

# Volunteers 101

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Publisher, *This Magazine*, 2010



It's no secret that small magazines rely on volunteer labour. (I actually started as a volunteer with *This Magazine*.) I was eager to learn more about the magazine and offered to help with fact checking. I went on to fill a number of volunteer roles over the years, and could always be counted on to show up whenever there was a task to be done that would be rewarded with free pizza.

Small magazine volunteers can include everyone from the full-time interns who help out in the office everyday to those helpful hands that come in a few times a year to stuff fundraising envelopes. Most small magazines wouldn't be able to function without volunteers; the trick is learning how to recruit and manage volunteers in ways that benefit both the magazine and the volunteer.

### Recruiting

Start by assessing what exactly your magazine needs volunteers for. Are you looking for full-time interns, new members for your events committee or someone to enter subscriptions for a few hours a week? Once you figure out what you need people to do, you can figure out where to find them and how best to recruit them.

Make recruitment a part of everything you do. Include sign-up sheets at launch parties. Have a volunteer section on your website or a call in the magazine. Send a message to the members of your Facebook group. Have professors who are fans of your magazine promote your internship program to their students.

Be realistic about what you can do with the resources you have. Volunteer training and management takes time and energy. For a lot of small magazines, having a huge volunteer roster may be the goal, but can you realistically train and manage a large pool of people?

In addition to the time and energy required to manage volunteers, think about the other resources you have. Do you have enough desks, phones, or CP Style Guides for your volunteers? Can people volunteer virtually? How will you organize things internally?

### Training and Retaining

Develop a formal interview process for potential volunteers. This provides an opportunity to discuss what volunteering entails and what the volunteer hopes to gain from the experience. If you know what volunteers want to learn, you can tailor their experience to help them get the most from their experience.

Make sure volunteers understand how the magazine runs and how essential they are to its smooth operation. At *This Magazine*, we couldn't function without volunteers. They help us with everything from copy editing to our annual literary contest. We never tire of reminding them of how invaluable they are.

Make sure volunteers have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Developing job descriptions helps to manage expectations and makes it easier for everyone. Develop a handbook or a guide to volunteering at your organization. This is a great resource for new volunteers, as well as a good refresher for current volunteers. Encourage volunteers to add resources and contribute to the guide. Think of it as a work in progress and keep it in an easily accessible place in your office.

Don't make assumptions about volunteers and their level of knowledge. Going over activities like how to answer the phone may seem silly, but remember that not everyone has administrative experience. Have current volunteers train new volunteers in the ways of the office. Remember: Check in with volunteers and address problems as soon as they arise.

### Appreciation

Recognizing the contributions of volunteers is so, so important. If you can't thank them, please don't recruit them. Acknowledge volunteers in newsletters, on your website, in your masthead and at events. Whenever you can say thank you, please do.

Make volunteers feel like part of the team. Invite them to staff meetings, story meetings or board meetings. Invite them to participate and contribute. Encourage virtual volunteers to come by the office to meet other volunteers. Appreciation doesn't have to be costly. Give volunteers a free subscription to the magazine, or offer them discounted subscriptions for their friends and families. Give them magazine merchandise. Offer them tickets to events and professional development or networking opportunities. Have a volunteer appreciation pizza party at the office or a local pub.

Provide support to volunteers to help them achieve their goals. Keep them in the loop about potential job offers. Offer to write letters of reference. If they're interested in a particular aspect of publishing, like circulation for example, offer to introduce them to circulators at other magazines so they can meet others in the industry.

Exit interviews with outgoing volunteers can provide valuable feedback. Have a formal process so volunteers can talk about their experience, what they learned and what they would have changed.