



BYSI Insider's Guide to Recruiting Volunteers (For Free!)

~Beth Beard, Editor, BYS Newsletter

Recruiting volunteers for youth sports and fitness programs can be challenging. Where are the best places to look? Where do you advertise? Who should you market to? How can you be more effective in recruiting and retaining volunteers?

I've put together this insider's guide to help you answer these questions and to share some of the tips, tools and resources I've gathered working with volunteers in Boston area nonprofits over the past ten years. This multipart guide is one step of many the Boston Youth Sports Initiative is taking to make your work with volunteers a little bit easier. Read on and discover the best places to find volunteers, matching services that will help you get connected, and even volunteers that are looking to work with youth sports programs right now!

Insider Tips and Tools for Finding Volunteers

Part One:

- Developing your recruitment process
- Saving time and money
- Getting out there- marketing and PR

Part Two:

- Getting creative
- Tailoring the strategies to fit your needs
- Last Thoughts

Top 5 Insider Resources

1. Craig's List
2. Idealist.org
3. Boston Cares
4. Volunteer Match and the Virtual Volunteering Guide
5. Energize Inc

Volunteer Recruitment Plan

Develop your process first- forms are your friends (really)

Setting up a good volunteer recruiting system initially takes time and energy- especially when you have limited resources. But if you are like most youth sports programs, finding, training, and supporting high quality volunteers is crucial to your success. None of the suggestions below need to be complicated or fancy- and if you keep reading you will find that much of the work has been done for you already.

- **Position Descriptions:** Develop a written job description for each unique volunteer position you are looking to fill. You can then quickly cut and paste these into numerous website and print listings.
- **Applications :** Applications not only provide you with standard information about all of your applicants, but they require the applicant to really think about *why* they want to volunteer with your program. I have found that only about 50-70% of people who express an interest in volunteering complete the application- and if they are not committed enough to fill out a simple form they will probably not be a great volunteer. I like to find this out *before* I go through an interview.
- **Introductory emails and letters :** When you post a listing on line, you may get as many as 30 responses, particularly from the matching websites like Volunteer Match and Volunteer Solutions. (You may also get none, but plan for 30!). Introductions give the applicant further details about your program, time commitment, work environment, job location, required screening and training. It helps to include the position description and application form with this letter.
- **Supporting Documents :** Once a volunteer completes the application and has a good interview, it is just as key that they have a clear understanding of what they will be doing. Having a written process for orientation, a contract that spells out what they can expect from you and what you can expect from them, a code of conduct, and a recognition plan for how they will be acknowledged for the great work they are doing all help. Together, these will all go a long way towards keeping your volunteers working hard, happy, invested, and accountable.

Saving Time

Borrow liberally from the work of others

To create a good system you do not need to reinvent the wheel, or even become an expert on volunteer management. Much of the work has been done for you. There are many examples on the web and elsewhere you can use to jumpstart the process-particularly from your peers, so do not be afraid to ask them! I have used the resources below many times and would be happy to share what I have.

- **Microsoft Templates** - There are thousands of free, downloadable Microsoft templates on the web. These include volunteer and staff applications, reference checks, and professional flyers to advertise your program. They even give you instructions on how to customize them. You can find dozens on the BYSI website in the Support section under "Administration".
- **Energize Inc,-** Their manual, *Volunteer Recruitment (and Membership Development) Book* by Susan Ellis, is a must have guide. They have forms, templates, and more to help you.
- **The National and Massachusetts Recreation and Parks Associations-** NRPA and MRPA

are great places to find a number of great resources, including volunteer guides and resources for all types of recreation and sports programs.

PR and Marketing

Encourage volunteers to find you- get listed and get out there

One of the best ways to recruit volunteers is to let them find you. The resources below focus on advertising your opportunities and providing profiles of interested volunteers through listings in databases, online, and print media. Just remember: the number one reason people volunteer is to *make a difference*. This is as true for youth sports coaches as it is for soup kitchen volunteers. Your advertisements should reflect the amazing work your program is doing and highlight how you are making a difference in the lives of Boston's youth. Think about using a Microsoft template and create professional flyers that will capture the attention of local volunteers and post them on line and in your community. (For example, see the "Winter Event Flyer Template" on our website in Administrator Resources).

- **Craig's List ****- Craig's List is, in this writer's humble opinion, the best thing since sliced bread. This community bulletin board is not fancy- just incredibly effective. There are dozens of categories where you can post and read listings for free from people all over Massachusetts (most are from Boston). On any given day, there are over 3,000 posts in the Community section- where you find and recruit volunteers- and over 8,000 jobs posted in the previous 10 days. Keep reading below to find Craig's List volunteer postings from people who are looking to work with YOU!
- **Volunteerist** - New Boston print and on-line magazine with 20,000 subscribers. Send them your volunteer postings and program information to get listed in their directory. Deadline for print submissions is Friday, Feb 18th. On-line submissions are on-going.
- **Volunteer Solutions** - This is a local matching database run by the United Way of Mass Bay (UWMB). Right now only registered nonprofits may post listings, but the BYSI is working with them to expand their service to all local youth sports programs and leagues.
- **Opportunity NOCS** - This is a national organization with a New England chapter. They have a bi-monthly email list and website for posting opportunities. They also offer low cost consulting.
- **Idealist ****- Idealist is the largest database of nonprofit job and volunteer opportunities on the internet. They run volunteer fairs, and have multiple databases and resources for nonprofits. I rarely go anywhere else to look for nonprofit job listings- other than Craig's List of course.
- **Volunteer Recruitment Fairs** - Most colleges and universities have volunteer fairs in the spring and/or fall organized out of the volunteer and service learning centers. You can usually set up a booth for free as long as you sign up in advance.
- **Local Community Groups** - organizations like the South Boston Volunteer Corps, local churches, youth groups, and private clubs are all great places to get the word out about your program and recruit people from the community.
- **BoardNet USA and Bridgestar**- They help match you with potential board members.

***Featured Resource*

All of the resources outlined in this article can be found on the BYSI website. Start in the Network Section's "Volunteer Info" and go from there. You may also want to print this

guide and keep a copy handy!

<http://www.bostonyouthsports.org/NetworkVolunteerInfo.aspx>

Getting Creative

Give a little (flexibility) and get a lot (more volunteers)

If you are like most programs, you have already done a great job recruiting from your primary volunteer pool- the dads of the kids in your program. About three quarters of the 3 million+ youth sports coaches in this country are dad's of kids on the teams and only a small fraction of them have had any formal training or coaches education. Less than one in ten are women- moms included. Not surprisingly, most of these coaches leave as soon as their children cease to be interested or eligible for additional sports competition, making your job as a recruiter all that much harder. While you may have a new group of parents every year or two, you have to recruit and train them all over again season after season. Luckily, there are many volunteers in addition to committed fathers that have much to offer youth sports programs- as long as you know where to look and are flexible about how you define what you need.

So where can you find new recruits? In Boston alone there are at least 10,000 men and women who play in amateur sports leagues and programs. There are also more than a dozen colleges and universities in the area, each with scores of students- and student athletes- looking to give their time to interested nonprofits. There are at least three organizations that match thousands of volunteers with compatible nonprofits and many more individuals who want to do something for the community but don't know how to get connected. Finally, how many moms, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and guardians all over the city are *already* connected to and invested in youth sports through their children and family members?

While seasonal coaching will always be in high demand, volunteers are needed for much more, from training clinics and marketing to event planning and transportation. For some programs the difficulty may not be with finding enough qualified volunteers, but rather with how they define who is "qualified" in the first place. In order to successfully broaden your pool of volunteers, you may have to think outside of the box and be creative in making the most of what they have to offer. Check out the great resources below for some of the many strategies and avenues you can tap into for committed adults to work with your program.

Volunteers who want to work with youth sports right now

I found these folks on Craig's List and sent each of them an email telling them about the BYSI. They were all excited to be included in our newsletter and are looking forward to hearing from you.

Think about some of the creative ways that you could work with them to support your program or team!

- **John** is 25 years old, college educated, and has lived in the North End for two years. He is interested in youth sports and would like to give back to the community (preferably in the North End). Please email him at JohnFPC@aol.com.

- A **group of 150 men** aged 18-22 are looking for a volunteer opportunity for 3-5 hours on July 28 th or 29 th. They are from a National college fraternity attending a convention in Boston and they would love to work with youth sports. Please call Jim Beanan @ 716 867 9956 or email Andrew Crowe at ajcrowe@yahoo.com.
- **Travis Farrenkopf** is a student at the New England Institute of Art and one of his projects is to produce a Public Service Announcement (PSA) for a nonprofit group. Filming will begin within the next two months and the project will be completed by April. You'll receive the completed project on DVD with royalty-free rights and it may be chosen to air on Comcast cable. Call and leave him a voicemail, 508-737-2280.

Service Learning, Internships, and Work-Study

Americorps is the largest service learning program in the United States, supporting a volunteer nonprofit work force of tens of thousands of young adults. Service learning programs are also offered at almost every college in Boston. Each operates differently from the next, but all of them work to connect students with meaningful opportunities to volunteer while learning about service. Internships are also a great way that students gain valuable work experience in exchange for volunteer labor or a small stipend while also receiving college credit and supervision. Work study programs provide students with a financial aid stipend for working in the community. Work study is usually set up between the organization and the college and allows the student to apply for their placement as they would a regular paid position.

It is important to note that each of these programs has its own guidelines and requirements that vary from program to program, and may operate on a specific time frame which may not coincide with a typical sports season. They also can demand a significant amount of paperwork and require that the organization provide support to the student in return. This could be in the form of a financial contribution, supervision, learning opportunities, training, and/or regular contact with the school program supervisor. Youth sports programs that are working with college service learning, internship and work study programs are successful because they have been able to adapt to meet the needs of the student and have the support system in place to ensure that the experience is positive for everyone.

- **College and University Students** - Boston University, Boston College, Harvard, MIT, Simmons, Northeastern, Wellesley, UMass Boston, Bentley, Tufts, and others each have a variety of volunteer, service learning, and work study programs. Many also have free volunteer fairs, corporate volunteer support services, and other great ways to get connected to the college community. You can also develop relationships with individual teams of student-athletes for clinics, mentoring and more.
- **Americorps Volunteers and the Massachusetts Service Alliance** - Americorps is a national program that provides financial and education support to young people in exchange for 1-2 years of full time community service. The Mass Service Alliance (MSA) is the state commission on volunteerism and they coordinate and provide technical assistance for most of the Americorps volunteers and programs.

Volunteer Matching Organizations

These organizations offer to directly match your nonprofit's needs with a large pool of corporate and/or individual volunteers. They are focused primarily on one-day events that require groups of

volunteers who do not need specific training or skills. These are great if you are planning a fundraiser, banquet, sports tournament, field trip, season opener, or any other one day event. They are also good resources if you need to clean up or repair a sports facility or other work that can be accomplished in a day. Note: You must be a registered 501c3 organization to work with these groups.

- **Boston Cares**** - They have three different programs, with the dominant focus on corporate groups and team projects. They also have a newsletter with a readership of 2,500 where they post opportunities that do not fit with their short-term model.
- **Single Volunteers Boston**- Matches singles with one day volunteer opportunities.
- **People Making a Difference (PMD)** - They focus on matching individual volunteers for service learning one day projects. They specialize in cleaning or other hands-on work.

***Featured Resource*

Virtual Volunteers

There are many people who are very interested in offering their technical, artistic, or professional skills to youth programs. Virtual volunteering is often an easy convenient way for people to get more experience and share their talents with others. It also allows you to connect with volunteers who may not be an ideal match based on what they can offer in person- due to location, physical ability, cultural practices, time conflicts, age, or health- but who are still invested in supporting youth sports programs.

In my last job working for an education organization, I needed help creating a complex database- with no budget or staff to lend a hand. Since all of the work could be done remotely, I used Volunteer Match to recruit 4 virtual volunteers who came from Michigan, India (yes India!), Newton, and California to design the database. I used the Virtual Volunteering Project's worksheets, handbook, and templates to create a clear process for recruiting and working with my volunteers. I have also worked with virtual volunteers to design a website- which they completed in a week!

- **Volunteer Match**** - This is a national database with over 41,000 referrals from Boston alone. This is the best place on the internet to find virtual- as well as local- volunteers.
- **Service Leader's Virtual Volunteer Guide**** - This guide is a step by step process for setting up a virtual volunteer program. They encourage you to use their work and adapt it for your needs.

***Featured Resource*

Tailoring the Fit

Use the strategies and resources that work best for your program

If you run a medium or large nonprofit sports program with paid staff, your program probably has a lot of options. You may even have the benefit of a full time volunteer manager who can use any of the resources in this guide and more. For example, taking the time to apply to become an Americorps program and employing several work study students could be great strategies to grow your organization. Small community-based nonprofits may want to focus on using resources like Volunteer

Solutions and Boston Cares for finding new local volunteers and Volunteer Match for some virtual support. Service learning, internship, and work study programs will only be a good option if you have the staff time to devote to manage them. Setting up a booth at a local volunteer fair is likewise only a viable idea if you have the time and energy. Volunteer league administrators who may not have 501c3 status, on the other hand, could focus on putting up a couple of postings (using flyer templates!) on Craig's list and developing relationships with one or two local community groups to find the volunteers they need.

Having a good match between your recruitment strategy and your needs and resources makes all the difference in the world. Every youth sports program is different and sometimes the hardest part about developing a volunteer recruitment plan is deciding on which strategies and tools will work best for you. Very few program leaders would use all of the resources in this guide, and some may not use any at all. However, everyone can benefit from having a clear, replicable recruitment system, an open mind, and a creative flexible set of strategies for finding a diverse group of volunteers that work best for you.

Last Thoughts

I hope this guide has been able to offer you at least one new tip, resource or tool to add to your volunteer recruitment arsenal. Please let me know if there is anything I have missed or how I can make it better. Most importantly, please support the growing youth sports community and tell us about your own successes and challenges with volunteer management so that we can share them with others. Keep up the great work!

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