

Secrets of Successful Health Science Library Volunteer Programs

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Who volunteers in health science libraries?

- Students – LIS, Medical, Nursing, Undergraduate, High School, etc.
- Retirees (including librarians)
- Job-seekers – new graduates and those “between jobs”
- Former at-home parents
- Those who can't or don't need to work full-time
- Inquisitive minds and explorers of new careers
- Sources for volunteers include HR, Professional Development, Volunteer, and Community departments. Try schools, senior centers and agencies. Also, consider your patrons!
- BWFH Library engaged 55 volunteers since 2008, who contributed 1,189 volunteer hours over the past year



How can volunteers add value to your library?

- Provide door-to-door service – delivering research and books to your patrons, distributing and posting library flyers (networking!)
- Act as greeters at library tables at health fairs and conferences
- Talented volunteers can create original artwork, or play an instrument or sing at programs
- Students and interns may have a course research requirement that can lead to a valuable project. One of our volunteers mapped data on questions asked to number of library resources owned by format.
- Contribute to library newsletters and write book and media reviews
- Speak on a topic they're an expert in
- Fundraising – Library “Friends”



Tips for recruitment, training, retention and management

- Interview potential volunteers to find out their reasons for volunteering, and if the library would be a good match
- Write job descriptions with title, qualifications and responsibilities
- Include volunteers in staff meetings and trainings. Meet one-to-one with each volunteer to provide feedback, and conduct an annual review
- Attend organizational events that recognize your volunteers. Make opportunities for social events.
- Offer opportunities for learning and familiarization with the collection
- Showcase your volunteers' accomplishments prominently
- Let volunteers interact with patrons

DO

- Let volunteers work independently or with other volunteers
- Check in regularly to see if your volunteer wants to continue with the same projects or try something new.
- Provide recommendations for outstanding job-seeking volunteers
- Make sure volunteers feel they are making a difference

DON'T

- Use volunteers to perform tasks that should be done by paid library staff.
- Expect the same level of attendance for volunteers as staff. Some may only want to work two hours per week or have the summer off.
- Ask volunteers to just perform repetitive tasks. But don't give all creative projects only to your volunteers instead of staff.



Bibliography

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And many thanks to the BWFH Library Services Volunteers for all their feedback on this poster.