



2014

# PANEL 5

## GFP Volunteers and Volunteerism

*The 3 R's of GFP volunteer management: recruit, retain and recognise. How best to recruit, retain and recognise GFP volunteers?*

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### Moderator



Safiya  
Ibn Garba

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### Panellists



Tornike  
Chargeishvili



Malaka  
Samara



Mercia  
Takavarasha



Andrea  
Thomas



Volunteerism is not something you get; it is first and foremost something that you give. It is the fire that burns inside of you that enables you to change your community – Tornike Chargeishvili

Generations For Peace prides itself on being volunteer-based organisation; it depends heavily on its local volunteers, referred to as Delegates and Pioneers, to carry out peace-building programmes within their home contexts. Rather than having external experts design and implement programmes, GFP trains local leaders of youth in a unique conflict transformation curriculum such that they can design programmes that address specific conflicts within their communities. However, being an organisation reliant on the quality and commitment of its volunteers, GFP must invest heavily in volunteer management: in specific, the recruitment, retention and recognition of Delegates and Pioneers. It is these “three R’s of volunteerism” that were the focus of this panel discussion.

When discussing recruitment - the process of enlisting volunteers to work for a project or organisation – the panellists focused heavily on the need for quality promotion; if you want someone to volunteer tell them why. According to Malaka Samara, first and foremost, individuals must recognise the importance of volunteering more broadly. When discussing volunteering in her community of Tulkarem in the West Bank, Malaka stated, “Some people in my community think that volunteerism is not important... they think life is only just to work and earn money... so it is very important for us to promote volunteering as a social, and individual responsibility.” She argued that individuals must

recognise the importance of community service in order to consider volunteering their time, thereafter, the specific volunteer opportunity must appeal to their strengths and desires. In order to appeal to potential volunteers, transparency is crucial for both the recruiter and the recruit; as was articulated by Mercia Takavarasha from Zimbabwe, to gain quality volunteers the recruiting organisation should know exactly who their pool of preferred volunteers are, and the volunteer should feel that s/he has a specific, desirable skillset that suits the volunteer position. Recruiting volunteers suited to each position is likely to be more rewarding for both the volunteer and the organisation or project recruiting.

In addition to being explicit about the type of position offered and the type of volunteer desired, organisations should select the correct mediums through which to recruit volunteers. The panellists argued that the means of recruiting volunteers is crucial to identifying effective volunteers. Malaka Samara emphasised the use of social media, “A lot of organisations do not take advantage of social media or even Internet at all, and this is a challenge to us in our field. In my community, you can find social media in almost any house – we must use it to recruit volunteers.” Other modes of recruitment include advertisements on relevant websites, ads in print mediums and appealing to volunteer recruitment organisations. For Mercia, use of the correct recruitment method should not be overlooked, “For our community programmes, we need volunteers who are passionate about peace building. If they are not, they might not understand what change we are trying to make... before recruiting, we need to know that they share our broader vision!” She argued that the tool should be selected keeping the ideal volunteers in mind; for example, Facebook is particularly useful when recruiting youth and LinkedIn for young professionals.





Telling your volunteers why you want them to volunteer, using the most suitable medium, may result in quality recruitment, but according to the panellists, retaining these volunteers is more complex. According to Tornike Chargeishvili from Georgia, "If you go through the right steps while recruiting, including clarifying what role volunteers will play in the organisation, you avoid problems later. He or she should feel that they are valuable. It is also important to be open with your volunteers, just ask them what motivates and demotivates them, then you know how to retain them." For Tornike, if volunteers are recruited carefully, with skillsets relevant to the specific opportunity and a general dedication to the cause (e.g., peace building), then retaining their interest may be as simple as granting them the opportunity they applied for; the opportunity might be motivation in itself. However, as Andrea Thomas, GFP volunteer working in Kyrgyzstan, elaborated upon, retaining volunteers for longer periods of time is more difficult. Volunteers must feel that they are making vital contributions; "they must be empowered and trusted with tasks," if they feel superfluous, they are likely to lose interest. Utilising an example from the GFP Sport For Peace programmes he carries out in Tbilisi, Tornike spoke of clear task designation, regular progress reports, and positive reinforcements and recognition as key to retaining volunteers.

Whilst recognition can be seen as a means of retention, recognising volunteers through incentives is also the third and final of the "three R's" of volunteer management. As stated by Andrea, volunteering must be made an attractive option to volunteers throughout the volunteering process, "everyone is focused on 'what's in it for me?' Everyone wants to know, 'how do I benefit? What do I get from the time I have invested?'" As there is no financial compensation within volunteering, incentives are essential to ensure sustained commitment. According to Mercia a good way to recognise the work of volunteers, is to grant capacity-building opportunities to those volunteers who have demonstrated leadership potential; for example, Generations For Peace provides specialised trainings (locally and internationally) that equip certain volunteers with conflict transformation and peace-building skills. Capacity-building opportunities can also include grants and scholarships to pursue relevant educational opportunities and increased responsibilities within the project or organisation. Mercia went on to talk about recognition within an organisation's media channels: "when we highlight the work of our volunteers on social media, it makes them feel appreciated, they should know their contributions matter!" According to Malaka, another important means of recognising volunteers is through certificates; presenting volunteers with certifications and awards, ideally in a ceremonious manner, grants the volunteer a tangible reward for the services they provided.

After a detailed discussion on recruiting, retaining and recognising volunteers, the panellists answered audience questions. The question that sparked the most discussion on the panel was, "how do we eradicate the negative attitudes people have towards volunteering?" According to Andrea, negative attitudes towards volunteering are common, particularly towards international volunteers. She stated, "It is important to make the community trust you; they should be convinced that the impact you are seeking to make will be positive, and remain even after you depart." Thus, whilst sustainable models of volunteer management are crucial, readying communities for volunteer initiatives is equally critical.

Collectively, the panellists' comments demonstrated that there were multiple ways to recruit, retain, and recognise volunteers; selecting a method to use depended on the local context, access, and available mediums. As demonstrated in the panel above, with the right combination and approach, a genuine sense of volunteerism can be encouraged and sustained in diverse communities.





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