

Engaging Volunteers

Includes a team exercise.

An important part of becoming an effective organizer is to successfully recruit and motivate team members. Most teams do not have a problem initially recruiting members, but find it a challenge to engage volunteers long-term and help each individual find a role that fits their skills and interests.

To engage and motivate team member (including yourself!), we recommend that you:

- Have at least one goal that your team is working towards (see “Defining Your Goals.”)
- Post the information on your website, send it to your mailing lists, and make it accessible at every team meeting for reference (you may even want to quickly review before every meeting).
- After deciding upon your goal(s), identify the volunteer roles needed to achieve your goal(s).
- Use the following engagement exercise with core members of your team so that everyone feels comfortable engaging newly joined volunteers. The trick is to quickly engage anyone who says, “I want to join your team!” in a meaningful role that suits their skills and interests.

Before the Exercise: Information You Need to Know

Before you engage a volunteer, you should have a clear idea of your team’s goal(s) and potential volunteer roles. Below is an example of distinct goals and associated volunteer roles.

Smart Growth

- Goal: get city council to approve a general plan with a 1:1 jobs/housing ratio, concentrating all new development over the next 20 years as infill, and without any planned development in our hillsides.
- Volunteer roles: Phone banker, Webmaster, Outreach Coordinator, Graphic Designer, Tabling Organizer, Advocacy Organizer, Researcher.

Green Buildings

- Goal: get 20 homes to commit to energy upgrades in 2011.
- Volunteer roles: Phone banker, Webmaster, Outreach Coordinator, Graphic Designer, Tabling Organizer, Coalition partner liaison

Fracking

- Goal: San Benito County enforces recently adopted regulation and moratorium adopted on fracking in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. In 1 year: Stronger regulations on fracking in San Benito, Santa Clara, and San Mateo Counties.
- Volunteer roles: Blogger, Spokesperson, Researcher, Graphic Designer

Public Education

- Goal: Organize four public presentations or film screenings, two to non-traditional allies (such as labor and schools) to educate on climate change
- Volunteer roles: Phone banker, webmaster, planner for tabling at community events, spokesperson, Graphic Designer, event organizer/supporter.

30-Minute Exercise: Getting a Volunteer Engaged

Split up into teams of two. One person will role-play an active team member and the second person will role-play a potential new member. In 5-10 minutes, the active team member has four goals: (1) Find out what motivates the new member, (2) make a request, (3) provide the details, and (4) make the potential new member feel valued, and remind the new member what they have committed to.

For purposes of the exercise, use the goal tracks outlined on the previous page (smart growth, green building, fracking, and public education) and pick one track to follow as you go through the steps. Below are the steps in further detail, with examples of how the conversation might proceed.

1) Find out what motivates the new member

Active member: “I hear you’re interested in joining our Team – that’s great news! Tell me about yourself. Why are you interested in this team?”

New member: “I’ve lived in Sunnyvale for 15 years and work at a start-up in Palo Alto. I’m interested in this team because...”

Continue conversation as normal, find out which environmental issues the new member thinks are most important and prepare yourself to relate it to your team’s work. However, do not jump into the request — you want to get to know this person. Remember what they tell you!

2) Make your request

Active member: “You know, I think you’d really like our team...”

- *(For Smart Growth)* If they referred to climate change, pollution, land use, walking, biking, transit, housing, social equity, the economy: “...We’re currently working on getting the city council to approve a General Plan that makes it more convenient to drive less and walk and take public transit more by encouraging a more equal jobs/housing balance and concentrated all-new development over the next 20 years as infill without development in our hillsides. The main purpose of this is to reduce emissions in the Bay Area. Can I tell you a bit about the different ways for you to get involved?”
- *(For Green Building)* If they referred to climate change, pollution, energy efficiency, saving money, the economy: “...We’re working to get 20 existing buildings in our city retrofitted for energy efficiency in 2011. Our goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing buildings. Can I tell you a bit about the different ways for you to get involved?”
- *(For Fracking)* “...We have just launched an effort against fracking in California. It’s pretty scary that plans are being made to ramp up fracking in California with minimal/zero regulations to protect our water and public health. Can I tell you a bit about the different ways for you to get involved?”
- *(For Public Education)* If they refer to education, youth, and social equity: “...We’re working to organize quarterly public presentations this year to educate our team and the community as well as build our team’s membership. Can I tell you a bit about the different volunteer roles we’re trying to fill?”

New member: “Yes” (Hopefully they say yes, if not, go to a different goal. If their interest is difficult to determine, try engaging them with a volunteer role that seems to fit their skills, like tabling at an event or designing a flier (see last response on “provide the details” - next page).

3) Provide the details

Active member:

- *(For smart growth)* “Well, it really depends on what you’re interested in, but you may like attending general plan meetings and making public comment or just supporting those that do. The next meeting is on Monday, do you think you’ll be able to attend?”
- *(For green buildings)* “We’re currently looking for homeowners to do home energy upgrades in their homes to reduce their carbon footprint and volunteers to support this effort. If you’d like to learn more, we’re hosting a house party in two weeks to educate friends and neighbors about this effort. Do you think you’ll be able to attend?”
- *(For fracking)* “We’re growing our team and are looking to fill several volunteer roles including people to help with blogging, research, outreach, and event organizing. Do any of these sound up your ally?”
- *(For education)* “We’d like to do a film screening or a hike at our next event in a couple months, hopefully attracting a younger audience. Could you help us organize this event?”
- *(If interest is difficult to determine)* “We’re always looking for volunteers to help with outreach for our activities and for our team. Would you be willing to help out with designing a flyer or helping us table at community events?”

POSITIVE RESPONSE

New member: “I can do that, though I think I should probably know more about the team before I do.”

Active member: “Well, come to our next team meeting to find out more and we can go from there. It’s a couple weeks from now; can I email you the information?”

New member: “Sounds great. I’m looking forward to it. Thanks for all of the info!”

NEGATIVE RESPONSE (Hey, it happens sometimes. Okay, all the time)

New member: “None of this sounds interesting to me at all!”

Active member: “Well, that’s totally okay too! Do you have other ideas for what you’d like to do? Maybe you’d just like to come to our next meeting to learn more about our group?” OR “Maybe this isn’t the right team for you?”

4) Make them feel valued and, if applicable, remind them what they are committed to do

Active member: “I’m so glad you’ve decided to get involved. I really think you’ll be a great addition and I love your enthusiasm. I’m glad you’ll be able to support our [goal] by [commitment]. I’m looking forward to seeing you at our next meeting!”

Follow the conversation up with an e-mail to thank them for volunteering, reviews what they have committed to, and relays other relevant information (e.g. logistics of event they will attend, your next team meeting, how to join your mailing list, etc).