Recruiting and Managing Volunteers for Your Event

How to train and retain your loyal event team
Your most powerful supporters

Volunteers are among your most valuable supporters for your event. After all, they’ve committed their own time and energy to help make your event successful. And with the right motivation and a great experience, they’re likely to be passionate promoters of your cause before, during, and even well after the event is over.

To make sure your volunteers are ready to help you create an awesome experience for your attendees, you’ll need to put time and resources into onboarding and training. And just like every other aspect of the business of running an event, the more efficiently and effectively you can accomplish this, the better the results will be.

With hands-on experience working with thousands of event directors and promoters across a wide range of event types, Eventbrite offers the following best practices and ideas to help you put a successful volunteer management strategy in place.
Set volunteers up for success

A great onboarding experience reduces no-shows and encourages volunteers to arrive at the event prepared to get to work. For this reason, it’s important to start recruiting volunteers far in advance and ensuring you have a way to get in touch with your volunteer staff quickly and easily prior to the event.

Get commitment early

One best practice we have found particularly helpful is for event organizers to set up a separate, free online registration process specifically designed for volunteers. Some event directors prefer to have all volunteers register for general support and then communicate shift assignments either closer to the actual event, or on event day. Others with larger, single, or multi-day events, have found it more effective to let volunteers select in advance specific jobs and time commitments using unique registration types on their registration page. Setting up volunteer registration in this manner can allow you to limit the number of people who can volunteer for a specific assignment or time, ensuring appropriate coverage across the entirety of the event.

Example free volunteer registration page (left) and custom questions page (right).
Communication is key
No matter which method you choose for volunteer registration, having all information, including each volunteer’s email and mobile number, centralized in one place provides an advantage not only for planning, but also communication.

Prior to event day, we recommend preparing a pre-event reminder email that includes all pertinent information specific to volunteering. This includes such information as directions to the event, where to park, how to check in as a volunteer, and any other details that would be important to know in advance. This information can also be reinforced in the event details section on the volunteer registration page.

Once at the event, you should consider alternative methods of communication. These days, for example, nearly every volunteer has access to a mobile phone, so texting important information and updates offers volunteers quick and easy access to relevant details at their fingertips. Providing your volunteers with walkie-talkies can be another method for rapid dissemination of information.

Set clear expectations
Letting volunteers know exactly what you expect from them before their shift begins is the number one way to ensure that they’ll perform their jobs successfully. Thoughtful preparation goes a long way in minimizing hiccups and walk-offs.

- Be specific about time commitments and tasks. Assign clear tasks and shifts, and stick to them. If it turns out that a volunteer can’t stay the entire time they had originally signed up for, it’s much better to know beforehand while you have the ability to make quick adjustments.

- Make the connection between each task and the success of the event. Let’s face it: a lot of event-related tasks just aren’t terribly glamorous or exciting. Communicating just how essential each job is to the success of your event will help volunteers appreciate the importance of doing the best job they can.

Brite Tip:
Pre-event volunteer communications must haves
- Clearly state event rules. Nobody wants to be surprised by unexpected rules and policies. If you have a dress code for volunteers or other specific policies such as no jewelry, piercings, gum-chewing, or outside food and beverages, communicate those clearly in advance in your pre-event communication.

- A pre-event checklist. A volunteer with a sunburn or soggy feet is less likely to be in a cheerful mood—or to stick around. Giving volunteers a list of items they should bring (for example, sunscreen, hat, flashlight, or rain jacket) will help them stay comfortable and productive.

How to stay in touch with your volunteers on site
- GroupMe (https://groupme.com/) provides a great tool designed to allow event directors to send fast, efficient communications to volunteers via group texts.
Match the right person to the right job

It might be tempting to think of all volunteers as interchangeable resources, but that doesn’t usually jibe with reality. Making an effort to match people to tasks can go a long way toward creating a more rewarding situation for everybody. Also, consider which jobs might not be a good fit for volunteers to handle and assign them to your most reliable paid staff members.

• **Don’t take unnecessary risks.** Whether it’s checking coats, handling money, or enforcing security, jobs where poor performance can put your event at risk are best handled by paid professionals.

• **Consider letting volunteers pick their own jobs.** Set up your volunteer registration process to let volunteers state their skills and job preferences in advance of the event. You can also screen volunteers early on the day of the event to get a sense for where they could fit best well before it’s all set in stone.

• **Use discretion in assigning tasks.** Not everyone is comfortable yelling out directions to a crowd, operating ticket scanners, or lifting boxes of t-shirts. Make sure people have the appropriate skills to get the job done.

• **Keep it simple.** Tasks that are easy to learn quickly and don’t require special knowledge are most suited to less experienced volunteers.

**Brite Tip:**

Use real-time check-in data available through your ticketing provider to fine-tune volunteer staffing needs throughout the event. If you see a sudden spike in ticket scans per minute at one gate while check-in at other entrances remain relatively light, use this insight to quickly move check-in staff from one location to the other.
Get volunteers ready to roll

Once your volunteers are onsite, it’s time to get them pumped up and ready to put on a great event. To your guests, volunteers represent the event and your brand as much as any paid staff. Just one experience with a grumpy or confused volunteer will stay in their memory long after the event has ended.

Onsite orientation: make it great

In the last-minute rush to pull your event together, don’t forget to make volunteer orientation a top priority. You want your volunteers to be enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and this is where you show them how to make it happen.

• Choose awesome trainers. No one will have more influence over a volunteer’s impression of the event than the person giving the orientation. Pick dynamic, passionate speakers to set the tone and build excitement. Depending on the size of your event, using Eventbrite field operations staff can be a great option.

• Be prepared. There’s a lot of information to cover. Build in time to organize and polish the presentation so volunteers stay engaged throughout the orientation. It’s always a good idea to hire experienced trainers who can adapt the presentation according to the particular needs of the group.

• Allow practice and question time. If your volunteers will be using certain devices and procedures, allow enough hands-on practice time to ensure that people are confident and capable of performing their tasks on event day. Encourage volunteers to ask questions.

• Tell them it’s okay to say, “I don’t know.” Throughout your event you’ll have volunteers who won’t know how to answer every question or handle every situation. Make sure they know which staff to turn to for more complex issues so they can keep things flowing smoothly.

• Remind them of the rules. Avoid misunderstandings by repeating the most important rules and policies you shared during the onboarding process.

• Say thank you. For most volunteers, feeling appreciated is enough of a reward for donating their time. Express genuine thanks during the orientation and as often as possible throughout the event.
Stay connected after the event

By the end of an event, people often develop a sense of community with their fellow volunteers and other staff. You can help keep that alive by sharing photos and thank you messages on your volunteer page, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Continuing to engage with volunteers after the event is a great way to keep them committed to your organization in the long term.

There’s also a lot of value in getting direct feedback from your volunteers after the event is over. Whether it’s through an online survey or a simple email, you can ask volunteers about how comfortable they were with the jobs they performed, whether or not the experience met their expectations, and anything else that might offer constructive input. This data can provide useful insight and suggestions that will help you make your next event even better.

When you make the time and effort to treat event volunteers like the strategic assets that they are, you’ll find you get a significant return on your investment. Putting an effective volunteer management plan in place results in more satisfied volunteers and a better overall experience for your guests.

Checklist: Arm volunteers with information

Make sure volunteers have the information they’ll need to assist attendees throughout the event. Include the following information both in pre-event communications and during onsite orientation.

- Attendee, staff, and volunteer policies and rules
- Location of the restrooms (the most common question volunteers are asked)
- Location of emergency exits, evacuation routes, fire extinguishers, and Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) throughout the event site
- Relevant Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations and how to accommodate entry and exit for guests with special needs
- Where to send guests with more complex issues or questions
- How to deal with unruly or sick guests, and how to call for security or medical assistance
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