

Reunion volunteers will get it done

Hi! I'm Edith Wagner, editor of *Reunions magazine*, and this time I'm going to talk about volunteers

Consistently, I'm asked for my four or five most important tips, and at the top of the list is this: never organize a reunion alone. There are plenty of stories about successful reunions organized by one person, but that's a lot of work and rather unfair. It can also be a good precursor to burnout.

If you're organizing any kind of reunion there must be others who are willing to help. As in all volunteer recruitment, you may have to ask but, frankly, that's how most volunteers start anyway ... by being asked. In some instances, others understand immediately what you're getting at and offer to volunteer. The smart ones will volunteer for things they love to do and happily relieve you of those responsibilities. It's the ones who need to be cajoled, begged or urged to contribute, who are more difficult.

Speaking of contributions, there are those who truly have no time to volunteer before the reunion. They have two perfect alternatives. The first is to contribute cash to help defray your pre-reunion expenses. If potential contributors ask what needs to be paid for, you can cite phone calls, postage, printing, and deposits. The other alternative for these people is to volunteer at the reunion itself. Can they help with games for the kids? Take photos? Serve food? And don't forget that cleanup always goes much faster with committed volunteers.

Interest, enthusiasm and "ownership" of the reunion grows with each volunteer you recruit. Don't be afraid to delegate whenever necessary.

What can volunteers do?

You should spend no money on services volunteers can perform. Assess your members' skills and talents. Examine each

need and purchase, to determine if there is a volunteer solution. Is a family artist willing to design invitations? Can someone provide and arrange flowers or make centerpieces? Would a talented cook help cater a picnic? Or is someone with a computer willing to input and maintain your mailing list? Who wants to get together to kvetch, gossip and stuff envelopes for mailings?

As reunion organizer, you are the main volunteer, the Big Kahuna — share the joy. Interest, enthusiasm and “ownership” of the reunion grows with each volunteer you recruit. Make sure many others get in on the action. How do you find volunteers? Ask, beg, demand, cajole, plead. Do whatever it takes to involve others in your success.

Highlight volunteer service lavishly in your correspondence and newsletter. For example, in the first mailing, ask for help to keep records, to do subsequent mailings, produce a program, memory book, family history, cookbook or quilt. In the second mailing include a list of who volunteered to do what and what you still need volunteers to do. In your last mailing when you generate excitement and enthusiasm for the reunion itself, solicit on-site volunteers. And remember, volunteers don't even need to be in the same city. They can stay in touch by phone, conference calls, fax, mail and email.

Some volunteers will be members of committees. Committees add to the fun and "ownership" of reunion organizing. They share planning, generate and implement ideas and inspire attendance. For more information about committees to consider for creating your reunion team, see the leadership podcast with emphasis on committees. It includes ideas for committees and committee responsibilities.

So let's talk a little about projects volunteers can do. Many reunions solicit volunteers to organize between-reunion activities

to help pay for ongoing expenses. Volunteers can negotiate group rates, food prices, transportation and tickets, then mark-up the price and add the difference to your reunion account. These activities could include a theater party, style show, progressive meal or party, casino night or bus tours. Note that many of these include fun activities that also serve to bond volunteers. And for any of the activities you can invite friends or co-workers who then help pay for your reunion. Let's say you're in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and you plan a theatre party to Chicago 100 miles away. You hire a motorcoach. get group rates on theatre tickets, perhaps arrange a catered lunch or box lunch on the bus and mark up the price so the profit goes into your reunion treasury. Oh, by the way, there is a podcast about how to hire a motorcoach. Listen to that too.

Or recruit volunteers to develop a cookbook as a fundraiser. They'll need to collect and input recipes, stories, traditions and hints. Emphasize deadlines and follow-up regularly. Volunteers can sort recipes and stories into folders, one for each food category. They should eliminate duplicates and clarify confusing recipes, standardize measurements and abbreviations and proofread every word ... over and over and over again.

It takes a dedicated volunteer editor to solicit contributions, provide overall direction and enforce deadlines. Additional volunteers are needed for book design, layout, production and distribution. Most of the work can be adapted to suit volunteer schedules and talents. You will still need volunteers even if you choose instead to contract with a printing company that specializes in cookbooks. See Reunion Resources at reunionsmag.com for companies who specialize in cookbook production.

Quilts

Another common reunion activity is making commemorative quilts. If your project is a quilt, you will need volunteers to distribute, produce and collect the pieces. Then, someone must assemble and sew the final product.

But, very importantly for your overall survival plan, there are the all important Reunion Day volunteers. As you approach your Reunion Day(s), review your volunteer plans and requirements. If you can, meet with volunteers or a committee who will work with volunteers before the reunion to review every detail of the program to coordinate tasks. Identify jobs that will be assigned to volunteers (runners, registration, greeters, kids' games, cooks, food service and cleanup). If possible, create a job description for each volunteer activity. Form groups of volunteers based on job responsibility, and review job duties with them. Allow ample time for questions and answers. During your reunion, consider brief, daily meetings to regroup, motivate, and review schedules. Thank volunteers for their help and motivate them to have a great reunion.

Engage the most gregarious, outgoing volunteers, perhaps family elders or committee members as a hospitality committee. Some cousins know only a few people (or perhaps no one) at the reunion. A friendly atmosphere and people to talk to will help them have fun. Identify these goodwill ambassadors with bright red vests or special nametags. They can watch for first-timers and introduce them around.

And what about next year?

There is always business to be done at reunions. Reunion business meetings are a good time to chose the next chairperson and solicit volunteers for the next reunion. The meeting is also a great time to recognize and publicly thank volunteers who helped with the current reunion. In fact you cannot thank volunteers

enough. There is no doubt, **you** probably have worked harder and longer than any other volunteers but appreciating them publicly is essential. First to make them feel good about themselves and their contributions, but also to make them want to volunteer again. Not to mention the possibility to recruit more volunteers for your next reunion.

Create volunteer job descriptions that clearly outline time requirements. Have incentives like meals, t-shirts, or buttons. Create a volunteer organizational chart with contacts and their cell phone numbers. Ask if there is any job to which they would prefer not to be assigned. This is a good way to avoid no-shows. Send reminders of their commitment as well as where and to whom they should report on site. Even if your reunion is far fewer people, do not do it alone. Share this great opportunity.

We, at Reunions magazine, are always looking for ideas you've tested at your reunions. Feel free to email them to editor@reunionismag.com or send them to Reunions magazine, PO Box 11727, Milwaukee WI 53211 or post them at our forum at <http://forums.reunionismag.com>.

Lots of ways to communicate about reunions.

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