



Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Great Volunteers

By Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Bernadette McIntyre

This resource document is based on insights shared by Bernadette McIntyre during Tourism Saskatchewan's webinar titled "Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Great Volunteers." Drawing on her extensive experience leading volunteer teams for major events, Her Honour McIntyre offers

practical strategies, thoughtful reflections, and tested approaches to building strong, engaged volunteer communities. Whether you're organizing a local event or managing a large-scale initiative, this guide provides valuable tips to help you recruit, train, motivate, and retain dedicated volunteers.

Strategies for successfully recruiting and retaining committed volunteers include:

- Having clear objectives and team goals, so the volunteers understand how and where they fit in and can contribute.
- Ensure that there are valuable contributions for the volunteers to make.
- Communicate clearly and frequently.
- Ensure the volunteers can have some fun!

Attracting volunteers can be challenging, however some key points to consider are:

- Clearly outline your goals and objectives and how the volunteers will contribute.
- Ask volunteers what they want to get out of the experience (such as building skills, networking, etc.)
- Try to match volunteers to duties that complement their interests and goals.
- Communication is key. Your volunteers need to feel like they are part of the team and are insiders of some sort.
- Show appreciation – thank you notes, treats, t-shirts, fun experiences, etc.

Key qualities organizers should look for when screening and selecting volunteers include:

- Having an interest or passion for the event, the role, the organization. If volunteers have no interest, they tend to be less dependable.
- Reliability.
- Skills that you need for the volunteer roles you require.

Volunteer training to prepare volunteers for their roles and responsibilities is essential to their success and the success of the event. The volunteer training should include:

- Clear articulation of the event or organizational goals and how the volunteer is contributing.
- Training in their specific duties, so they feel confident in their role.
- Customer service and dealing with public training.
- A list of who they can call when they need assistance.
- A true picture of how the event will progress. It is often organized chaos at the beginning until everyone settles in. Prepare your volunteers for the flow of the event.

Keeping volunteers motivated and engaged is challenging. The general rule is feed them, clothe them and thank them. To expand on that, a few strategies include:

- Continual communication, so they feel they are part of the team. Ensure they hear any news related to your organization before the public does.
- Include periodic displays of appreciation, e.g. discounts, invitations to events or occasions, food, clothing, pins, thank you notes. It does not have to be expensive.
- For annual or ongoing volunteers, tiered incentives are a good idea. The volunteer gains more privileges, status or swag the more they volunteer. These types of incentives can assist in retaining volunteers for many years.

Building a community and sense of belonging with volunteers involves much of what has been discussed above.

- Meaningful and continual communication
- Listening to their input and actioning where possible
- Fun experiences
- Valuable contributions
- Appreciation
- Truly caring about your volunteers

Recognition is appreciated and valued by most of us. Volunteers want to be thanked for a job well done, both publicly and personally. Always thank the volunteers in your written materials and speeches. Personally thank volunteers in person and via personal notes.

Remember to listen to their input. They are your frontline and can contribute to overall improvement. Always remember to listen, thank and make it fun!

As a leader you need to be positive, enthusiastic, appreciative and calm, when managing and leading the volunteers. It takes significant energy and focus to continually be present. Of late several organizations and events have adopted a co-leader model, so you have a partner to lean on and share the responsibilities. I endorse this model, with one caution, you and your partner, must be of like mind, compatible and able to work together through thick and thin.

It is said and I agree:

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others."

It truly takes a team to accomplish the dream.

In conclusion:

Be a volunteer!

Thank a volunteer!

Make Memories!

Have Fun!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernadette McIntyre is Saskatchewan's 24th Lieutenant Governor on January 31, 2025. Growing up in Bethune, Saskatchewan, Her Honour saw how the whole community volunteered their time and expertise to ensure they were able to have the experiences they wanted.

Her Honour has carried on that spirit of volunteerism, dedicating decades to dozens of boards and councils, as well as planning national curling championships, Grey Cup Festivals and more. Among many accolades, she was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame in 2023 in recognition of her inspiring leadership.