

UNIT V

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Building a Foundation for Recruitment

A foundation for recruitment should be established through a variety of public relations and community outreach events, activities and initiatives. *Remember, efforts to recruit volunteers of color will involve many of the same techniques formerly used to recruit professional staff of color. Therefore, only recruitment techniques not previously described and/or techniques most instrumental in the recruitment of volunteers will be addressed here in detail.*

Public Relations & Community Outreach

Public relations efforts to recruit volunteers from communities of color would do well to rely heavily upon suggestions from the new CASA professional staff members of color. These persons have a keen awareness of the wide variety of media sources persons from communities of color rely on for information and may suggest places to advertise that have a higher probability of reaching the intended population. Consider advertising with mainstream newspapers, community and not-for-profit publications, select radio programs, and on television to recruit prospective volunteers of color while simultaneously bolstering program visibility.

Some efforts to recruit volunteers from communities of color may also double as efforts to advance community outreach initiatives. For example, presentations made at community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, community mental health facilities, etc., the places where prospective volunteers of color can be recruited, may also serve as ideal places to educate the public about the important service to the community that CASA programs provide.

Tailoring Recruitment Techniques to Reach Communities of Color

Non-traditional methods of recruitment may be necessary to generate interest in volunteers from communities of color. People from communities of color may take a greater interest in volunteer work if recruitment efforts occur at places familiar to them and that are perceived as 'safe' spaces in their social environment. Community centers, religious institutions, an informal lunch, a focus group meeting in the community, and in the home are some of the 'safe' places conducive to marketing volunteer work to persons of color. These settings are ideal recruitment sites in the effort to find people so inclined to participate in volunteer initiatives, value child advocacy, and willingly give service to the community.

Community Centers

Unlike mainstream agencies, which generally are located in the downtown or central location of a city, community centers that serve persons of color are located in the heart of these communities. Hence, they are typically run and frequented by persons of color, and tend to be places where persons of color feel welcomed and treated with both respect and dignity. Recruitment efforts made within community centers also come with the added benefit of endorsement of the center, of particular relevance in the event that patrons of the community center are unfamiliar with the services offered by CASA.

Religious Institutions

Religious establishments are the spiritual center within communities of color and have a historical record of credible service to members of the community. They are the primary source of emotional, psychological and spiritual support for much of the community, and may be the only place where many members of the community turn for advice of all kinds. Given this powerful position in the lives of people of color, these institutions carry considerable clout when endorsing programs, projects, and initiatives from the pulpit of the congregation. Members of the community respect and trust services endorsed by their pastors, ministers, or spiritual leaders. In light of this, recruitment of CASA volunteers from religious institutions comes with the powerful backing of the spiritual leadership of the community and has the potential to generate people committed to child advocacy as an extension of their spiritual beliefs and desire to serve the community.

Informal Lunch

An informal lunch opens the possibility to recruit prospective volunteers utilizing the recommendation of leaders from communities of color. During informal lunch dates, persons considered good prospects may receive first hand information about the important advocacy work that CASA programs provide for children, and the invaluable service they offer to Family Court. In one-on-one, or small group situations, it is possible for prospective volunteers to ask very specific questions and to elicit detailed responses about the nature, time commitment, and challenges facing a CASA volunteer. It is anticipated that opportunities for clarification will inspire interest in participation, as well as, provide a realistic understanding of the responsibilities of a CASA volunteer.

Focus Groups

Focus groups may serve a variety of purposes but are generally used to gather information pertinent to a specific problem, interest, or initiative. In the quest to recruit volunteers of color, focus groups may be used to gather information regarding barrier to, and incentive for, attracting African Americans, Native Americans, and/or Latinos as CASA volunteers (see subsequent section, **Barriers**, for an actual focus group summary conducted by the Onondaga CASA Program). Remember, to encourage maximum participation, focus group meetings should be held at places located within communities of color and that are easily accessible (using public transportation) to members of the community.

Home Recruitment

Some members of the community, those less comfortable in the more mainstream environments, or those needing a more personal touch, may respond more favorably if the request to serve as a CASA volunteer takes place in their home. CASA's willingness to extend itself by making visits to the home sends the message that these persons are a valued member of this society. Indeed, volunteers of color are a necessary resource and their volunteer service is an invaluable asset to CASA programs and, by extension, their community.

When constructing a list of people for home recruiting, some of the best recommendations will come from respected leaders in communities of color such as pastors, educators, and natural community leaders (people without titles, but who have considerable clout in the community – – grandmothers, mentors, block leaders, etc.) Community leaders suggest people with a proven track record, those willing to extend themselves, who have an interest in child advocacy, or have shown a commitment to quality service to the community.

Following-Up to Organize Recruits

Immediately after formalized efforts to recruit volunteers of color for CASA programs are made, there must be follow-up. Follow-up contacts make possible a second chance appeal to a prospective volunteer's civic responsibility as demonstrated through the desire to advocate for the best interest of children. Contacts can be as specific as mailing out information, and/or applications to those persons who have expressed a strong interest in volunteering during initial recruitment attempts. Follow-up by telephone call is critical. Contacts may also be as broad as making phone calls, sending mailings to businesses, or agencies to identify and generate interest from reluctant prospective volunteers. Some persons may only respond favorably when follow-up and second appeals are made to provide service to children.

Phone Contacts

Follow-up phone contacts are an excellent way to revisit persons, agencies, or business establishments to determine the capacity of formal presentations to generate new recruits. Through phone conversations, CASA professional staff can identify persons expressing an interest in receiving additional information about the time commitment and other requirements expected of CASA volunteers. Follow-up phone calls may also generate recommendations from agency and business personnel regarding friends, colleagues and business contacts considered likely prospective volunteers who should be contacted.

Mailings

Mailing out printed materials such as brochures, pamphlets, and applications within days of a formal presentation is a useful strategy to keep interest alive to volunteer for CASA. Mailings serve to remind persons that in the midst of their busy lives and schedules that recruitment of volunteers is still a priority for CASA. Mailings make possible opportunities to contact persons recommended by personnel from agencies or business establishments following a formal presentation. Prospective volunteers may also emerge through word of mouth, by over hearing a discussion in the office, following a mailing.

Identify Barriers to Recruiting a Diverse Volunteer Base

During the recruitment efforts to develop a diverse group of volunteers obstacles and barriers will inevitably present themselves. Below is a discussion of three obstacles to the recruitment of volunteers from communities of color.

Distrust of Social Institutions by Communities of Color

Persons from communities of color have a historical record of distrust and suspicion for mainstream human service social institutions. The health care, social service, mental health, and criminal justice systems are but a few of the social institutions in which persons of color consistently experience difficulty negotiating services from their predominantly white staff members. Communities of color often describe these human service institutions and their employees as openly hostile and insensitive to their cultural values, belief systems, and child rearing practices. Because of the history of suspicion and distrust, prospective volunteers may be reluctant to volunteer in the very institutions with which they have had negative experiences.

Failure of Print Materials/Advertisements to Reach the Intended Population

Campaigns to recruit volunteers of color require planned, systematic efforts utilizing print materials designed to reach specific audiences. During the multicultural era efforts to recruit persons from communities of color have relied heavily on updating print materials to reach a broader and more diversified client base. These efforts have included the production of brochures, pamphlets, posters, and flyers featuring and designed to attract the African American, Latino, Asian American, or Native American communities.

Despite the best of intentions, when marketing departments overlook consulting with experts from communities of color, print materials may fall short of the designated campaign goals. For example, many members of the Latino community do not speak Spanish and may feel insulted, or overlooked if print materials make the assumption that "all" Latinos speak and read Spanish. Whenever undertaking recruitment efforts in the Latino community, literature should also be written in both Spanish and English.

Clearing Questionable Records of Prospective Volunteers

When persons from communities of color elect to volunteer they do so despite their reservations and distrust of human service systems. Some volunteers may have had a negative encounter with a human service agency and may retain some residual feelings of animosity and frustration about the quality of care, or sensitivity with which their case was treated. For others, an interface with a human service agency may have left a blemish on their record, one they believed would be removed following the final disposition of their case. Given these concerns, many prospective volunteers are reticent to volunteer if they must withstand a background check of their record. CASA programs may need to reassure prospective volunteers that erroneous records will not be used against them. Furthermore, CASA programs should make an effort to expedite (working with a legal team) the clearing of questionable records to avoid losing qualified persons wishing to volunteer.

Note, the focus group reports that follow identify barriers to, and incentives for, attracting African American and Latino CASA volunteers from the perspective of members of the African American and Latino communities. These summary reports list ideas generated from actual focus groups arranged by the staff of the Onondaga CASA program. Bare in mind, efforts to solicit similar feedback from members of the Native American, and/or Asian American communities may also be obtained using focus groups.

Focus Group Meeting Report: Barriers to and Incentives for Attracting African American CASA Volunteers

With grant funding from the National CASA to improve recruitment of volunteers from communities of color, the Onondaga Casa program convened a focus group to elicit opinions of African Americans living in the Syracuse/Onondaga County community. The aim of the focus group was to identify barriers to and incentives for attracting African Americans to become CASA volunteers. Below is an abbreviated summary of the group's major findings:

- \$ Information about the CASA program should be framed in ways and terms meaningful for the African American community: CASA volunteers can in some respect play a role valued in African American communities, -- a member of the "village" or extended family that plays such a critical role in supporting young people.
- \$ CASA needs to be described in concrete terms, i.e., how CASA really and directly helps children in foster care. Agencies that are not themselves "community-based" have to be seen as credible and providing services that are effective.
- \$ Agencies/CASA programs need to be supportive of community services in order to build relationships and trust that are needed in order to effectively recruit volunteers.

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- \$ CASA programs and agencies will need to overcome mistrust of human service systems that are widely viewed as not having kept promises in the African American community.
- \$ CASA programs and sponsoring agencies must be able to demonstrate participation of African Americans at all levels of the organization. It is not enough to have an African American “spokesperson.” Agencies must have African Americans in positions of authority in an organization.
- \$ CASA programs must be able to demonstrate an understanding of cultural differences.
- \$ The program needs to be able to show results. Involving families that have benefitted from CASA services, i.e., “success stories” would be an effective recruitment strategy.
- \$ The role and responsibilities of the CASA volunteers need to be specific and understandable. The “job description” for a CASA volunteer should make clear what competencies are or are not required. The program should find ways to reassure prospective volunteers that they do not need to have any particular professional training such as law or social work. The common sense, commitment to children skills should be emphasized.
- \$ People from communities of color are motivated to volunteer when the information about the program or agency is a clear call for help.
- \$ Informational groups, similar to focus groups are a good way to recruit volunteers because such groups give people a chance to ask questions and discuss the program among peers.
- \$ The religious institutions are a critically important source of recruitment: an endorsement by a spiritual leader is important in attracting minority participants in programs. Ads placed in religious bulletins are likely to be an effective way to disseminate information.
- \$ Working through coordinating bodies such as the local ministerial alliance, provides an invaluable endorsement of the program and the ability to disseminate information to a large number of people simultaneously. An example is having the issue of safe and permanent homes for children the subject of sermons in many African American churches on the same Sunday.
- \$ Word of mouth endorsements from other people who are trusted in the community helps to attract African American volunteers.
- \$ Judges speaking about how CASA helps them to make better decisions will help recruitment efforts. Community members are a good source of information about which judges are respected in the community.

- \$ Programs and agencies should find ways to broaden their outreach efforts to avoid calling upon the same individuals all of the time.
- \$ Time and financial constraints make it difficult for individuals from the African American community to volunteer. Racial barriers in the larger society limit economic opportunities for many African Americans forcing them to work two or three jobs. These conditions hamper the capacity of African Americans to volunteer and must be improved to increase their availability to volunteer.
- \$ Information about the program and recruitment information should be placed in community-based media outlets including community papers, and radio stations. Programs should not expect community media to run information/advertising for free. Despite their community focus, these are business enterprises and need to be respected as such.
- \$ Information can be disseminated by “user-friendly” posters and flyers that contain brief, to the point information, placed in locations where people congregate and gather.
- \$ Information should also be delivered orally: programs should not rely solely on written forms of recruitment.
- \$ Amenities, such as food and support, such as child care, encourage volunteerism.
- \$ Community-based locations for volunteer activities, such as training and meetings, will encourage volunteerism among African Americans.
- \$ Offering even a modest stipend is another tool that will increase minority participation as volunteers.

**Focus Group Meeting Report:
Barriers to and Incentives for Attracting Latino CASA Volunteers**

With grant funding from the National CASA to improve recruitment of volunteers from communities of color, the Syracuse Center for Community Alternatives convened a focus group to elicit opinions of persons from the Latino community living in the Syracuse/Onondaga County. The aim of the focus group was to identify barriers to and incentives for attracting Latinos to become CASA volunteers. Below is an abbreviated summary of the group’s major findings:

- \$ CASA program brochures must provide a more accurate assessment of the time commitment expected of volunteers. The required time designated in the print materials (9-12 hours per month) appears deceptive and an underestimation of the ‘real’ time commitment.

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- \$ CASA print materials (brochures, pamphlets, flyers, posters) should emphasize that volunteers work on one case at a time. Ambiguity regarding case load may discourage prospective volunteers concerned with limited expendable time.
- \$ CASA program staff must explain and facilitate efforts of volunteers in their attempts to gather investigation materials during the daytime court hours (since many volunteers work during the day).
- \$ CASA program staff will need to help volunteers manage their anxiety about organizing investigative materials into a written report. Some prospective volunteers may be apprehensive about writing reports.
- \$ CASA program staff may need to be flexible regarding training requirements. Expecting volunteers to attend every session may be too stringent. Consider taping the training sessions and making the tapes available to volunteers, or offer more than one training time per/session.
- \$ CASA program staff must understand that volunteer service is a substantial time commitment, that Latino prospective volunteers have multiple family commitments— their own children need their attention, and they are involved in extended family issues.
- \$ CASA programs must make every effort to provide childcare during the training of volunteers, that a child-friendly training environment might be an incentive for prospective volunteers.
- \$ CASA program should appeal to students from local community colleges – – not all students are transient, or youth – human service programs at colleges look for community-based opportunities for students.
- \$ CASA program staff must be prepared to help a prospective volunteer work through fear, or reluctance to work in the inner-city neighborhoods – prospective volunteers may have the perception that it could be dangerous in the neighborhoods, or in a family’s home.
- \$ CASA program staff must help volunteers deal with the reaction of a biological parent, another adult, family, or non-family member, when the CASA volunteer approaches them in the home. Reactions may vary as some cases will be more difficult than others.
- \$ CASA program staff should prepare prospective volunteers to handle confidential information during the investigation of a case. They will have access to criminal records, substance use histories, and/or other private details of people’s lives.
- \$ CASA programs must do a good job of explaining the value of CASA volunteers and the services they provide to families. Prospective volunteers are more likely

to participate if they understand the vital role of CASA programs to troubled families.

§ CASA programs must generously use recognitions such as a plate, certificate, or plaque as important incentives for volunteers. Remember, because prospective volunteers believe money would not inspire people to volunteer, other incentives may be critical to the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Location

Recruitment strategies to solicit volunteers from communities of color must carefully consider the location of these initiatives. Persons of color are much more likely to respond affirmatively to recruitment materials, and elect to attend presentations scheduled at familiar locations considered “safe” places in the community. Community centers, the Girls or Boys Club, the Church, or mosque, the YMCA/YWCA, are often perceived by persons of color as places where they feel well received and treated with positive regard. Community-based locations are not only places where persons of color feel “at home”, but are also locations that are easily accessible by public transportation. A significant impediment for persons without their own transportation is the ability to reach an event using public transportation. A CASA program would do well to carefully consider the location of their recruitment presentations to ensure that they can be reached via public transportation.