



# Coffee Break Training - Management Science Program

## Recruiting Volunteers

No. MS-2012-1 November 7, 2012

**Learning Objective:** The student shall learn techniques to recruit, obtain and maintain volunteers for the fire service.

For recruiting to be effective, you must understand your community and the reason why people volunteer. The most common reason is the self-imposed need to belong to something that makes one's community a better place. Most individuals will excel in a department that has realistic and meaningful goals that will improve the department as well as the individual. You also need to allow volunteers to balance their personal lives with the time they can give the department. To be successful, a fire department needs to provide activities that include the entire family. Those include organized social events, special occasions and junior firefighter programs.

The best department recruitment programs result in a high retention rate of volunteers. The department must mandate training and response levels and ensure it is not merely a closed social club. Very few people want to join a department that has limited opportunities for self-improvement or skill development.

The length of time that a new volunteer will remain with the department will be determined within the first few months of volunteerism. The department's membership committee and officers need to make new volunteers feel welcome. They need to help them adjust, introduce them to other members of the department, provide mentorship, and ensure they feel welcome and encouraged to continue to volunteer.

In order to market your department and attract new volunteers, you must be upfront about the time commitment, training opportunities and your expectations of their involvement. Some departments use attractive brochures that outline the department, membership benefits and incentive programs. Other departments may have open houses or use TV, Internet and radio spots to advertise they are seeking new volunteers.

You must also consider that it takes an array of talents for a department to run smoothly. There are numerous ways in which someone can volunteer, from information technology-related issues, administrative functions, fundraising, public education and of course actually responding to EMS and fire/rescue calls. Volunteerism can be a wonderful thing when done for the right reason with the right people!

Sources:

[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)

[www.vcos.org](http://www.vcos.org)

[www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org)



More than 85 percent of America's fire departments rely on volunteers. Recruiting qualified personnel is critical to their success. *Photo courtesy of Kim Legore.*

For archived downloads, go to:

[www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/)