# What Volunteers need: A White paper
# by
# Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Task Force

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The Volunteer Recruitment task force has investigated several challenges in recruiting volunteers for sections. Anecdotal information has been gathered from committee members, section chairs and other volunteers concerning best practices as well as failures to recruit.

The most helpful resource the task force discovered was the book, *Volunteers How to get them How to keep them* by Helen Little. In the book were listed the twelve basic needs of every volunteer.

The task force has added one item and modified the list to reflect the needs of ASME, and suggests that they be used as a guideline to develop Volunteer Recruitment programs.

In the following white paper, the needs are listed, ASME is evaluated for performance against each, and recommendations for future actions are made.

The 13 Basic needs of every volunteer

1. A specific, manageable task with a beginning and an end.

   Meets: Some section tasks meet these criteria, for instance, planning a section program or producing a newsletter. Some leadership tasks are more varied and don't have a specific timeline, like the membership chair or section chair. However, candidates for the more complex tasks have usually had a chance to learn by volunteering for some time in other functions.

Needs: Section positions should be evaluated as to where they fall in this continuum. For instance, the newsletter chair has a specific number of issues to produce on a defined timeline. Many functions of the section treasurer and chair are defined as to when they are performed, but the membership chair tasks are not guided in that manner. If a calendar with specific tasks and deadlines could be created, the expectations would be made much clearer and specific tasks might be shared with other section members.

2. A task that matches interests and reasons for volunteering

   Meets: In most groups, volunteers are asked for task preference when any new posts are created or have been vacated. However, some less popular tasks still need to be done and then a volunteer is assigned such task.

   Needs: A survey of what interests a member and what he/she expects to learn or accomplish by volunteering would be helpful in recruiting new volunteers. A section member who is interested in education might be contacted about arranging a plant tour for a student section, or providing a presentation for an area school during Engineers Week. The more familiar a section leader becomes with a new section member, the easier it is to involve them in the workings of the section. And the more a volunteer's interests are met, the more eager they will be to volunteer.

   If a volunteer is assigned a task that lies outside his/her interest, then ASME should provide him/her a simplified task form outlining the process, main objectives and deliverables.

3. A good reason for doing the task.

   Meets: Some tasks meet this criterion – section program planning, professional development or newsletters are self-evident.

   Needs: All tasks given to a section should be evaluated. Are all the tasks and reports necessary and helpful to the section members? Are the tasks helping to meet the goals of the Society or is it just "business as usual"?

4. Written instructions

   Meets: The ML-10 section manual, VP's guide, Treasurer's manual, Industry relations manual, section program manuals, forms and instructions are available in print and on the web for downloading. The Local Information Center on the web has nearly everything you would need, including policies.

   Needs: As discussed in #1, some tasks may need to be redefined or re-evaluated. In that instance, instructions may need to be rewritten.

   While there are many available sources on how to accomplish certain tasks, ASME should consider condensing / summarizing some frequent task descriptions into a simple, preferably one page, instruction form which would save volunteer time. We may also consider a recruiting kit with information on why members volunteer, the benefits of volunteering, how to recruit volunteers and how to motivate and mentor volunteers.

5. A reasonable deadline for completing the task.

   Meets: Deadlines for reports are clearly stated on the form and on the web. ASME usually tries to give their volunteers a reasonable amount of time to prepare for semi-annual meetings, Congress and SAM, by sending out agendas and notices in plenty of time to elicit feedback and receive reports. It is the task of the section officers to anticipate the amount of time it will take to complete a task in order to assign it and not overwhelm the member who takes on the assignment.

6. Freedom to complete the task when and where it is most convenient for the volunteer

   Meets: We have many resources for leaders on the web in the Leadership Toolbox – manuals, forms, and downloads of rosters. Email and the web have made volunteering more portable and easy to complete when you have time. (The website is open 24/7).

   Needs: Section leaders need to be flexible on this point, having meetings over the web, taking time to contact other volunteers by phone and answering any inquiries regarding the Society in a timely manner.

7. Everything necessary to complete the task without interruption.

   Meets: Much of the material needed to complete section tasks resides on the web in the Local Information Center.

   Needs: It would be helpful if each task were accompanied by a list of information needed to complete it, when applicable.

8. Adequate training

Meets: We already have meetings and training sessions - MTS, RACS, Leadership Training sessions and modules, training handbooks, TEC, RSCs, professional development courses. Delivery includes web-based, video and personal instruction.

Needs: The volunteers need to be encouraged to share responsibility for small pieces of larger tasks. Completing a large task is easier when you have others to help you, and it encourages new volunteers by introducing them to a volunteer role gradually.

9. A safe, comfortable, and friendly working environment.

Meets: ASME usually meets in physically appealing and safe places.

Needs: ASME could benefit from a closer working relationship between student sections and senior sections, as well as cooperation among the various councils and committees. Care should be taken to assure that the meeting place is convenient to most group members. Volunteering should also be fun.

10. Follow-up to see that the task is completed.

Meets: Some follow-up occurs from staff to volunteer, and peer to peer.

Needs: A better method of follow-up may be devised, especially if it could be automated to occur online.

11. An opportunity to provide feedback when the task is finished.

Needs: Regional VP's provide feedback to sections, but this is not standardized in any way. It may be useful to conduct a yearly audit of each unit or committee to provide some feedback on their performance, so they know where they have succeeded and where there is room for improvement.
Consider implementing some kind of feedback form, which would evaluate lessons learned.

12. Appreciation, recognition and rewards that match the reasons for volunteering.

Meets: Certificates are provided for those who leave committees. Some regional VP's get ASME Gear items to give out as awards at the end of the year; others reward their committees with non-ASME items.

Needs: There may be other ways to provide recognition and rewards. Some volunteer to get leadership and supervisory experience, in that case a letter to their supervisor and a certificate may be an appropriate reward. This is something that needs to be explored in more detail, once we establish the reason that people volunteer.
While there are existing mechanisms, the recognition for difficult tasks (such as organizing a technical conference, RAC, etc.) should be expanded.

13. Value added to encourage employer to support volunteer efforts.

Meets: Through the volunteer experience, members can develop or improve:

- Communications skills
- Oral presentation skills
- Team building
- Project management
- Leadership skills

Needs: ASME needs to improve their communication of the value of volunteering to industry. Since training budgets are shrinking – especially for "soft skills" – ASME could provide more value to industry by helping to train engineers in non-technical areas also.

Recommendations of the task force are as follows.
A recruitment kit for section leaders to show them how to recruit, motivate and mentor new volunteers.
Create exercises for section leaders to show them how to recruit. People learn more by doing than by reading.
Make sure that materials for volunteers are available on the web so that they can access them when they need them, 24/7.
Section work should be done in teams when possible. Teaming is an effective way to complete tasks, and most people enjoy teams over solitary assignments.
Encouraging section leaders to try different methods to encourage section members to come up with ideas on how to complete projects – or tackle any problems. Methods may include Ringii process, panel method, story boards, electronic brainstorming and bulletin boards, Crawford slip writing, Gallery method, Delphi method, TRIZ, mind mapping, integrated problem solving, collective notebooks, morphological creativity or synectics. Training may be needed in some of these methods.
Volunteers should be encouraged to recruit in their workplaces for new members and new volunteers.
Roles and summaries of all section offices should be available on the web.

In conclusion, the task force feels that ASME could benefit from a re-evaluation of sections and the way that they do business, as well as the tasks that are assigned to each unit. Tasks need to be evaluated as to their adherence to the mission and vision of ASME and according to the usefulness to the member.

Better methods of feedback to each unit and individual volunteer and more appreciation of volunteer efforts need to be devised. In addition, the message that volunteering creates value for the company and for an individual should be communicated better to industry. By adequately training their volunteers, ASME helps industry by providing leadership and project management training that many companies no longer provide.