

FESTIVAL AND EVENT PRODUCTION

Volunteer Guide

Volunteers are not a necessary but can be a very wonderful addition to many events and festivals. While some events could not function without the help of volunteers, in an ideal setting you would be able to execute your event without any volunteer help. Below we expand on these ideas and talk about what sort of roles we recommend for volunteers and ways you can thank them for their hard work.

When an event or festival should utilize volunteers

Volunteers are excellent ways to help buffer some staffing needs - and depending on the event, there may be a lot of interest from people to volunteer. Many events, especially running races (5ks, marathons, etc) have a vital need for volunteers; other events, such a corporate events, don't normally have as many due to the type of work involved. While some volunteers are clearly there just to get into the event, the majority of volunteers have a strong desire to see the event succeed and do well at the job they're given. Many long running events and festivals have a solid core team of volunteers that come back, year after year, and are vital to the operation.



Bo the First Dog volunteering to be petted by all nearby staff

How to Retain Volunteers

Offering incentives to work

Free entry after shift(s) is/are complete

T-Shirt / Hat / Other Merch

Discounts at food / drink vendors

Mention on website / social media

Preferred access to advance ticket sales

Having them put up a deposit

For events such as three day camping music festivals, it is common to require an upfront deposit from volunteers, usually the price of a general admission ticket, to help ensure they do not flake once on-site, and that if they do, at least the festival is financially compensated for it.

Most other events do not require a deposit; if anyone flakes they are generally put on a black list for future volunteer opportunities.

Preferred roles for volunteers

The general rule of thumb with volunteers that works for the vast majority of events and festivals is: "if the festival can get by without it, it is safe for a volunteer". In other words, the festival cannot get by without a proper amount of trained, licensed, and bonded security guards - roles that should always be paid - but it can likely get by fine if no one handing out festival maps at the entrance, greeting guests as they walk in.

List of Roles:

Front Gate Greeter - can hand out maps, pamphlets, etc.

Trash / Recycling Pickup Helper

Ticketing Help (help manage the lines outside of the ticketing booth)

Artist Relations Help (help the paid staff coordinate various hospitality and transpo needs)

Roamer with a sign that says "ASK ME!", "INFO HERE", or something similar that can answer questions that guests have

Kid's Area support with games, activities alongside paid staff

Egress help - can message to guests leaving important information like what needs to be thrown away, where transportation is, etc.

Social Media - help take / post images / support the Social Media team

Handling volunteers who flake out

For most events, they build in a certain percentage of volunteers they expect to flake. For some, it can be around 5-10% but for longer, multi-day, easy-to-slip-out type events and festivals, it can be as high as 30-40%. For this, they will try to overstaff the volunteer roles to accommodate the expected loss.

As noted above, most events will put you on a black list and ban you from coming back as a volunteer, but other events that have RFID chips in their credentials can effectively "kill" those passes so you can no longer use them; in fact, if you try to and it registers as failed, often you will have to forfeit your pass to the security guard.

Receiving post event feedback from volunteers

As quickly as possible after the event, send volunteers either a form or a guided message that asks them specific questions about their experience. This will help you gain valuable insight as to what worked / what didn't and how you can best evolve your volunteer program. Often, you'll only get a handful of responses back, so you may want to tie in some incentives (free merch is a good one) by those that complete the post event survey.

Some example questions:

What was your favorite experience of this event?

What areas did you feel could use improvement?

How did you enjoy the role you were given?

Is there anything we can do to improve your role?

Did you feel you were properly trained and managed throughout the event? If not, please explain.

Did you feel you were given enough breaks / meals / water throughout the event?

Would you volunteer with us again?

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