



# Top 10 Tips for Volunteer Recruitment and Retention



Photo: Adri Howe

**These ideas will help you find and keep skilled equine volunteers.**

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## 1. Determine Your Needs:

- Assess what needs to be done—are you looking for a volunteer to muck your barn or do your taxes?
- Get input from staff or trusted advisors on what roles can be filled by volunteers
- Create a volunteer application
- Write job descriptions for every volunteer position

**Note:** Check out this [sample volunteer application](#) on [ASPCApro.org](#)

## 2. Search & Respond:

- Post volunteer opportunities on your website and social media channels
- Use local and national online volunteer registries like [volunteermatch.org](#) or [idealist.org](#)
- Ask current volunteers for referrals

**Note:** Respond immediately to any volunteer inquiries—if you don't, potential volunteers may move on to another organization that is more responsive.



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### 3. Have a Solid Orientation:

- Set up a one-hour orientation for people interested in volunteering
- During the meeting, share your mission and goals with potential volunteers so they can determine if they align with their own personal beliefs
- Communicate what general volunteer opportunities are available and keep it simple, since at this point you're just looking for good fits
- Share how much time volunteers can expect to spend with horses—many people will expect some direct contact with horses, so be clear up front
- Have volunteers fill out an application and tell them you will get back to them

**Note:** Not everyone will be a good fit for your organization—the orientation is a good time to figure that out. After the meeting, review completed volunteer applications and assign people based on their skills/interests and your needs.



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## 4. Weigh Pros and Cons:

- Consider registering your rescue or sanctuary with local government in order to serve as a site for mandatory community service
- Community service volunteers can be a boon to your organization by providing a large pool of workers who may be available during regular work hours, and they may even have specific skills you need
- However, they require unique management requirements, including additional paperwork and a separate orientation and may lack the knowledge you need and/or be resentful of their service, which could be reflected in the quality of their work

**Note:** Whatever you decide to do, make sure your staff is on board since they will be expected to interact with community service volunteers.



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## 5. Train Volunteers:

- Hold a large training meeting to deliver content to groups of people, followed by one-on-one sessions
- Have staff or established volunteers serve as mentors to new volunteers
- Provide a manual that includes expectations and standard operating procedures
- Require volunteers to sign a liability waiver
- Make sure you provide volunteers with an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback



**Note:** It's perfectly acceptable to give volunteers proficiency tests to make sure they can handle the tasks they've been assigned. Be prepared to provide further training or reassign a volunteer to another task if they're not successful.

## 6. Train Staff:

- Make sure all staff greet volunteers when they encounter them on site
- Provide staff an opportunity to share ideas and concerns about volunteers at staff meetings or with management one-on-one
- Request that staff attend volunteer orientations or functions to get to know volunteers better

**Note:** Some organizations build volunteer engagement and supervision into yearly staff evaluations.



## 7. Be Friendly:

- Smile—a lot
- Call volunteers by name and ask them to wear nametags until you learn their names
- Encourage friendships among volunteers and staff—host a potluck or other social event
- Work side by side with volunteers so they can see you do the dirty work, too



**Note:** Set up a volunteer Facebook group—or ask a trusted volunteer to do it—where they can interact with one another.

## 8. Create a Great Environment:

- Make sure volunteers have enough space in which to do their work
- Ensure that any tools provided are in good working condition
- Provide sign-in sheets for tracking hours

**Note:** The number of volunteer hours your organization accrues is an indicator of your success. In fact, some grantmakers will ask for your annual number of volunteer hours.



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## 9. Be Appreciative:

- Verbally thank volunteers when you see them on site
- Send thank-you emails and handwritten notes for special efforts
- Provide food and drinks on a regular basis as a thank-you to volunteers
- Acknowledge volunteers in your publications and online
- Hold a volunteer appreciation social gathering at least once a year

**Note:** Make sure you share achievements and milestones with volunteers so they know how their efforts are contributing to the success of the organization.



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## 10. Budget Wisely:

Typical expenses associated with volunteers may include

- Training materials
- T-shirts/name tags
- Food
- Staff time for training

**Note:** Consult with other similarly sized nonprofit organizations to see how much they budget for volunteer expenses. Adding a budget line item for volunteer expenses shows that volunteers are indispensable to the success of your organization.

