



How Can I Help?

Volunteer Applications – Too Many or Too Few? Here’s What to Do!

By Katie Mulembe, Catholic Volunteer Network Membership and Recruitment Coordinator

Across the country, service organizations are reporting an increase in interest from potential volunteers. Catholic Volunteer Network was happy to discover that this trend is true for our members as well. In March we conducted a survey of our members, asking about the current flow of volunteer applications. Sixty-six percent of responders indicated an increase ranging from 5 percent all the way up to 100 percent or more. Furthermore, only 3.5 percent indicated that they did not expect to fill all their slots for the upcoming year. The state of the economy was cited as the major reason for this dramatic increase – with fewer jobs available, more college students are pursuing service as a way to bring about positive change in the world, as well as gain valuable work experience.

Too Many?

An influx of applications is a sign of a strong organization and effective recruitment strategies. If you are in this category, congratulate yourself – you have worked hard throughout the year to achieve this! But, don’t spend too long celebrating; sorting through so many applications is a lot of work. When reviewing the applications, look for a person’s strengths and interests and see how they correlate with your program’s objectives and charism.

Remember that even the applicant with the most impressive resume will not make a good volunteer if they cannot buy in to the mission of the organization. It is always best to find a placement or program that allows them to serve to the best of their abilities. Jon Alvarez of Good Shepherd Volunteers affirms, “We see the application process really as a discernment process, in which we listen to the applicant’s interests, gifts and talents, and give them honest feedback about where we could see them thriving.”

All this considered, 35.7 percent of respondents to the survey indicated that they expected to fill all their slots and still have to turn good candidates away. In order to not dissuade the applicant from continuing to pursue full-time service, it is important to provide good recommendations of other service options. An easy way to do this is to refer them back to Catholic Volunteer Network. Mention that they can order a RESPONSE directory or fill out a volunteer profile on our website. You might also want to point them to programs that are similar to yours, such as those that place volunteers in the same locations, doing the same type of service, or provide similar benefits to their volunteers.

With the help of our search engine on the website, you can easily find out this information. Gina Scarpello of Cabrini Mission Corps has found such collaboration to be quite fruitful for her program. She says, “I think fostering an attitude of collaboration versus competition when it comes to recruiting could

be a great service to our individual organizations, to Catholic Volunteer Network and the church. Yes, times of plenty (applicants, that is) make it easier to be more collaborative, so perhaps this is the time to be more intentional about fostering such an attitude.”

Too Few?

Maybe you cut back on your budget this year and were not able to do much face to face recruitment, or perhaps your program is new and does not yet have name recognition. There are plenty of explanations of why your program received fewer applications than expected. This is not necessarily an indication of a weakness of your program. The good news is that it is not too late to find good applicants for your upcoming cycle. Here are a few suggestions of how you can get in touch with those potential volunteers that are looking for a program like yours.

The programs that received an increased number of applications may be looking for specific programs to recommend applicants to. That means it could be very beneficial to let other programs know that you are still looking for applicants. You may want to use the Catholic Volunteer Network listserv to do this, or you can also get in touch with programs individually. Consider communicating with programs that have similarities to yours because their applicants may also be interested in your program. For example, if you are primarily looking for teachers, you may want to talk to directors of other education programs.

The Catholic Volunteer Network website has experienced a great increase in visitors over the past few months. In addition to searching for volunteer programs, these individuals are able to post their profile so that you can search for them. In their profile, potential volunteers list their educational and work experience as well as their interests in volunteering. Last month alone, 174 new volunteer profiles were posted on the site. You can easily access these profiles by logging on to <http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org> and clicking on “For Volunteer Programs.”

The Years to Come

In the years to come the job market will surely improve, but that doesn’t mean we have to see a decline in applications for our programs. We can learn a lot from this increase and use it as a time to refine the way we view volunteer recruitment. Use this time to spread the word about your program and develop strong ties with others doing similar work. As an organization, we are looking forward to seeing all the good that will come from this “boom” in volunteering. We hope this will be a time of growth, advancement and collaboration for all our members.