

## We Couldn't Do It Without You!

### Recruiting and Supporting Volunteer Youth Leaders

*"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." - Henry Ford*

*Whether it's a Sunday night meal, mission trip, lock-in, or car wash, you likely have already learned how invaluable strong volunteers are to your youth program. The ideas included below are intended to assist you as you recruit and support volunteers for events throughout the program year.*

### Getting to Know You

Host an informal time where the volunteers will be able to socialize and get to know you and each other. This creates a space for volunteers to build relationships with one another, which is important when it comes to finding support in one another throughout the year.

### Team Building

Volunteers will be relying on each other to see that the youth program runs smoothly throughout the year. There should be a strong sense of trust and a good process of communication built in the very beginning. Teambuilding activities will help the volunteers get an idea of how to work together in a simple and fun way. There are myriad resources available for community building ideas and activities.

### Evaluating Gifts and Talents

All volunteers are valuable to the youth program in unique ways. It is beneficial to learn what their talents and gifts are before the youth program begins, so their gifts and passions may be showcased throughout the year. Ask volunteers to fill out a survey of their strengths, passions, weaknesses, and concerns to get a sense of where you may wish to best utilize each volunteer.

### Planning

It is helpful to have a basic idea of how the youth group is structured before gathering the volunteers, yet also hospitable to give them the opportunity to give input when it comes to planning. This helps them take ownership in the program, allows them to understand what is expected from them, and gives them an opportunity to best use their talents and gifts.

## Regular Meetings

Schedule a time, such as once a month or once a semester, where volunteers meet with the youth worker/youth pastor to discuss how things are going in with the program. This is a place where changes may be made to the original plan in order to move the youth program in the right direction. Everyone should try to remain open and willing to change things if it is beneficial to the program.

## Safe Place

It is helpful to have a space where volunteers may raise concerns about personal issues, the program itself, conflict with other volunteers, or the young people. This may be part of the regular meeting, so long as the volunteers feel they may express concerns with privacy and confidentially. It is beneficial for the youth worker/youth pastor to be available for volunteers and have a system in place for anonymous reporting should volunteers feel the need to do so.

## How Are You?

It is the responsibility of the youth worker/youth pastor to check-in with volunteers to see how they are doing throughout the year. Being a volunteer for the youth program is both a very rewarding and demanding act of service. It can be tiring when a volunteer is constantly pouring out without being poured into. Ensure there is an opportunity at your regular meetings or via e-mail for the youth workers to be able to send in prayer requests. If an emergency occurs, allow a space for the volunteer to be able to pass on their duties to another volunteer for the time being. Encourage volunteers to be involved in other areas of the church where they can meet their own spiritual needs, so they do not end up spiritually dry.

## We Did It!

At the end of the program year, host a reflection retreat to debrief the year. Use this opportunity to thank your volunteers by hosting a nice meal during this reflection time, offering small gift cards, writing a handwritten note, etc. As you all debrief what went well and what can be learned for next year, use the following questions to guide your reflection time together:

- After this year I feel . . .
- The thing I liked most about this year was . . .
- The thing I did not like about this year was . . .
- Something I feel needs improvement is . . .
- I hope next year . . .

An important step after the reflection process is to ensure volunteers know that you really will incorporate their feedback as you plan the next program year.

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