



January 2019

## Useful Community Development... quick notes

**Inside: Finding and Retaining Volunteers, Too Many Businesses of a Particular Type, Rural Brain Drain, A CDC Switches to a Health Focus**

Visit us and explore at <https://www.useful-community-development.org>.

### Recruiting and Keeping Volunteers for Your Community



Most of our readers need volunteers or are in contact with a community organization that does. Recruiting volunteers, and then retaining them for the next occurrence of the same task, is a bit of an art.

Some important tips about recruitment include:

- Make sure that those who are making the ask are clear about the nature of the task, the time requirements, and the importance of the job to the overall vision

- and purpose of the organization. Some people are prone to say "yes" to any community invitation, but many more folks want to know "why."
- As appropriate, use the recruitment chore to reinforce loyalty to the organization, to educate people about your cause, or to challenge them to greater participation.
  - Arm those who will ask for volunteers with information to address any likely concerns about transportation, parking, weather contingencies, dress, and hostility or resistance they might face. Make sure those who are recruiting have a grasp of any prior history pertaining to volunteers for the same duty. The fact that no one suffered sunburn, fell in the creek, or got cussed out last time may be just the enticement needed for the new volunteer.
  - Expand your recruitment beyond your usual base of support. If you are struggling to find enough volunteers, ask a nearby business to make a pitch to employees, and ask churches to help you out. Reach out to universities, who may have student volunteer offices.
  - Increasingly, some volunteers just don't show up. Try to minimize that through a program of reminder calls or e-mails. But when you recruit volunteers, let them know this will happen, as in "We will shoot you an e-mail the week before and call you the day before." Otherwise a particular volunteer could feel singled out and mistrusted.

Now let's share a few secrets of keeping volunteers:

- Assure that volunteers are welcomed warmly and not left directionless to sit or stand around for several minutes while you get organized. This does not mean that everything has to be 100 percent ready when the first volunteer arrives, but you should give a clear understanding of exactly what is happening and when something else will occur. For example, your volunteer coordinator at the event could say, "You're the first one to arrive. Why don't you wait right here while we finish setting up the tables? We should be back in about 5 minutes." People don't like to have their time wasted, so don't let them wonder about when they will be able to make a meaningful contribution.
- After the event, provide recognition for your volunteers. Make sure they are publicly thanked at a meeting or in an e-mail or newsletter, and thanked in person as well. If you can, engineer something the volunteer needs to do at the end of the shift so that you make sure that the volunteer doesn't just slink away and feel like no one cared. This leads us to the next point.
- If you have the ability to give perks or little gifts, these can be unexpected incentives. Perks could be behind-the-scenes tours, first dibs on the goodies, a parking pass, or introductions to someone they would like to meet. "Gifts" might mean actual swag such as T-shirts, pens, and the like, or you

can let your volunteers take home leftover food or flowers. If your volunteers have been selling things, they should be allowed to choose a free item for themselves.

- If the task has much complexity at all, be sure to offer sufficient training. For example, a volunteer for weekly bookkeeping needs much more hand-holding than your volunteers who pour beer at your annual carnival. If your accounting helper doesn't feel competent, he or she is unlikely to want to continue. Our beer example notwithstanding, make sure even repetitive tasks are adequately explained and demonstrated. If your beer guy or gal feels "I don't know if I did that right" at the end of the shift, something is wrong.
- But don't be rigid. Don't let the excellent be the enemy of the good. Some percentage of your volunteers will be perfectionists, so it's important to let folks know how much leeway the volunteer has to make independent decisions, make exceptions, and just plain make mistakes. If your organization is selling \$50 annual passes and an error would be quite harmful to the organizations, don't try to sugar coat it. But if the napkin doesn't wrap around the hot dog in a certain way, it's probably not a big deal.
- Remember that volunteers need to have fun and feel appreciated. Don't let your seriousness overwhelm a good volunteer.

Above all, look at this from the point of view of the volunteer. See [our page directed at potential volunteers](#) for inspiration.

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## **When Supply of Certain Businesses Far Outstrips Demand**

A short, fun read about bars in Rochester caught our eye this month. Check this out for a universally applicable story aptly entitled [When Local Growth Is Really Just Redistribution](#). It's really easy for the proliferation of bars and restaurants, especially, to get way ahead of the community's ability to pay the money or spend the time that would be required to keep every business profitable.

Only the most fearless of planning commissions and city councils are willing to take on such an issue, but discuss among yourselves what steps might be effective in preventing the almost inevitable exit of some businesses when a particular commercial land use is overbuilt.

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**Student Loan Debt Impacts: As Diverse as Rural Brain Drain,**

## Housing

By now many of us have figured out that the astronomical student loan debts facing some folks in the workforce are placing an upper limit on the percentage of homeowners we can hope to attract to our neighborhood. Many traditional mortgage lenders still haven't figured out a way to allow financing of starter homes for those who have large payments.

Another less noted impact is the increasing impact on those who might return to contribute to their local rural communities after college. The pressure to make more money is causing many to choose urban living regardless of personal preferences.

For more details from the Federal Reserve, see [their article on the subject](#).

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## Positioning a Community Development Corporation with a Health Focus

This past September, the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation (CDC) in Cleveland voted to adopt what they call a health-first approach to their work. They have embraced the widest possible concept of health to wrap around traditional CDC work, such as housing, and to help them identify and evaluate priorities.

If you are involved in a CDC as staff or a board member, you will want to [check out this article](#) for more details.

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## Free Webinar on Philadelphia's Big Green Energy Project Feb. 7

Register to hear Christine Knapp, the City's sustainability director, and Adam Agallaco, the energy director, discuss their new power purchase agreement that will enable construction of a huge solar facility projected to meet 22 percent of the city's energy needs. [Register free](#) for this Urban Elephant Media production, one hour starting at 2 p.m. Eastern time on Thursday, February 7.

New on Our Website This month we posted a new page on [small cell technology](#), concentrating mostly on the visual aspects. We also answered these questions about [what to do when a village created a](#)

[dumping ground](#), [zoning setbacks for replacing a structure](#), [most influential factors in neighborhood attachment](#), [selling condo common ground to the town with a deed restriction to preserve beachfront view](#), and [rezoning from business to residential](#).

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