



Informational Recruitment Meeting as an Orientation Tool

Lesson Author(s) and Institutional Affiliation:

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Abstract:

This module focuses on Extension volunteer administrators having a mindset of orientation within all volunteer recruitment activities. It encourages agents to think about purposefully orientating folks to their program within all recruitment materials and activities.

A specific technique is described: An informational meeting for folks interested in joining a volunteer program. This technique is useful for associations, groups and Master Volunteer programs. It is efficient because agents reach many people at one time. This allows an agent to give information and answer common questions one time to many people, saving time and energy.

Sometimes, upon joining our volunteer program, folks find out that the mission and goals of the volunteer group do not match up with their personal motivations. Today's talk will help us develop a strategy to minimize this negative experience.

Objectives:

- Participants will be able to plan and conduct a volunteer program informational meeting which focuses on beginning the orientation process for potential volunteer candidates
- Participants will be able to list at least three positive outcomes of conducting an informational meeting to recruit new volunteers

Advance Preparation:

- Review of lesson abstract, background, handouts and PowerPoint information

Materials Needed:

- Laptop and projector
- Copies of handouts

Time Needed: 45 minutes

BACKGROUND

Volunteer administrators and members often compartmentalize the various steps in volunteer program development, and focus on only one step at a time. There is no doubt that to build-up and maintain a healthy volunteer program, a systematic approach is necessary; however, it is easy to get caught-up in the routine of “going through the motions” and forget some of the overarching goals that we are trying to accomplish. It takes a purposeful strategy to avoid this pitfall.

INTEREST APPROACH

“Sweet’N Low: Perspectives and Purpose.”

Have the audience to divide up into groups of three or four people in each group. Once they are in their groups, give each group a Sweet’N Low packet and pose the questions, “What is this?” and “What is its purpose?” Each group discuss this among themselves.

After a couple of minutes, have each group state some of their answers. There will be some creative answers other than “a sugar substitute.” Point out the fact that we all have different perspectives and experiences and different ways of viewing the same thing. This will sometimes result in hindering motivation, increased frustration or even conflict.

This happens within our volunteer programs as well. We recruit and invite the public to join our volunteer group. Sometimes, once a part of our program, folks find out that the mission and goals of the volunteer group do not match up with their personal motivations. Today’s talk will help us develop a strategy to minimize this negative experience.

LESSON

The lesson follows the PowerPoint presentation. Commentary is given in the “notes” section of many of the slides. The following information will also complement the delivery of this module.

Wanting more volunteers is a common desire within Extension volunteer programs. This is a legitimate need, yet it is much deeper than that. What we **really** want are volunteers that know and agree with fundamental things such as:

- Extension’s mission
- The volunteer program’s purpose and role within Extension’s mission
- The vision for the volunteer program
- The volunteer program’s strategic plan going into the future
....and the list could go on and on

It is never too soon to begin orienting people to your Extension volunteer program, both internally and externally. All contact that we make with the public is an opportunity to tell the story of who we are and what we do.

A specific technique that is effective in helping with this is an informational meeting for folks interested in joining your volunteer program. A meeting such as this could be held once or twice a year, with the purpose of recruiting people for your program, that have a good understanding of what the program’s purpose is and the expectations for volunteering within that program.

The informational meeting should be an informal, fun event where potential volunteer candidates can hear from the volunteer administrator as well as a leader within the volunteer group and interact with current program volunteers. It should be expressed within the invitation to this event that attendance does not constitute any commitment to Extension. This is an efficient use of the agent’s as well as the volunteer’s time spent on recruiting new members; furthermore, this is an exciting activity that builds enthusiasm.

This informational meeting will eliminate some conflict, frustration and disappointment down the line because expectations are set up-front. Furthermore, these messages can be made less offensive because expectations and requirements are given to a broad group instead of a one-on-one conversation.

There are some other really great things that will come out of a meeting such as this. Some folks will join your group! They will know what the volunteer program is all about,

Tips for using the meeting technique with your volunteer group

- Including current volunteers in the planning and implementation of this event will help ensure success and make it more fun.
- You, as the volunteer administrator, should be the primary orchestrator of this event. This will affirm your leadership role and underscore the volunteer program’s tie to Extension.

and they will want to be a part of it. Some folks will not join your group! Upon attending the informational event, they will understand what the volunteer program is all about (purpose, expectations, educational focus, ect...) and they will realize that the program is not what they thought it was. Either way, they will know more about you, Extension and the volunteer program. Those that join your group will be well on their way. Also, this serves a great reminder for current volunteers of fundamental and powerful concepts related to your volunteer program.

The informational meeting should be an interactive time between potential volunteers, current volunteers and the Extension volunteer administrator. An important item to keep in mind is to keep the program part of the meeting brief, allowing the majority of time to be devoted to answering questions and interaction time between current and potential volunteers.

The potential volunteer candidates will be thankful for a fun, non-threatening, non-binding look into your volunteer program. Furthermore, Extension is a winner, walking away with great publicity and a new batch of committed volunteers.

APPLICATION

Have the audience think about Extension volunteer groups that they are involved with. Would this informational meeting technique work well with any of those groups?

Possibly, they are already doing something like this within their organization. Has there been anything discussed today that might add to what they are doing? Have the audience take a few minutes to write these items down prior to adjourning.

REFERENCES

Lockett, L. (2007). [Conducting a Master Gardener Informational Recruitment Meeting]. Unpublished personal notes.

HANDOUTS

Sample Invitation Letter to Potential Volunteer Candidates

Use with Extension Letterhead

825 N. McDonald Street, Suite 150
McKinney, Texas 75069
972-548-4232
Metro 972-424-1460, ext. 4232

Date

Dear Extension Friend,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Collin County Master Gardener Training Program. Texas AgriLife Extension Service is an educational organization provided by the U.S. and State governments, as well as our local County government, through the Texas A&M University System. Because the size of our audience and the scope of our job is always increasing, Texas AgriLife Extension takes time out to train a group of volunteers that will commit to assisting Extension in reaching the citizens of Collin County with researched based horticulture information.

The purpose of this program is to support and assist the Collin County office of Texas AgriLife Extension in providing information on research-based gardening practices to the community and completing community service activities within the county.

While participants will benefit personally in this training, it should be understood that the principal criterion for acceptance is the availability and willingness of the individual to volunteer to help county residents with their horticulture interests.

The training covers topics such as: the proper environmental and cultural practices in the cultivation and management of ornamental and flowering plants, the production and care of vegetable gardens and fruits and nuts, and the care and maintenance of turf and landscape plants, and a general understanding of plant disease, entomology, soils, botany and fertilization.

The training will consist of 13 classes, each Tuesday from August 8, 2006 through November 7, 2006. This will be a total of 65 hours of training. Texas AgriLife Extension specialists and staff will teach the classes. Each class will start at 8:30 a.m. and will last until 3:30 p.m. You may not miss more than one class.

Orienting New Volunteers and New Faculty

All classes will be held at the Texas A&M Research and Extension Center located at 17360 Coit Road, between George Bush Freeway and Campbell Road in Plano, Texas. See the enclosed map for directions.

The Master Gardener Training Program fee is \$_____ for the Training Class, Plus \$_____ for CCMGA annual dues. The Master Gardener Handbook is included in this cost and will serve as the class textbook. Extension Fact Sheets are also provided which cover all areas of horticulture. **Please do not send the course fee until you attend the informational meeting discussed further in this letter and have received notification that you have been accepted into the program.**

In return for this training, you must contribute a minimum of 65 hours of volunteer time; however, you are welcomed, even encouraged to contribute as many hours as you wish. Our interest in selecting individuals for this program goes beyond the first year of training. We need people who are willing to commit to continued participation as experienced Master Gardeners through annual re-certification.

There are many ways you can fulfill the 65-hour volunteer requirement. Examples of this include answering questions from office visitors and telephone callers, participation in horticulture educational programs at schools, and presentations to garden clubs and civic groups.

Your next step in becoming a Master Gardener will be to attend an informational meeting held at the Texas A&M Research & Extension Center on Thursday, June 22, 2006 from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. The informational meeting will be held in the Whitehurst Building classrooms, and will explain the goals of Texas AgriLife Extension and the Texas Master Gardener Program more in-depth. This meeting will also provide you with an opportunity to visit with current Master Gardeners. Dress for this event will be casual. Feel free to stay and attend our monthly General Meeting held at the same location at 11:30 a.m.

Prior to this meeting, I encourage you to visit the Texas AgriLife Extension Website at <http://texasextension.tamu.edu> & <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>, as well as the Texas Master Gardener Website at www.ccmgatx.org to learn more about us. I look forward to meeting you at the information session in June.

Sincerely,

Ima Gardener
County Extension Agent, Horticulture
Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Collin County

POWERPOINTS

See the attached PowerPoint presentation, "Informational Recruitment Meeting as an Orientation Tool."

EVALUATION

See the attached evaluation form for this module.