

Intro to Recruitment & Retention



This text is designed to aid volunteer rescue squads with their recruitment of new members and the retention of your existing members. This program is one of many ideas for R&R. Use this information as you develop your own Recruitment & Retention Program. As you begin planning please be open-minded and ask yourself what you are looking for in a new member. And remember that members come in many different forms, what do you want them to do?

Each R&R campaign will be different, different from year to year and squad to squad. The ideas we will discuss can be used for Junior, Senior squad members and Auxiliary members.

Making the commitment for Recruitment & Retention

R&R must be an ongoing process for any agency looking to increase or improve their membership. If you think you can have an R&R campaign in the spring or fall and make it last for a year then you have lost the point of Recruiting and Retaining members.

Commitment for Recruitment and Retention

As we make the decision to recruit new members we first must ask ourselves these questions,

- v Do you really want new members?
What are your squad's needs?

- v Are you willing to change?
What will happen when new members come into your squad?
Many will bring new ideas.
Will want get involved.

- v Will your agency accept "outsiders?"
Rescue Squads become a tight nit group.
A new person means new ideas.
Also means new problems.
It is change and we are all afraid of CHANGE.

- v Re-think application process
Take a look at your squad's application.
How difficult is it to complete.
How long is it.
Does it ask questions that are "illegal" to ask?
Who has them in your squad?

- v Plan for new members
 - Orientation and training
Develop a detailed plan for your new members.
Use a checklist for new members and their progress.
You may have to train them form scratch.
Members form other agencies, orienting them to your squad.

 - Member development
Some type of mentoring program.
Begin a retention plan the moment they apply.

 - Don't send mixed messages
To many times we accept a new member and then do nothing.
They must feel needed.

Appoint a Recruitment Officer

Most agencies have membership committees. These committees are charged with the processing of new applicants and preparing them for presenting to your squad for vote. Each rescue squad processes a new member differently, your county government or public safety division may also play a part in the process. Who ever starts the application process must have guidelines to work from.

v Someone must be in charge

Someone has to be responsible for the recruiting of new members.
Many squads use committees.

v Follow-up on leads

Ask any sales representative what happens when they don't follow-up on a new lead. They lose that customer. Your squad is no different. Most people today will not ask twice, many will donate their time with another squad or other volunteer organization.

v Don't let anyone slip through the cracks

Many applicants say the same thing, "What happened to my application, you've had it for months".

The worst thing a squad can do is misplace or ignore applications.
Applies also to new members who you have voted into your squad.

v Treat prospective recruits as customers

Don't lose them!

v Make sure recruit knows they are wanted

They have just finished their EMT class and are eager to serve, don't put out the fire.

v Have a system to process new referrals

24-hour telephone line
Some structure form to field inquiries.
Special Post Office Box.

Take a Good Look at Your Agency –Do The Research

- v **Rubber meets the road**
How hard are you willing to work to get new members.
This is not an easy task.
Must be a squad effort.

- v **Get your demographics - the facts**
What are you looking for?
What/who is there to get?
What is your population?

- v **Is there anyone to recruit?**
If not what is next?
If yes, what is the next step?

- v **Is it realistic to recruit volunteers?**
What are my options?
Public service?

- v **Don't waste your time and money**
We must be realistic when we plan a recruitment program.
If we see no potential for new volunteers, concentrate on other programs.
Investing in retention vs. recruitment.

- v **What do you want volunteers to do?**
Write a job description for every position in your agency. Most have job descriptions for Officers but no the everyday crewmember. This lets the new recruit know up front what is expected of them.

- v **What resources do you have to help you?**
VAVRS Recruitment & Retention Officer
County Public Safety Departments
Virginia Office of EMS
Recruitment success stories.

Most squads try to develop their own plan and many are successful. Others have taken programs from other squads or other volunteer organization and molded them to fit their specific recruitment needs. What you do will depend on how much effort you can or are willing to put into the program.

Take Advantage of Opportunities to Recruit

Most volunteer rescue squads are guilty of the same thing, not taking advantage of all the resources available to them. Many we don't even think about,

- v **Selling county decals**
Many counties and towns have agreements with volunteer fire & rescue to sell county decals. Look at the volume of people that you have to sell your agency to!
- v **Integrate recruitment into fundraising**
Again this is an excellent opportunity to promote your squad and recruit members.
- v **Piggyback on E-911 Campaign**
This is a great opportunity for a countywide campaign. These have been very successful statewide.
- v **All press releases should include recruitment messages**
Never let an opportunity go by without selling your squad.
- v **Use all available resources to keep recruitment in front of the public**
 - EMS Week
 - Open House
 - Community events

Stop the Revolving Door (or at least find out how it is working)

- v **Find out why members are leaving and staying**
This will help in the squad's strategic plans.
They may be leaving for the same reasons.
- v **Exit interviews**
Again this will help you as you plan for the rest of your squad members.
- v **Find out why members are joining**
What is their expectation of you?
- v **Ask the question on your application**
This is your first contact with the potential member.
- v **Consider an internal study on personnel issues with an outside facilitator**
Your members are a valuable source of information. Just be careful they may tell you just what they think!

Educate Public About Your Agency

Has anyone ever ask you who much money you make working for the rescue squad. Maybe they wanted to give you their address so you can send the bill for your services. Maybe they think you are a part of the county and they pay you. Ever had this happen to you?

We are the experts at what we do, EMS, and who better to tell the story about your rescue squad.

- √ **Developing positive relationship with community**
This is the first and most important step in community relations. How? We get involved, we participate in the community events, and we provide the service they expect!
- √ **Encourage community input**
Make them a part of your squad.
Use their experience
Members to your Board or advisory group
- √ **Community outreach is key**
Will only make your squad stronger
- √ **Newsletter and WebPages**
Lets them know you are interested in them
Lets you tell a specific story or need.
Avenue for community input and is an outreach.
- √ **Sell your squad**
This is your big chance they are listening!
- √ **Hearing more than just fund drive**
This is the time they hear from us the most, when we need money! Tell them more.
 - Available services
 - Featured members
 - Squad accomplishments

Business Support

- √ **Fund raising**
Not only are they donors but how can they help develop and support the fund drives.
- √ **Human Relations assistance**
Use their technical assistance to write bylaws and membership applications.
- √ **Technical assistance**
What skills do they have that can also benefit you?

Project A Positive Message When Promoting Your Squad

- v The sky is falling – NOT
Though it may seem so.

- v Tell about positive opportunities
Education
Community Service
Personal Satisfaction

- v Be honest
It is work
Take Dedication
Personal & family commitment.

- v Tell the public what your needs are
Members
Funding
Emotional Support

- v EMS is demanding and challenging
Let them know what you are required to do.

- v Professional training
Brag about your level of services.

- v Stepping stone to future opportunities
Job opportunities, especially to the younger audiences.



The Media Can Be Your Friend! That's the truth

- v **EMS recruitment is news**
It can be a great human-interest story.
People want to hear good news.

- v **Put yourself in the media's shoes**
They are going to report the news they have, GOOD or BAD.
How would you want your squad portrayed?

- v **Develop a professional relationship**
Get to know the local reporters.
Invite them to your activities.
Don't limit yourself to one reporter or station.
Use TV and radio.
Cable TV

- v **What can you do for the media?**
Avenue for GOOD news.

- v **What can the media do for you?**
With a good relationship they can get your message to thousands.
Helps promote communities.
Be an influence.
Be a hindrance.

- v **Understand the media's limitations**
They report only what they know.
Give them the information you want reported.
You are a small part of today's news.

- v **Be consistent, promote often**
Have a promotions plan.
Compare yourselves to a department store, look at how many times a year they promote themselves with sales. You also are selling a product.

Use different avenues to promote,
 TV
 Newspapers
 Church Bulletins
 Flyers
 Cable TV

Be creative with your squad's promotions.

Management & Leadership: Keys To Retention

One of the hardest jobs in any volunteer organization is the retention of its members. Members will leave your squad for a variety of reasons. Some of these you cannot control, but many you can. The key is knowing and recognizing some of the early warning signs.

v **Internal vs. external retention factors**

Internal retention factors can be defined as problems or reasons that were created within the squad that caused a volunteer to leave. They may be policies, personalities, poor training or any number of causes. Your squad and its leadership need to have the ability to control these issues.

External retention factors can be defined as problems or reasons that come from outside the squad that cause volunteers to leave. They may be things like jobs, family and illness. These are reasons you as a squad have very little control over.

v **Internal conflict - one of top reasons members leave**

Internal conflict is the number one reason members leave a volunteer rescue squad. Burnout ranks in the top five along with jobs and family commitments.

v **What can your agency control?**

First is policies, many squads have created many if not most of their problems by not developing good policies. Then not applying the policies fair and consistently when problem arise.

Organized membership plan, this includes good application process and orientation of new members.

v **At a disadvantage - turnover of leadership**

Our biggest problem as volunteers is our leadership can change on a regular basis. Most squads elect Officers on an annual basis.

v **Lack of training for leaders**

Most of our Officers come into the office with the greatest of interests. Unfortunately many of them were elected because they were popular not necessarily the most qualified. Most volunteers are very well trained as EMT's or higher but are not formally trained as leaders. VAVRS and the Office of EMS offer Officer training. Squads should consider minimum qualifications for members to serve as Officers

Integration of Career Into Volunteer EMS Systems

Many communities are tossed with this very decision. Due to the lack of volunteers at different times of the day rescue squads, towns and counties have integrated career staffing into the volunteer system. Many areas have become completely paid and have discontinued the used of volunteers completely.

This is a situation all of us will face at sometime in the future and it would be good for all of us to begin studying how it works and how it has impacted the EMS system.

- √ **Fertile ground for disaster - if not prepared**
Many squads have been very successful with a career/volunteer system. Squads have also had very unpleasant experiences as well.
- √ **Volunteer and Career**
Treat both the same.
Same level of training.
- √ **Need strong leadership**
May require a paid administration.
Leadership training is a must.
- √ **Long and short-term planning is mandatory**
Squad/Counties must have a well thought plan.
Will required long term financial investment.
- √ **Not necessarily an admission of failure**
This has been very successful in many areas.
Administrators should visit the success stories.
- √ **Combination systems are a viable option**

Formal Retention Programs

Formal programs are far and few between. Most squads have a few incentives that they can give. Many of these are based on what they can afford. Some administrators/Officers find it hard to spend donations on these items. You will find that a good retention program is as important as buying a heart monitor because without the EMT the heart monitor is useless. This will be the best investment your squad will ever make.

The following are ideas you can use to develop a quality retention program,

v **VOLSAP**

This program is still in the developmental stages. It allows local government and your squad to participate in an individual retirement program for your members.

v **Retirement Programs**

You can purchase your own retirement program. This can be an expensive program.

v **Reimbursement/Stipend per call**

This is a performance-based program where a member receives money based on calls run.

v **Points Programs**

Another performance based program where a member receives points based on their participation in squad activities and calls.

v **Personal Property Tax Reduction**

Counties offer tax reductions for volunteers serving as volunteers.

v **Free County Decal**

Many localities offer volunteers county vehicle decals as a thank you for serving.

v **Personal Accomplishments**

Recognition for accomplishments is the backbone of a good retention program. Everyone enjoys a pat on the back for a job well done.

v **Go beyond banquets, plaques and pins**

These are great programs but too often we rely on them to provide all of our member's retention. Be creative with your program.

Need Realistic Expectations of Formal Retention Programs

No recruitment or retention program is a sure thing. What works this year may not work next year. We must realize that this is an ongoing process and will take plenty of work and patients. Everyone involved must remember it will take time to make the program successful.

- v **Don't perceive them as "magic potions"**
Every recruitment and retention campaign will take time and dedication.
- v **Will not substitute for good management!**
This speaks for itself; nothing can replace good management in an organization.
- v **Menu approach**
Think outside of the box
Explore many options before starting.
- v **Everyone is motivated differently**
Be flexible with your program.
- v **Long-term vs. short-term volunteer**
Make the program fit the needs of the squad.
Remember what type of member you are looking for.
- v **Older vs. younger volunteer**
Again, be flexible.
Different ages require different approaches in recruitment and retention.
They look for and have different needs.
- v **Keep it "Under Construction"**
This program NEVER stops, every time a new member applies the recruiting and retaining continues. Your program will always be "Under Construction".

