

Engaging Volunteers for Fall Ministry

We've made it through the summer and maybe hosted a virtual VBS, Zoom youth group, or were able to pull off a small in-person camp in between shut-downs. Now we are staring at starting up all the fall ministry programs: Sunday School, confirmation, milestone ministry, etc. We know we can't do this alone but are uncertain how to go about building a team in this new environment. The good news is that many of the same strategies that we have used in the past to recruit volunteers still work. However, we do need to keep in mind that the skill set and the support our volunteers need might be different going forward.

The first thing to do is to update ministry job descriptions to reflect the skills needed for the new dynamics. In the article "Reengaging Volunteer Leaders for Digital Ministry," Sarah Bentley Allred cautions us to consider what tools and training our volunteers might need to be successful interacting online or in a blended learning environment. We can create a wish list of ministry positions, what each position's responsibility would entail and what skill set the person would need to be successful. We need to be honest. No one likes surprises, finding out after they have said yes that the job requires more than they know how to do or want to do!



Next, we need to consider the potential pool of volunteers. Sitting down with a directory or other listing, we should prayerfully assess who might have the skills needed and *personally* reach out to each one. An email is fine for a first contact, but a personal note or phone call is always better. Understand that some of those who served previously may be intimidated by online technology, but just need some encouragement and training to get them comfortable with using it. Setting up a one-on-one session with them to get them familiar with controls works wonders! However, if a past volunteer is unable to continue, we can thank them graciously for their service and see if we can find another role for them

The number of those available to serve may be expanding. With more people working from home, some congregants may have more time to give especially if they can videotape a lesson or presentation ahead of time. So be sure to advertise the ministry's needs – there will be people who have skills we may not know about. Develop a questionnaire to find out what interests, gifts, and talents a new person might have. Then conduct an informal interview to see if the person is a good match for a position that is open. Don't force fit. It is important for everyone that the experience be a good one.

Finally, Allred reminds us that when we look for volunteers, we need to make sure we convey the importance of the program: "why do we do this specific ministry?" We also need to emphasize the value we place on the time they are gifting to the ministry. We can show that we appreciate our volunteers by checking in with them frequently, sending notes of thanks, and recognizing their contributions with small gifts. Personal contact in the age of the pandemic, even if it is by Facetime or Zoom, is essential.

For further details about engaging volunteers, check out Allred's full article at <https://buildfaith.org/reengaging-volunteer-leaders-for-digital-ministry/>