini task groups include the following:

- It is easier to recruit good people for a specific task, especially if there is an end date.
- When volunteers understand what they need to do and by when they need to do it, they are happier and feel better about their involvement. It is then easier to recruit them for something else.
- The task gets done.
- The organization has a way of testing someone as a volunteer.

Once you've done your homework, you are ready to ask someone to volunteer. It is best to not stand up at a meeting and ask people to step forward. Unfortunately, the wrong person might stand up, and this increases the fear factor. Some people might be interested but won't publically volunteer because they are concerned people will think that they feel they are better than the group.

You can, however, tell people that you have a number of important volunteer jobs that you need to fill. You can even mention them and invite people to contact you directly if they are interested in volunteering. You are protecting yourself from an inappropriate volunteer and helping to alleviate the fear factor. If you need people to help with a project or other one time job, publicly inviting them to sign up to help can work well. In these cases people are



joining a group to help with a one time job – acting as a greeter at a program for example – not being the leader/organizer.

Steps to Recruiting Volunteer

Generally the best ways to recruit are one-on-one or two-on-one.

- Identify the person you want to recruit.
- Talk or/meet with the person privately with the job description in hand.
- Tell the person that the organization has determined she/he is the best person for the job (even if it is the third person you've asked).
- Share the job description and describe the job (not the title).
- Tell the person about the support available for carrying out the job.
- Make sure any time parameters are understood.
- Tell the person that she/he is the right person, and you know she/he will do a great job in an important position for the members of your affiliate.
- Be quiet!

If the person says no (and she/he may) but is really the best candidate, ask her/him to think about it for a day and indicate that you will call tomorrow to discuss it further. If you think it will be a tough recruit, indicate up front that you don't want an answer immediately.

Now, put the volunteer to work and get out of the way. If you've asked the right person, allow that person to do the job. Don't micromanage. Ensure that the volunteer knows and understands key deadlines and other parameters to the job and then allow the freedom to perform that job.

At the same time don't forget about the volunteer. Check in from time to time and ask how things are going. Offer support and assistance if the volunteer is having difficulty or you see a problem. Deadlines are important, and reminding people ahead of the deadline is simple courtesy. Volunteers are critically important for your affiliate. Once you have them, you must take care of them. It is important to

- Check on them, see how they are doing,
- Encourage and support them,
- Allow them to do their jobs, and
- Thank them and recognize them for their work.

Other Ways to Recruit Volunteers

Nominating Committees. Leaving who will be on your affiliate's board to chance is asking for trouble. Generally the critical task of identifying and recruiting key leaders is the responsibility of the Nominating Committee, and the process used by a Nominating



Committee is the same as the process use to recruit a volunteer. The difference is that the pool of candidates may be smaller, and the jobs may carry more responsibility.

A starting point can be defining the jobs of a Board member or Officer just as for any volunteer position. The Committee, which acts very similarly to a mini task group, identifies prospects and moves to recruit them. Recruiting one-on-one or two-on-one is even more important with Board and Officer Positions.

Since openness and honest conversation are important in this task, all discussions in a Nominating Committee must be kept absolutely confidential. Affiliate leaders should also look for guidance in their Bylaws to define the scope of the Nominating Committee.

Replacing Volunteers

If volunteers just aren't working out (have disappeared, are not doing anything, or are causing real problems within your organization), keeping them in volunteer roles can become a greater liability than replacing them. Often people who are unresponsive have simply taken on a tasks they can't handle or don't have time for. They can be embarrassed and reluctant to tell anyone that they are failing.

In this situation you can consider contacting the volunteer (possibly by letter if unreachable by phone, fax, or email) and voicing the organization's concern. You can relate that you feel you might have put the volunteer in a bad position (it's me not you) and that you want to relieve her/him of the burden of the job. These actions must be taken very discreetly to avoid any embarrassment for the member. You can tell the volunteer that someone else will be taking care of this area for now and that she/he will remain an active and valued member of the organization. If you are sending a letter and have not been getting any response, you can set a date by which you will act.

If the position is on the Board or as an officer, you must first start by looking at your bylaws to determine how a position can be changed. You may need to seek additional guidance from ACNM.

We all want volunteers to do good jobs and have great experiences doing them. To avoid problems, it is important to take careful steps in the beginning to develop job descriptions, communicate jobs and time frames, and identify the right person as best you can.



Sample Volunteer Job Description

Internet Coordinator

The ____ ACNM affiliate plans on creating an internet presence to facilitate communication with members, non-member midwives and the public.

Key Responsibilities

- Investigate and recommend options to the Board by _____ (give them at least 30 days).
- Based on a decision by the Board, implement the web presence plan by _____ (say somewhere between 30 and 90 days).
- Once the web presence is created, promote and monitor web communications.

Other Key Considerations

Time frame: This position is for one year ending on _____ (this often coincides with the organization's officer year).

Budget: There is a ceiling of \$200 for costs to create a web presence (this is changeable but requires a decision of the Board).

If a website or webpage is created, it must be owned by the affiliate.

This position reports to the President: (insert contact information).

Support for carrying out this task is also available from _____.



Sample Mini Task Group Assignment Sheet

Task: Increase public awareness of midwives is a key priority of the _____ affiliate. The task is to recommend, develop, and plan public awareness initiatives for the upcoming year. This includes recommendations for how to support ACNM public relations plans and our own state wide efforts.

Timeframe: Recommend an action plan by the Board meeting on _____. Plan to share the draft plan in advance with Board members via email. This task group starts now and ends upon presentation of the draft plan to the Board.

Task Group: Yourself as the group leader; _____ and _____.

Responsible to: The Vice President (*insert contact information*). The Vice President can be considered a member of the task group, however, you are the leader.

Key Considerations

Group meetings may occur via conference call, in person, video chat, etc.

Very limited funds are available to support a plan. Draft the plan on a low or no cost basis.

Resources: ACNM, we recommend that you contact _____ (*if this is available*)

