


Sprouting Volunteers

Volunteers provide an incredible boost to a school garden program. Ratios of students to adults are lowered, a wide range of expertise is introduced to the program, teachers get additional support, parental involvement is increased and all participants in some way serve the program as spokespeople in the community. Who wouldn't want that kind of leverage?

Recruiting Volunteers

 The first place to look is the parent population itself, perhaps via the PTO. Other community volunteers interested in working with children in the garden can be found at local colleges and high schools, where various departments of agriculture, horticulture or science may have community outreach or service programs looking to assist or adopt a new school garden. Talk to local garden clubs and horticultural societies, arboretums and botanical gardens, nurseries and garden centers, senior centers and the County Cooperative Extension Office. Your county may have a Master Gardener Program with volunteers to help launch your program. Appendix D, "Educational and Technical Assistance," has other specific examples of regional and national organizations that can provide technical assistance in a variety of ways.

Volunteers can assist with a host of tasks, only one of which is actually working with students in the garden. A working parent unavailable to lead a class planting might enjoy organizing coffee, snacks and a Saturday morning tool and garden cleanup. Donated skilled parent or community labor is wonderful for building a shed, laying block and pipe, or wiring an irrigation timer. A garden center groupie may be terrified of kids but has the kind of connections



at local nurseries to generate donations of seeds, plants or other supply needs. Parents may have special talents, such as crafting, dried flower arranging, organizing a harvest festival or leading field trips. The possibilities are numerous indeed.

Consider, also, a largely untapped, yet on-site, resource: older students. Buddy gardening can be rewarding for both older and younger students. Pairing two classes can address shortages of plot space or adult volunteers. It is very gratifying to watch students of different ages teaching and socializing with each other.

Managing and Supporting Your Volunteers

Whether you intend to recruit one volunteer, or one thousand, there are some key concepts that will ensure your success. “ISOTURES” is an acronym created by the National 4-H Foundation to identify the major components of their volunteer management program. The eight components of ISOTURES follow:



Identify and recruit people who have the competence and attitudes essential to accomplishing the goals of the program.

Select and place volunteers in roles that will meet their needs as well as the program’s needs.

Orient volunteers to the goals of the project and the role they will play.

Train volunteers in the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for them to successfully accomplish their tasks.

Utimize the volunteers’ time and skills effectively.

Recognize and appreciate volunteers’ contributions.

Evaluate volunteers’ performance and provide useful feedback.

Supervise supportively, helping the volunteers to obtain the desired goals.

Why People Volunteer

People volunteer for a variety of reasons including, but in no way limited to, the following: to accomplish a valued goal, to be



needed, to learn new skills, to meet people and to gain recognition. It is important to understand people's needs as well as what they have to offer to the program so that you can nurture a partnership that is beneficial to both. Listed below are several categories of factors that motivate people. For each category, there are several suggested tasks that might interest a person who is motivated by these factors. These are just a few suggestions to get you thinking; examine your program and your volunteers to identify other appropriate matches.

Altruism/Public Service. Concerned primarily with the general good, these volunteers tend to be idealistic and fair minded. They value tasks that allow them to involve the community, address broad goals and interact with government. Examples: planning large events; organizing an awards program; and serving on a board or as liaison to a government agency.

Affiliation. These volunteers enjoy working with others and making new friends. Being liked, appreciated and supported is very important. Social interaction is critical; solo tasks are not for them. Examples: participating in and organizing projects and events; conducting social events; developing public relations opportunities; and coordinating recognition programs.

Recognition. These volunteers are concerned with status and prestige and have a strong need to be recognized and appreciated. They do well on projects that have high visibility and lots of attention. They value being involved in newsworthy events and being a part of an elite group that makes decisions. Examples: developing public relations opportunities; authoring articles with a byline; and acting as liaison to community leaders.

Achievement. Driven by the pursuit of excellence, these volunteers value opportunities for innovation and perfection. They like challenging tasks, clear feedback and the opportunity to learn. Examples: monitoring insect and disease conditions; and developing a viable irrigation system.

Power. These volunteers value influence, authority and control. They enjoy planning and making decisions about programs and events. Examples: chairing committees; directing the program as a board member; and enforcing policies and procedures.



Preservation. The primary concern of these volunteers is environmental responsibility. They excel at teaching others about the environment and will be interested in any efforts they believe directly benefit environmental quality. Examples: developing educational materials; teaching; and fund raising.

Motivating Your Volunteers

We've probably all been involved in a project that lacked direction and never got off the ground. The following guidelines will help you "start smart," by planning an effective first meeting to inspire participants to move forward on the garden project.

- Recruit several key players up front. Secure their support and enthusiasm before recruiting the masses.
- Identify potential "Nay Sayers" and contact them early. Address their concerns and inspire their participation.
- Be sure to include all potential players (students, parents, staff, administration, neighborhood associations).
- Have an agenda with a proposed plan of action or at least a clear statement of the need. Provide a framework and solicit input from the group to fill it in. Allow others to contribute ideas and be involved from the start.
- Keep the pace fast but allow plenty of opportunity for group participation and input.
- Use good meeting management skills. (Check Appendix B for references.) Before you close the meeting, agree when to meet again and who will do what specific tasks prior to the next meeting.
- Have fun! Share your enthusiasm! Get everyone charged up!

To unleash the creative potential of volunteers, match the right person with the right position. Give authority and responsibility to appropriate volunteers. Invite suggestions for improvement and then move aside and let volunteers do their jobs!

Providing a short orientation to classroom volunteers will make them more at ease and increase the program's success. Dis-

cuss such topics as the location of seeds and tools, scheduling facilities, securing approval for purchases, working the water system, seasonal crops and activities, and garden etiquette. Periodic updates to share what works and what doesn't are also helpful.

Appreciate your volunteers. Acknowledge their participation in the school newspaper, have the children present awards (small plants, harvest baskets or tenderly drawn certificates) at a ceremony in the garden at year's end. Let them know how much they mean to the garden efforts. In many instances, they are the character and the sustaining force of the program. Saying "thank you" is an important way to let your volunteers know that they are valued and needed.

50 Ways to Say "Thank You!"

Wow! * Keep up the good work! * We couldn't do it without you! * Excellent! * You are amazing! * Great job! * Thanks so much! * Outstanding! * I am so proud of you! * Super! * What a great idea! * I am impressed! * Well done! * You are so creative! * Nice work! * You did it! * You are a big help! * Good for you! * You handled that very well! * Perfect! * I know I can count on you! * Fabulous! * You are getting there! * I like the way you did that! * That turned out very well! * Good thinking! * Incredible! * I sure appreciate all your help! * Way to go! * Nice touch! * We are so lucky that you share your talents with us! * Where did you learn how to do that? * Encore! * Awesome! * Thank you! * I am inspired! * Your enthusiasm is contagious! * Bravo! * You are so special! * Your generosity is overwhelming! * Nicely put! * That is beautiful! * Great! * Fantastic! * We appreciate your efforts! * Amazing job! * You work so hard! * Excellent results! * We're thrilled with your input! * You make things happen!



When the Job is Not Getting Done

When one person is not following through on his or her commitments, it impacts the morale of the whole team. Here are some suggestions for preventing and, if necessary, addressing the situation:

- ❑ Be sure that tasks are clearly understood and time lines spelled out at the time of assignment.
- ❑ Prepare written minutes of meetings that clearly state who will do what by when. Distribute them to all team members (those who were present at the meeting as well as those who were not) and post them.
- ❑ Using a chart format for the minutes with four columns (Topic; Points of Discussion; Conclusions; and Follow-up) is very effective. The Follow-up column clearly states what task is to be done, who will do it and when it must be complete.
- ❑ Discuss the problem privately with the offender and enlist his or her cooperation in correcting the situation. Allow them a graceful “out” if they have overextended themselves and will not be able to deliver all that was promised.

