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## Volunteer Recruitment Packets: Tools for Expanding Volunteer Involvement

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## Volunteer Recruitment Packets: Tools for Expanding Volunteer Involvement

### Abstract

Extension agents must become proficient volunteer recruiters. The 2003 Kentucky Volunteer Administration Academy developed a volunteer recruitment packet as a tool to be used by Extension professionals, staff, and volunteers. The recruitment packet includes major components that introduce Extension to potential volunteers. Thirteen customized volunteer recruitment packets were developed based upon programmatic need and request frequency. Additional packets can be developed based upon the needs of the program and volunteers. Recruitment packets have been distributed and used in a variety of ways that extend recruitment and marketing efforts to volunteers who are engaged and supervised by the agent.

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## Introduction & Review of Literature

Volunteers are an essential component of 4-H programs and extend delivery methods to clientele who otherwise might not be served (Steele, 1994). Volunteers have a wide range of responsibilities in 4-H and Extension programs. They are vital to issues-based programming and are key components in accomplishing national initiatives for Cooperative Extension (Patton, 1990). Extension agents involve volunteers by asking them to engage in a variety of roles and duties, and to accept responsibilities (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). Finding these adults who are willing to engage

in volunteer activities is becoming increasingly difficult for many Extension professionals (Rodriguez, Hirschl, Mead, & Goggin, 2000).

Extension agents serving in the role of volunteer administrators must become proficient in volunteer recruitment. Recruitment is defined as the process of actively searching for volunteers who have previously been identified (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998). In order to successfully recruit 4-H volunteers, agents should focus on 4-H's positive name recognition, the volunteer's potential for personal interaction with 4-H members and volunteers, and the opportunity to make a contribution to the community (Culp & Schwartz, 1999).

Independent Sector (2003) found the number one reason given by non-volunteers for their lack of involvement was that they had never been asked to serve. The problem facing Extension professionals, therefore, is how to recruit and engage community members as volunteers in their programs.

In a study of natural resource volunteers, Smith and Finley (2004) determined that 41% of 4-H parents, 4-H volunteers, and natural resources professionals working remembered being directly asked for their assistance. Smith and Finley called for the development of a simple tool to identify those most likely to achieve success as a 4-H volunteer. As a result, the 2003 Volunteer Administration Academy (Culp & Stivers, 2003) developed a Volunteer Recruitment packet as a tool to be used by Extension professionals, office staff, and volunteer leaders.

## Discussion

The volunteer recruitment packet may be used in a variety of ways. Examples include: an informational packet for prospective volunteers; as a marketing piece to be used for promotion; or as a recruitment tool to provide individuals who indicate an interest in a particular program or activity with specific information and details. The volunteer packet consists of major components that introduce the Cooperative Extension Service to potential volunteers. These components include: promotional brochures to outline county and state programs, position vacancies, a thank-you letter, a volunteer application, behavioral expectation guidelines, and an interest inventory.

The "thank you for your interest" letter establishes that volunteers and volunteerism are important components of Extension programming. This letter should explain the application and screening processes and could include a description of packet materials or any other pertinent information.

The application and volunteer expectations component begins the major screening and selection process. The application includes general information, previous volunteer experience, education and certifications, personal references, background check consent form, and volunteer interest checklist. The volunteer expectations form is a signed contractual agreement between the volunteer and the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. It defines behavioral guidelines that all Extension volunteers must adhere to while working under the umbrella of the Cooperative Extension Service. The primary purpose of outlining the expectations for volunteers is to ensure the safety and well being of all participants (i.e., youth, their parents and families, salaried and volunteer staff). The volunteer expectations will provide a basis for annual volunteer evaluation.

Finally, a county needs survey is included to allow the prospective volunteer to select the task with the time frame to which they are willing to commit. This component also allows volunteers to be matched with tasks that need to be completed in the county program.

The recruitment packets can also be *customized* to meet specific programming needs with the addition of a position description outlining the position purpose, time requirement, location, specific responsibilities, qualifications, benefits, and the Extension professional's contact information. For this project, a total of 13 customized volunteer recruitment packets were developed and used based upon programmatic need and request frequency. These recruitment packets included: School Club Leader, Community Club Leader, Camping Volunteer, Camping Teen Leader, Teen Club Leader, 4-H Council Member, 4-H Project Club Leader, Shooting Sports Leader, Overnight Chaperone, Episodic Volunteer, Extension Council member, Master Gardener, and Livestock Club Leader.

The recruitment packets have been distributed and used in a variety of ways. 4-H Council members received the packets to use when recruiting new members. Support staff have a supply available for potential volunteers who make inquiries at the Extension Office. The Extension Council's nominating committee made use of the packets as both an informational and recruitment tool. Recruitment packets were also made available at an Extension Open House as a marketing piece. Shooting Sports coaches distributed the packets to recruit shooting sports volunteers. Tenured volunteers used the packets to recruit adult and teen volunteers for camp. Civic organizations, including Rotary, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus, and PTO, received the packets as a component of an educational presentation, with community service opportunities included.

## Uses and Implications

1. The recruitment packet contributes to effective time management by helping Extension professionals become proactive at recruitment and focusing on the big picture need for volunteer involvement.

2. All volunteers receive consistent, inclusive information about Extension, its programs, and the need for volunteers.
3. Recruitment packets are professional in appearance and can be customized for individual counties.
4. Packets facilitate shared responsibility for recruitment and lend themselves for delegating recruitment to individuals besides the agent.
5. The recruitment packets provide focus for the program, identify and articulate the need for the volunteer position, and provide specific details and information about the volunteer role or opportunity.
6. The recruitment packets are effective marketing tools that promote Extension, its programs, and volunteer needs.
7. Recruitment packets encourage a good match between the needs of the program and the qualifications, responsibilities, and expectations of the volunteer.
8. Packets provide instantaneous information for walk-in volunteers, thereby reducing the time delay between expressing interest and becoming engaged in volunteer service.

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