

# Eight Tips for Finding Volunteers

You might need eight days in a week to get that next fundraiser off the ground. And you definitely need eight to eighty warm bodies for your fundraiser to set sail (get sales)! Research suggests there is a strong correlation between the number of volunteers a fundraising organization taps and the amount of money they can expect to raise. Where and how do you get good volunteers committed to your fundraising goal?

**1. Seek 'em out:** At the bus stop, at the school drop off or pickup, at the neighborhood BBQ or monthly Bunco game. Opportunities are right in your backyard. Have the sign up sheet with you at all times and follow up quickly with those who say “yes.” For a given fundraiser, you can display a large poster signup sheet in the school hallway, listing areas of need, e.g. concession, classroom, counting orders, product delivery. Visuals can support by showing a picture: “Help sell  $x$  and the school gets  $y$ .” Better yet, “help sell  $x$  and your child gets  $y$ .”

**2. Line 'em up:** During the first two weeks of school, line up a healthy reserve of volunteers who rotate during the year. Individuals should not be tapped for more than one or two fundraisers a year. Encourage eager newcomers, such as parents of kindergartners or high school newcomers, and parents new to the community. Keep the pipeline full: At the end of each drive, begin the search for next year's crop of volunteers. Ask this year's volunteers to write a job description for their replacement. Then ask who they recommend for the job.

**3. Sell 'em with information:** Busy parents, working parents don't always have the school calendar on the brain, nor do they necessarily know what your parent group is about. Make folders describing your mission, the people on the team and their contact information, and include a snapshot of the year's calendar of activities and have them ready for open house and parent-teacher conferences. Ask for one commitment, either to a regularly scheduled fundraiser or to a special event or project. Use constant reminders: a month-at-a-glance calendar parents can tape to the refrigerator, telephone trees, email groups, electronic bulletin boards.

**4. Think short-term:** Give volunteers a specific task in a manageable timeframe and let them take ownership. Recruiting warm bodies for quick results is effective when the volunteer position can be done by almost anyone, either because no special skills are required or the necessary skills can be taught in a limited amount of time. Short-term simple jobs can be handed to those who would help at family book reading night, a field trip, or a special weekend event.

**5. Match Skills:** If it's more than a warm body you need, consider matching the skills and interests of your volunteers to your list of tasks. Get to know them by asking questions: What would they like to do? How much time can they commit? What do they do for a living or for fun that applies? For example, the freelance copywriter in your neighborhood may be the next person to take on your newsletter or write and pitch a press release to the local media. Similarly, the tennis league member who never has time for meetings and committees might be the person to chaperone a sporting event.

**6. Target each grade:** Parents who may not warm up to a schoolwide fundraiser may find it easier to get involved to raise funds for their child's specific grade level. Parents will see a direct benefit to their child because their efforts are sharply targeted.

**7. Put more people on the clock:** Whether someone has an hour, a half-day, a weekend or a whole school year to give — accept it -Graciously. Then ask the new volunteer to tell five friends about the parent group and its goals. And so it goes.

**8. Praise 'em like you should:** Create an environment that celebrates the spirit of volunteering all the time. End-of-year appreciation is nice but you might need to recognize your star players weekly, monthly or on some recurring basis. Ideas: A prime parking spot with a big sign that says "Reserved for Volunteer of the Week"; a monthly raffle for "best seat in the house" for school events like graduation or local events such as a hot play or concert in town; a feature story complete with pictures of volunteers in your parent-group newsletter or the local newspaper.

### **Wrap-Up**

You know you have a winning fundraiser when volunteers replay their experience thinking of the playground they helped build instead of the catalogs, order forms and monies they organized. This warm-hearted memory just might motivate them to sign up and volunteer again.



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