

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING AND RETAINING YOUR VOLUNTEERS



The Volunteer Program is confident that your new volunteer will have a positive impact on your department and/or project. But to help make this relationship as beneficial as possible, a few tips for sustaining effective volunteering follow.

Training

Providing your volunteer with high quality orientation and training is probably the most important element for making him/her feel valued and prepared. No one likes to be ill prepared to take on the challenges they will face once they are “on the job.” Prepare at least a minimal job description in writing. It will help you think through exactly what you want out of the volunteer and you’ll both have something to refer to. *This time up front will save you time later on.*

Feedback-Giving it.

“Job reviews” can be useful for volunteers. They can help volunteers appreciate what they are contributing as well as recognize areas where they can improve their performance. Consider providing your volunteer regular feedback, preferably both orally (regularly) and in written (1-2 times per year) form, but at least orally.

Feedback-Getting it

Volunteers are more likely to stick around if they feel they have a real voice in improving their project. For some staff, accepting ideas from volunteers may seem like an annoyance. However, if volunteers are to feel they are part of the “team” working toward a common goal, they will feel appreciated and stay engaged for the long haul.

Personal development

Everyone likes to grow as a person, so empower your volunteer to take the reins or try something new. Let your veteran volunteers play a role in training.

Recognition

Recognition takes two forms. *The most important involves treating your volunteer with respect on a day-to-day basis.* This means taking the time to give your volunteer an update on what is going on in the department and occasionally asking his/her opinion on how to carry out a task. The second type encompasses doing things that are special, like an appreciation gift or perhaps recognizing your volunteer in a local newspaper or the City newsletter. Any of these can provide “psychic rewards” that let your volunteer know his/her contribution is noticed and appreciated.

A successful support strategy can do more than just keep your volunteer motivated and engaged. If you empower your volunteer, he or she can become a great advocate for your program. Please don’t hesitate to call if we can help with developing any of the above suggestions, as we want your relationship with volunteers to be as positive an experience as possible.

Cory Bytof
Extension 3407
www.sanrafaelvolunteers.org