

# Farmers Market Volunteers

Chapter 4: Human Resources

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Volunteers donate untold hours, days, and seasons to making Washington State farmers markets possible. They are especially crucial for new and small markets, but can play significant roles at markets of any size. A 2010 Farmers Market Manager Survey conducted by the WSU Small Farms Program found that 73% of farmers markets relied on volunteers. On average, volunteers collectively dedicated 338 hours *per market* in a single season.

## Jobs for Market Volunteers

In addition to serving as a board or committee member, the types of jobs volunteers can do are unlimited.

- Market day help (set up / take down)
- Children or senior activities
- Special events / chef demos
- Fundraising / grant writing
- Information / market booth
- Arranging music
- Administrative support
- Printing, sign making
- Photography
- Social media
- Repairs and odd jobs
- Strategic planning / board support
- Writing reports

## Recruiting Volunteers

Volunteers may come in the form of a service group or high school club or they may be individuals that have a couple hours a week or are willing to come to every market.

- Create a volunteer application form so that you have basic information and can be sure they understand what kind of commitment the market needs. You may also need information to do a criminal check as due diligence.
- Think about what motivates prospective volunteers. Are they obliged to do community service, trying to learn new skills, looking for social outlets?
- Harness the power of word of mouth. Some markets create brochures to recruit volunteers or recruit via their website or social media. Make sure to highlight the *benefits* of volunteering for your market alongside what the market needs.

## Retaining Volunteers

The best way to retain volunteers to make sure they have a positive experience. Even volunteers need a certain level of “supervision” and support. If the market manager or a board member does not have time to work with volunteers, then it might be better to wait and recruit volunteers when you do.

- ❑ Provide an orientation to all volunteers and training, appropriate with their duties. This can be tough during a busy market day/season. Delegate this job to a board member if the manager does not have time. Be sure to emphasize safety rules.
- ❑ Publically and formally show your appreciation to all volunteers, even if they were only able to help for a single hour. It can be as simple as a card or gifts from vendors. You may also be able to acknowledge volunteers at the market or at special events. This is also a great time to recruit new volunteers

### *Why Volunteer?*

Source: Hollywood Farmers Market (Portland, OR)  
“Volunteer Opportunities” brochure

- Meet your neighbors
- Become part of the market
- Spend time volunteering with your family
- Pet dogs
- Help keep the market in Hollywood [neighborhood]
- Wear a yellow apron
- Feel productive
- Make new friends
- Get to know the market

## Administrative Tips

If possible, try to plan ahead for volunteers at your market so that you don’t run into any informational needs that you need for insurance, taxes, or reporting.

- ❑ The market should have a way to track all volunteer hours (e.g., sign in sheet).
- ❑ Typically, volunteers in Washington State are not covered under the market’s commercial liability insurance policy if they are injured at the market. Ask your insurance agent if you have any questions about your policy.
- ❑ Include volunteers in your annual budget to cover any market SWAG, thank yous, and time needed for supervision and reporting.
- ❑ According to Sheri Muntean ([www.foodfromfarms.org](http://www.foodfromfarms.org)) “The United States Department of Labor has very clear guidelines about volunteer assistance. ... Two issues farmers’ markets should be aware of are (1) you cannot ask an employee to do the same work they do as an employee as a volunteer, and (2) For-profit farmers’ markets should not use volunteer labor at all according to the Department of Labor.”