

VOLUNTEERS IS YOUR LAND TRUST READY?



The Growing Need for Volunteers

Volunteer Canada published a report in 2002 entitled “Recruiting, Retaining and Rewarding Volunteers: What Volunteers Have to Say”. The report notes, “The most important steps that voluntary organizations could take to recruit, retain and reward their volunteers are to ensure that the experiences they provide are meaningful and facilitate personal growth”.

The Reasons for Volunteering: Motivations, Barriers and Benefits

The number one reason 95% of volunteers donate their time as “belief in the cause supported by the organization”. The second motivating factor, 81%, stated “to use skills and experience” The third motivation cited shows 69% of the respondents stated they were “personally affected by the cause the organization supports”. The fourth reason given by 57% stated they volunteer, “To explore one’s own strengths”.

Why They Do Not Volunteer

“No extra time”. This was the main reason 72% of Ontarians reported they did not volunteer. Next, 32% cited “Unwillingness to make a year-round commitment”. 21%, of Ontario Volunteers stated, they gave monetary donations instead of more time; and 18% stated they did not volunteer because “they had not personally been asked”.

The Need For Volunteers

Land Trusts exist today only through the dedication and foresight of volunteers. The process of setting business objectives, incorporation, and obtaining charitable status may involve hundreds of volunteer hours for a new land trust. This is only the beginning. The land trust will require the commitment of volunteers to serve as board members, committee members, land monitors and fundraisers for years to come. The success of the program will depend largely on two elements.

The first element requires a good understanding of what motivates volunteers to donate their time to a charity. Understanding the volunteer’s expectations of your organization will also help determine a good fit. Consider how you will reward your volunteers. Not all volunteers want a formal recognition program but develop ways of acknowledging their contributions on a regular basis. This may include little more than a letter of thanks but make it a policy.



The second element is to create a Volunteer Manual or a Volunteer Program Guide. This manual is essential in establishing policies and procedures that will support the successful management of your volunteers. These policies will help clarify responsibilities, ensure consistency, describe methods and manage risks in your program. Everyone involved in recruiting, supporting, developing and managing volunteers should assist in drafting this manual. The success of the volunteer experience will largely depend on the communication systems you put in place.

Running A Risk- How to Play It Safe

Your land trust will need to implement procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of your volunteers. Your organization will require personal accident and public liability insurance policies for volunteer workers. As well, you must comply with government legislation pertaining to volunteers, including workplace health and safety, anti-discrimination, and the new privacy legislation.



Attracting the Right Volunteers

Job Description: The recruitment of volunteers is much the same as hiring staff. For each position you should develop a job description that includes the duties, qualifications, benefits to the volunteer, expected time commitment, location of work and requirements. If the volunteer position requires specific skills

– target your message.

Duties: Summarize the duties e.g. Monitoring property owned or managed by the land trust.

Qualifications: Include any education, previous experience or skills that you require.

Benefits: What are the rewards for the volunteer? e.g. to work with our professional biologist; onsite training provided, annual training seminars available.

Time Commitment: Outline the expectations of how time is required. e.g. we would like a person to make a two year commitment of 2 Saturdays each summer in June and 2 in August.

Location of work: Transportation may be an issue. Describe the distance to the property from your land trust office. Note if car-pooling is available.

Required: Are criminal reference checks or medical checks required? Does the volunteer position require first aid training?

Sell the Opportunity: There are benefits to volunteering for a land trust. Be sure to address these in your recruitment campaign. Ask yourself why you chose to support this organization? Attracting the brightest and the best begins with promoting your organization and its successes. Use testimonials from your existing volunteers. Speak of your accomplishments. Remember to include your mission statement or purpose of the organization.

Is Your Land Trust Ready?

Before you begin recruiting volunteers, identify your organization's needs and responsibilities. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why do you want to involve volunteers in your organization's activities?
- What type of work do you want volunteers to do? Will it be meaningful? Be specific.
- What skills will you require of volunteers to perform this type of work? Be specific.
- Where will volunteers be required to work? Region, district or city?
- Are you able to offer appropriate support, including training for volunteers to help them achieve their goals and those of the organization?
- Do you have a manager of volunteers who can keep current information on all your volunteers?
- Do you have a budget for your volunteer activities and which expenses will you cover?
- Do you have adequate space and equipment for the volunteer?
- Do you have a program in place to evaluate volunteers regularly?
- Do you have a program in place to recognize the volunteers' contribution?
- Have you assessed the risks for the volunteer assignments?

Recruiting Volunteers:

There are many ways to advertise your opportunities for volunteers. You may choose the web; newspaper; newsletters; local high school; community bulletin boards – to name a few. Whatever you choose, remember to write your recruitment message to appeal to the “right” volunteer. Your message should be realistic and state clearly the expectations.

Hold an Open House. Here the potential volunteers are given the opportunity to meet with board members and other volunteers in an informal setting. They will gain a better understanding of what your organization does and whether this would be a good fit for them.



Beginning the Interview Process

With a job description in place you are well on your way to hiring your first volunteer team. The initial interviews may be by phone or face to face. The hiring committee should be made up of individuals who clearly understand the work to be done. If you are seeking new volunteers for land monitoring, involve the biologist who is currently active with your organization. He/she will be able to provide the applicant with specific information during the interview and will ask the appropriate questions. Create an interview template which will cover the questions you wish to ask and document the candidate responses.

Training New Volunteers

New volunteers will require training. Even veteran volunteers who are new to your land trust require orientation, pre-placement training, and on the job training. These training essentials will equip the new volunteers with a better understanding of the policies in your volunteer guidebook.

The Orientation training

Orientation is an introduction to the new position the volunteer will be assuming. The volunteer should be provided with a description of the roles and the responsibilities they will be accepting as well as those of the staff and other volunteers. The orientation should also include providing a contact book, which lists the names and contact numbers of staff, board members and other volunteers.

The Pre-placement Training

More job specific training may include developing a work plan and determining the amount of time required for the job assigned.

On-the-job training

Regardless of the volunteer's job, whether it be entering data into a computer, monitoring property, fixing fences or teaching a workshop, on-the-job training is necessary. This training not only benefits the Land Trust, it benefits the volunteer as well. Every volunteer wants to do his or her best and education is the most powerful gift you can give. Under the leadership and supervision of an experienced staff person or volunteer trainer, the new volunteer will learn how to perform their new responsibilities well. The instructor will evaluate and make recommendations to the new volunteer throughout this period.

Continuous Education

Educational workshops are an essential component to the success of your volunteers' commitment. The gift of training your volunteers is an acknowledgement of their value to your Land Trust. Provide the volunteers with ongoing training and opportunities to meet other land trust volunteers.

