



## Meal Plan 3

# Volunteers for the Kitchen



*In the rural library “kitchen” one person often does the work of the Executive Chef, Sous Chef, Broiler cook, Fry cook, Pastry Chef, Bottle Washer, and Caterer. Getting some help in the kitchen is a good way to avoid being overwhelmed.*

Technical volunteers can be most effective if they are assigned work that is clearly defined, short-term, and non-urgent. It’s up to you to make the most of your volunteers’ free time and efforts. That is what this section is all about!

### TOPICS COVERED:

- Appetizer: Volunteer Planning
- Side Dish #1: Recruitment
- Side Dish #2: Volunteer Selection
- Main Course: Getting Started
- Dessert: Supervision
- After Dinner Beverage: Project Closing
- Fast Food—Meal Plan 3 Summary



### Volunteers are Invaluable

*“The computer committee is a group of volunteer patrons and several staff members. There’s about five core folks who have computer experience. The committee offers me and other staff members an opportunity to raise issues that have come up on a daily basis. They also assist with the planning. It’s been really great to have outside information and ideas. It’s like a think tank and when I get very frustrated, I can say ‘Hey, I really don’t know what’s going on. Does anyone? Have you heard of this?’ These are folks that I can e-mail or call. They’ve just been really quite invaluable.”*

*Kate McMullin  
Southwest Harbor Public Library, Mt Desert Island, ME*



## APPETIZER: Volunteer Planning

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- A phone and/or computer so you can communicate with your volunteer
- A clear understanding of who you want to help you and when
- A quart of support
- A dash of patience

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

*4 to 8 hours to define who you need and what they will do.*

## PREPARATION

To bring the right staff into your kitchen, you need to first:

- **Define and prioritize needs for your library.** What tasks need to be done and what support do you need for your library? How often does this work need to be done?
- **Decide who can best accomplish each task.** Do you need a volunteer to do one task, or a person to do routine tasks on a regular basis? What skills must they have to do the work you need done?
- **Create a volunteer job description.** The volunteer needs to know what they are being asked to do. A clear job description (for staff or volunteers) is essential for success. Include in the job description:
  - What the volunteer will do
  - When will the volunteer do it
  - How many hours will the volunteer need to work
  - Who is the volunteer liaison on your staff and what is the best way for a potential volunteer to get in touch with that person
  - Any deadlines that need to be met
- **Decide on a process for the volunteers to be screened, oriented, managed and supported.** Who will support and supervise the volunteers' work?
- **Decide on a budget.** Does the project have costs associated with it? If yes, do you have money available now to purchase the necessary ingredients **before** the volunteer arrives?

## SIDE DISH #1: Recruitment

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- A computer, printer, and/or phone to spread the word
- A volunteer job description
- An understanding of who you want and what you want them to do
- A person to coach and support the volunteer
- Staying away from nuts and fruitcakes

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

8 to 10 hours to recruit (more if you can).

## PREPARATION

Unless you are calling in Uncle Bob or another relative to help you in your library, you need to spread the word about your volunteer position throughout your entire community. Here are some actions you can take:

- **Ask your colleagues.** Where do other libraries in your state and region go for technical volunteers?
- **Ask other volunteers.** Many times, current volunteers will be the best source for new volunteers. They may know of someone, or they can tell you where to post a job description.
- **Look through newspapers and newsletters.** You can list your volunteer job description free of charge in many local newspapers, P.T.A newsletters, or other community publications.
- **Check schools and community college postings.** Many vocational schools and community colleges will post your volunteer job description in a career center or a departmental bulletin board. Some professors may announce the opportunity in their classes. Try contacting departments related to technology, such as engineering and computer science.



### The Right Mix

*"I put Adam and Dr. White together and both of them came to the program right after we got the Gates grant with all of the manuals telling you how to do things. Dr. White was in his late 60's so he couldn't get down on the floor. Adam was 14 so he could get down on the floor. So Dr. White told Adam how to do the wiring, and we did the entire building with CAT5, successfully networking the computers. Then Dr. White developed courses on teaching basic computing to the public using a lot of the Gates-supplied manuals. Adam then took the training and adapted it for use for teenagers. Out of these efforts we have really created—for a county our size—a very unique program."*

*Rita Maupin  
Calhoun County Public Library, Blountstown, FL*



- **Get the word out to virtual communities:** These communities (e.g. Yahoo Groups, MySpace, Facebook) provide a network of people who are interested in connecting and sharing information with other like-minded people via the Internet. It's often possible to locate tech-savvy people in a particular location or with particular expertise. Using a library-oriented community such as WebJunction ([www.webjunction.org](http://www.webjunction.org)), you may even be able to get help from "virtual" volunteers who can provide answers to particular questions.
- **Consult user groups:** These are groups that meet either in person or online to discuss different technical topics. People who participate in these groups may be good volunteers.



### **Knowledgeable Volunteers Can Help Your Library Save Money**

*Your library is likely too short on funds to hire a technology manager or consultant, but that doesn't mean you can't get the help you need. The Yale Public Library in Yale, OK discovered, that tapping into the community to find volunteers with technology expertise was a great way to accomplish projects without spending big bucks.*

*When the library wanted to wire it's building for Internet access in 1999, it turned to a former board member who had experience setting up computer labs.*

*"He did all the wiring and put in the jacks," said staff member Janice Clark. The Yale Public Library has also been able to retain the services of this volunteer for assistance with its other technology needs. "He volunteers and donates his time to do any of our computer projects," Clark said. "He has saved us so much money."*

*Clark explained that another board member, the computer teacher at Yale's high school, has helped train the library's staff to use Microsoft Word and other basic pieces of software. Clark also occasionally seeks advice from the city's schoolchildren, whom she says are quite knowledgeable about technology.*

*Even though its budget is small, the Yale Public Library is staying up-to-date in terms of technology with the help of its volunteers. "We're excited that as a little town of 14,000, we are really moving on," Clark said.*

*Janice Clark  
Yale Public Library, Yale, OK*



## SIDE DISH #2: Volunteer Selection

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- A volunteer job description
- An understanding of who you want and what you want them to do
- The Chef who will supervise the volunteer
- A kitchen full of eager **volunteers**

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

*4 to 6 hours to interview (more if you can).*

## PREPARATION

You may be tempted to welcome with open arms the first volunteer who shows up. Remember that you are going to invest time and energy supporting them, and you are going to entrust them with care of your computer systems. It's crucial to screen potential volunteers by interviewing them first to find out whether or not they are a good match for your library's needs. You should also check their references in the same way you would for a staff person.

Consider these guidelines when interviewing volunteers:

- **What skills will the volunteer need to accomplish the task?**  
Ask about the volunteer's previous experience with the technology you want them to work on. Bear in mind that some volunteers can learn skills as they go, especially if they have other technical expertise, or they are taking a class. It may be worth risking if the volunteer is serious about learning.
- **Is the volunteer willing to work in at a library with limited resources?**  
A volunteer might be coming from an environment that had the latest and most expensive system. Ask if the volunteer has any experience working in a library setting which may be "lean and mean". If he or she has not worked in a library setting, explain some of your ways of working, including your budget, staff skill level, and atmosphere. Ask if the volunteer would be comfortable working in an environment with fewer resources.
- **Can the volunteer communicate clearly about the work they do?**  
Can the volunteer explain technical issues in a way that you understand? If the volunteer uses a word you don't know, will he or she define it clearly? Is the volunteer willing to report back regularly on the progress made and document his or her work?
- **Is the volunteer reliable?**  
Make sure the volunteer is willing to make a specific time commitment and finish the project before the deadline you give. Checking a volunteer's references is the best way to see if he or she is likely to follow through.



## **High-School Students Can Help Keep Library Computers Up and Running**

*In Pryor, OK, high-school students can take classes that will help prepare them for careers in technology — at the same time, they also get real-world experience by helping to maintain their local library's 12 public-access computers. David Shreffler, who teaches the high-school computer classes and acts as Pryor Public Library's technology consultant, explained that when the current librarian wanted to spend money to hire a full-time IT staff member, he stepped in and offered his students' services instead.*

*"I have students that are available about every hour, and we train them to help," Shreffler said. "And it's a good thing for us and it's not a lot of trouble."*

*Shreffler and his students visit the library several times a week to perform a variety of maintenance chores on the computers, including replacing malfunctioning computer components, installing software, and troubleshooting occasional connectivity problems. Because most of the computers are more than four years old, having a regular maintenance team has been especially useful in keeping Pryor Public Library's machines functional.*

*David Shreffler Consultant  
Pryor Public Library, Pryor, OK*



## MAIN COURSE: Getting Started

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- The Chef who will supervise the volunteer
- An excited and charming guest Chef (i.e. volunteer)

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

*3 hours*

## PREPARATION

- **Be clear on what you're cooking up.** A good rule of thumb is to keep all volunteer projects under 20 to 30 hours over a three month period. Why? Because most volunteers will not sign up for anything longer, since it would be too time consuming.
- **Whip up a work plan.** Once you have determined the scope of work, you should document it in a work plan. It is similar to the contract you would sign with a staff person, just shorter and more informal. Even if you are one of the lucky libraries with an ongoing relationship with a volunteer, you will still find it useful to create work plans for specific projects. The essential elements of a work plan are:
  - A list of specific tasks to be accomplished.
  - A plan for training and sustainability of the project
  - A timeline. Include the weekly schedule for work on the project.
- A work plan will help you reach a shared understanding of the volunteer's work, and assist you in making sure you aren't placing too many demands or requesting conflicting timelines.
- **Schedule an initial “get to know you” meeting with your volunteer.** This not only gives a volunteer a chance to get a better idea of the resources and equipment he or she might need, but gives you an opportunity to teach the volunteer a little bit about how the library functions. Here are some good points to cover:
  - Who you serve
  - The main contacts for the volunteer staff (including on-site computer literate people)
  - The project budget
  - Where everything is located, including the phone, tools, sign-in/sign-out sheet, rest room, coffee, and so forth
  - Your work plan to make sure you and the volunteer understand the work to be done, the timeline, and when you will be checking in about progress
- **Review your library security and confidentiality guidelines.** If you keep confidential information about your staff or patrons, make sure you communicate this to all volunteers. Clearly describe what they can and cannot access.



**Notes from  
a Chef**

### **Good Volunteers May Be Closer Than You Think**

*"I have one volunteer who I call my technology guru. Whenever I have a technology question I'm not sure on, I give him a call. Just between you and me, it's my husband! I'll call him up and say that "I need to talk to my technology volunteer. He'll say, 'I think he's out' I'll say, 'Oh, OK. When can I call back?' He'll then say, 'Oh here he is, he just came in!""*

*Bonnie Tollefson*

*Levy County Public Library System, Bronson, FL*

## DESSERT: Supervision

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- The Chef who will supervise the volunteer
- An excited and charming guest Chef (i.e. volunteer)
- A ¼ lb of direction

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

2 hours on a monthly basis

## PREPARATION

- **Check in regularly.** The staff liaison should communicate with volunteers on a regular basis to talk about their progress and find out if there are any problems or changes to the work plan. Technical volunteers may be used to working at a very rapid pace. However, if your library needs to take things more slowly, you can communicate this while keeping the project moving toward completion with regular meetings, e-mails, or phone calls. This is also a great way to let volunteers know that you value their time and energy.
- **Establish accountability.** Volunteers should understand that even though they are giving their time away, it doesn't mean they can blow things off or not show up, etc. Some libraries have their volunteers sign letters of commitment, while others rely on volunteers' devotion to the cause to keep them interested and coming back.
- **Set limits.** With accountability comes a lot of responsibility, and although volunteers should feel like they can “own” their work, they shouldn't feel burdened. Volunteers should know they are allowed to say “no”, or “That's all I can do.” Sometimes, volunteers will burn out after one or two projects because they put in tons of hours, when this could have been avoided had they only known that it was okay for them to set limits. After your first meeting, volunteers should re-evaluate the work and see if it looks realistic.
- **Document work done.** Make sure your volunteers keep records of the work that they did. You might want to set up a system for this, such as a log book or spreadsheet.



### Notes from a Chef

#### Retirees Bring a Lifetime of Experience to Volunteering

*“We are fortunate to have two retired men, who worked in the computer industry, to help us with our computer upgrades and maintenance. They come once a week to download any updates to Windows, antivirus, and/or our spyware programs. They also run antivirus and spyware scans. This two or three hours per week frees me to do my other jobs. They are very knowledgeable and work independently. In addition, they volunteer for other projects as we need them. It is a huge time and stress saver for the library!”*

*Kristi Bryant  
Wells Public Library, Wells, ME*

## AFTER DINNER BEVERAGE: Project Closing

### EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS:

- A case of gratitude
- A kitchen full of thankfulness

### TIME TO IMPLEMENT:

*2 hours monthly.*

## PREPARATION

A well-managed volunteer program can offer a great experience for both the person who is volunteering and the library. Sometimes lasting relationships develop between volunteers and their local library.

Remember what your mother taught you! **Always say Thank You!** Here are some ways to say it:

- **Be sure to thank the volunteer at the end of a project.** Do this even if your volunteer has decided that he or she loves your organization and will continue working.
- **Do something personal.** This can include things like buying a volunteer a gift certificate at his or her favorite store, or giving that volunteer something that's related to your library.
- **Think about what is most meaningful to your volunteer.** He or she might prefer to hear about the impact of their work, receive your newsletter, or be invited to a staff party, rather than receive a t-shirt or plaque.
- **Keep communications clear.** This is the key to successful technical volunteer projects.
- **Establish future volunteer communications and make sure that you have accurate contact details.**



## OTHER TASTY RECIPES

- Why Have Volunteers?  
[http://www.helpnow.org/npos\\_tips.php](http://www.helpnow.org/npos_tips.php)
- Recruit a Volunteer  
<http://webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent;jsessionid=039CEDCF1A38A29846E7A48725CEB813?id=1158>
- Sample Technology Volunteer Job Description  
<http://webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent;jsessionid=039CEDCF1A38A29846E7A48725CEB813?id=1312>
- Volunteer Job Description  
<http://www.ewbportland.org/node/29>



- Your Circle of Resources – Volunteer Recruitment  
<http://www.energizeinc.com/art/avolrb.html>
- Shared Wisdom: Recruiting and Managing Volunteers  
<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/volunteers/page6010.cfm>
- Where Should We Place Our Volunteer Ads?  
<http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/04/17.html>
- Essential Volunteer Management  
<http://www.casenet.org/program-management/volunteer-manage/essenvol.htm>



## Fast Food—Meal Plan 3 Summary

Technical volunteers can be most effective if they are assigned work that is clearly defined, short-term and non-urgent—it's up to you to make the most of your volunteers donated time and efforts.

### MENU 3 CHECKLIST

- Bring the right staff into your kitchen:
  - Define and prioritize needs for your library.
  - Decide who can best accomplish each task.
  - Create a volunteer project description.
  - Decide on a process for the volunteers to be screened, oriented, managed and supported.
  - Decide on a budget.
- To find and recruit volunteers:
  - Ask your colleagues and other volunteers.
  - Look through newspapers and newsletters.
  - Check schools and community college postings.
- When selecting volunteers:
  - Screen potential volunteers by interviewing them first.
  - Check their references in the same way you would a staff person.
  - Think seriously about whether they will be a good match for your library's needs.
- As you start up your volunteer project:
  - Try to keep all volunteer projects under 20 to 30 hours over a three month period.
  - Create a work plan.
  - Schedule an initial “get to know you” meeting.
  - Review your library security and confidentiality guidelines.
- Ensure proper volunteer supervision:
  - Have a staff liaison communicate with volunteers on a regular basis to talk about their progress and any problems or changes to the work plan.
  - Establish accountability.
  - Set limits.
  - Document work done.



### MENU 3 CHECKLIST (continued)

- Close the volunteer project on a positive note:
  - Be sure to thank the volunteer once they've finished a project.
  - Do something personal.
  - Think about what is most meaningful to your volunteer.
  - Keep communications clear.
  - Establish future volunteer communications and make sure that you have accurate contact details.