

Colleague Connections

About Colleague Connections

"Colleague Connections" is just for you. It is your opportunity to share information, ask questions and/or to learn more about your fellow coordinators of volunteers. It is whatever you want and/or need it to be. Send your suggestions for upcoming editions to beth@volunteervictoria.bc.ca.

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Responding to Potential Volunteers – Some tips for the New Year and beyond ...

It's not surprising that the staff at Volunteer Victoria speak to thousands of people each year about volunteering. This is part and parcel of what we do in promoting volunteer opportunities in our community. During our conversations, we often hear wonderful tales of great volunteer experiences. We are affirmed over and over again that many people in our community believe in the value of giving their time to others, and do so often.

Sometimes, however, we meet up with individuals whose hearts are in the right place, but they have become frustrated by the process of trying to volunteer. They tell us that they want to do so, but they haven't been able to yet because their phone calls or emails were not returned by the agency. Unfortunately, their good intentions were not well received and they stopped trying to volunteer. We all lose when this happens.

We know that there are many reasons for this lack of contact between agencies and potential volunteers, but think that there are some workable solutions. Here are a few:

Don't have enough time to respond to volunteer requests in a timely manner? Recruit an administrative volunteer to assist with initial call-backs to volunteers, or set aside some time each day to fit in a phone call or email response to potential volunteers. Set yourself a goal to respond to all inquiries within 24-48 hours.

Experiencing staff turnover at your agency and can't deal with all the requests? Appoint a back-up person, or put a message on voicemail and email that notes the vacancy and encourages people to call again after a specific date or at a specific time.

Currently aren't recruiting volunteers? Make sure your position posting is made inactive on Volunteer Victoria's database, and change your messages to note when you will be recruiting next. Always refer people you turn away back to Volunteer Victoria so they can find another volunteer opportunity. Remember, it's not only your current volunteers who deserve your excellent

customer service. Potential volunteers, too, need care and attention to make sure they actually do volunteer with someone, even if it's not with you.

We asked some of our colleagues how they effectively respond to potential volunteers. This is what they had to say:

Ashley Hodgins, MS Society of Canada: "I have created a potential volunteer spreadsheet with a section for contact information and a section for comments. When volunteers call or email, and I can't get back to them right away, I add them to the list and schedule a time during my week to respond to everyone. I use the comments section to indicate when and how the volunteer was contacted, if I left a message, what event they were interested in and any other relevant information. This allows me to look back at the list the next week and determine who I haven't heard back from and therefore who should be re-contacted."

Nancy Martens, Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health: "I have a generic email with the steps necessary before a person can start volunteering which I copy and paste into an email to people wanting information. I also create a distribution list of potential volunteers and blind copy them information about volunteering."

Marg Kennett, CNIB: "This task has always been a *huge* priority for me and "same day service" is the rule, when I'm in the office. I also make sure I get the interview set in a timely manner and except for rare occasions, screening is complete, including criminal record check, within a 2-3 week period."

We know our agencies believe in responding effectively to volunteers, but we also know that sometimes things get in the way of good intentions. The New Year offers a perfect opportunity to try some new things. What can *you* do to increase your level of customer service to potential volunteers this year?

**Send your suggestions for upcoming editions to
beth@volunteervictoria.bc.ca**