Introduction

Volunteers are the foundation for most USA Ultimate affiliates. Volunteers have a passion for the sport of ultimate, a desire to be a part of the action, and the time to dedicate to your organization. Often times there are high turnover rates for volunteers in key positions. Finding a new web developer or volunteer coordinator can be time-consuming and can affect the organization through the value of lost production. Developing a volunteer retention strategy is a sound way of hedging your organization against the risk that arises when a volunteer leaves their position with your organization. The purpose of this document is to provide insight into developing a recruitment and retention strategy for each of the highly valued volunteer positions within your organization.

As previously discussed in *Obtaining and Managing Volunteers* by Jon Francis and Raphael Savir (2010), there are volunteers that hold positions of importance in an organization. These individuals have a pivotal role within the organization in order to allow you to focus on events, tournaments and the club itself. The most valuable volunteers are those that take on responsibilities and tasks that would be difficult for the organization to perform without a paid professional. Highly valued volunteer positions include event coordinators, web developer, website administrator, content providers, fundraisers, database developers, and project managers. Each of these positions holds a high degree of value and assists with many of the operational goals of the organization. When considering how to retain your volunteers keep in mind that they likely have jobs and other priorities outside of your organization. This is in regards to the possibility that the individual may be volunteering with your organization in addition to working in a position outside of your organization. Schedule flexibility will allow your volunteers the opportunity to be a valued contributor to your organization, even while also holding another full-time position.

Organizational Volunteers

Organizational volunteers are important to the structure and efficiency of an ultimate organization as they often perform very specialized tasks. Some positions that may be useful to consider implementing within your organization include: budgeting/accounting manager, event planner, tournament director, league commissioner, safe sport coordinator, local outreach coordinator, youth/college/club/adult coordinator, media coordinator, event volunteer coordinator, hospitality/food/vendor coordinator, transportation coordinator, sponsorship coordinator, fundraising coordinator, web/database developer, website administrator, social media or communications coordinator, event photographer, and video producer. Following are more detailed ideas and tips for engaging and managing a selection of these important volunteer types and roles for your organization.
Event Volunteer Coordinators

Event volunteer coordinators are vital to the success of many ultimate events. Event volunteer coordinators aid in organizing the event volunteers for the organization hosting the event. A few of the responsibilities for this volunteer position include: coordinating the field setup and teardown, assigning the ushers and parking attendants to locations around the event and training field side game operations volunteers. With strong a combination of these types of volunteers in the fold and an event volunteer coordinator to guide them, an ultimate organization can achieve success during many of their hosted events.

The event volunteer coordinator may be responsible for recruiting additional volunteers that are needed to successfully execute an event. The event volunteer coordinator is a direct contributor to the retention of event volunteers. Event volunteer coordinators may recruit volunteers by building connections with related organizations (schools, churches, etc.) that could possibly provide volunteers for current and future events. It is important for the event volunteer coordinator to understand the importance of effective communication amongst volunteers, and to build positive rapport among the event volunteers.

In addition to being volunteer recruiters, event volunteer coordinators should be able to understand the numerous dynamics of an event. The role of the event volunteer coordinator is to collaborate with the event organizers to build the structure of the event and then find volunteers to fill the event’s functional volunteer roles. An event volunteer coordinator should be aware of how many volunteers he/she need to make the event run smoothly, and then recruit enough volunteers to fill the positions. Event volunteer coordinators are essential in organizing the numerous volunteer roles need to run the event and their expertise is invaluable to the progress of the organization.

To best retain a volunteer coordinator, give the individual the respect and trust to run things the way they see fit. Many volunteer coordinators are very experienced in understanding the dynamics of organizing an ultimate event and coordinating multiple events/games occurring at the same time. The event staff can assist the volunteer coordinator by developing a roster of volunteers, approving and providing a map of the facility for the coordinator to use during the event.

To prepare for the departure of a coordinator, create a list of potential coordinators among the registered volunteers and ask if they would feel capable enough to handle the responsibility of being a coordinator. Develop a list of event coordinators for the future in order to mitigate similar situations in the future. This will enable events to run smoothly even in the absence of the coordinator.
Event Volunteers

An ultimate event's success is often dependent on the volunteers recruited to aid in the event's operations. Event volunteers assist in many different aspects of the event's procedures. Due to the numerous responsibilities that volunteers are tasked with, they serve a crucial role in executing many events. Event volunteers are often recruited by the event volunteer coordinator and offer their free time to help with many operational and logistical efforts for events.

Field Setup and Teardown

To hold an ultimate game or tournament, an organization needs to set up a field or series of fields for the games with the intention of removing the setup once the game(s) have concluded. Field setup and teardown volunteers make this responsibility much easier for event organizers. Field setup and teardown volunteers often show up early and stay late on game day with the intention of being able to construct and deconstruct the game day field. This is an important volunteer role due to the number of fields typically utilized for an ultimate tournament or event. Without field setup and tear down volunteers, it would make the event process much more difficult for the organizers. The best way to recruit these volunteers is to partner up with local schools or ultimate clubs that are interested in gaining experience with event operations.

Ushers and Parking Attendants

Ushers and parking attendants aid in the overall event experience for spectators. Ushers and parking attendants are most often needed for large tournaments and events. Ushers aid in showing spectators to their seats for the games and can assist with crowd control. Parking attendants serve to direct the parking of cars for the event. Without ushers and parking attendants, the event organizers would need to take on these roles to ensure that the event's seating setup and parking are run effectively.

Ushers and parking attendants may be difficult to retain because they are often away from the action on the field. Ushers are often moving while monitoring spectators which hinders their ability to watch the game. Parking attendants are stationed in the event's parking lot and is away from the field until they are released from their duties. A way to increase retention would be to rotate these volunteers through other positions like game operations volunteer, in order to provide an opportunity to watch the game to these volunteers. An alternative strategy would be to allow each volunteer a ten to twenty-minute break to watch the game.

Field Side Game Operations

Field side game operations volunteers work to make sure that the games run without any exterior problems. Game operation volunteers maintain the barriers and/or signage around the field, maintain the
field itself, refill water coolers and perform other important tasks associated with the event. Game operation volunteers’ aid in keeping high-quality conditions for each game played. Game operations volunteers are active and aid in the players’ overall game experience. Without game operation volunteers, the event organizers may get stretched too thin in an attempt to cover all of their responsibilities.

Game operation volunteers should be trained on the facilities of the event location before the event for best performance. This is due to the close proximity to the action on the field and the importance of the position. Training should consist of on protocol and tasks included in sideline maintenance (barrier positioning, water cooler filling stations, etc.). Additional site-specific training by the event volunteer coordinator may be necessary as well.

**Web Developers**

Web developers maintain the organization’s website properties and have at least an intermediate understanding of web software programming. A web developer will often take a volunteer position to refine their developing skills and to build a web page or program that they can add to their resume. Web developers often seek the challenge of building and maintaining their projects. Because they know their products better than other developers, it makes it difficult to replace this position if they leave.

One way to help in retaining a web developer is to touch on their accomplishments with your organization. Make note of the importance of the individual’s contribution to your organization and provide them with the freedom to be creative and innovative. Having trust in your web developer will go a long way to retaining them.

To assist with the potential transition between volunteers in this role, ask the current web developer to write a detailed description for the web pages and programs they developed. This will help the next volunteer in the position understand what is already in place and how it works so that they can make the transition into the position seamlessly. Often times the volunteer role is pivotal to gaining additional professional experience; providing a letter of recommendation to the departing web developer may be an appreciated gesture as they search for other professional opportunities.

**Web Site Administrators**

Website administrators (web admins) are responsible for your organization’s email system and online content posting. A web admin provides security to those using organizational emails and helps with keeping your website running smoothly. Web admins often set maintenance timelines in order to keep the website updated with current content.
In order to retain a website admin, it is recommended to give them flexibility in their schedules. Website admins will more than likely be volunteering at your company as a way to continue to develop their skills outside of their workplace. The ability to contribute to the organization within the constraints of their schedule will be quite valuable to their professional development.

To help with possible transitions within this volunteer role, it would be encouraged to have the current admin develop a how-to guide for the website software. Another way to make this transition easier is to make a daily responsibility guide for the organization to follow until the replacement admin is trained. A position guide will enable the replacement admin to have an easier time acclimating to the roles of the position.

**Database Developers**

Database developers are charged with the role of developing and maintaining the organization’s databases. For a league which may have over 100 players, or a club with hundreds of members, a database tailored to the organization’s website is the easiest way to track statistics or to provide online registration. A database developer manages large amounts of metadata on a daily basis. This data can be used for organizational outreach and can be analyzed for demographic and marketing purposes. It is the role of database developer to ensure that these functions remain operational year-round.

To prepare for the possible departure of your database developer, it would be recommended to have the individual leave instructions on how the database functions in order to make the transition period as smooth as possible.

**Fundraising Coordinators**

Within most organizations, an experienced fund-raiser is a crucial volunteer role. (Note that the use of the hyphen is to differentiate a person who raises funds from a fundraiser event.) Within most organizations, this role is highly valued and great effort should be expended to recruit an experienced fund-raiser. These individuals are often experienced in applying for grants or building relations with corporations in order to gain a partnership (or sponsorship).

One way to help in retaining an organization’s volunteer fundraising coordinator would be to provide them with incentives for top performances. Examples could include gift cards, game tickets, a team jersey, or special recognition at team events. Developing a non-cash incentive system will likely provide incentive and increase motivation and rapport among your volunteers.

When your experienced fund-raiser decides to leave your organization, ask him/her to compose a list of current fundraisers that the organization has already established a history of executing as well as some
ideas for future fundraising events. Additionally, ask the departing individual to refer possible replacement candidates. For new volunteers in this role, encourage them to review the *Affiliates Guide for Fundraisers, Partnerships and Sponsorships* (2015) as a resource for new fundraising initiatives.

**Content Providers**

Many of the main responsibilities of the Content Provider are to produce press releases, tournament blogs and other important content for your newsletters and website/page. Additionally, Content Providers also write letters of inquiry for grants or other forms of funding and write to owners of fields and other facilities to possibly procure them for the organization use. The content provider may often edit and review important letters and press releases before these documents are mailed or published.

To assist in retaining a content provider volunteer, provide them with valuable responsibilities related to the creation of documents or the editing and reviewing of existing content. Many Content Providers may find the opportunity to review important documents or contribute to the organization’s website to be a benefit of the volunteer position.

When transitioning this role to a new volunteer, ensure that there is an individual in your organization that can fill the role of the departing content provider. Encourage your current volunteers to provide recommendations for filling the role.

**Volunteer Recruitment Strategies**

When your organization loses key volunteers, there may be a period of struggle and/or adjustment in maintaining the same level of effective performance. Volunteer recruitment is used to defray the cost of losing important contributors. A recruitment strategy must be tailored to the organization that will be implementing the strategy in order to have a highly functional group of volunteers that fit the organization’s culture.

A strong volunteer recruitment strategy works to communicate the mission of the organization to prospective volunteers in such a way that they become interested in serving the organization. This can be accomplished through advertising the organization’s needs through different forms of media. Newspaper advertisements, social media posts, targeted email campaigns, and even the use of radio or television advertisements can get your message out to a large number of people in a short amount of time. These methods of publicity can be obtained through either your organization (social media and email) or through asking an independent media outlet (TV station or newspaper publisher) for a volunteer search advertisement or radio mention. These methods can potentially be provided for little or no cost, if the organization provides information about their status and the urgent need for volunteers.
One way to build a dependable stream of volunteers is to partner with a local company who will encourage their employees to volunteer with your organization as a form of positive publicity and community engagement. Your organization benefits from a steady supply of volunteers for either event or organizational positions. For a guide on how to apply for a corporate partnership please read the corporate partnership section of the *Affiliates Guide for Fundraisers, Partnerships and Sponsorships* (2015).

**Resources for Developing a Volunteer Recruitment Strategy**

The following resources are extremely useful for recruitment strategy development.

**Energize**: Energize is a resource designed for the leaders of volunteers. This link leads to their Recruitment section -- [https://www.energizeinc.com/how_tos_volunteer_management/recruitment](https://www.energizeinc.com/how_tos_volunteer_management/recruitment)

**GrantSpace**: GrantSpace is a service developed by the Foundation Center to provide benefits to non-profits. This link leads to their FAQ's about volunteer recruitment -- [http://grantspace.org/tools/knowledge-base/Nonprofit-Management/Employment-Volunteering/recruiting-and-managing-volunteers](http://grantspace.org/tools/knowledge-base/Nonprofit-Management/Employment-Volunteering/recruiting-and-managing-volunteers)

**Volunteer Retention Strategies**

To improve retention for your organizational volunteers, develop a retention strategy for the future. Retention is an “outcome” rather than a “task” (Davis 2012). Retention is the end result of a well-organized, welcoming, and meaningful volunteer assignment -- the cumulative effect of doing all the elements of volunteer management right (Energize 2015). Each retention strategy will be unique to the organization that develops it.

A strong volunteer retention strategy demonstrates the value of the organization to current volunteers. This can be through recognition of volunteer contributions, non-cash incentives and future references for their employment search. Recognition is the most valuable tool for volunteer retention. By recognizing your volunteers’ accomplishments and time with your organization, you have built trust and value for your volunteers, thus making it more likely to retain them. Non-cash incentives like free tickets to a sports game or a team jersey for an outstanding performance will incentivize your volunteers to perform to a high standard and will provide them a target from which to strive towards.

To aid in this transition between volunteers in this role, it may be beneficial to provide a recommendation to the volunteer that is leaving which may be beneficial for future job searches. By providing a recommendation, you are building trust with the remaining volunteers through showing that you will help with their job search if they have to return to the workforce. Though implementing these aspects in your volunteer retention strategy, you can increase the retention rate of your volunteers for the present and future.
Resources for Developing a Volunteer Retention Strategy

The following resources are extremely useful for developing a retention strategy development.

**Energize**: [https://www.energizeinc.com/how_tos_volunteer_management/retention](https://www.energizeinc.com/how_tos_volunteer_management/retention)

**Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)**: SHRM is a global organization dedicated to Human Resources. This link leads their Retention section -- [http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/staffingmanagement/pages/retention.aspx](http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/staffingmanagement/pages/retention.aspx)
Works Cited


Academy of Management Perspectives, Vol. 24, No. 2. (May 2010), pp. 48-64


Muir, Mary Rose, and Lin Li. "What Are the Top Factors That Drive Employee Retention and Are There Demographic (Gender, Generation, Ethnicity, Geography, Etc.) Differences in These Factors?" Cornell University ILR School DigitalCommons@ILR. Cornell University, Spring 2014. Web. 8 July 2015.


