

Recruiting an Efficient and Reliable Volunteer Workforce

Introduction

The United Soccer League, and the clubs associated, rely on the contribution of many volunteers, who with their passion for soccer, willingly offer their time and skills to contribute to the overall success of the league and its clubs. It is the responsibility of the clubs, their human resources, and their operations team to ensure that all volunteers are given the best experience possible.

Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment focuses on attracting and inviting skillful volunteers to consider involvement with your organization by utilizing recruitment strategies and processes. It is a project which relies on people who, not being paid and out of free will and motivation, dedicate long hours over the course of the season to the benefit of your club.

Many clubs make the mistake of beginning their recruiting before they have an idea of why they are recruiting and for what positions. The most important step for recruitment is planning and design. In order to do this, you must spend time outlining your match day procedures, what staff is needed to complete each task, and building the job/position descriptions for each role.

Messaging

Creating a message that is inviting and encourage people to become involved with your club is an important part of the recruitment process. You must have a compelling message. You need to explain why your club is worthy of that person's time. Make your message short, simple, and direct, communicating the need for the volunteer's service. Additionally, point out the benefits the volunteer will receive. These include being involved in the growth of the club as well as skills and valuable experience that the volunteer will gain.

The club may have several recruitment messages, each being tailored to the volunteers being sought, such as student vs. professionals, or specific skill vs. general skills. Each message should identify:

- The specific need of the club
- How the volunteer can alleviate the need
- The benefits to the volunteer

When reviewing your recruitment message, does the message answer the following questions:

- Does the message value the volunteer?
- Do I know why some people might not say yes?
- Is the message tailored to a target audience?
- Does the message include the needs of our club?

Lastly, being specific in the minimum requirements for the position will help weed out volunteer applications early on. Volunteers need to be at least 18 years old, communicate well in English, be motivated team players, have the skills needed for defined roles, and commit to a reasonable number of

days and shifts. The most important criteria for volunteers prove to be attitude, enthusiasm and motivation.

Recruitment Strategies

Two common strategies used to recruit volunteers for defined positions are *non-targeted* recruitment and *targeted* recruitment. Non-targeted recruitment means looking for people with general skills, such as volunteers to assist in stadium set-up, hand out crew, fan engagement, or general match day duties. Targeted recruitment involves looking for people with specific skills, such as PA Announcers, video board operators, field managers, and liaison with prior experience. Both strategies should use the recruitment messaging as outline above.

Recruitment Process

People most often volunteer when they feel they are being asked to get involved personally. Do not assume a general advertisement on your website or social media will attract all or most of the volunteers you need. People need to be asked again and again! Recruit at three different periods throughout the season.

- January, prior to the start of the season.
- May, at the end of school.
- August, when school start backs up

When recruiting volunteers, involve the entire organization, from the CEO to the Head Coach. Sometimes the volunteer coordinator or HR is not the most effective recruiter. In addition, peers may be especially good at recruiting students and professionals.

Recruiting Techniques

There are many techniques available for recruiting volunteers. You must decide which is best for disseminating the recruitment message for your organization and for your specific volunteer positions. Some recruitment techniques to try are:

- Teamworks Online
- Social Media Accounts
- Public Appearances
- Referrals from individuals associated with your organization
- Older kids participating in your academy or in a club affiliate
- University Students

Students

Many students participate in programs, societies and Greek life which require volunteer hours for participation. Connect with both high school and college educational groups in your region and share your volunteer opportunities to bring more hands onboard. Students attending local colleges and universities can be tremendous opportunity in which clubs should invest. Not only does volunteer

experience enhance the student's resume, but it can also open up additional opportunities with the club such as an internship or a full-time job.

Look into whether or not local schools have a Sports Management program or student led club. If so, get involved, whether as a guest speaker, or as a local partner, and drive attention to your club.

Onboarding and Training

Given the number of volunteers needed to build a useful volunteer pool, an efficient welcome and integration becomes of paramount importance as people need to become productive very quickly. Hosting a Volunteer Kick-Off session can be useful in informing volunteer about your club, the league, match day procedures, roles and positions, and general club information which could be important on match day. Bringing everyone under one roof can also relieve the amount of stress and back-end work for the HR Department. Paperwork, liability waivers, and guidelines and policies can all be covered and collected by the HR department onsite and relieve the unnecessary stress of them trying to track down volunteers with missing paperwork.

The Volunteer Kick-off session is a great engagement and motivational tool, as it allows volunteers to interact directly with upper management at the club and helps on their expectations about the tasks to be done. Some examples of topics to be covered during the session are accreditation, code of conduct, volunteer culture, liability, a virtual/physical stadium tour, and presentations regarding projects and positions involving volunteers.

During the session, it is recommended to have break out sessions where volunteers rotate through difference stations to learn the roles and responsibilities of various positions in which they can be involved to increase proficiency. For the positions that involve customer interaction, incorporate role playing with questions and situations the volunteer could encounter during the season.

Developing a Volunteer Guide

First, there should be the manual for full-time staff and supervisors. The main objectives of the manual are to ensure smooth collaboration between staff and volunteers by providing functional managers and coordinators with necessary tools and information about volunteer management rules, their rights and duties, as well as to guarantee appropriate staff attitudes towards volunteers. The Manual will be developed by the Volunteer Coordinator in close cooperation with Human Resources. The manual should provide a brief description of each volunteer position as well as standards and principles of managing volunteers. It should also contain practical management issues including volunteers' supervision and responsibilities of staff members working with volunteers; with a special emphasis put on motivation. Additionally, the manual should contain points of contact, ways of handling basic/predictable problems (e.g. no-shows, shift changes management), providing volunteers with uniforms and catering, volunteer work conditions, and communication between all involved staff members and volunteers.

Lastly, the Volunteer Manual will be developed. The main objective of the Volunteer Manual is to provide Volunteers with all necessary information which allows them to effectively fulfill their functions during the season. Exemplary content in the manual would include:

- Introduction and forewords (e.g. Club President, Head Coach, VOL Managers);

- General information about the club;
- Who's Who;
- Mission and values;
- Detailed match schedule;
- Basic Volunteers' information:
- General Volunteers' role;
- Match Day Procedures
- Volunteers' Code of Conduct – the most significant do's and don'ts;
- Volunteer Uniform – uniform components, volunteer's appearance;
- Accreditation and operational areas
- Parking Maps
- Detailed Stadium Map
- Safety & Security issues - order directions, safety measures, forbidden items and behaviors;
- FAQ, Photos, quotations and so on should be placed in order to make the Manual more attractive to Volunteers.

Management and Administration

Not only are good onboarding and training procedures needed, but great management of the program if you want to get the most out of your volunteers. The first task is receiving quantitative estimates of volunteers needed from each department for each role as well as an elaboration of job descriptions for each function with specific requirements towards volunteers with proper skills and qualifications. It should be the responsibility of one person, the volunteer coordinator, to communicate, schedule, assign, and manage all volunteers.

Communication Schedule

- Volunteer request e-mail distributed to volunteer pool at least 14 days prior. Positions are filled on a first come, first serve basis.
- Volunteer position, brief sheet and call time are distributed via e-mail to scheduled volunteers at least 7 days prior.
- Request confirmation from scheduled volunteers via email at least 4 days prior to match.
- Send a follow up and thank you email to all volunteers on the first business day after a match.

Match Day

Volunteers should be given clear directives regarding match day procedures (parking, stadium entrance, accreditation, meeting location), and arrive ready to work. All of the processes and communications leading up to match day, contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the volunteers.

Parking

- Upon arrival to the stadium, they should be directed to a staff or volunteer specific parking lot, and gain access either via parking pass or name on a list.

Accreditation

- Most volunteers will gain access to the stadium through a temporary/match specific credential. This should be distributed prior to the volunteer's entry into the stadium. Two options would be to either have a designation box office window for credential pick-up, or preferably, have the volunteer coordinator set up a station outside the venue to greet all volunteers upon arrival, provide them with their credential and brief sheet, and then direct them to their next location.

Uniforms

- Volunteers should be recognizable and distinguished by wearing uniform attire labeling them as volunteers.
- Uniforms should be on brand and further portray the volunteer culture.

Catering

Proper catering is a very important factor in the success of the Volunteers project. The main recommendation is that catering has a huge influence on the motivation and level of satisfaction of volunteers and hence special attention must be given to it

Volunteer Meeting Room

Designating a room specifically for volunteers has proved to be very important. They are used for various purposes, ranging from changing rooms to rest areas and also for socialization aspects. This also provides volunteers a consistent reference point. For returners, they will always know where they need to check-in upon arrival and check-out after the match. The Volunteer Meeting Room can be multifunctional and serve as a briefing room, break room, locker room or dining hall.

Match Day Roles

When recruiting and staffing volunteers for matches, consider the skills and experience required to meet the expectations of that position. A volunteer filling the position of Field Manager would certainly require more experience than someone assisting in fan engagement on the concourse or fan zone. Use roles and positions as a method of motivation, encouraging new volunteers to return, as the more they volunteer, the more responsibility they will be given. Another method would be to put volunteers in a rotation, providing volunteers with experience in multiple roles, and learning what they enjoy and where they excel.

No Shows: It is always better to have more volunteers than not enough on Match Day. Volunteer Management should develop a no-show management process and ensure that there is a pool of volunteers in each venue that can serve as "all-rounder" in such. The current idea is to have around 3-5 additional volunteers per venue.

Important note on integration and respect for volunteers

It should be expressed to volunteers that respect is one of the underlying principles of their involvement with the same and they should expect the same from every staff member. This involves proper management of volunteers and certain attitude towards them. Volunteers feeling undervalued and unappreciated is one of the main reasons for turnover. To avoid this, the right number of volunteers need to be identified, they need to have the right skillset, they need to be able to do the job that is

required and have efficient training. Additionally, there must be actions taken to overcome the (initial) skepticism from full time staff and the underestimation of volunteers' engagement on match day. An effort should be undertaken to enhance sense of volunteering within all projects and to strengthen respect towards volunteers as important part of the organization.

After Placement

Building on the volunteer experience by developing an after placement program should be the organization's commitment to social responsibility. Many individuals and students see volunteering as a means to an end, and assisting them in reaching that end will not only be an act of good will towards the volunteers, but will also help increase the value of your volunteer program and the role it plays in contributing to the growth of knowledge and experience to the sport industry in your community. Creating a volunteer to internship program is one way in which you can help students meet requirements, have valuable experiences, and create important contacts to assist in starting a career after school. In addition, providing a reference letter after volunteers complete so many hours can be valuable to those looking to break into the industry. Clubs can also utilize their network with other clubs in their market and within the United Soccer League to assist in job placement for valuable volunteers. It is important to note that the after placement program does not guarantee volunteers a job after volunteering/internship, but aims at facilitating the search and providing employees with the necessary visibility towards potential future employers. For those volunteers who already have careers outside of the sport industry, it would be recommended that you assist in continuing to build their knowledge and experiences. For those markets that see other large sporting events come into their community, it would be encouraged that the organization use their connections to provide their staff/volunteers with additional experience in having the opportunity to be a part of that event.

Conclusion

Volunteers have become a huge asset in the sport industry and are allowing clubs to expand their operational capacity beyond what would be possible with just staff. Volunteers should be considered as an extension of the organizations workforce and receive the same training and bare some of the same responsibility as full-time staff. As clubs begin to invest and create more value around the volunteers, the more efficient they will become on match day, and allow the club to further expand their boundaries and operations.

For more information regarding developing your club's volunteer program, please contact Justen Braddock (justen.braddock@uslsoccer.com).