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# Writing Persuasive Volunteer Recruitment Appeals

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In the old days, most volunteer recruitment appeals were delivered in face-to-face meetings where you had a bit of time and space to fully describe why volunteering was a good idea. These days you're probably limited to a quick explanation, most often through a static media such as a newspaper announcement or a Web site, where space is at a premium and you need to make a good quick first impression

Here are some tips for putting a lot of content into a short written appeal, with some examples both good and bad from the US, UK, Canada and Australia.

## 1. Catch Attention with a Good Opening

The opening of the Message must be interesting enough to entice the potential volunteer to continue reading or listening. The body of the Message must be appealing enough to interest the potential volunteer in considering the volunteer opportunity or, at least, in contacting the agency to get more information. Boring Messages are only likely to appeal to boring people.

Consider these examples:

- Volunteers needed to sleep. NW women's shelter is recruiting for its Sunday overnight shifts. Talk, laugh, and share with the residents.
- Be a PhoneFriend! DC Hotline is looking for people who care about children to work as volunteers as phone friends, the afternoon phone line for children. If you want to help children who are scared, lonely or need support call 223-CALL. Training begins soon.
- Interested in the arts? Volunteers know what goes on behind the scenes at the Kennedy Center. Call the Friends of the Kennedy Center at 254-8700.

The short opening line in each conveys an image that is likely to entice the reader to continue through the remainder of the message.

My favorite example of doing this well appeared in a weekly column in the Louisville Courier (and may still appear, for all I know). Some unknown genius managed to condense volunteer opportunities to one-liners, and still make them both understandable. Here are examples:

**Lunch Break:**

Pick up and deliver meals to shut-ins on your daily lunch hour, Saturdays or in the evening.

**Critter Sitter:**

Watch children while mothers attend self-help classes, organize activities and tutor.

**Jack of All Trades:**

Paint, make small repairs, and build shelves.

**Guardian Angel:**

Spend 20 hours a week with special needs children, serving in day care schools, etc.

**Stick It:**

Put labels on envelopes.

**Knight in Shining Armor:**

Need to listen and support victim of domestic violence at the hospital or doctor's office.

**Leap Frog:**

Teach early gymnastics skills to children 2 years to 8 years of age.

**Star Trek:**

Set up experiments, generally assist science teacher.

## 2. Present a Complete Picture

The body of the Message should present information in an order that psychologically matches how people will think about the offer:

- Need: Is there a problem?
- Solution: Can this job help solve it?
- Fears: Will I be capable of helping with it?
- Benefits: What's in it for me?
- Contact: How do I get involved?

One way to cover all this is to imagine you're directing a motion picture. Your goal is to get the prospective volunteer to "view" the movie in their head - seeing the problem you're trying to solve, the difficulties it creates and the ways that volunteers are involved. In essence you want the prospective volunteer to picture themselves as a star of the movie - the volunteer coming to the rescue.

Consider this example:

**American Jewish Congress****Volunteer Corps in Israel**

As war in the Persian Gulf rages on and Israel awaits the next bombing by Iraqi Scuds, many Americans are asking how they can help. In response, the American Jewish Congress has organized the AJCongress Volunteer Corps in Israel, a new program designed to serve the Israeli people who are the targets of Saddam Hussein's missiles.

Israelis have shown extraordinary courage and resilience in the face of these brutal and deadly attacks. But the anxiety and strain they live under are causing serious emotional stress among the most vulnerable - children, the elderly and the psychologically and physically handicapped.

The Israeli institutions that care for these men, women, and children are overworked and understaffed. They need help - American volunteers who will provide care and love for the innocent casualties of Iraqi brutality.

Israel's Ministry of Social Welfare has established a special program to assign volunteers from abroad where they are most required. The greatest demand is for volunteers who will serve as attendants in these institutions. Mental health professionals, nurses and physiotherapists are also needed.

All volunteers must be able to spend a minimum of two weeks in Israel and pay their own airfare. Housing and meals in Israel are provided by the institutions to which volunteers are assigned.

If you wish to serve in the AJCongress Volunteer Corps in Israel - or if you cannot volunteer but wish to support the program - please call us at 212/360-1600 or send in the coupon below.

And this example:

### **Office of the Public Advocate**

#### **Community Visitor**

Community Visitors(CV) have a unique role in monitoring the quality of services for people who are vulnerable and living in residential services for people with a disability.

The core role of the CV is to safeguard the interests and rights of vulnerable people who have a disability and are living in eligible services. CVs do this by identifying and reporting issues and problems from the perspective of the individual resident and by referring these for resolution within the service system. CVs are responsible for performing this role by:

- Visiting eligible services regularly, announced or unannounced and as otherwise required or requested.
- Identifying, appraising and monitoring issues and problems from the perspective of the individual resident, keeping in mind community expectations, relevant legislative principles and service standards.
- Resolving identified problems through direct negotiations with the staff and management of the facility where possible.
- Referring on serious, persistent or unresolved issues to the Regional Convenor.
- Participating, with the Panel Secretary, in the preparation of a report on each visit.
- Contributing to the development of the Annual Report through the reports made on each visit and as otherwise required.
- Attending training sessions convened by the CV Co-ordinating Unit as required.
- Attending meetings as requested by the Regional Convenor, CV Co-ordinating Unit or the Office of the Public Advocate ( e.g. quarterly meetings and the Annual General Meeting).

Each of these gives you concrete "pictures" of the kinds of thing you would be doing as a volunteer and gives you an explanation of why you would be doing them - in effect, a short movie.

As a general rule, spend more space on need than on logistics. People will first decide whether you're worth volunteering for and then decide whether they can fit you into their schedule. The need you stress may be yours, your clientele's, or a perceived need/benefit of the volunteer.

Sometimes you can't cover the whole picture, so you selectively choose what you think your "strengths" might be. These could simply be different interests that a prospective volunteer might have. In general, there are four different types of "selling points" that might be used:

### **The Cause or Clientele**

- The King County Sexual Assault Center believes that all people, including children, have the right to be free to live without the fear of sexual violence. We also believe that victims of sexual abuse and their non-offending family members deserve support to alleviate the trauma of sexual abuse in their lives. Volunteer opportunities are currently available in a variety of areas and we are recruiting now for our October and January training sessions. Please call 226-5062 to help eliminate sexual violence in your community.
- Orphan Foundation of America: Help defend the rights of orphan children in America. Research, administration, public policy, advocacy, fundraising. Contact Father Joseph Rivers, 223-4129.

### **The Solution or Accomplishment**

- Volunteers are being sought for the Auxiliary of Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound. The Auxiliary, along with its three area councils and 14 local guilds, raises money for scholarships, medical equipment, patient aid and patient education. Over the last decade, the auxiliary has raised more than \$587,000 and awarded more than 200 scholarships. The auxiliary raises money through support, two hospital gift shops, making articles for sale, and other activities. For Olympia-area information, call Paula Mittelstaedt, Olympia guild volunteer chairperson, at 491-3656.

### **The Type of Work**

- Agency serving low income youth at risk looking for photographer with equipment to volunteer taking photographs at our 1st graduation ceremony! Agency will pay for developing, etc. Help make this event a wonderful memory. Call Seattle Youth Initiative, 382-5011, ask for Patty.
- Cablearn cable channel 27 seeks daytime volunteers to assist with marketing, educational programming, program development and underwriting or research in educational video techniques. Good experience or background for educators interested in video. Call 545-TV27 weekdays.
- Put your public relations and event planning skills to work now as a volunteer for Whalefest '90! This fun and educational special event helps people learn more about whales and their marine environment. Whalefest takes place Feb. 23-25, 1990 at Pier 70. Call Whales World at 441-0629 for details.

### **The Setting**

- Death Valley National Monument - This large desert valley, nearly surrounded by high mountains, contains the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere and is known as the hottest spot in North America. Here you

can find spectacular wildflower displays, sand dunes, Scotty's Castle, and remnants of the gold and borax mining days. Volunteer Jobs: Opportunities that exist in the winter are involved with interpretation, campground host program, and curatorial work. Contact: Death Valley National Monument, 619/786-2331.

### 3. Don't be Misunderstood

Recruitment messages must be easily understood. They must be intelligible and avoid jargon, unless it is included for a specific reason and will be understood by the intended reader. Messages should be examined for ease of comprehension by someone other than the author of the message. Remember: What Can be Misunderstood, Will Be.

Consider these embarrassing examples, crafted by experienced volunteer managers who knew exactly what they really meant to say

- Atlanta Community Food Bank - Volunteers needed to sort donated food and make sure food is edible. 892-9822.
- The Travelers Aid Society needs volunteers for its service desk at Union Station. Hours are from 9:30-1:30 and 1:30-5:30, seven days a week. For more info, call 347-0101.

If the image of a volunteer job conjured up by the first message is "food taster," then that of the second is definitely "slave."

The sad news is that an amused reader is unlikely to call up and insist that you probably don't really mean what you wrote, but is more likely to conclude volunteering for an agency that stupid probably isn't what they want to do with their time.

### 4. Test the Message

The Message should be tested on members of the target group at whom it is aimed, to make sure it is understandable to them and communicates in a way most likely to be appealing to their interests. The most common - and fatal - mistake in writing recruitment appeals is to end up with something that appeals mightily to the person who wrote it but says nothing to its intended audience.

Consider this interesting example of a message that you personally might find a bit disconcerting:

Seattle Mental Health Institute, a progressive community mental health center on Capitol Hill, with a \$4 million budget, is seeking to fill three (3) positions on its Board of Directors. Individuals with varying backgrounds in business who are interested in a volunteer leadership position in the community are encouraged to apply. For applications, write Shobha Hathiramani, Admin. Secretary, Seattle Mental Health Institute, 1600 E. Olive St, Seattle, WA 98122.

But when you realize that its target audience was young business executives it begins to make a bit more sense - almost like an artfully crafted Shakespearean sonnet. It "speaks the right language."

### 5. Make the Message Inviting

The whole point of a recruitment message is to make the potential volunteer contact the agency for a further discussion. This means that the message should be aimed at getting the prospective volunteer to visualize themselves successfully becoming a volunteer.

Consider this example:

## **Kauai Hospice**

### **Becoming a Hospice Volunteer**

Want to have more meaning in your life? Do you want to do something that is satisfying and of great service to your community? Then become a Kauai Hospice volunteer!

Volunteers are needed from the westside to service families of the terminally ill who live between Koloa and Kekeha. Becoming a hospice volunteer is similar to helping a neighbor in need.

The only qualification required is your desire to help someone in need. You don't need any medical skills; you don't even need a college degree; you don't even need to know what to say. All you need to do is sign up for our hospice volunteer training session beginning on February 17 at Kauai Veterans Memorial Hospital for an all-day session which then continues for 4 evening sessions in the following two weeks.

Another training session will be offered shortly after the westside training session for people on the eastside from Lihue to Hanalei. For more information, call Kathleen Boyle, Kauai Hospice director at 245-7277.

And contrast it with this bureaucratic nightmare:

### **ASAP - Asylum Seeker Assistance Project**

#### **Customer Service Officers**

- Training provided
- Build new friendships
- Learn new skills

Tasks/Qualifications/skills required:

1. Display good public relation skills
2. Basic maths skills (to give change, calculate total costs, count up money, basic record keeping)
3. Social conscience for people seeking asylum
4. Stock sorting and rotation
5. Pricing
6. Good housekeeping
7. General cleaning (e.g. sweeping, window cleaning, dusting)
8. Work well in a team
9. Must be reliable and punctual

Training/supervision provided:

1. An initial probationary period will be required in which initial on the job training will take place.
2. On going training will be provided on the job or through workshops as required.
3. Volunteers will be invited to attend seminars provided by ASAP or their sister agencies on relevant asylum seeker issues.
4. A team meeting will be organised on a regular basis for all volunteers to get to know each other better, catch up on what's been happening, work through any problems which may arise and review current shop policies as needed.

#### Requirements:

- Police Check
- Minimum time commitment of one day a week (i.e. 4 - 8 hrs on any one day)
- Attend training sessions as required
- All volunteers must meet the requirements of ASAP as outlined in the "Becoming A Volunteer" booklet, which will be provided on request.

One small but significant way to make a message more inviting is to give the name of a person, preferably including their first name, not just the name of the agency which is to be contacted. Volunteering is a personal decision and people like to talk with other people about it.

Follow these tips and you'll be more likely to end up with a recruitment appeals that attracts precisely the kind of volunteers that you're looking for!

#### Related Topics:

[Recruitment](#)

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