

Volunteers are one of the strongest untapped resources. Many wildfire preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are conducted through volunteerism. Volunteers bring a diverse set of skills, energy, vision, and motivation to the field of fire adaptation - and a lot of staff in any given organization will tell you that they began by volunteering.

A well-organized and designed volunteer engagement approach can help volunteers be successful and help to grow and sustain wildfire resilience work in your community by:

- Extending coordinating group/organization/agency reach
- Expanding skilled workforce
- Providing concrete examples of what residents can accomplish
- Receiving feedback on what residents really want and need
- Providing match funds for grants through volunteer hours and contributions
- Building connections and partnerships across industries
- Guiding and growing the wildfire programs beyond their starting point

But managing people and projects to generate outcomes and impacts, takes capacity.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

Capacity for Volunteer Management

Dedicate capacity. If you are new to managing volunteers, it's easy to underestimate what it takes to train and support them. Start small, take the time to plan, and avoid the temptation to put it under "other duties as assigned" for one or more staff at your organization.

Tap into core competencies. Volunteer coordination takes a person who is a strong leader. They are motivated, collaborative, and can empower others. They exhibit cultural competency, can communicate clearly, understand the value of partnerships, and also serve as a project manager. Many smaller organizations use multiple staff to fill these roles.



Photos: Fire Adapted Colorado

Volunteer Engagement and Management

Have a well-defined project and tasks. Volunteers are more likely to dedicate their time to well-defined projects and specific tasks, especially at the beginning of their service.

Assign one point of contact. A consistent and responsive contact person them.

Provide orientation. Developing and delivering a baseline orientation for all volunteers will ensure that everyone is on the same page about the program, your organization, and their roles.

Match activity to volunteer skills, capacity, and interests. Volunteers want to work on things that are of personal value and can walk away at any time. Solicit their feedback and, if feasible, find ways to continue to provide value to them and your work. They are often willing to share what is and what isn't working.

Provide ongoing training, learning, and connection opportunities. Once you've trained a volunteer, you want them to stay! Continuing education, social events, and celebrating wins are all great ways to take care of your volunteers and inspire them to invite others.

Be flexible and open to change. People have a lot going on and many volunteers are older. Issues like health or family have to take precedence over volunteering.

IDEAS FOR FUNDING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

- Donations from individuals and businesses
- Direct grants from public agency partners or philanthropic organizations, such as community foundations
- Administrative fees from larger mitigation grants
- Homeowner Association dues
- Contact your county to see if they receive Title III USFS Secure Rural Schools Act Title III funds for wildfire preparedness and learn about their application process

LEARN MORE

Wildfire Adapted Partnership (Colorado) coordinates volunteer efforts through the Neighborhood Ambassador Program. Check out their [Fire Adapted Communities Neighborhood Ambassador Toolkit](#) and learn more:

