

# International Visitors

## A potential resource for help

If you're looking for a new source of volunteers and are eager to add diversity to your volunteer corps, you should consider recruiting the generally overlooked foreign nationals living temporarily in many American communities.

These are people who are here legally but do not have work permits. So, they cannot accept a paying job but they can volunteer and often do, when asked.

There are a number of ways such people enter the United States:

They are here as full-time students and are not permitted to hold full-time jobs while studying. They are the spouses of people employed by a multi-national company and on assignment here for six months or longer. The employed spouse is on a work visa, but most often the unemployed spouse is not permitted to work for pay. Older children may also be living here while their parent works.

They are au pairs - generally young women who provide live-in child care for room, board, and a small stipend and must be enrolled in at least part-time higher education courses. Regula-

tions require them to have time off each week, but they are restricted from other paid employment. Some sponsoring organizations encourage them to do volunteer work as an added cultural exchange opportunity.

In general, these foreign nationals are quite well-educated, with a wide range of skills. The spouses of corporate employees might or might not be fluent in English, though more often than not they do speak the language.

These potential volunteers are especially helpful if you serve a client population for whom English is a new language. This can include not only your primary clients, but their extended families. For example, could a school or youth program include grandparents in more activities if interpreters were available? Do you work with Alzheimer's patients who have reverted back to non-English mother tongues? It's a very common situation that leaves in nursing care facilities with serious communication problems. There are undoubtedly many such opportunities to help your community.

Other ways to utilize foreign nation-

als include inviting them to speak about their country (show slides, play music, etc.) to groups of students, seniors, or clients. Or, how about becoming one-to-one friends with peers and later continuing with a penpal relationship, or, these days, an e-mail relationship, after they return to their home country?

Finally, such volunteers can educate your organization about voluntary service, philanthropy, charity, and civic engagement in their home country. This will provide a very useful perspective on your efforts to recruit American citizens with the same cultural background.

### Recruiting International Visitors

There are a number of ways to find this talent pool. Consider these ideas:

■ Assess which corporations in your community have foreign branches or offices and therefore and might rotate in foreign workers and their families. Contact their personnel/human departments and enlist their help in spreading the word about the possibilities and benefits of volunteering.

■ Talk with the Admissions Office of local colleges and universities and find out which staff or faculty offer counseling or other guidance to foreign students. Also, ask which organizations on campus sponsor interna-

tional exchange or reach out to foreign visitors to the school.

■ Identify any local community programs for immigrants, as well as organizations promoting "hyphenated" affiliations: the German-American Club, the Japanese-American Association, etc. These groups often sponsor recreational programs for visitors of their cultural heritage.

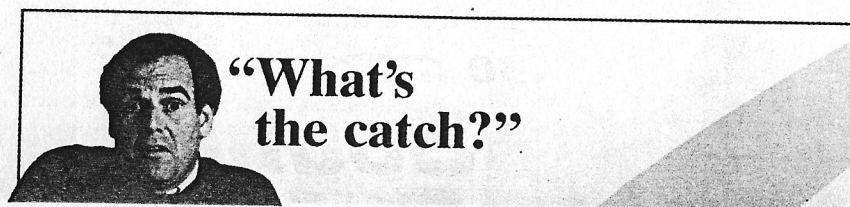
■ Contact any local foreign language newspapers or newsletters and see if they would be interested in running a story about your volunteer opportunities.


■ Collaborate with any foreign exchange programs, either for students or for diplomatic visitors.

■ Post your volunteer opportunities for foreign nationals on Web sites that have an international focus, such as [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), or even on one of the many new volunteer opportunity registries springing up online in many countries around the world. In other words, let people who know they are coming to the United States do some advance planning.

Because of the power of the Internet to publicize almost anything, your organization might already be receiving unsolicited emails from young adults in other countries seeking a paid or stipended internship. This is a

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## ON VOLUNTEERS

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different category of worker than the volunteers discussed here, since such interns are usually seeking a United States sponsor for their visit abroad, requiring you to follow special procedures. For example, depending on the country involved, the prospective worker may need to apply for an employment authorization from their country and receive validation from an immigration officer prior to serving with you. You may also be held liable if the intern illegally remains in the United States when the temporary visa expires. Once again, the real focus here is recruiting foreign visitors to become volunteers in addition to whatever brought them to this country for a few months to a few years. Before spreading your recruitment message, take the time to develop volunteer assignments most likely to

use these foreign nationals' skills and to pique their interest. Remember that these might be very educated and experienced workers.

Beyond all the reasons you might give to any prospective volunteer to join you, there are a few persuading arguments that work especially well for international candidates. Try explaining that volunteering allows someone to:

- Make new friends and learn first-hand about new areas of American culture.
- Improve your English through practical use.
- Keep your professional skills active/alive so that when you return home you'll be in practice.
- Learn new skills that will help you get a good job when you return home (and get some references for

your resume).

- Help others with what you know best: your own language.

- For some cultures it might work best to recruit spouses or students to volunteer together in small groups rather than individually. This minimizes the psychic risk for each volunteer, accommodates possible cultural mores (e.g., unmarried women should not go out unescorted), and provides built-in support and friendship. *NPT*

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## BOARDS

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organization passionately among their colleagues and friends. Board members should be available to join the organization's executive or development director in meetings with funders to advocate for the group.

One of the primary values board members can add is to communicate about the organization throughout the community. Here again, boards comprised of people from diverse backgrounds will relate to and reach out to a broader scope of individuals and institutions whose support will be important.

The ideal is to have a board comprised of people who have the intellect to understand the strategic and financial issues, the caring to pay attention, and the commitment to support the organization. Unfortunately, the ideal is rarely achieved. In reality, many organizations are fortunate to have even a small band of individuals with these three key qualities.

It is often astounding to see how much even a minority of board members can

