**ENGAGING GOD’S PEOPLE FOR MINISTRY**   
A Volunteer Engagement Strategy  
  
*“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4: 11 – 13*  
Being part of a church community can be a wonderful thing – it’s where one can grow in faith, build meaningful relationships and have opportunities to share one’s gifts and talents in various capacities. However churches can only function with the involvement of many volunteers so that its mission and vision is realized, which overall is to build God’s Kingdom.

In order to have well-functioning churches, it’s important to realize that volunteers are what make the church. Without a contingent of people willing to serve as builders in God’s Kingdom, there wouldn’t be a church – at least as we know it with its various ministries and programs.

Developing an effective strategy for engaging people in ministry gives meaning and purpose to the many tasks and responsibilities taken on by volunteers. It will ensure that people who give of their precious time will experience an efficient process and feel they are adding value to a program. So what can a church do to create a meaningful culture that engages and inspires people to serve and fulfill its mission?

**Here are 13 Tips for Engaging God’s People for Ministry**

1. **Mission and Vision**  
   What is your church’s mission/vision? Do people know what it is and understand how their specific ministry connects to that vision? Do they understand how their personal involvement will impact lives for God’s Kingdom?  
   Volunteers do what they do because they are passionate about a particular cause. They can spend numerous hours serving, sometimes even going out of their way for a cause that has meaning for them. Important then is that your Volunteer Engagement Strategy connects to your church’s mission and vision and how volunteer involvement will impact lives for Christ. Without that clear understanding, volunteers will just be participating in a good program.
2. **Write Job Descriptions**  
   Would you accept a job offer without knowing your duties, your hours, who you report to or how your work would benefit the company? It’s hard to imagine that anyone would. The same goes for volunteer positions within a church. Volunteers need to understand their role and its purpose, what’s expected of them, what kind of training is available, who to report to and length of assignment. A written job description also provides a self-screening method for people interested in serving, helping them discover that one position may fit their gift and skill set better than another. Additionally, job descriptions can be used for conversation starters when issues of accountability need to be discussed. See additional details [here](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/About%20Job%20Descriptions.pdf).
3. **Clear Expectations**  
   Clarity is a powerful thing! The more details you can provide a volunteer as they start a new role, the more confident and empowered they will feel. Be upfront about all of the responsibilities and expectations of the position, the purpose of the ministry program and how it fits into the vision of your church. Don’t expect them to figure things out for themselves or assume that they know because they’ve been a member of your church for a long time. Cover all the details including what autonomy they may have in making decisions.
4. **Gift Based Placement**

Not sure what kind of gifts God has entrusted your church members? What if you had people participate in a “Discover-Your-Spiritual-Gifts” program on a regular basis and stored the results in a database that categorized all the serving positions in your church for the spiritual gifts required? Putting people into a position that doesn’t utilize their gifts generally does not work very well. Putting the right gifts to work though can bring great rewards in as much that those serving are so energized they may even consider extending the length of their service term.

1. **Recruiting**   
   The definition of recruiting is *“communicating a truthful and compelling message to discover prospects.”* Use this to guide the messages needed to inform your congregation of various ministry opportunities. Be mindful not to recruit out of desperation or with a boring message. This is all about ministry and volunteers being living stones in building God’s Kingdom. Additionally, look at various ways to recruit, not just the standard method of a bulletin or pulpit announcement – use multiple methods and target the intended prospects with what would resonate with them. And then of course use the number one method for recruiting by making a personal request and inviting people into ministry. It is a known fact that the number one reason people don’t volunteer is that nobody asked them. Lastly, equip and encourage those who are already serving to tap the shoulders of their friends who may be a good fit for your team.
2. **Quality Attracts Quality**

If a ministry is known for high quality in what it accomplishes, then others who appreciate that level of quality will be attracted. But, just as excellence attracts excellence, mediocrity will also attract mediocrity. If your church’s programs are based on whatever a volunteer wants to do, then it can dilute your church’s vision. If no training is offered, there is also less chance of leadership development. Consider then what you need to do to raise the standard of a ministry program. Is there a way of being more professional, of increasing the quality of a ministry program? Will it require having a tough conversation with an individual to move him/her to another ministry that is a better fit? Should your church stop doing something for a while and re-launch the following year? What does your church need to do to increase the quality of its programs so there is powerful ministry effectiveness?

1. **Develop Volunteer Leaders**In order to develop volunteer leaders, it’s important to help church members value serving as an aspect of being a Christ follower. The most effective way of doing so is through consistent training and discipleship, taking time to invest in them and their spiritual journeys. Volunteers should not be seen as commodities or just warm bodies filling a role, but need to be built up in the power of the Holy Spirit, so they bear fruit. When they are positioned in areas of giftedness and experience growth in their own journeys as well as their ministry, volunteers will have a greater desire to see that ministry succeed and will work hard to bringing others on board.
2. **Effective Communication**   
   Effective communication makes volunteers feel appreciated, informed and equipped to serve with excellence. Regular communication is motivating while the lack of it is one of the main reasons volunteers become dissatisfied. Besides providing job descriptions and training people for their ministry roles, it’s important to continually engage volunteers and keep them informed. If people are showing up late for meetings, are unprepared or not doing what they’re supposed to do, is it due to lack of commitment or interest, or is it that they just don’t know? It is therefore the responsibility of ministry leaders to help volunteers be as prepared as possible, communicating well in advance and keeping them up to date on all that’s happening within their ministry program. On the other hand, also be ready to listen to your volunteers and promptly respond to their concerns.
3. **Volunteer Training and Equipping**  
   The goal of training and equipping is *“to provide the necessary resources and to communicate, develop and transfer the attitudes, competencies and knowledge needed for the volunteer to do their ministry effectively.”*  
   Volunteers feel awkward and vulnerable when they don’t have the necessary resources to perform their ministry tasks. Consequently, the more detail and structure they are provided and the latitude they have in making decisions, the more comfortable they will feel in their role and valued as volunteers. Additionally, attitudes and competencies also need to be shared so volunteers can maximize the impact of their ministry. Do they need to have organizational skills, or understand a specific computer program? What kind of attitude will they need to exhibit in their role? Friendliness? Flexibility? Love for children? How to engage marginalized people?  
   Planning a training event should be scheduled for all ministry roles within a church, even if the position seems straightforward and easy to understand ie: usher. These should be offered especially for new volunteers, but veterans to the role should also be encouraged to attend as they can not only offer personal insights, but learn of new policies and procedures. Training events don’t have to last all day, but could also be facilitated before or after a worship service or as part of regular team meetings. Content needing to be covered would dictate the length of time for volunteer training.

**Outside an initial training and equipping event, the best training is through an ongoing coaching relationship with regular check-ins and encouragement.**

1. **Recognition and Appreciation**   
   Volunteers are one of the greatest assets a church has. They freely give numerous hours of their time and don’t ask for anything in return. Acknowledging their contributions and letting them know they are appreciated is important and should be an integral part of any church’s ministry plans. But volunteer recognition is [more than saying thank you](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/10%20Tips%20for%20Recognizing%20Church%20Volunteers.pdf). It needs to be a deliberate and intentional ongoing way that leaders engage with their volunteers. They need to hear they are a valuable part of your church and its vision for ministry and that what they are doing is making a difference – is touching lives.  
   There are of course different ways to give thanks and recognize the contributions made

by your volunteer teams – both formal and informal. To plan activities appropriately, it’s important to know what is meaningful for your volunteers and so think about the many ways your church can say thank you.

A special time of recognition your church can tie into is **National Volunteer Week** which takes place in April every year. This could be an opportunity to host some kind of special event celebrating the countless blessings your volunteers bring to so many.

1. **Volunteer Feedback**   
   Another way to recognize your volunteers is providing them with ways and means to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions related to their ministry program. Every church wants their programs to have impact and make a difference in the lives of their members – including those who are personally involved as leaders. This again lets volunteers know they are valued and have meaningful contributions to make.  
   Evaluations can take on different formats – assessing that the program is meeting its purpose; determining if leadership is fulfilling the program’s mandate; determining a need for re-visioning and assessing the church’s Volunteer Engagement Strategy and its effectiveness. Here is a sample [Ministry Evaluation form](http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Ministry%20Evaluation%20form.docx) that provides an overall evaluation and can be provided to ministry program leaders.
2. **Focus on Your People**   
   Ministry is all about relationships, not just the tasks. Therefore make an effort to really get to know those who are serving with you on your ministry teams. Take time to know who they are, how they are wired and what motivates them. Learn about their family and things that are important in their lives. Know special dates – birthdays, anniversaries (happy and sad) and acknowledge those dates with a card or phone call. Spend time with your team outside of ministry commitments – go for dinner once in a while – either one on one or with your entire team. Build a positive team environment and check in with them on a regular basis as they engage in ministry. Encourage, affirm and love your people!
3. **Finally, But Most Important…PRAY!**God has raised up many people in the church for ministry and according to His purposes. His desire is also to bless that work and make it bear fruit for His glory. He calls us to come to Him so that He can “supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)  
   So before doing anything else as you initiate a Volunteer Engagement Strategy, pray God’s leading on every aspect of what that means for your congregation. Ask God to show you where he is already at work in regards to engaging volunteers and ask that he show you how your team can join him in that mission.   
   Pray for your church and its many ministries; pray for the staff and the many volunteers who commit to serving God and His church – pray that they will serve with passionate hearts and make a difference in your community. Pray that as they serve they will grow in their personal faith and encounter the heart of the Father. Pray for a spirit of peace and wisdom and ultimately for God’s glory to be evident as His Kingdom is furthered through your church’s ministries.