

# LOWELL COMMUNITY FESTIVAL AND EVENT PLANNERS RESOURCE GROUP



Mosaic Lowell

January 3, 2024 Meeting, 6:00 pm, LTC

The meeting included an introduction; a panel in which Brad Buitenhuys, of Lowell Litter Krewe, and Aurora Erickson, of Points of Light and Lowell Senior Center, shared their experiences recruiting and managing volunteers; Questions and Answers with Brad and Aurora; and a free-form discussion related to recruiting, retaining, and managing volunteers.

The following notes are not presented chronologically but have instead been sorted into:

- **Hints and Resources:** Helpful suggestions for how festivals and events can manage volunteers that came from the panelists or the attendees,
- **Questions:** Desired information and unanswered questions the group had, and
- **Ideas:** Brainstormed ideas of new ways to collaborate or initiatives to undertake. Some attendees volunteered to explore and work on certain ideas, which is noted by their initials.

## Hints and Resources

- Recruitment
  - o Use your connections, who may have good reach/contacts to spread the word of your volunteer opportunities and bring additional people on board.
  - o Places to consider asking for volunteers
    - Consider outreach to “local notables” such as politicians, media personalities, or nonprofit or business leadership. If they join, their networks may also join.
    - Consider the audience at local churches and congregations when recruiting volunteers.
    - Also consider fraternities and social organizations
    - Massachusetts National Guard sends volunteers to events and the rumour is they can provide a bouncy castle!
    - Local businesses – including your sponsors – should be invited to volunteer!
  - o Articulate the “Why”
    - Why are you doing this, and why is it important. What is your mission and why should this be important to volunteers?
    - Articulating this, and selling your message will assist with volunteer engagement, marketing, and sponsorship requests.
    - Sometimes the “why” is clear, but why is it important to volunteer for a cultural festival that isn’t raising funds for any particular cause? (The festival and its benefits are the cause!)
- Management
  - o Make sure the volunteers a clear understanding of their task!
    - Give people as much notice as possible so they know what they are going to do when they show up.
    - Provide definitions of what each role entails, what exactly will be needed of them.

- Have tasks and back-up tasks in case volunteers leave earlier than expected or for no-shows
    - Schedule a volunteer orientation ahead of the event, this can be an opportunity to give out volunteer t-shirts, meet in person, answer any questions, and see if folks show up.
    - Have a volunteer check in station.
  - Prepare so you (or if your event is big enough, your team leaders) feel empowered to give answers to questions quickly and cheerfully
    - Create a spreadsheet for the day of the event to organize volunteers so you know what timeframes you will have help.
    - Have additional roles/tasks ready in case more volunteers show up than expected.
  - Make sure volunteers have the tools they need!
    - Prepare a contact sheet for every volunteer so that they have the numbers of important event staff people.
    - Have volunteer t-shirts made ahead of time so that volunteers and staff are easy to find during the event, bright colors are recommended.
- Retainage
  - Creating a positive atmosphere, the message and environment are important to the volunteer experience.
  - Following the above management guidelines may help retainage – people will be more likely to volunteer again when they felt useful the entire time, felt like the event was well-run, and had their questions answered efficiently
  - Express gratitude to your volunteers – this can go a long way.
    - If you can at the event before they leave, thank volunteers individually or have a team leader thank volunteers individually
    - Send a post-event thank you to volunteers.
  - Consider fun giveaways – for example, buttons that have the number of years a volunteer has participated in your festival/event.
- Consider giving volunteers who have helped with your event for multiple years to have an elevated role (this will help take the pressure off of you to manage everything and many volunteers feel honored to be recognized this way)

## Questions

These are questions that the group feels are important to continue researching and talking about in future meetings.

- How can we avoid burnout on leadership committees?
- How to get more volunteers—are there a “place to go” or a “pool” for leaders to go and ask for volunteers?
- How can we build horizontal connections for volunteers, i.e., how can we provide opportunities for volunteers to chat and make acquaintance, as this social interaction is a reason many volunteer.
- How can we share information in a digestible format, i.e., provide enough text and details for those who won’t consider something they see on a flyer unless it has enough information while also not overwhelming those who will be attracted by a simple, clear layout, image, etc on a flyer?
- How can we make the need for volunteers more public and commonly-known? I.e., Lowell Litter Krewe people just know that it’s a volunteer opportunity, but people might not realize festivals need volunteers without seeing the call for volunteers.
- How can we make people feel specially invited, going further than a call on an email list?

## Ideas

These are ideas for collaborations – people who volunteered to help develop a collaboration are indicated by their initials.

- “Book It for Volunteers” – **CGH and LV**
  - o Create a website that indicates a coalition of events and connects people with opportunities
  - o Create a volunteer pool mailing list
  - o Volunteers who participate in the program can get “stars” for each festival they volunteer at, and can redeem the stars for prizes (local gift certificate or somesuch)
  - o BB noted he could provide access to Smart Sheets for a badge system to track this
- Renewal and emphasis on social media volunteer sharing – **AE, JH, and TC**
  - o “Volunteers in Lowell” Instagram that shares images of volunteers in action, volunteer of the month, and volunteer opportunities
  - o Revitalize Lowell Volunteer Hub (Facebook group)
  - o Cultivate an Instagram chat
- Create a volunteer mailing list
  - o Could be self-submitted list that could be sorted
- Mosaic Resource Page – **JO**
- Strengthen different modes of communication for this group (Festival and Event Resource Group)
  - o What’s App?
- Volunteer Fair – **JO and PC**
  - o Similar to a job fair, but for volunteer opportunities
  - o Get face-time with prospective volunteers
  - o Also similar to a club day at the beginning of a college semester
  - o Question: How to attract not just people who already volunteer, but people who might but don’t currently volunteer?