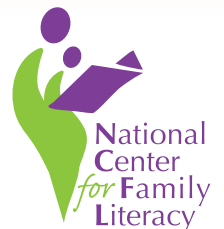


# Planning for Volunteers in Literacy

## CHAPTER 5: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT



Funded by UPS



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CHAPTER 5:  
**Volunteer  
Recruitment and  
Placement**

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## Introduction

**R**ecruiting and placing volunteers is at the heart of a program's successful volunteer component. This chapter will explore steps and processes in recruiting and placing volunteers. It also will discuss successes and challenges, as well as forms and tools that can be helpful in the management of a volunteer program.

The following program example describes briefly some ways that volunteers can truly round out the literacy services provided to families.



## Program Description

In 1991, Pima County Adult Education in Tucson, Arizona, was selected as one of five cities nationwide to receive a Toyota Families for Learning grant. The program began with three sites in the Sunnyside School District and has grown to 10 sites in three districts, including three Toyota Families in Schools (elementary-based) sites. In 1994, Pima County tapped another program called AmeriCorps, a program of national service in which members volunteer in their communities for 1,700 hours and then receive an educational award to further their education.

AmeriCorps volunteers have become central members of the family literacy teams at each site in the Pima County program, bringing a spirit of service to all that they do. Many of them are former family literacy students and bring a depth of understanding of the power of family literacy that enriches their work with families. Former students know best the potential and the challenges of dedicating one's time and focus to furthering educational goals and often students choose to talk with AmeriCorps members in difficult times or in times of insecurity. AmeriCorps volunteers are a cornerstone of staffing at each site.

In addition to AmeriCorps members, the program also uses many community volunteers. The majority work in the adult education component, providing one-on-one and small group tutoring. Classes are multi-level and volunteers often provide assistance that helps those students needing individualized instruction meet their goals.

In this chapter, program examples refer to the Pima County Adult Education program and include strategies that have worked with both AmeriCorps members and community volunteers.

## Getting the Big Picture



When recruiting volunteers, it is key that they get a thorough picture of your literacy program. The most successful way to do this is to have them visit the program, learn about the educational components, and meet the students and staff. For example, when one woman decided she was interested in volunteering in family literacy, the Pima County program invited her to attend an intensive implementation training to help her get the big picture of family literacy. After the training was over, she was never heard from again! Although some might view the loss of a potential volunteer as a failure, the program considered this an important success. With a fuller knowledge of family literacy, the volunteer decided her time and talents could be used better in a different setting. The program and the volunteer discovered this before making a large investment (of time or resources) in the placement process.

Other ways to give volunteers the “the big picture” are to have them look at students’ work and writing, books or projects that parents have made, and other materials that represent your program’s services. And of course, talking with former students and other volunteers about their experiences in the program is a great way for potential volunteers to gain firsthand knowledge about the program and the families it serves.

## Recruiting Volunteers

As you consider how to recruit volunteers, keep in mind why you want to recruit volunteers, and why volunteers might be interested in supporting your program. The preceding chapters have provided some valuable strategies for evaluating the challenges and benefits to incorporating volunteers. Before you begin recruitment efforts, be sure that you and your staff are committed to maximizing the contributions volunteers will offer your program.

Recruiting volunteers is a year-round, non-stop activity. If you are lucky enough to have a Volunteer Coordinator in your program, it is critical that he or she spends some time getting to know the program’s mission and vision and the philosophies behind the program’s instructional approach. The Pima County Adult Education program’s Volunteer Coordinator knows the culture of family literacy and its goals and can “just feel it” when he meets a volunteer that would be right for the program.

Before recruiting, be sure you know what your needs are. (See the chapter in this guidebook on “Assessing Program Needs.”) Survey your staff and teachers to know where they could use additional help. Your needs for volunteers will change as your program, staff, and students change, so have a process in place to evaluate

your volunteer need regularly. Once you know what the needs are, you can create descriptions explaining the work you think can be performed by a volunteer. (See the chapter on “Defining Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities.”) Then be prepared for surprises. You may think your greatest need is in tutoring, and suddenly a volunteer with a background in fundraising appears when you hadn’t thought of that as a need.

After doing a program needs assessment and defining volunteer roles, you are ready to recruit. While it requires specific actions to make it happen, volunteer recruitment is also a mindset. It becomes integrated into all aspects of outreach. For example, if you are talking to a civic group about the literacy needs in your community, you can talk about the fact that you use volunteers in your program.

**Some venues for recruiting volunteers include:**

- Local volunteer organizations
- Literacy organizations
- Newspapers and other community publications
- Retirement organizations
- Education organizations
- Community colleges and universities
- Staff’s friends and colleagues
- Former students
- Elementary schools where you have programs

When you contact these organizations, it is important that you have concise, clear descriptions of what volunteers in your program will be doing. Ideally, these descriptions will include not only examples of activities the volunteer will do, but also details about location and scheduling. If possible, have current or former students take part in presentations to community organizations. If potential volunteers can hear about the impact of the program directly from a student, it is much more powerful than hearing it from a staff member. Leave informational materials about your program with the contact person from that agency. Include a list of volunteer opportunities and perhaps a donation list of goods and supplies your program needs. This will encourage those who can’t volunteer their time to get involved nonetheless. (See *Sample H* for an example of a volunteer recruitment flier to distribute throughout the community.)

As you get to know your community through this strategy, you may find there is a need for developing a volunteer databank among literacy agencies. This project, though labor intensive, can provide a beneficial resource to the entire community.

In addition, it can increase the visibility and effectiveness of volunteers. You might even use a volunteer to coordinate this project.

Informal meetings and community events can provide opportunities for networking with potential volunteers. Volunteer support often results from informal discussions about student successes and the important role your program plays in the community.



At one literacy site where students were predominantly studying English as a Second Language, a small group of students decided they wanted to begin preparation for their GED exam. The adult educator began networking with friends and community members in search of someone who could volunteer 4-8 hours a week teaching math and encountered several people of diverse skills and background who were inspired to volunteer. A community organizer, an engineer, and a published poet expressed interest in volunteering with the project. The community organizer taught math classes with the GED students for an entire year. The poet and engineer worked one-on-one and in small groups with English language learners. This arrangement provided a mutually beneficial relationship in which volunteers learned about immigrant families and adult education while students gained language and math skills.

### Screening

It's important to assess potential candidates' reasons, goals and motivations for volunteering; their professional background, training, and teaching approaches; their communication styles; and their availability. Staff will want to be sure that volunteers share values that are compatible with the program's values and educational approach. If your program values a student-centered, participatory approach, does that volunteer also bring that perspective and the skills to implement it? If your program serves English language learners, what is the volunteer's experience with different languages and cultures? Many programs have discovered that while teaching experience is valuable, it is not always better. Sometimes it is better to find trainable people, engaged and open, who are eager to learn.



This screening can happen as casually as through informal conversations, or through more formal means such as written surveys and forms (see *Template H* for an example of a volunteer information form). Each program must know whose job it is to do this screening: the Volunteer Coordinator? The Program Manager? The classroom teacher? In most cases, there should be one point person to coordinate the volunteers in your program.

Simultaneously with the recruitment phase, teachers are preparing to welcome potential volunteers in their classroom. Ideally, teachers participate in an orientation that covers:

- Why people volunteer
- What it takes on the front end to make a successful placement
- How to communicate with staff and students about the volunteer's role
- How to help volunteers feel a part of the entire program
- How to manage time around meeting and planning with a volunteer
- What to cover when meeting with volunteers
- How to define roles and responsibilities for volunteers

These discussions can help cement the idea that accepting a volunteer in a classroom is a huge responsibility for a teacher. (See the chapter on “Involving and Developing Staff.”) Working with volunteers is not just taking advantage of “free help,” but also a time and energy commitment on the teacher's part.

#### **Tips for recruiting volunteers**

- Know who is in charge of recruiting volunteers in your organization and make it a fully defined part of that person's job description
- Make repeated contacts with community organizations that support the mission of your program
- Have job descriptions for positions that can be filled by volunteers
- Help potential volunteers see the big picture of your program
- Make volunteer recruitment a year-round part of your program
- Don't assume that community agencies and volunteers know about your program
- Don't assume that teachers know how to use volunteers without some training

## **Placing Volunteers**

Once the screening phase has helped identify a good match for your program, it's time to match the volunteer to the work that needs to be done. To determine what work best suits the volunteer, consider his skills and interests, the communication style of the teacher or staff member who will oversee the volunteer's work, individual personalities, and the volunteer's desire for support or independence.

By this time, you should know, for example, if a volunteer has the skills and desire to work with a small group of advanced English speakers, tutor math to GED students, or do one-on-one tutoring with computer skills.

With experience you will begin to notice signs of successful volunteer placement. For example, the Pima County program considers volunteer placement to be successful if:

- Students express that they are learning and reaching their goals better through their work with the volunteer
- Volunteers express their comfort level and satisfaction with what they are doing
- Volunteers feel they are an integral part of the entire site
- Volunteers see the big picture and how what they do ties in with and enhances all of the programming
- Volunteers make a long-term commitment to the site or students
- Volunteers become community advocates for your program.

The greatest challenge to placing volunteers is “match making.” There are many aspects to ensuring that the volunteer is the right match with a particular site, with a particular teacher, and with particular students. This is a delicate, lengthy process, but one very much worth the effort. A bad match, in any one of these areas, can have long-term consequences. It is worth the time spent up front to create the best matches possible.

One year, the Pima County program thought they’d made a good match. Although there were some initial concerns (the volunteer’s availability, language issues, the teacher’s communication style), the staff agreed to move ahead with the placement. After several weeks, it became clear that the match wasn’t working—and that the volunteer, the teacher and the students were not benefiting from the arrangement. The Volunteer Coordinator found another position that was better suited for the volunteer. After the experience, everyone agreed that the “red flags” at the beginning of the process were a pretty good indicator that the match should not have been forced.

Another challenge after placement is finding the time for the teachers and the volunteers to meet, plan, and evaluate. This communication is crucial to the success of the volunteer placement and must be built into the regular work week. This expectation of staff to meet and communicate regularly with volunteers should be a part of the staff training component.

For a volunteer who is going to provide classroom support, the orientation process might include these steps (see also the following chapter on “Training and Development for Volunteers”):



1. The volunteer and the teacher meet to discuss expectations, what kind of support the volunteer may or may not need, scheduling considerations, the role of the teacher, etc. Teachers must be able to express what the site’s needs are, what the volunteers should expect when they first come to the site, and the plan for the first visit. There must be clarity about who develops materials and plans.
2. The volunteer observes the teacher working with students and is introduced and drawn into the lesson and conversation.
3. The teacher, volunteer, and students discuss the day’s experience by talking about what they observed and learned. As the volunteer interacts with students, staff should note the level of comfort between the volunteer and the students.
4. After the class, the teacher (and perhaps the Volunteer Coordinator or Program Coordinator) debriefs with the volunteer, encouraging the volunteer to ask any questions about her ongoing role. Practical considerations, like scheduling, should be discussed as well.
5. Staff—the teacher, the Volunteer Coordinator, and the Program Coordinator—then evaluate the volunteer’s potential integration into the classroom. Any concerns should be addressed at this point, and if for some reason the volunteer doesn’t seem to be a good fit in this classroom, other roles that might be more appropriate should be discussed.

While this may seem like an inordinate amount of “up front” work before permanently placing a volunteer, it can prevent many difficult scenarios where teachers, volunteers, and students alike are frustrated and disappointed with the placement.

#### **Tips for placing volunteers**

- Arrange a meeting between the volunteer and teaching staff
- Allow opportunities to observe and “try out” the placement before firm commitments are set
- Follow up and evaluate soon after initial placement
- Be clear with volunteers that your goal is to find a position that will be equally rewarding for the volunteer and the students—be honest, and encourage honesty from your volunteers

## Putting It All Together

Finally, follow up is the next crucial step to a successful experience for all. After the volunteer has had a few days' experience, check in to see how things are going for the volunteer, the teaching staff and the students. Prepare a survey or set of questions to find out what you need to know about how the placement is working. *Templates I and J* are forms that may be useful in evaluating the success of a placement and the ongoing needs of volunteers. Evaluations should continue throughout the year. If a placement isn't working, find out if there is another role the volunteer can fill, or you may even have to consider that your program isn't the right opportunity for that volunteer.



Recruiting and placing volunteers is not much different from recruiting and placing students in your family literacy program. The key is to recruit with retention in mind. A volunteer who has a negative experience early on—much like a student—is likely to drop out.

Volunteers want to know their contributions are worthwhile. One of the best ways to ensure this is to take the time to place volunteers in roles that put their skills to good use. And it's okay if it takes a little while before you—and your volunteer—figure out what that best use is.

# Open the Door to Opportunity

## Volunteer for Literacy!

Volunteers are needed in a variety of roles to help children, parents & families learn important skills and reach their goals.

### Volunteers can...

- Teach reading, writing, math or GED preparation
- Read aloud to children
- Help with student recruitment
- Provide administrative support
- And much more!



**Please Call Today!**

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*(Adapted from The Learning Source for Adults and Families, Aurora, CO)*

Pima County Adult Education • Volunteer Information Form
(Please Print Clearly)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ M / F

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did you hear about the Pima College Adult Education Program?
[ ] Volunteer Center [ ] Another Volunteer [ ] Newspaper [ ] Friend [ ] Other:

2. Have you any previous volunteer or tutoring experience? [ ] Yes [ ] No
If so, what organization and role?

3. Education (highest grade completed):

4. Have you any teaching experience? [ ] Yes [ ] No If so, what grade level and subjects?

5. What is your special area of interest or expertise? [ ] Math [ ] Computers [ ] Reading [ ] Writing [ ] Science
[ ] Citizenship [ ] ESOL [ ] Clerical Support [ ] Other:

6. Reason(s) for seeking volunteer work in adult education:

7. Tutoring Preference: [ ] Learning Center/Classroom [ ] One-on-one [ ] Computer-assisted Instruction
[ ] Other:

8. Availability Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Days/Times Available: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

(for office use only)

Date of Orientation: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Entered in Database: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject Area: \_\_\_\_\_

**Pima County Adult Education • Volunteer Quarterly Self-Evaluation**  
(Please Print Clearly)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Day(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the best way to get in touch with you? \_\_\_\_\_

\* Include only if this is new or changed information.

1. On a scale of one to ten, how happy or satisfied are you in your position?

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

2. Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What has happened in your volunteer position lately that has given you joy and satisfaction?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are some challenges you are currently facing? What support would you like in dealing with them?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. If you could make any changes in your volunteer position or situation, what would they be?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Tutor Requests**

**Tutor Requests**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Need</b>	<b>Referral/Notes</b>