



SECTION 2.06

VOLUNTEERS—HOW TO RECRUIT THEM, HOW TO KEEP THEM



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Most of the positions at a community club are filled by volunteers. Unfortunately, one common problem we hear of is the difficulty clubs have in recruiting volunteers. Beyond tennis clubs, this problem is very common in a wide variety of not-for-profit sector organizations which have traditionally relied on a substantial contribution of volunteer time.

There are a number of reasons suggested for this trend. The increasing number of two income families has decreased the number of people available for volunteer work. The non-work time which is available is more often dedicated to family activities. Even those people who have traditionally had careers are indicating that their work now requires a greater time commitment, further limiting their discretionary time. Finally, there has been a growth in the number and scope of the organizations which rely on volunteers to perform much of the work. There are probably other factors which have also led to the present situation. In the final analysis, volunteers have become increasingly difficult to find.



There are no easy answers to the question of how to be more effective in recruiting volunteers. Here are a few suggested strategies and tactics which might assist your club in keeping positions filled.

- 1) To begin with, having some form of plan can be very helpful in identifying needs well in advance. Thus, the club should attempt to get a multi-year commitment from key volunteers and have some sort of succession plan in place (for example, the Vice- President). Ideally, this position serves as training towards taking on the presidency in a following year. Assuming that you can get the required commitment, you now have a plan to fill a key position for the next year.
- 2) This type of approach could be used with a number of positions on the executive. You could work towards a situation where only a percentage of your executive would be turning over each year. In this way, you would always have an experienced nucleus on each year's executive, with a certain amount of new blood to ensure that, over time, the

work is being fairly distributed amongst the members. You would also be able to identify well in advance what positions you were going to have to recruit for the next year.

- 3) The club might also consider having the job of recruiting volunteers specifically assigned to the Vice-President. As noted above, these people are often not given a specific job other than to act on behalf of the President when that person is not available. With an objective to recruit a specified number of new volunteers each year, the Vice-President could spend a good part of the season identifying and recruiting candidates. All too often, we see clubs where the question of who will serve on the executive the following year is not even addressed until late in the summer. By this time, some of the best prospects may have been missed.



- 4) If your club can afford staff, then take advantage of their presence to ease the specific day to day workload of the volunteers. Anything which can be done to make the job requirements easier to fulfil, and succeed at, will lead to people feeling better about their volunteer commitment and facilitate recruiting new volunteers.
- 5) Ensure that a job description is in place for each volunteer. In the preceding pages, suggested job descriptions for various positions have been noted. These might not specifically work for your club. However, some form of job description will assist in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each volunteer. Having a clear purpose of expectations will assist a volunteer in performing his/her duties effectively and with as little wasted time and effort as possible.
- 6) Get to know as broad a base of your membership as soon as possible. This will allow you to potentially identify people who have a specific skill set, or interest in an area, which would be useful to the club. It could also allow you to identify

a means of matching peoples' personal needs and objectives with the club's needs and objectives. As an example, if you had a member whose children were actively involved in your club's junior program, then that person may be an ideal candidate for volunteer work in junior development. Thus, the club's needs are being met simultaneously with the person's individual need to be able to spend time with his/her family.

- 7) It is crucial that you ensure some form of volunteer recognition program is in place. Clubs often organize a social function at the end of the year to which everyone who has volunteered some time to the operation of the club is invited. This is not limited to members of the executive but also includes people who perform other volunteer work, such as captaining league teams or running round robins. This function serves to say thank-you and will leave people feeling good about the time they have put into the club. This means there is a better chance that this person will continue to volunteer in future.



8) Finally, all meetings should be well-organized and run effectively. Volunteers often complain more about the meetings they must attend than the actual workload associated with their positions. Whether meetings are in the workplace or in a volunteer situation, poorly run, unfocused meetings usually become classified as “a waste of time”. Remember, time is one thing which seems to be at a real premium these days. Therefore, in the interest of keeping volunteers involved, we should all make every effort to avoid wasting their time. The following are a few suggestions about running effective meetings.

a) Set a schedule of meetings for the entire year in advance so that all members of your executive can plan other activities and commitments around them. This will maximize the attendance at the meetings and avoid the biggest waste of time, the meeting which is poorly attended.

b) Ensure that a formal agenda is established and circulated prior to the meeting. The agenda must be prioritized. This will ensure each member arrives prepared for the meeting. It will also ensure issues which must be resolved at the meeting are dealt with at the start and the less pressing issues do not take up an undue amount of time and energy.

c) Establish a deadline for completing each meeting at the start of the year. For example, if at the first meeting everyone agrees that all subsequent meetings will begin at 7 pm and end at 9:30 pm, then people are likely to work towards this at each meeting. This also provides guidelines for how extensive the agenda for each meeting should be and how much time should be allocated to discussion of each topic or issue. If



you have prioritized the agenda, you will also have the option of ending the meeting before the entire agenda has been dealt with. The assumption is that the less pressing topics can always be carried forward to the next meeting if need be. In this way, you can almost always have the meeting finished by the agreed deadline.

d) Prepare minutes which focus on the decisions made, the agreed follow up actions and the responsibilities for those actions. Ensure that these minutes are prepared and circulated promptly following the meeting. This will serve as a reminder to people and will also provide a starting point for discussion on the topic at the next meeting. Hopefully, this will avoid the syndrome where each meeting goes over the same discussion and little new is specifically achieved.

9) Find a way to make volunteering fun! How about organizing a social activity outside of tennis club business where volunteers and their significant others attend to reinforce the team building concept?

The above suggestions represent just a few of the ideas that often work at clubs. There are undoubtedly other great ideas which we have not yet encountered. However, the point is that if you are having trouble recruiting and retaining volunteers, we suggest you review these ideas and see if implementing some or all of them might solve some problems.



PLANNING & EXECUTIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS



Successful organizations require people who:

- 1) Are willing to join the organization and participate in it;
- 2) Will perform agreed-upon tasks at a minimum acceptable standard and within agreed-upon time frames;
- 3) Are able and willing to exert effort above the minimum acceptable level;
- 4) Are capable of learning and developing new skills, adapting to changes and developing innovations for improved service or efficiency;
- 5) Are cooperative team players who are able to work well with others; and
- 6) Have the greater good of the organization as their primary concern.



In many volunteer organizations, jobs have evolved in a random way. Sometimes, job descriptions have been written but have not been updated in a timely manner. To assist in recruiting volunteers, it is helpful to have clear job descriptions that include the time commitment expected from the volunteers. Once job descriptions have been written, they should be reviewed and updated, if necessary, on an annual basis. Ideally, the organization should undertake an annual planning exercise where it considers questions such as:

- Is the organization growing, staying stable, or declining?
- What is the outlook over the next one to three years?
- What programs should be introduced, increased, reduced or cut?
- What other changes should be made?
- Are there organizational changes required as a result of the above?
- Is there a new need for a volunteer with specific expertise in, say, marketing?



Each organization should develop, at the very least, an annual one-year operating plan with clear and specific objectives. A three-year strategic plan is also very helpful when considering volunteer recruitment and retention as it identifies positions which may need a specific skill set.

As a result of the planning exercise and resulting plans, some job descriptions may need to be updated. In other cases, where it is decided that a new position is necessary, a job description will need to be written. Job descriptions should be considered reasonably flexible in order to take advantage of any volunteer's special skills.

All members of an executive should be friendly, approachable and receptive to suggestions and comments made by the general membership (i.e. should have a customer service orientation).



Most tennis clubs are managed by a Board of Directors or Executive Committee, with the process for determining the members and the length of their term defined in the by-laws or constitution of the club. Usually, they are elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting. At a minimum, the club will have a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Other common positions include membership, marketing/promotion, social, facilities, player development, and junior development. Larger clubs may have paid employees doing the duties of court monitors, club instructors and club managers. Ideally, there is some turnover each year so that each year's executive has a mix of experienced and new members.

Detailed suggested job descriptions for various positions on a tennis club executive are in document 2.02 Club Organization. These will need modifying to be suitable for your particular club.



In addition to the above positions, there are often opportunities to get non-executive club members involved in the running of the club. These include serving on a committee headed by an executive member e.g. a social committee or a tournament committee, or taking on one specific responsibility such as running a ladder. Frequently, these volunteer opportunities can serve as an introduction and lead-in to becoming a member of the executive in due course.

The other volunteers are usually recruited by the executive member in charge of a particular activity.



RECRUITMENT

A circular inset image showing a green sign with blue, hand-drawn text that reads "VOLUNTEER NEEDED". The sign is placed on a light-colored surface, possibly a table, and is partially obscured by a white, torn-edge paper or fabric. The background of the entire slide is a solid blue color.

VOLUNTEER
NEEDED

Recruitment of the following year's executive should be carefully planned and should usually begin early in the season. At an executive meeting, members should indicate whether they intend to return to the same executive position, or whether they might be interested in another executive position, in the following year. When the vacant positions are known, the board can prepare a list of all club members who may be suitable for, and interested in, those positions. Members who are often at the club, who are active players or who have made suggestions or comments regarding the running of the club, should be on the list of those to be contacted.

The coming year's president (who will be either the current year's president or vice president) should then go about contacting those members, initiating discussion and providing job descriptions. Members who decline considering volunteering for the coming year should be asked if they would consider serving within the next two or three years, and also if they can suggest the name of another member

who might be interested in the position. This adds to the list of potential volunteers and gives an indication of who may be approached next year. Those who decline should also be asked for a specific reason why they will not consider volunteering. If several prospective volunteers decline for the same reason, it may be possible to implement changes to the position or tasks that would enable them to change their minds.

Posting notices on the bulletin board and putting an article in the newsletter are two other ways to obtain recruits.



Why Do People Volunteer?

- Because they were asked (65% of volunteers in sport organizations volunteered because someone asked them)
- To do their share
- To get a change from being a leader
- To feel needed
- To make new friends
- Because there is no one else to do it
- Because of who did the asking
- To be part of a team
- To get the free membership, meals, or other benefits
- To have an impact
- To be a leader
- To stand up and be counted



When You Invite People to Volunteer

- Be motivated and enthusiastic yourself. Sincerity always wins.
- Be clear on what you want them to do. Provide written job description.
- Be honest—tell them what is involved, even if it sounds like a lot.
- Explain why you have asked this particular person to volunteer—what skills or experience make them a good candidate for the position.
- Remember you cannot insult them by asking them to volunteer (but don't pressure them). You are flattering them by implying that they have the skills to do the job. Sell the benefits of the club and the importance of solid leadership.
- Define the benefits to the volunteer (free membership for the year, executive dinner, opportunity to meet many other members, etc.).
- The best way to recruit volunteers is to ask them.



TRAINING/ ORIENTATION



Newly-elected executive members should receive an orientation package which includes:

- Welcome letter from the president
- A short history of the club
- Job descriptions for all executive and staff positions
- The constitution and by-laws
- Minutes of previous meetings, as appropriate
- Recent financial statements, including budgets
- One-year and other plans
- Information on existing and potential programs

Reviewing this material prior to attending their first executive meeting will enable them to contribute to discussions and decisions immediately. The president should welcome new executive members to their first meeting, briefly review their position responsibilities and their obligations as executive members (see below) and ensure that any questions are answered. On a committee with returning and new members, it is the president's responsibility

to ensure that all new members are made to feel welcome and that their contributions are encouraged.

The overriding duty of a director of a club is one of acting honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the club. In addition, a director should exercise the due care, diligence and skill that a reasonably competent person would exercise in the same circumstances. This means that a director should declare any conflicts of interest, keep confidentiality, and exercise due diligence by attending meetings and keeping informed. Directors and officers insurance (D & O) insures against negligence. Other insurance can cover club assets, liability, bodily injury and property damage. Please go to the [OTA website](#) and click Clubs > Club Insurance Program for more information.

Other volunteers should receive whatever information is necessary for them to carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively in order to achieve their objectives.

Informal Networking

Executive members find that they can increase their knowledge by talking informally to executives from other clubs about their challenges, opportunities, successes and failures. For this reason, club executives should take advantage of every opportunity to mix with other executives. Organized events which provide for this networking are meetings of their regional organization, the OTA Annual General Meeting and Presidents' Day.



RECOGNITION



Recognition is essential. Just as they have volunteered for different reasons, individuals respond to and obtain satisfaction from different types of recognition. Acknowledging the contribution of each volunteer in a way that will be meaningful to that volunteer is one of the challenges in volunteer management.

One way to look at volunteer recognition is to divide it into personal and public recognition. Personal recognition is primarily the responsibility of the president in that leadership starts at the top. Some ways of acknowledging the contributions of executive members, or any other volunteers, are:

- A smile
- Saying “thank you”
- Praising the volunteer’s behaviour or results
- Making supportive remarks
- Writing a thank you letter
- Giving a birthday card
- Encouraging the general membership to direct complimentary remarks to the person responsible for the organization of an event or prize

Public recognition is usually more tangible:

- Posting a list of volunteers on the bulletin board or in the newsletter
- Making a presentation at the annual general meeting or awards banquet
- Having a plaque or trophy wall in the clubhouse listing past executives
- Saying a public “thank you”
- Having a volunteer banquet or other volunteer event
- Paying for a volunteer to attend a training workshop
- Nominating for OTA volunteer awards (Bruce Childs, DSA, etc.)

Every club should ensure that a volunteer recognition program is in place to recognize and reward those who have given their time and skills to the club during the year or season. Recognizing and thanking volunteers not only shows them that their contribution is appreciated but also makes it easier to attract and retain them.

RETENTION

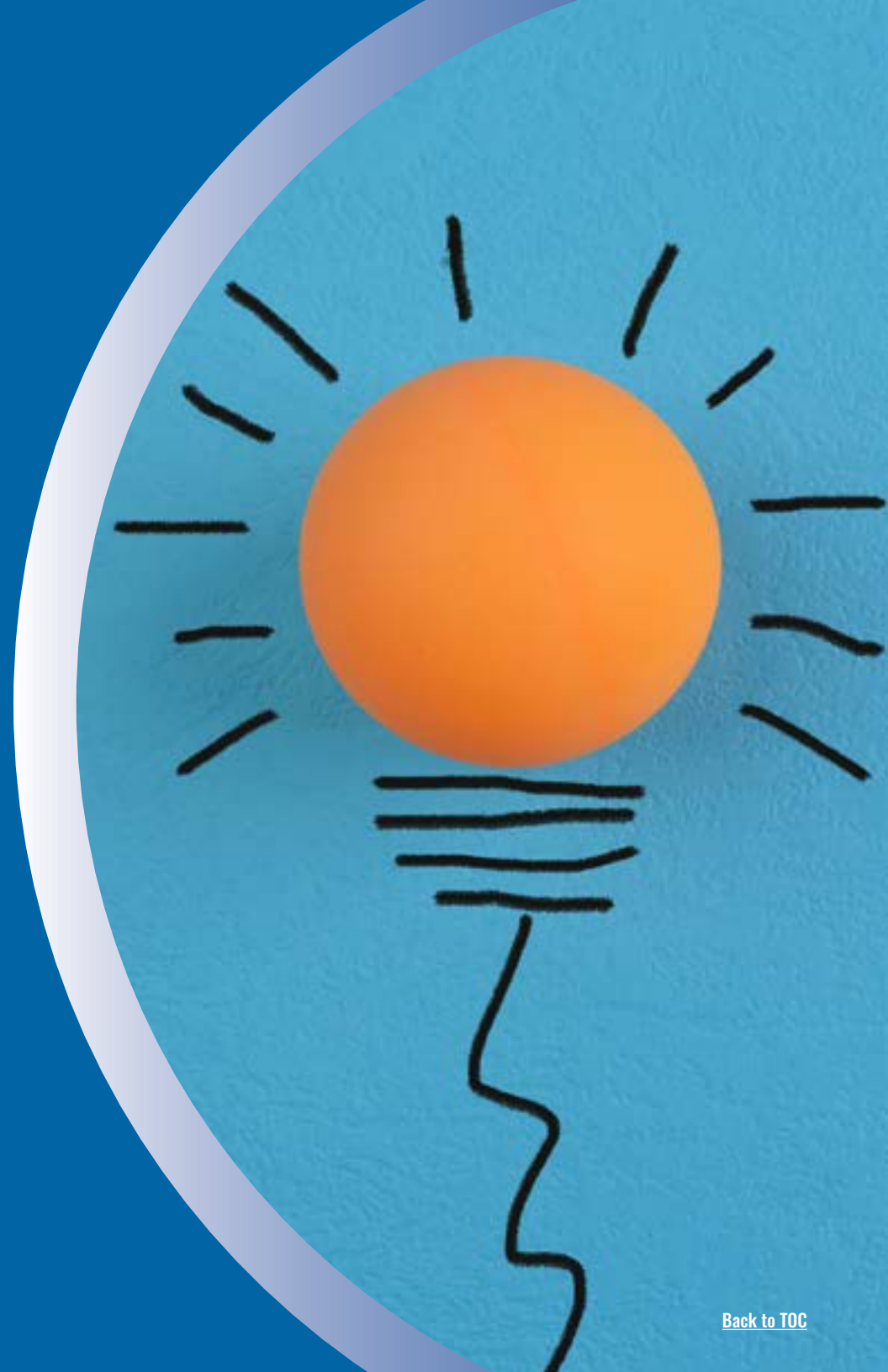


Volunteers who have performed well should be encouraged to carry on making a contribution. Executive members can be asked to take on the same or other responsibilities for the following year, assuming that they have served only one or two years. As already mentioned, it is good to have a mix of new and returning members on an executive so that new ones bring fresh ideas and suggestions, while at the same time have the opportunity to benefit from the experience of returning members. If one-third to one-half of an executive turns over each year, there is opportunity for many members to take a turn and be involved in the administration of their club.



A well-organized, open-minded and supportive president will find recruitment and retention less onerous than a poorly organized president. People react positively to positive direction. Executive members who have enjoyed their volunteer experience can be very persuasive when encouraging others to join them or take their place. Word-of-mouth ensures that club members considering volunteering for the upcoming year know how well meetings have been run as well as how effectively the president has performed. Confidence in a president's performance can make it easier to recruit or retain good executive members. These reasons make it even more imperative for the president to exhibit good leadership skills during her/his term.

CONCLUSION



All of the above information is based on what has been proven to work well at various clubs throughout the province. If there are suggestions in the material that would be new implementations at your club, then you might consider incorporating them and monitoring how well they contribute to the recruitment and retention of volunteers. If you have programs that are working well and that are not covered by this material, the OTA would appreciate receiving information that would enable them to update or add to this resource.



These are offered by the Ontario Tennis Association to recognize and thank the many volunteers who have donated countless hours to the promotion of the game of tennis.

**A. VOLUNTEER ACHIEVEMENT
—BRUCE CHILDS COMMUNITY
CLUB AWARD**

Clubs will receive an email from the OTA at the appropriate time (usually 6 weeks before the club AGM) to offer this benefit to them.

The OTA then prepares the award and mails it to the club.

This award is to be presented annually to the community tennis club executive member who best embodies the philosophy of the Ontario Tennis Association. To be eligible, one must have served at least two terms on an Ontario Tennis Association Member Club's Executive (to have been completed in the candidate's nomination year). If requested, a rep from the OTA can present this award at the Club's or at a Regional Annual General Meeting. However, the club president usually does this award presentation at a club event (such as the club AGM). This award is voted on by the Club's Executive.

**B. DISTINGUISHED SERVICE
AWARD OUTSTANDING
VOLUNTEER ACHIEVEMENT
AWARD**

Please go to the [OTA website](#) and click Clubs > Distinguished Service Awards for information on the DSA award.