

September 2014 Guidance on Visibility Volunteer Recruitment, Engagement, and Maintenance

ICEBREAKER

Consider this quote: *“Nonprofit organizations weren’t started to consistently ask for money and talk about the troubles of keeping the lights on. Remember, they were started to change the world. This is the story worth telling.”* (Portnoy 2014:15).

- How does your League share stories with the community?
- How do you present the League’s fight in your social media outreach?
- In your League’s outreach, what fraction of the posts/tweets/emails has to do with asking for support?

GUIDANCE

Volunteers of the 21st century are a different breed than volunteers the League may have had in the past. In order to effectively recruit, engage, and maintain volunteers for your League, it is important to present the League’s mission effectively and to understand the motivations of volunteers to get involved and make a commitment. Between generations (Gen Y and Gen X) there are differences in regards to their motivations, commitment, skills, and strengths (McKee 2012: 23). The two generationally different groups of volunteers are both willing to help. It’s a matter of tapping into these groups through a knowledgeable approach.

Recruiting through storytelling:

Communicating the true story of the nonprofit’s mission is key to connecting with volunteers and donors. The answer to “what does your organization do/solve?” should be apparent in all outreach efforts especially through social media. Sometimes that message can be lost or overshadowed by statistics or calls to donate. The efforts of the League should not only be told in terms of numbers but also stories, as these are what people can relate to.

When producing social media for a nonprofit we should be thinking like screenwriters for a Hollywood movie. Be able to explain the organization’s cause succinctly, and then expand by presenting the complete story arc.

- **Setting** – the physical location of the drama
- **Protagonist** – the character we root for; the organization as well as each person who works for the organization
- **Antagonist** – the obstacle in the way of the hero’s quest (can be redefined constantly to correctly match the hero’s journey.)
- **The Inciting Incident** – the why of the story; make it relatable so you can find collaborators

The story of struggle and perseverance is engaging to an audience. Frame the day-to-day workings of the League as a story to recruit new members and volunteers.

When the League’s mission is presented as a story, a new generation of volunteers who are looking to make a difference will be inspired to join the cause. Understanding the new volunteers and their motivations is key to recruitment. Reasons for volunteering vary between generations. The [YPTF toolkit](#) provides a lot of great information on the differences between the generations. Once you understand the characteristics of each generation, you can move on to the recruitment and engagement phase.

Individuals from both generations respond better to volunteer opportunities when there is little pressure for regular long-term commitment to an organization (McKee 2012: 4). Leagues will be more successful in recruiting volunteers by asking individuals to get involved with a small—but fun—but project to get to know the organization. Allow for the volunteers to experience a taste of what it would be like to get join the volunteer team—think of it as dating (McKee 2012: 26)!

Membership & Leadership Development Program

The first “date” (McKee 2012: 28):

- Show your appreciation for the volunteer’s help
- Gather information from the volunteer regarding their skills, strengths, and commitment availability
- Secure a second “date”

The second “date” (McKee 2012: 35):

- Listen to their interests to identify their motivation for volunteering
- Explicitly present your need for their volunteerism
- Secure a future “date”

Once you successfully recruit your volunteers, focus on maintaining their interest and involvement. Rather than managing your volunteers, think of it as leading them.

How to engage both generations of volunteers (McKee 2012: 93-114):

1. Understand the motivations of your volunteers
2. Make your volunteers feel appreciated
3. Offer your volunteers privileges and perks for their commitment
4. Be available to your volunteers
5. Provide tangible incentives
6. Create a sense of community
7. Establish accountability for your volunteers
8. Allow time for team “huddles”
9. Empower your volunteers

Sharing your enthusiasm for the League can prove to be difficult if one does not understand the demographic they are reaching out to. In order for volunteer managers to engage, lead, and retain volunteers, they must be receptive to new knowledge of the ever-changing volunteer pool (McKee 2012: 197).

Resources:

LWV Storybank Stories: <http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/storybank-stories>

May 2014 Guidance is a good resource for social media

McKee, Jonathan, and Thomas W. McKee. *The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*, 2nd ed. N.p.: Group, n.d. Print. ISBN 9780764486197

MLD Binder, Chapters 5 and 10

Portnoy, Dan. *The Non-Profit Narrative: How Telling Stories Can Change the World*. Portnoy Media Group, 2014. Print. ISBN 9780615599793

YPTF Resource: <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/young-peoples-task-force-building-league-tomorrow>

Storytelling can be utilized for fundraising as well. Know the months when giving is most common and time the social media content so that the tension of the story is high during these times to show that the battle is not yet over. If most of giving takes place in the Fourth Quarter especially in December, October should begin your third act so that the climax happens in December.

