

Tips for Working with Volunteers

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

The University of Tennessee
Municipal Technical Advisory Service
1610 University Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37921-6741
865-974-0411 phone
865-974-0423 fax
www.mtas.tennessee.edu

Table of Contents

Tips for Working with Volunteers	3
--	---

Tips for Working with Volunteers

Reference Number:
MTAS-1360

Sustainable urban forestry requires far more than a single department or organization responsible for a community's trees. It requires a partnership of all interested people, young and old, professional and non-professional. Volunteers can fill this need. Some of the benefits when using volunteers include:

1. **Obtaining skills that may not be on staff.** Volunteers typically include a cross section of the community: lawyers, landscapers, writers, artists, business people, teachers and many others. Their talents and contacts can add depth and power to any forestry program.
2. **New ideas.** An array of vocational and cultural backgrounds is sure to bring ideas. Some may not be workable, but others can lead to great new projects or the success of old ones.
3. **Public support.** Volunteers can serve as a conduit between urban foresters and their constituents. They can speak up for funding, defend management decisions, challenge politicians or special interests, and serve as a link with broad segments of the community.
4. **Extra hands, more work.** Whether it is pruning young trees, planting, or staffing exhibits and educational programs, volunteers expand the urban forestry work force. More can be accomplished, benefiting the tree resource, citizens of the community, and the volunteers themselves.

According to the National Arbor Day Foundation, there are five important tips to working well with volunteers:

1. **Work with existing volunteer groups when possible instead of creating yet another organization.** Or, if you are involved in the leadership of a group, aggressively recruit members. Of course, be open to all who are interested, but also personally ask people to join who you know would add strength, balance, diversity and the kind of talent needed to accomplish your goals.
2. **Provide direction.** Most volunteers want guidance and do not want their time wasted. Use an agenda at meetings, assign specific doable tasks complete with deadlines and a clear idea about the expected outcome or product. For specific positions (secretary, treasurer, etc.) develop job descriptions just like those for paid positions.
3. **Provide orientation and training.** Orientation can be a presentation or at least a manual. The manual should include the history, mission and goals of your organization; policies; a directory of who's who; and basic information about tree care and urban forestry.
4. **Supervise.** An important part of successful volunteer management is trust and delegation of duties. Train and explain, then step back and let the volunteers do their jobs. However, provide helpful feedback as needed and plenty of positive reinforcement.
5. **Thank!** Virtually everyone likes to be recognized for the good works they perform, especially volunteers. Often, this is the only pay they receive. Express appreciation often and sincerely, including written notes, formal letters, plaques or other tokens of appreciation.

DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.

Source URL (retrieved on 01/26/2021 - 10:02am): <https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu/reference/tips-working-volunteers>

MTAS