

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Effective Practices for Implementing Local Climate and Energy Programs: *Working with Volunteers*

Lessons Learned *by Communities for Communities*

The views expressed in this document are those of the Climate Showcase Communities grant recipients. U.S. EPA does not endorse any products or commercial services mentioned.

WHAT IS IT?

Volunteers can extend the reach of programs by helping with one-time events or by making long-term commitments to program implementation. Working with volunteers can help boost organizational capacity and encourage civic engagement.

WHY DO IT?

- Volunteers can offer programs cost effectively or provide in-kind labor to fulfill grant matching requirements.
- Working with volunteers can create new advocates and peer trainers.
- Engaging local volunteers can build the community fabric. Community members who collaborate are more likely to work together on other projects.
- Volunteers can enable programs to sustain project work when grants end.

WHAT WORKS?

- Show volunteers your appreciation often. Handwritten thank-you notes or recognition from local leaders can go a long way.
- Match volunteers with projects in neighborhoods where they live or work.
- Use volunteers' skills and knowledge so that they know they add value to the project.
- When applicable, train volunteers on how to go door-to-door or hold workshops.
- Give volunteers feedback about their impact and make sure they know the importance of their role in the project.
- Create a spreadsheet or database to track volunteer involvement.
- Remind volunteers by phone two days before a volunteer event.

WHAT SHOULD YOU WATCH OUT FOR?

- Volunteers often have competing demands on their time. You may need to reach out to more potential volunteers than you think you need, but be ready with explicit, discrete tasks for everyone who participates.
- Volunteers are not always able to make long-term commitments. Be clear about the schedule from the beginning of the project.
- Be realistic about the skills needed. Match tasks to a volunteer's interests and skill set.

WHAT RESOURCES HAVE PROJECTS FOUND TO BE USEFUL?

- Idealist—Matches volunteers with local opportunities: idealist.org
- HandsOn Network—Network of local volunteer centers: handsonnetwork.org
- AmeriCorps, Local Conservation Corps, and other volunteer organizations
- Local job training programs
- Energize—free online volunteer management guides: www.energizeinc.com



"A volunteer is an investor, and investors tend to defend their investments."

Climate Showcase Communities project lead

"Train, engage, and support volunteers. Don't treat them like free resources."

Lisa, Green Homes Challenge, Frederick County, Maryland

"Why do it? It is fun!"

Lindsay, Eugene SmartTrips, Oregon