

FSLN Coffee Chat: Volunteer Engagement with Food Forward's Joe Bobman and Taylor Crotty
Wednesday, May 15, 2019
4pm -4:45pm EST
Zoom platform

Resources

Volunteer Posting Sites:

<https://www.volunteermatch.org/>

<https://www.pointsoflight.org/volunteer-search/>

Examples of Volunteer Position Descriptions from Food Forward:

<https://foodforward.org/volunteer/volunteer-positions/>

Link to Volunteer Code of Conduct / Policy:

Here's an example of our basic terms of participation for volunteers (from [Willing Hands](#) - VT/NH)

<http://www.willinghands.org/gleaning/Pickers/ParticipationTerms.php>

[Food Forward's Non-Discrimination Policy](#)

[DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING: Sexual Harassment Policy](#)

Volunteer Management Systems

Note that there are many softwares for volunteer management on the market and we don't recommend any specific software. However, these resources may help you through the search & selection process:

<https://www.idealware.org/reports/consumers-guide-volunteer-management-systems/>

<https://www.wholewhale.com/volunteer-management-tools/>

More resources for learning:

<http://learn.volunteermatch.org/>

<https://volpro.net/>

<https://www.energizeinc.com/directory/professional-associations/north-america>

<http://cvacert.org/>

Virtual Volunteering:

<https://www.onlinevolunteering.org/en>

Notes

Food Forward's volunteer programs:

Food recovery- harvesting at farms, collecting at Farmers Markets.

Range from a couple hours to long term leadership roles.

Engage 4,000 volunteers per year! 190 volunteer events per month

Captured the volunteer's journey at the organization-- from start to finish--

Hope to encourage volunteers to become regular volunteers and take leadership roles- allows them to expand programs without adding staff.

Volunteers can be the best advocates for food justice and for Food Forward and their work.

Q: What has worked to educate volunteers and keep them engaged?

Newsletters for volunteers and the public- issues in the area; also volunteer-specific newsletters like happy hours and hikes, volunteer ops, Happy Hours and hikes allow opportunity for volunteer leaders to get to know each other and Food Forward staff better.

Creating a sense of community among volunteers through fun!

Important to check in with volunteers regularly-- are they happy, feeling fulfilled, valued-- even if they've been with the org for a long time. Interests might shift over time.

Q: how do you onboard and train volunteers to be advocates for your org?

When people come in very eager to lead, ask them to volunteer first. They host trainings in the office about issues food forward works on, logistics for events; constantly provide additional resources about how they talk about food waste as an issue or Food Forward as an org.

Provide opportunities for volunteers to give feedback and shape the program.

Community Ambassadors- volunteer program with training, resources, how to give an elevator pitch, FAQ's, etc. Allows a small number of volunteers to go out and represent them at events. Resources are helpful for all volunteers.

Treat volunteer leadership positions like they are an employment opportunity, have detailed position descriptions that are similar to job descriptions. <https://foodforward.org/volunteer/volunteer-positions/>

What hasn't worked well?

Using volunteer posting platforms can be a great way to find new volunteers but also takes a lot of time; have narrowed it down to 3-4 sites that they stick with. Evaluating how successful they are and then letting less-helpful ones go.

Cold calls and emails haven't worked so well.

To grow, need to recruit more leaders. Be more strategic about who they ask to take on more responsibility.

To assess what works, ask volunteers how they heard about you and write it down, tells you how people come to your organization. Allows you to focus on what's working and stop spending time on what's not working.

Q: have you had to deal with a long-time volunteer that behaved inappropriately, esp towards women?

Treat volunteer leaders similar to a paid position, there can be a need to 'fire' a volunteer. An org needs to be able to fire volunteers to engage them effectively.

Have a disciplinary process, sexual harassment policy, code of conduct that volunteers sign-on to. In extreme cases they fire the volunteer immediately. For minor violations, document the incident- documentation is important legally in case you ever need to fire the vol. In the best case scenario this is an opportunity to give feedback to the volunteer.

Setting expectations and having codes of conduct in place are key. These can be referred to if something comes up.

Does anyone else have exp engaging volunteers as food systems advocates or policy advocates?

How do you evaluate what volunteers do, pick tasks? Do you sometimes reject suggestions for work that might be done by volunteers (from the board, for example)?

They are constantly turning down requests for volunteers because they can't always find a volunteer to fit the position. Ask the requestor to write a short job description- that helps them see if they could recruit a volunteer for that position.

Asking folks to write a job description helps them narrow down what they want, also shows their investment. If they don't have time to write a job description they won't have time to manage a volunteer.

How can small orgs without a dedicated volunteer coordinator use volunteers strategically?

Recruit a volunteer coordinator.

Join networks, find others with dedicated positions to learn from. Takes a lot of staff education about volunteerism. Ask for time at a staff meeting to talk about what a volunteer can and can't do.

How do you keep track of work, volunteers, hours, etc.? Nuts and bolts of managing volunteers? Software?

(Question asker was already using ChowMatch with their organization) Chow Match may handle the basic requirements that a Volunteer Management system would offer - <https://www.chowmatch.com/> - software for food recovery organizations. Food Forward doesn't use ChowMatch so can't speak much to this.

At some point a volunteer management software system is helpful to onboard, coordinate volunteers, track hours. There are lots of options! Food Forward uses a custom built application. Will share examples in links.

CropMobster has an interesting model... they use a Facebook group I think but that's pretty low tech

What is the best way to sell Chow Match to potential recipients to get on the platform itself?

Instructional sheet on how to sign up, walk folks through the process. Sign up recipients, then volunteers, then donors. Working on your elevator pitch is helpful for this process.

Have you had success with recruiting and retaining volunteers with incentives?

Food Forward used an incentive program earlier in the program- gave out Food Forward SWAG after a number of events. People loved the shirts, other swag was not as helpful, people aren't doing it for physical things. Shifting away from physical items to doing happy hours and creating community around leads instead of physical items. Volunteers love feeling a sense of membership and belonging through special events, shirts with the name.

Other ideas- gift certificates to a farmers market or restaurant. For big events, free attendance at the event is the incentive. Recognition- volunteer of the month on blog, in combo with a gift card. People seem to like the blog more than the gift card.

How do you distinguish between a volunteer and ambassador? - separate onboarding process with position descriptions, on Food Forward Website.

Volunteer Match website has a great blog, volunteer Pro has lots of resources. Look for professional development networks in your area.