

Recruiting Key Volunteers to Fulfill Ongoing Tasks



A.T. Clubs and Appalachian Trail Conservancy offer volunteer opportunities that are occasional as well as those that are longer-term roles, also known as “key” volunteer positions.

These long-term positions are critical to sustaining volunteer leadership in the A.T. Cooperative Management System. This resource is focused on recruitment of “key volunteers” who serve as leaders, coordinators, or fulfill permanent volunteer positions, such as office/visitor center volunteers, or section maintainers.

This guide is focused on recruitment of key volunteers. A separate manual for planning and promoting volunteer events for episodic volunteers is also available. ➡

The successful recruitment of key volunteers relies first on a clearly defined position description and a process for selecting candidate(s) for the position. Once those first two steps are complete, the next step is to promote and advertise the position.



A Guide for Recruiting Event Volunteers is also found online at appalachiantrail.org.

Crafting Position Descriptions

A position description includes:

- A high-level introduction to the type of work achieved by this position and the benefit it provides your organization, the Trail, or other people. This is a big-picture of the purpose of the role and its associated responsibilities.
- An action-oriented list of activities that a person undertakes to fulfill the duties of this position.
- Any experience or skills someone starting this position must have to do the work. This includes defining any essential eligibility requirements.
- What training and support is offered. If pre-requisites exist for the position, such as a background check, detail that information up-front.
- Benefits that a person gains by volunteering. These may include: deepening their understanding of A.T. management; gaining professional experience; training or certifications; an opportunity to meet people with common interests; ways to contribute their ideas, enthusiasm, and talents. Not all reasons people volunteer are altruistic, so describe both tangible and intangible benefits.
- A description of the work environment, schedule, term of the role, or flexibility that may exist.
- How a person should express interest in being considered for the position. Should they apply? Would it be best for them to call and discuss the position? Perhaps they email someone to learn more? This may be as simple as the contact information for the volunteer supervisor's contact information. If there is a process or timeline for interviews or selection, provide that information.

Process for Selecting Candidates

Unlike events that are intended to invite a wide array of people to give back, it is vital to screen potential volunteers for key roles since having someone ill-suited for a position can be as detrimental as not having the position filled at all.

The selection process used should reflect the importance of the position, so that it is rigorous enough to help get the right candidate, but not unnecessarily

bureaucratic. A phone interview may be suitable for some positions, but if a position requires special skill and/or greater commitment, meeting face-to-face is preferable.

Just like a job-interview, the screening process is as much an opportunity for the potential volunteer to screen the organization and the position for alignment with their interests, as much as it is for your volunteer supervisor to make sure the placement is a suitable fit for organizational needs.

Ensure that all volunteers go through the same selection procedure for the same role; this guarantees that all people are afforded an equal opportunity. Be clear about the volunteer selection process and communicate in advance if everyone may not be selected. Your organization may have alternate position descriptions or opportunities that more suitable to a volunteer(s) who isn't selected for a given role.

Be aware of both your organization's policies and procedures, as well as any state regulations for your volunteer program to be compliant. For instance, some states have requirements for volunteers to be notified of your organization's whistleblower policy. A.T. volunteers have rights and responsibilities they are entitled to as well as Code of Conduct that is expected of them.

Know the right person for the job is out there. It's about matching your needs through a thorough description and your screening process so that both your organization and the volunteer receive the mutual benefit gained by a successful match.

Crafting a Compelling Position Description

- The position doesn't have to have "volunteer" in the title.
- Specificity reigns supreme when it comes to helping accurately set expectations. When expectations are met, even when the assignment is difficult, volunteers are more likely to be committed.
- Be realistic. If the job is hard (or technical), be clear about the satisfaction that comes with strenuous effort. Likewise, if it's a solo gig, say that, too.
- Envision your ideal candidate and what questions they might have about the role. Aim to answer those questions within the description.
- Steer clear of jargon so that your appeal can be read and understood by anyone.
- Outline what flexibility does exist. For example, is it a short-term assignment, is scheduling self-directed or determined weekly/monthly, or is there a "settling-in period" where new volunteers can test the role? One barrier to volunteering is a fear of the commitment that would be expected; this can be ameliorated by defining a term and potential for renewal.
- Review the position description with the volunteer at least annually to revise as necessary, so that it continues to meet their expectation and adequately represents the role to future volunteers.
- Define what success looks like and what on-going feedback or support is provided.

Finding Potential Volunteers for the Role(s)

After crafting the position description and knowing what process you will use for selecting candidates, recruitment for the position(s) can begin in earnest. Knowing the skills or experience someone must have to be successful at the position helps volunteer supervisors begin their quest for potential candidates.

For example, in fulfilling a position for an A.T. visitor center or information role, a supervisor may circulate the advertisement among avid regional hikers or A.T. 2,000-milers who have knowledge of and experience with the Trail. In another example, clubs seeking to fulfill outreach or social media roles may publicize the opportunity through career centers at colleges and universities. Skill-based volunteers with finance, organizational leadership, or legal experience may be identified through societies of retired professionals (SCORE), Business Network International, Chambers of Commerce, A.T. Community businesses, or LinkedIn networks. Catchafire.org also matches volunteers with professional skills to non-profits.

If recruiting from within an organization's existing members and volunteers, it's important to *ask* people to consider key roles rather than assuming they will naturally identify that potential next step.

Beyond listing your invitation to apply for a position in your own newsletters and websites, consider posting volunteer job listings to community papers, websites that serve as clearinghouses for connecting people with civic interest with opportunities – such as United Way, Hands-on Network, Idealist, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's website.

Raising the profile of the organization, generally, may increase interest among potential volunteers. This can be achieved by working with local media to profile your organization and its work, or through presentations and events at local outfitters, community centers, libraries, or civic organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Junior League, Lion's Club, YMCA, and YWCA to name a few. Some communities and entities also offer volunteer fairs to connect people with civic interest with organizations. Other creative options for reaching people with leadership experience in recreation is to network with people completing terms on parks and recreation committees.

As connections with new potential volunteers develop, be sure that your conversation includes an ask. Sharing volunteer position descriptions is a primary step in converting interest in to participation; follow-up with them on your invitation for them to get involved.

On-Boarding New Volunteers

On-boarding process should be commensurate with the level of commitment you're asking of the volunteer in a given position. Once selected, volunteer on-boarding will likely include:

- [A.T. Volunteer Orientation video and information](#)
- Organizational Orientation, including policies and procedures
- [Training](#) specific to the position
- Mentorship
- How to track hours and report accomplishments