

Effective Practices in Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers An Adult Literacy Perspective

By Gregory Smith and Sarah Feuer

Talented and committed volunteers are the backbone to Florida's volunteer-based literacy sector. In 2007, over 4,800 individuals volunteered for one of Florida's numerous community, library or faith based literacy programs.

Most literacy volunteers serve as tutors providing one-to-one or small group instruction to adults who need to develop basic reading, writing and/or English language skills.

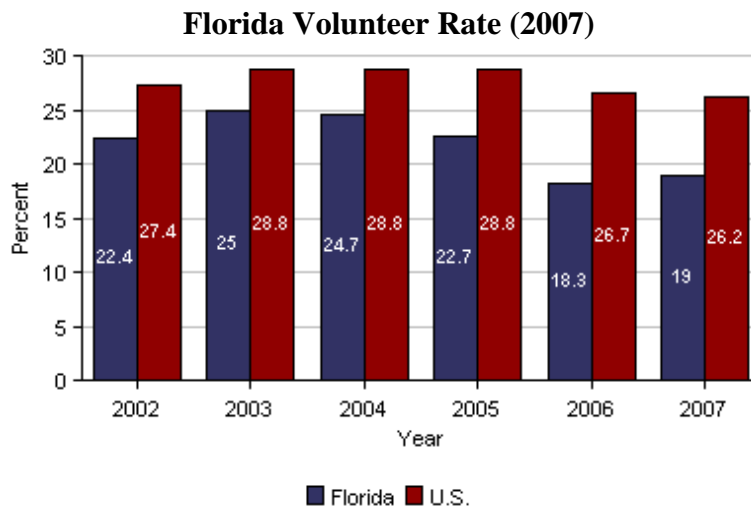
This white paper will explore trends, challenges and promising practices with regard to successfully recruiting and supporting volunteers. Drawing on data and expertise from volunteer service professionals from both inside and outside the field of literacy, we hope that this paper will help to inform the good work of Florida's volunteer literacy programs.

It's usually good to start with a well developed plan. Many organizations will include volunteer recruitment as a core component of an organization's communications and marketing plan. Your plan should include concrete and measurable objectives, a timetable, an action plan and assigned responsibilities.

Most literacy programs have limited resources when it comes to marketing and volunteer recruitment, therefore a deliberative planning process can help to identify areas that may provide the greatest return on your investment of time, effort and resources. Information on what works or hasn't worked for other programs can also help you to make informed decisions, an area in which we hope this report may contribute to your knowledge.

Trends in Volunteering

Taking a look at state and national trends in volunteerism, Florida tends to lag behind the nation when it comes to the percentage of people volunteering. Perhaps hopeful news for literacy programs is that tutoring and teaching rank among the top three volunteer activities.

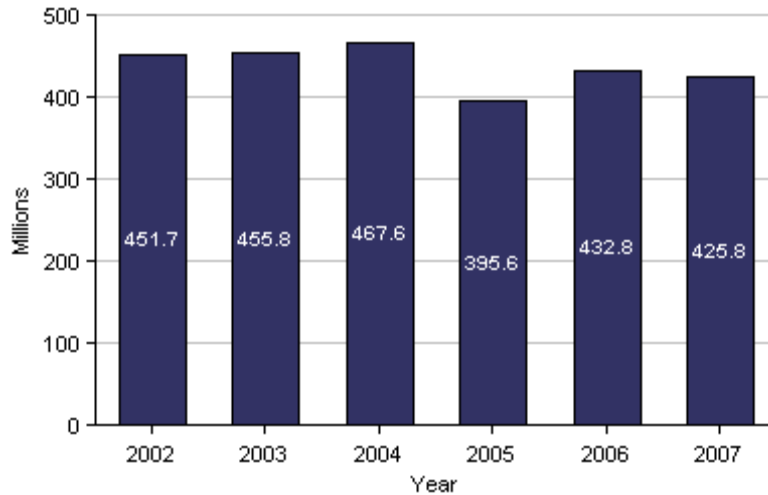


Source: Corporation for National and Community Service

Florida Volunteering by Age and Gender (2006)							
Age	Median Hours	State Rate	National Rate	Category	Median Hours	State Rate	National Rate
16-24 years	50	17.60%	23.40%	Age Group			
25-34 years	40	18.80%	24.70%	College Students	40	22.00%	29.60%
35-44 years	52	25.00%	33.30%	Baby Boomers	52	24.50%	32.20%
45-54 years	50	24.70%	32.20%	Gender			
55-64 years	60	22.20%	29.30%	Male	52	18.50%	24.30%
65+ years	104	21.20%	24.40%	Female	60	24.90%	31.60%

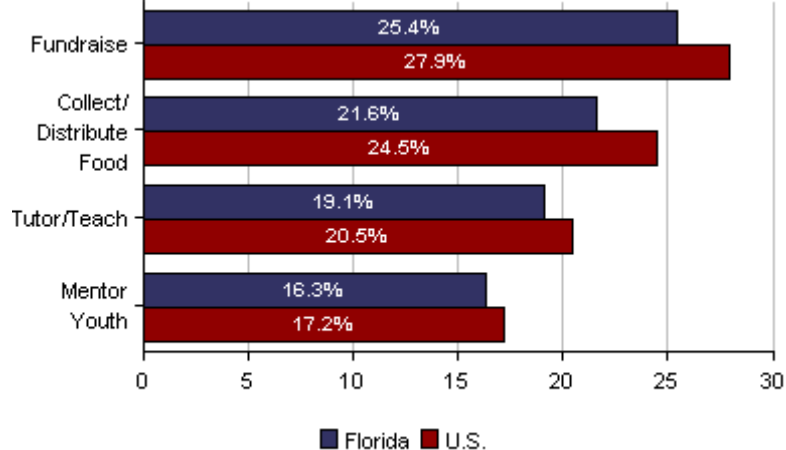
Source: Corporation for National and Community Service

Total Hours Volunteered Per Year in Florida (2007)



Source: Corporation for National and Community Service

Main Activities for Florida Volunteers (2007)



Source: Corporation for National and Community Service

Volunteer Recruitment

In a 2007 survey of Florida’s Community Based Literacy programs, volunteer recruitment was identified as the greatest challenge when it came to running a successful volunteer program. The following tables provide information on trends and promising practices with regard to recruiting volunteers.

National Survey of Volunteer Programs

Most Useful Ways to Find Volunteers	Percentage
Word of Mouth	71%
Internet Recruiting Services	37%
Live Presentations to Groups	33%
Events	29%
Newspaper Ads	29%
Local Volunteer Center	17%
Relationships with Local Corporations	15%
Direct mail	8%
Radio/TV Ads	8%

Source: Volunteermatch.org

What Florida Literacy Practitioners are Saying

Effectiveness of Volunteer Recruitment Approaches	Very effective	Moderately effective	Not effective	Haven't tried yet
Local newspaper free listings, articles	38.90%	44.40%	11.10%	5.60%
Referrals from individuals associated with your organization	57.90%	36.80%	0.00%	5.30%
Radio PSAs	17.60%	23.50%	35.30%	23.50%
Posters, flyers, and/or bookmarks	26.30%	47.40%	21.10%	5.30%
TV PSAs	31.30%	6.30%	25.00%	37.50%
United way	11.10%	38.90%	16.70%	33.30%
Local volunteer center	16.70%	38.90%	0.00%	44.40%
Public speaking	10.50%	57.90%	15.80%	15.80%
Internet-VolunteerMatch.org	0.00%	29.40%	5.90%	64.70%
Internet- Idealist.org	0.00%	11.80%	5.90%	82.40%
Internet- DoSomething.org	0.00%	5.90%	5.90%	88.20%
Internet- Networkforgood.org	0.00%	6.30%	12.50%	81.30%
Internet- organization's website	22.20%	33.30%	22.20%	22.20%
Volunteer fairs	22.20%	27.80%	22.20%	27.80%
Community fairs/events(booth)	11.10%	55.60%	16.70%	16.70%
Billboards	0.00%	5.90%	0.00%	94.10%
Direct mail	5.90%	23.50%	23.50%	47.10%
Direct e-mail	0.00%	17.60%	23.50%	58.80%

Source: 2007 Florida Community Based Organizations Needs Assessment Survey

The national recruitment data reflects the experiences of Florida literacy practitioners in many respects. One significant difference is in the area of Internet recruiting services. While these services are second only to “word of mouth” as a recruiting tool nationally, most Florida literacy programs have not yet tried using these free services.

Free On-Line Volunteer Recruitment Websites

Idealist.org

[Volunteer Match](http://Volunteer_Match)

SERVENet.org

Networkforgood.org

1-800-volunteer.org

Craigslist.com

Florida Literacy Coalition

Creative Suggestions on How to Recruit Volunteers:

1. Donate adult books with a bookplate/inscription for the literacy program/volunteer, to the public library.
2. Place upcoming tutor trainings in the events column of your local newspapers.
3. Put up a display at the local farmers market.
4. Have “a general interest workshop” (i.e. birdhouse building) and recruit volunteers from among the participants.
5. Set up an information table at the mall.
6. Enlist the support of the mayor and council members.
7. Place a ‘Thank You’ advertisement in the local newspaper’s volunteer section.
8. Rent a portable sign and have it placed on a major intersection.
9. Advertise in the newsletters of local retirement communities.
10. Place help wanted ads at the local community college.
11. Participate in college job fairs.
12. Blend traditional face-to-face workshops with online opportunities so that ongoing training is available to volunteers without overtaxing staff.
13. Distribute flyers at major bookstores.
14. Design a special tutor recruitment insert to be added to the city water bills one month.
15. Advertise in your city’s community calendar e-mails.
16. Partner with a 4-H group to provide literacy information and training to its members or with older Girl Scouts.

Sources: Community Literacy of Ontario, *The ABCs of Volunteer Recruitment*, ProLiteracy, *Reducing Waiting Lists*.

What Motivates Volunteers

Corporate America spends billions of dollars annually investing in market research, with the hopes of gaining insight into what motivates individuals to purchase their products and services. Volunteer based programs can also use data to identify prospective volunteers and understand their motives and interests. A great way to start is with your own current and former volunteers who can provide program specific insight into what appealed to them about volunteering for your organization.

National Survey Important Factors In A Volunteer Experience	Very Important	
	Very Important	Important
Cause I care about	68%	23%
Fits my schedule	63%	26%
Understand expectations	45%	35%
I can make a difference	44%	36%
Interesting/challenging	40%	36%
Nearby/convenient	41%	33%
Uses my skills/experience	35%	35%
Intellectually stimulating	23%	31%
Has orientation/training	22%	27%
Matches my career skills	21%	26%
Volunteer with friends	10%	15%

Source: Volunteermatch.com

A Literacy Perspective...

What Generates Interest in Volunteering for Literacy	Percentage
Volunteer to have a chance to interact with others	90%
Feel a need to give back to the community	89%
Agree that it is important for immigrants to learn and speak English	68%
Agree that being unable to read and speak English is a growing problem	57%
Enjoy learning about other cultures and ways of life	47%
Have a need to teach others	27%
Are motivated to teach or are experienced teachers	19%
Are motivated to help others integrate into the community	12%
Are motivated to help immigrants	11%
Like to teach or are experienced teachers	9%
Personal gains such as networking, enhance resume, or obligated ranked lower.	

Source: West Suburban Literacy Partners, Illinois

Identifying Your Target Audience and Key Messages

In 2007, West Suburban Literacy Partners, a consortium of literacy organizations in the Chicago metropolitan area, received a grant to study volunteer recruitment and retention. Working with an area market research firm, they surveyed over 900 community residents as well as approximately 200 current and former literacy volunteers.

Their community resident telephone survey revealed that differences in volunteer prospects (i.e. individuals who expressed an interest in becoming a literacy volunteer) and those who actually volunteer. As shown below the prospects tended to be younger, less affluent, be non-white and have children under 18.

Characteristics of Prospects and Current Volunteers		
	Prospects	Current
Age median	49.5 years	57.5 years
Children under 18	40%	17%
Household income	\$59,200	\$82,900
White	86%	93%
Library- visit/month	83%	87%
Volunteer for other organization	56%	61%

Source: West Suburban Literacy Partners in Illinois

It is interesting to note that both the prospective and current volunteers were frequent users of the library (83% for prospects and 87% for volunteers) and the majority already volunteer for other organizations (56% for prospects and 61% for volunteers).

What Florida Literacy Providers are Saying

Effectiveness of recruiting efforts targeted to the following audiences	Very Effective	Moderately effective	Not effective	Haven't tried yet
Libraries/library patrons	33.30%	38.90%	16.70%	11.10%
Civic/professional associations	0.00%	64.70%	23.50%	11.60%
Churches/faith organizations	33.30%	38.90%	22.20%	5.60%
Business/government employees	5.90%	29.40%	23.50%	41.20%
Retired teacher organizations/former teachers	21.10%	47.40%	0.00%	31.60%
University students/faculty	11.80%	17.60%	29.40%	41.20%
Seniors/retirees	17.60%	52.90%	17.60%	11.80%
Working professionals	0.00%	47.10%	29.40%	23.50%
Teens	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	71.40%

Source: 2007 Florida Community Based Organizations Needs Assessment Survey

10 Places to Recruit Volunteers

Send your volunteer flyers or a press release to the following places:

1. Corporate outplacement programs
2. Corporate volunteer programs
3. Churches, synagogues and other places of worship
4. Internship programs
5. Career counseling centers
6. Civic clubs, fraternal societies, sororities
7. Governmental organizations
8. Court system (sentence to serve)
9. Volunteer recruitment fairs
10. Other non-profit organizations

Source: drcharity.com

While it's important to use demographic data on current volunteers to help inform your recruitment efforts, don't fall into the trap of focusing on a volunteer "type". When you target certain areas of the community with posters, flyers, signs and advertising you are clearly implying your desire to recruit volunteers from those locations.

Your program will be strengthened by having a diversity of volunteers. If you are wondering where to start, do a survey, interviews and/or focus groups and ask volunteers and representatives from various constituencies how you can better reach a wider audience. This will also give you a good opportunity to test your key messages. Remember that your choice of words and images often communicate much more than the literal meaning.

Identifying Your Key Messages:

- Key messages help you focus on what is important to you and your audience.
- A message should be clear, concise and compelling.
- Most audiences are on a need to know basis. Don't water down your message with extra information that folks don't need to know.
- The messenger can be as important as the message.

Using Volunteers and Adult Learners to Give Voice to Your Message

Adult learners and volunteers can be very effective spokes people for your organization's recruiting and marketing efforts. They are often able to validate your program and communicate in a very personal way a host of reasons to volunteer for your organization. By sharing their stories, these individuals can illuminate one or more of your key messages with texture, images, emotion and meaning.

It's often effective for tutor and student pairs to work together. Their collective message can truly highlight the special rewards that come with being a tutor.

It is important to prepare your volunteers and students for this role. Share with them your key messages, information on your audience and how what they are doing fits with your other outreach and recruitment efforts. If doing public speaking, they should be prepared to answer basic questions about your organization and volunteer opportunities. The Florida Literacy Coalition sponsors an Annual Literacy Ambassador Training to help adult learners develop skills to do public speaking and media outreach. For more information, go to www.floridaliteracy.org

Florida Snowbirds: Recruiting and Utilizing Seasonal Volunteer Tutors

Florida is well known as a destination for seasonal residents interested in escaping cold weather up north. Approximately 100,000 temporary residents flock to Florida during the peak winter months.

While many of these folks live an active lifestyle, they are a great source for volunteers if organizations can successfully navigate around the seasonal nature of their residency.

So, how do adult and family literacy organizations, and more importantly, the students, deal with tutor snowbirds' migration cycle?

Best Practices with Snowbirds

Keep students active in summer

One dilemma that arises with snowbird volunteers is how to handle the students whose tutors leave for the summer.

The Martin County Literacy Council (MCLC) assigns two or three students to each active summer tutor. MCLC is now looking at going to a small-group setting where the seasonal volunteer is a supplement or assistant teacher.

Certain volunteers may be interested in staying connected with their student during the summer months. Allow tutors during the summers to stay in touch by e-mail, letters and phone calls. For ESOL students, Sister Exworthy of DePorres P.L.A.C.E. has seen tutors send letters or call their students on the phone. She also knows tutors that have emailed their basic literacy student exercises, helping them do self-directed study.

Be Flexible and Creative

“Don’t turn snowbirds away,” says Elizabeth Acosta, Executive Director of the Literacy Volunteers of Collier County. Try to be flexible and work with their schedules. While snowbirds are only available for a portion of the year, it is not untypical for them to tutor with greater frequency and intensity when they are around. Sometimes they will tutor three or more times a week.

Some literacy organizations offer individual or small group training if seasonal volunteers cannot make scheduled tutor training. Consider letting experienced tutors skip the training or arrange for them to train up north. This way, the snowbirds only need a basic orientation to get started.

Seasonal volunteers can also help at a distance. If snowbirds have access to a computer and the internet, organizations can ask them to research topics, edit documents or web pages, or help write.

Break down projects that are manageable for the time volunteers are here, for example, organizing an office library or filing. Acosta had a seasonal tutor who was very handy with office maintenance, saving the organization time and money in hiring a contractor.

Remember, flexibility is the key to a successful partnership between snowbirds and literacy organizations.

10 Places to Recruit Snowbirds

1. Daughters of the American Revolution
2. AARP chapters
3. Local senior centers/ retirement communities
4. Florida Retired Educators Association (FREA)
5. Small businesses in the community
6. Local book clubs
7. Word of mouth from current snowbirds
8. Snowbirdsgulfcoast.com (Snowbirds magazine)
9. Flaspots.com (Florida Senior State Championship Games)
- 10.FCOA.org (Florida Council of Aging)

Volunteer Retention

Volunteer retention rates, similar to volunteer rates, tend to increase with age. According to a study conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteer rates are low for young adults and rise as individuals approach middle age. The rates do not decline as individuals become seniors. For example adults between 20 and 25 have a 50.6% retention rate, while volunteer retention peaks in the mid to late forties (at about 70%), and holds steady in older age.

This same study showed the relationship between level of education and retention when assessing volunteers who stay for more than one year. The retention rate for college graduates is 72.4%, compared to 60.2% of high school graduates and 50.5% of individuals without a high school degree.

Volunteer who contribute more time also tend to stay around longer. Individuals who volunteer 50 hours are 40% more likely to serve for one year than those who volunteer for 1-14 hours.

Volunteer retention is also related to the activities that people perform. Individuals who tutor, teach or mentor have a 20% higher retention rate than those who provide general labor or supply transportation. Those providing professional or management related services have the highest retention rate.

Providing a diverse range of volunteer opportunities can help your organization recruit and retain satisfied volunteers. While the majority of literacy volunteers serve as tutors, your organization may lose out on good local talent if you don't offer volunteer opportunities that appeal to a range of interests.

The following chart shows how Florida's literacy programs utilize volunteers.

How Florida Literacy Organizations Utilize Volunteers	Response Percent
One to One Tutoring	95%
Board of Directors	84%
Small Group Tutoring	74%
Volunteering tutor training	63%
Fundraising (other)	47%
General Office Support	42%
Teaching (class)	42%
Event Planning (non-fundraising)	42%
Fundraising (Event Planning)	37%
Student Intake, Assessment and/or Placement	37%
Marketing/PR/Recruitment	37%
Special Projects	32%
Volunteer Orientation	16%
Other	11%

Source: 2007 Florida Community Based Organizations Needs Assessment Survey

Successful volunteer programs have policies, procedures and systems in place to make sure their volunteers feel prepared, supported, productive and appreciated.

The [ProLiteracy Accreditation](#) process gives local literacy organizations a structured approach to planning and evaluation based on nationally-recognized standards, including the areas of volunteer recruitment and support.

The following lists provide suggestions for effectively supporting and retaining volunteers.

Best Practices in Volunteer Tutor Retention

- Make volunteers feel welcome.
- Provide a clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations.
- Set time parameters for service.
- Tell your volunteers exactly what your organization needs.
- Regularly schedule high quality training workshops.
- Distribute a list of places to tutor.
- Provide on-going in-service training opportunities.
- Offer student evaluations that help to inform instruction.
- Ensure a good match between the student and tutor.
- Continue on-going and open communication.
- Offer social events that both students and volunteers can attend.
- Use a reporting process that measures students' successes.
- Make a program coordinator or trainer available to answer questions and provide assistance.
- Recognize and thank your volunteers!

Source: Florida Literacy Coalition

Additional Resources:

[Job Description for Adult Education Teacher](#)

[Job Description for Adult Basic Education Teacher](#)

[Job Description for Adult Basic Education Teacher Aide](#)

[Sample Volunteer Recruitment Letter](#)

[Tutor Responsibilities Agreement](#)

[Volunteer Application and Agreement](#)

[Volunteer Tutor Job Description and Guidelines](#)

[Recruiting Volunteers: Tips of the Trade](#)

[Volunteer Opportunities Flyer](#)

[Attract X-cellent Volunteers](#)

Volunteer Management Resource Organizations

Points of Light Institute

1875 K St NW 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20006
Tel: 202-729-8000

<http://www.pointsoflight.org/>

Sponsors annual conference on community volunteering and national service, offers regional seminars, consultation, and produces publications. Convenes the Volunteer Center National Network

ProLiteracy Worldwide

1320 Jamesville Avenue
Syracuse, NY 13210
Toll Free: 888-528-2224

info@proliteracy.org

ProLiteracy accredits local adult education and literacy organizations. Has an annual conference on volunteering. Provides advocacy and Trainer Certification, as well as internships across the world.

Corporation for National and Community Service

1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Tel.: (202) 606-5000

<http://www.nationalservice.org/>

Oversees national service programs like AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, AmeriCorps VISTA, Senior Corps, and USA Freedom Corps.

Independent Sector

1200 Eighteenth Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202-467-6100

<http://www.independentsector.org/>

National association for non-profits; conducts research on philanthropy and volunteering; sponsors annual conference.

Broad Source

1828 L Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 452-6262

<http://www.boardsource.org/>

National Nonprofit organization dedicated to building stronger nonprofit boards and stronger nonprofit organizations; extensive catalog of publications.

Sources: Points of Light Foundation: Volunteer management Series, www.ProLiteracy.org



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