



Recruiting Council Members

An Intentional Approach

*A Guide for
Chartered Child Abuse Prevention Councils*



Prevent Child Abuse
Indiana

A Division of The Villages

Rev. January 2009

Imagine this scenario: two people decide to throw a party. Each person has the same size house and the same amount of money and resources to use for his party.



The first person agonizes throughout the preparations. He buys some snacks and drinks. He asks himself, “Who will want to come? How can I get people to agree to show up?”

The second person thinks to himself, “What kinds of fun things should we do? Who shall I invite? Which of my friends would enjoy this party—and each other-- the most?”

Who do you think will have the most successful party?

If you guessed the second person, you are right. The first person is already assuming that people won’t want to come. In fact, he worries about how to “get” them to show up! Plus, he puts little thought into what people will do at the party. He buys snacks and drinks and hopes for the best.

The second person is thinking about the best way to ensure his guests have a good time. In fact, he assumes that he has enough friends that he will need to be careful in selecting the invitees to make sure they enjoy one another.

How does this apply to recruiting volunteers for your Council?

Many people are like the first person when it comes to recruiting volunteers for a prevention council.



“We can’t get people to come to the meetings.”

“How can I convince people to chair a committee?”

“Everybody I know is already too busy. They’ll never want to join another group!”

“We recruited some new members, but they stopped showing up. It always falls to the same small group of people.”

The truth is that successful recruiting starts long before you approach people to join your council.

It starts with the assumptions you hold about your council and its purpose. It starts with your intentions for asking people to join you.

Have you ever been asked to join a committee or club, but the people asking you didn't make your role clear to you?

RECRUITMENT CHAIR: "Well, we meet on Tuesday nights. Just show up and I'll introduce you to people."

YOUR INTERIOR THOUGHTS: "Umm...great. What will I do? Why do they want me? How much time will I have to give?"

COMMITTEE CHAIR AT THE FIRST MEETING: "Oh, didn't anyone tell you about the Huckleberry Festival? Yeah, it's a week long, and we work the booth for 12 hours each day. We put you down for Wednesday through Saturday."



YOUR INTERIOR THOUGHTS: Gulp. "Holy cow!! What the heck have I gotten myself into? And how can I get out of it? Maybe if I fake my own death..."

BUT...suppose someone approached you like this:

"Jane, our council is working on a new initiative to bring Shaken Infant Syndrome presentations to students in our middle schools. Your background as a sales associate working with school systems would be really helpful in allowing us to get a foot in the door to talk to key staff members. Plus, I've seen you give some presentations and your skills are top notch. Being a member of the council would involve around five hours a month, except for April when we all tend to put in as much as 10-15 hours. You could make a real difference in the lives of kids by helping us with this project. What do you say?"

In a brief conversation, the person has communicated some key points:

- We know about your skills and could find a place for you to use them in a meaningful way.
- I've seen your skills in action and admire them.
- This can be a positive experience for you.
- Our council is focused and organized.
- We place reasonable limits on how much time we ask of people.

Even if you decide you can't commit right now, you leave the experience with a positive impression of the Council—an impression you will likely share with other people. And when you do have some time to give to a cause, you will probably give this Council a lot of consideration.

Most people want to help their communities, but they shy away from situations where they feel like nothing more than a warm body. Who wants to feel “guilted” into giving more than they can reasonably give? People want to have good experiences. They want to believe that their time and talents are being used for a higher purpose. In short, they want to:



**Have Fun
And
Do Good.**

So, what are the basic principles of recruiting—and retaining—enthusiastic volunteers for your council?

Get organized before doing anything else.

In the same way that you wouldn't welcome party guests to a cluttered house, you don't want to bring volunteers into a disorganized council. If you don't have a strategic plan already, get one done. If you have one but you've ignored it, maybe it's time to update it. The same goes for bylaws; it doesn't make a good impression on new volunteers if they find out that your bylaws haven't been updated since 1980.

Decide what you need and make a list.

It's never a good idea to head for the grocery store without a list—especially if you're hungry! Think about your council. What skill sets does your council lack? What kinds of people would best fit those roles? Brainstorm about specific people in your community who might be a good fit for the council. Make a list and determine who on your council has a connection with those people.

Make a plan with a timeline.

Decide who will connect each of these people and when those meetings should be completed. Decide whether you want to approach people individually or whether you want to host a session for a group of people. Use the one page recruitment flier as a "leave behind" piece to give to people you talk with about Council membership. Be sure to personalize it by filling in the name of your Council, county and contact information. If you can print it in color, do so. In any case, print it on nice paper. It makes a good impression.

Under no circumstances should this flier be used for general distribution. You are targeting particular people, not the general population.

If a person is interested, ask him to complete the Potential Council Member Profile. As with the "leave behind" flier, fill in your Council's name before printing the profiles. Explain that the profile allows your recruitment committee to get to know the candidate a bit before making a decision.

For Heaven's sake--follow up.

Tell potential Council members that you will get back with them with a decision by a certain date. Then do it. Nothing hurts your efforts more than failing to follow up.

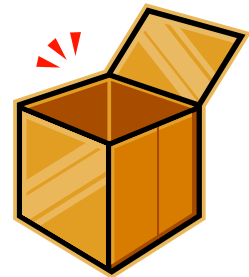
Why go to all of this trouble?

OK, that's a fair question! This process may seem a little formal, but there are some compelling reasons for recruiting this way. This process communicates some very important information to candidates:

- It tells them that you are organized and clear about what you need.
- It tells them that they were approached because *there is something special about them* that you have recognized.
- It communicates to candidates that getting on this council is not a done deal; in fact, being asked to be a member is an honor.
- It communicates that you want this to be a positive experience for them, and by asking about their skills sets and preferences you are making sure it will be.

You've heard the concept of "thinking outside the box." When it comes to recruiting volunteers for your Council, it's a good idea to

**GET RID OF
THE BOX.**



Seriously. Look beyond the obvious for Council members. Certainly social workers, case managers, therapists, teachers, law enforcement personnel, court personnel, CASA and DCS workers are often excellent candidates. But they are asked to serve on a lot of committees.

Think about other people who have different life experiences who might be delighted to be asked.

- Beauticians (who knows more about what's happening in your neighborhood?)
- Mechanics

- Store clerks
- Bank employees
- Veterinarians
- Construction workers
- Dentists
- Shop Owners
- Store Clerks
- People from the faith community

You can probably add to this list. Helping kids and families isn't just the business of people who work in human services. It's everybody's business.

Orienting New Members

Once you get your new Council members around the table, your work isn't done. If you want to retain these new, enthusiastic recruits to your cause, get them off to a good start by providing an orientation for them. A good orientation session for new Prevention Council members doesn't have to be complicated. But it should include these elements:

- ❖ A brief review about what constitutes child neglect and abuse.
- ❖ Statistics on abuse and neglect, including reports made and percent substantiated.
- ❖ An explanation about how "the system" works—what happens when a report is made.
- ❖ What primary prevention is and why it is so important.
- ❖ Specifics of your Council—history, main events, committees, officers, etc.
- ❖ Plenty of time for questions.
- ❖ An up to date list of Council members and how to contact them.
- ❖ Clear expectations of Council members.

Giving a new member a folder or notebook of information is always a nice touch. It helps the person feel a part of the group, and gives him a chance to review information after the meeting.

If your Council is currently made up mostly of people in the helping professions—DCS workers, social workers, therapists, law enforcement, etc.—remember to pay special attention to how newly recruited "civilian" volunteers are treated. It's too easy to feel like an outsider if people around the table are

chatting about CHINS cases or DCS or other bits of system-based alphabet soup.

It might be a good idea to include a glossary of these terms for new Council members.

And last but not least...

Thank them!

People who give their time to a cause are giving away something they can never get back again. Be sure to recognize and appreciate volunteers for the work they do. You don't have to spend a lot of money. A nice certificate, applauding someone at a meeting, a thank you note—these are little things that really add up and will keep volunteers involved and enthused.

