

Increase Volunteer Numbers

for Your Growing Church

An illustration of several hands of different skin tones stacked together in a circle, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The hands are wearing various watches, bracelets, and rings. The sleeves are also diverse, including a light blue sleeve, a grey sleeve with blue and orange floral patterns, a blue and white striped sleeve, a red sleeve, a dark blue sleeve, a yellow and black plaid sleeve, a brown and red striped sleeve, and a blue and white striped sleeve. The background is a light beige color with abstract shapes.

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There is one resource in ministry that every church agrees you can never have enough of: volunteers. It doesn't matter how many you have, you need more. And more. And even more.

Running an effective ministry is only possible if you have enough hands to do the work.

So why is [volunteer recruitment and retention](#) one of the biggest pain points for church leaders again and again?

Because people are hard. They're busy, lack confidence, or don't understand the importance of serving.

But filling and maintaining your volunteer rosters is not only doable, it can be made significantly easier.

This guide is designed to show you how to:

- 1. Set and reinforce realistic expectations.**
- 2. Implement recruitment best practices.**
- 3. Provide sufficient training.**
- 4. Manage scheduling and communication.**
- 5. Increase your retention rates.**
- 6. Check on your volunteers' personal spiritual journeys.**

It's time to take volunteer recruitment and retention from something you actively avoid to something you can't wait to invite others into.



Where to Start

You can't figure out where you want to go until you know where you're at. The first thing you need to do to increase your volunteer numbers is to look closely at your church's needs.

Starting with the regular activities in your ministry, work with your staff or leadership teams to answer these questions:

- **What recurring events need volunteers?**

Think about what's happening in the life of your church weekly, monthly, and even quarterly (Sunday services, Wednesday night activities, weekly praise band/choir practice, etc.). Leave out the special events (VBS, revival, Christmas Eve service, etc.) for now.

We'll look at special events in a minute!

- **How many volunteers does each of those events need at a bare minimum?**

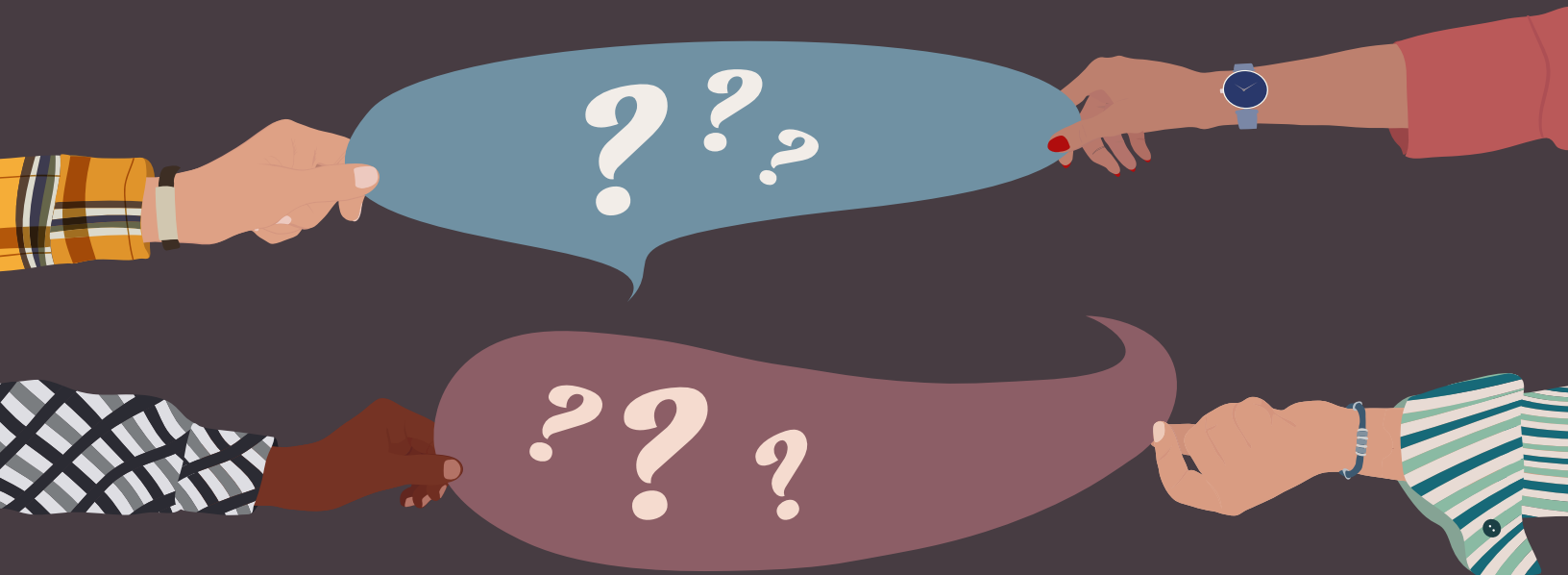
Would additional volunteers help things run more smoothly?

- **What volunteer positions need to be filled for each recurring event?**

Count security, greeters, teachers, nursery workers, A/V techs, etc. Make sure to include every role in this list, even if you aren't personally responsible for recruiting that position.

- **How many volunteers do you currently have?**

How does that number compare to the number you need for bare minimum success and to the number for increasing efficiency?



Now, let's talk about [special events](#). These are the things your church does once or twice a year that typically require significantly more planning and lots of hands to pull off. Answer these questions for those events (these questions are similar to the ones for recurring events, but don't skip over them!):

- **What special events already on the church calendar need volunteers?**
(Think: Upward Sports, Night to Shine, Fall Festival, etc.)
- **How many volunteers does each of those events need at a bare minimum?**
Would additional volunteers help things run more smoothly? If this is a new event for your church, you may not be able to answer this question exactly, but get as close as you can!
- **What volunteer positions need to be filled for each special event?**
Make sure to include every role in this list, even if you aren't personally responsible for recruiting that position.
- **What special roles are needed that you don't typically require for recurring events?**
- **For events that you've done before, how many volunteers did you have last time?**
Were there enough people for the event to be successful? How does that number compare to the number you need for bare minimum success and to the number for increasing efficiency?

You can't proceed to the next step until you have answered all of these questions, so make sure you take the time to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider each one. Collaborate with the other ministry leaders in your church to put together a comprehensive list to make the next part easier.



Set and Reinforce Realistic Expectations

Every person in your ministry has expectations, from the senior pastor to the first-time visitor.

When it comes to your volunteers, expectations will range from how difficult or time-consuming their specific roles will be to how quickly a project can be completed. You'll likely encounter expectations of how much fun your volunteers will have and whether they've made a lasting impact on your ministry.

Those expectations vary from person to person, but the reality is that there's no escaping the expectations of your congregation. The only option is to manage those expectations firmly and gracefully.

But things rarely go according to plan.

So, how do you avoid the frustration that comes when serving doesn't go the way your volunteers expected it to?

Step 1:

Develop “job descriptions” for each volunteer role.

Every person serving in your ministry needs to know what they're responsible for. Write detailed descriptions of the responsibilities for each role to help eliminate confusion and frustration.

Each description should include the role's purpose or goal, the expected time commitment (e.g., one hour each week, six hours for a single event, etc.), and any requirements for the position (e.g., minimum age, previous experience, or specific skills).



Step 2:

Share those descriptions as you recruit.

Those descriptions become the basis of the expectations for each volunteer role. But they don't do much good if you don't share them as you're recruiting. When you ask people to serve, share the descriptions for the positions you want them to fill so they understand up front exactly what they're committing to.

Your leaders and volunteers need to be aware of the descriptions so everyone is on the same page. Your volunteers also need to be able to ask questions and negotiate expectations as needed.

Step 3:

Check in regularly.

Before people agree to serve, you need to have a plan already in place for checking on them.

If someone signs up to serve in the nursery for the next year, plan to check in with them after the first week, the first month, the first six months, and at the end of the year. If someone is serving for a single event, check in during the event as time allows and take time to talk with them after the event is over to see how things went.

You may not be able to act on every piece of feedback, but you should take time to listen to everything your volunteers have to say. Volunteers who don't feel heard will just stop telling you when they have a problem. They won't stop talking about what the issue is, but they will stop telling you about it.

Taking the time to check in with your volunteers regularly will help manage expectations and prevent any issues with unmet or unclear expectations before they have a chance to snowball.

Implementing Recruitment Best Practices

Recruiting volunteers can often feel like herding cats. You're running around begging people to fill a gaping hole in your rotation schedule or scrambling to find someone to step in because someone else had to back out.

It might not ever be a piece of cake, but there are things you can do to make it much smoother and easier to manage.

Best Practice #1:

Change the Mindset

Outside the context of the church, we often think of a volunteer as someone who makes a short-term commitment when they have time to spare. The busier the person, the less likely they are to volunteer.

When we apply that mindset to ministry, we end up with people who don't volunteer because they view it as optional, leaving a small percentage to do the lion's share of the work. The issue is that we aren't called to serve sometimes. In 1 Peter 4:10, we're told that "Each of [us] should use whatever gift [we] have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

Peter doesn't tell us to serve when it's convenient or when we don't have anything else going on. He doesn't say to volunteer if we've got time to spare in our busy schedules. No, he tells us we should use our gifts and serve as faithful stewards and doesn't offer an alternative. We are commanded to "serve one another in love," so one of the best ways to increase the outcome of your recruitment efforts is to change the mindset from one of volunteering to one of service.

Volunteering in the church shouldn't be a short-term commitment. It requires a life dedicated to serving the Lord and using the gifts He's given us for His glory.

So stop looking for volunteers and start asking people to obey the command to serve their church!



Best Practice #2:

Extend Personal Invitations

One in four people say they don't volunteer because no one asked them to serve. Now, you might be thinking, "I did ask! I have slides and make announcements from the stage and send out emails looking for people who can help."

All of those things are great and will likely yield some results, but that's not what people mean when they say no one asked them. They want you to approach them and personally ask them to step into a specific position.

That sounds like a lot of extra work, especially on top of all of the things you're already doing. But if you're struggling to fill your rotation rosters or keep your current volunteers from burning out, don't miss the 25% of your congregation who just want to feel like you care if they serve.

You likely have dozens (if not hundreds) of people in your church who aren't actively serving anywhere in your ministry. Brainstorm with your other leaders and put together a list of potential names for your open positions.

Even if you know a large percentage of your members, you cannot know everyone, so ask those already serving or those rotating off your volunteer roster for recommendations. This works for those who decline a request to volunteer, too. If someone says no, ask if they have anyone else in mind who might be a good fit.

Then ask! If you don't know the recommended person, see if one of your other leaders or key volunteers does. People are significantly more likely to say yes to a request if it comes from someone they already have a relationship with.

But even for those who don't have pre-existing relationships with the asker, a personal invitation goes a long way in bringing them into the fold and encouraging them to obey the call to serve.

Best Practice #3:

Don't Count Anyone Out

One of the worst things you can do when recruiting volunteers is choose not to ask someone because you think they'll say no.

Resist the temptation to make the decision for them. You aren't saving someone from having to say "no"; you're robbing them of the opportunity to say "yes."

You have no idea what God may be calling someone to do or instructing them to not do, and He may be using you to nudge them in the direction He wants them to go. So, take the time (even if it feels like a waste of time) to ask every person whose name comes up and allow them the chance to make their own choices.

And if someone does say no, take the time to talk to them to figure out why they declined. There may be another area that would be a better fit for their skills and availability. But you'll never know if you don't ask!

Best Practice #4:

Match Skills and Passions

The people in your congregation are each gifted with talents and desires that God intends for them to use for His glory.

A lack of gifting in a certain way does not prohibit someone from serving; it just means they're meant to volunteer in a different capacity. As we talked about before, we're all called to serve. It just may require a bit more effort to find the right fit for some than for others.

Evaluate your volunteers' (and prospective volunteers') strengths and weaknesses. Find out what they're passionate about and the areas where they feel led to serve.

Not every volunteer is meant for every role, but every member of your congregation is made to serve.

Fitting someone into a position that matches what they're good at and what they're enthusiastic about increases your chances of hearing a "yes" and has the added benefit of increasing the odds of retaining those volunteers!

Best Practice #5:

Get Creative!

You might need to get creative as you're working toward matching the skills and passions of your congregants with the volunteer positions you need to fill.

Each person in your church is unique, meaning that some of your people won't fall into the normal areas of service. You likely have people sitting in your pews every Sunday who long to serve but don't think they can because they don't see anywhere that matches their gifting and ability.

This could include some of your special needs adults, elderly members, or anyone else who doesn't fit in the spaces you're typically trying to fill. But, again, since we're all called to serve, it's your responsibility to find ways for them to contribute to the work of the church.

Does your follow-up ministry need some work? Your older, less mobile congregants can help write cards or send messages that don't require physical effort.

Does your kitchen crew need to pack meal bags each week for the local elementary school? Your special needs adults can help with that task.

Do you need someone to lead the fundraising efforts for the kids' camp? Small business owners who can't commit to serving regularly can use their local contacts to secure sponsorships.

Look at every task that goes into running your ministry, no matter how small. You'll find dozens of ways for volunteers limited by time or ability to participate in fulfilling the mission and vision of your church. You just have to be a little creative sometimes.



Provide Sufficient Training

One of the biggest reasons people quit volunteering is because they feel inadequately prepared for their roles. Before you can successfully manage your volunteer schedules and other needs, you have to prioritize training.

Step 1:

Determine what training is needed for each role.

- **Where will each of your volunteers physically serve?**
Show them each location they need to be familiar with, where materials will be stored, where emergency exits are located, etc. If you have a large campus or multiple buildings, creating a map may be beneficial for newer volunteers.
- **What curriculum will they be teaching, and/or what materials will they be using?**
If the volunteers are responsible for assembling materials, making copies, etc., make sure they know where everything they need is located and how to use things.
- **Will they be using any [technology](#), software, or other equipment in their roles?**
Teach them how to use each item and explain what to do if it doesn't work properly.
- **Is there any external training required?**
Think CPR, first aid, recognizing signs of abuse in minors, emergency response, etc. Help your volunteers schedule classes and collect any certificates upon completion.
- **What is the process for finding subs or letting you know when they are unable to serve?**
We'll talk a bit more about managing schedules later.

Step 2:

Decide the best format for training.

In-person training tends to be the default option simply because it's what's always been done. But other training options may work better for your volunteers.

- **In-person training:**
Meet somewhere on your campus to go through your training agenda and show people where they will be serving.
- **Virtual training:**
Think Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams where you can meet with your volunteers without asking them to come up to your campus.
- **Pre-recorded training:**
Record your training in sections beforehand and send out only the parts each volunteer needs. Just be mindful of how you'll ensure your volunteers actually watch the training videos!
- **One-on-one training:**
Meet with your volunteers individually. This is best when you have someone onboarding in the middle of a rotation cycle or who can't participate in your other training options.

Different options will work for different positions, so don't be afraid to try something out or use varying methods for each ministry area. It matters less how you do your training and more that every volunteer feels confident and comfortable serving in their role.



Step 3:

Get your volunteers to come.

Convincing your volunteers of the importance of training (especially if someone has been serving for a long time) will likely be your biggest challenge.

Here are some tips to make getting your volunteers to attend training a bit easier.

Tip #1

Encourage people to attend training by reminding them that Jesus Himself trained the disciples before they were ready to serve.

Tip #2

Offer door prizes or other treats as a reward for attending.

Tip #3

Provide food during the training. Food brings people together and is a good motivator for people who might not otherwise prioritize training.

Tip #4

Start and end every training session on time. Be respectful of your volunteers' time! If they know you won't start and end on time, you'll struggle to convince them to attend anything you do.

Tip #5

Be organized. Have an agenda and stick to it. A quick way to ensure your volunteers won't come back next time is to make them feel like they aren't missing anything important.

Tip #6

Create community. Use icebreakers and dedicated fellowship time to help them connect with you and each other.

Tip #7

Don't miss the big picture. Tie everything back to why they're serving in the first place: to glorify God and to build His Kingdom!

Manage Scheduling and Communication

If you're still using spreadsheets to manage your volunteer rosters, [this is your sign to upgrade!](#) You have way too many things to do to rely on a tool that isn't intuitive and built to keep you up to date.

If you already have a tool to manage scheduling and communication, make sure you're taking advantage of every tool available.

Whatever you decide to use, there are a few things you should do to maximize the effectiveness of your scheduling and communication efforts.

Send all serving requests through your [management tool](#).

Even if you ask someone to serve in person, send them a digital request so they can be added to your scheduler. Having some people respond in your management tool while others respond verbally or through another platform creates confusion and makes it more difficult to find gaps in your schedule.

This also gives your volunteers a single location to see when they're scheduled to serve. They won't have to refer back to texts and emails or continually ask you what they've committed to.

Encourage volunteers to use your management tool to find replacements.

Most volunteer management systems have options to search for a sub or to decline a request to serve. Teaching your volunteers how to use your scheduling tool should be part of the training agenda we discussed earlier. They won't use it if they don't know how.

Continue to reinforce using the schedule manager. If someone tells you they need a replacement teacher for Sunday school, remind them to send a request to the available subs through the volunteer scheduler so everything can be tracked in one place.

You can always offer assistance if they have trouble, but the whole point of having a management tool is to take tasks off of your plate.

Communicate serving needs in a consistent way.

Your scheduling tool likely has the option to [send communications](#) to all of your volunteers regardless of where or when they're serving. Use this regularly to send requests for new positions or to fill temporary roles.

You should still use your other methods of recruiting volunteers (personal invitations, slides, social media, etc.). But pointing your volunteers to a single location to keep up with when they're committed to serving, finding a sub when they need to be out, and seeing other opportunities to volunteer will increase your overall effectiveness and reduce confusion and redundancy.

Increasing Retention Rates

One of the biggest reasons people stop serving is because they feel underqualified or unprepared for their roles. Hopefully, you're already taking steps to manage that issue and provide sufficient training, as we talked about earlier.

With that particular roadblock out of the way, let's talk about three of the other most common reasons you're losing volunteers and what you can do about each one.

Burnout

Burnout is a major problem that can be avoided with the right steps. Teach your leaders to recognize the signs of burnout and how to help struggling volunteers get back on their feet.

Volunteers experiencing burnout may:

- **Lose their enthusiasm for their role or your ministry's mission.**
- **Begin doubting their abilities where they'd previously displayed confidence.**
- **Miss their scheduled serving times (*with or without advance notice*) with increasing frequency.**
- **Become hostile or irritated in ordinary encounters.**

Overcoming burnout requires intentionality. While you hope to retain your volunteers experiencing burnout, approach each situation with patience and love, putting the well-being of your volunteers above your need to fill positions.

Struggling volunteers will take note of how you respond to their needs, and your actions may be the deciding factor in whether or not someone continues to serve (or comes back to serve later).

Here are some things you should do when you see volunteers experiencing burnout:

- **Work with the volunteer to identify the cause of the burnout and to determine their next steps.**
- **Check in often (*even more than you normally would*) and provide support.**
- **Offer alternative ways to serve. Sometimes, people just need a change of scenery!**
- **Encourage them to take time off if needed and assure them that they are welcome back whenever they're ready to serve again.**

Feeling Unappreciated

No one wants to feel unappreciated. Volunteers will likely choose not to serve anymore if they feel like no one notices or cares about the effort they're putting in or the time they're sacrificing.

We know you appreciate every second your volunteers give, but they need to hear it from you.

A simple Google search can give you dozens of ways to acknowledge your volunteers for their commitment, but here are a few to get you started:

- **Host a volunteer appreciation luncheon once a year.**

Break it down by ministry area (e.g. worship team, kids ministry, youth, etc.) so you can be intentional about making each of your volunteers feel seen.

- **Send personal thank-you cards at the end of each serving cycle.**

Whether someone serves for a single event, a month, a year, etc., receiving a card from your church leadership is a great way to show your volunteers that you appreciate their service. When possible, call out a specific contribution the volunteer made and encourage them to continue to use their gifts and talents for God's glory.

- **Recognize volunteers during your regular services.**

Acknowledge those who served at an event or in a specific ministry and give a report to your church on the results of that effort. If you're telling your congregation about how Vacation Bible School went, make sure you include a shout-out to all of the people who made the event happen!



Lack of Flexibility and Support

Life happens. Plans fall through, circumstances change, and things come up.

There will be times when someone's schedule changes or they have an unexpected situation that impacts their ability to serve. Whether someone needs to swap serving weeks with another volunteer or step out of a commitment partway through, the last thing they need is to feel guilty or that they've burdened you.

You have to be flexible and ensure that you don't accidentally discourage the volunteer (even if finding a replacement is inconvenient or frustrating).

There will be other times when someone has a problem that needs to be addressed.

When someone approaches you about an issue in their role, no matter how big or small, you have to take the time to listen to their concerns. You can't always fix their problems, but working with them to find a solution or talking with them about why things need to stay the same goes a long way in offering the support your volunteers need.

They need to know that you're on their side and are there to help them with any problems that come up. As we talked about before, volunteers who don't feel supported won't stop talking about their issues; they'll just stop bringing them to you.

Making your volunteers feel that you don't listen or are annoyed if they need to back out of a commitment will only encourage them to not serve in the future.



Checking In On Your Volunteers' Spiritual Journeys

Serving is a part of the [discipleship journey](#). Just as your Bible study teachers, deacons, elders, pastors, and other leaders regularly check in on the growth of the people in your congregation, you should be checking on your volunteers.

Volunteering in ministry is an act of faith, trusting God to multiply time and talents to further His Kingdom. Your volunteers need you to remind them regularly that their service makes a difference in your church and that it matters to their Maker.

As you check in with your volunteers about their roles, take a few minutes to ask about how God is moving in their lives and how you can pray for them. Whenever possible, take time to pray with them over their requests and over their service.

This may sound like a lot of extra work, but the spiritual growth of your volunteers, both through their service and outside of their roles, is vital to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Through your recruitment, training, and communications, encourage your volunteers to serve joyfully and regularly share the impacts they're having on the Kingdom.

Serving in the church isn't just about giving time and talents; it's receiving the blessings that come from obedience and growing as disciples.

Managing volunteers doesn't have to be something you dread. You have a unique opportunity to attract people to your ministry and give them ways to contribute directly to the work your church is doing.

You're walking alongside your volunteers in their discipleship journeys and participating in Kingdom growth.

So take this guide, apply what you can, and look forward to how God will use you and those serving in your ministry to bring glory to His Name!