



# SMALL ORGANIZATION FAMILY VOLUNTEER INSIGHTS

HOW SMALLER ORGANIZATIONS APPROACH  
FAMILY VOLUNTEERISM



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Disney and Points of Light launched the Disney Family Volunteering Rewards Program to encourage schools and nonprofits to engage youth and their families in volunteer projects. This tips sheet was created based on information collected from 366 representatives at nonprofits, schools and parent-teacher associations with a budget under one million dollars, each of whom received at least five tickets during the last year. Survey respondents represent 42 states.

**“The most successful part of the approach was being able to bring families together while bringing social awareness to an ongoing issue we have as a society.”**

**Renee, California**

## Successful Approaches

Overall, small nonprofit organizations and schools found success by creating family-friendly events that offered tasks for all ages, choosing meaningful causes and designing event themes that would interest kids. They used social media and varied communication channels to recruit. Here are a few comments pulled from open-ended responses that reflect each of the themes:

- **“Remind** individuals that their families are invited and encouraged to join. They may not consider it unless you let them know.”
- **“Family-friendly events that were interactive allowed for varying ages and abilities, outdoors and flexible hours.”**
- **“Use your project as a learning opportunity as well. Have plenty of information about your cause or why. Ask teachers to discuss the cause or aspects of the project in lessons prior to the event day. We find there is increased interest in the cause and the educational factor.”**
- **“Make sure there is time at the beginning of the project to explain how their work is making a difference.”**
- **“We believe the more we have a social presence, the more people we can reach. So our focus this year is to be more engaged on the social platform.”**

When asked about specific techniques, **“establishing strong partnerships”** rose to the top as most successful, while **“using days of service or signature events”**—such as Martin Luther King Day, Family Volunteer Day or Global Youth Service Day—was used by only 28% of respondents. For the most part, respondents planned service days based on the schedule of their organization, and volunteer projects did not depend on this time frame of specific service

## Highest Rated Techniques and Tactics

One respondent said they used days of service: “Because we used students, most of the service days were off days or events that did not conflict with service days,” and another person said, “Not days of service but holidays, Christmas, or our blood drive annually on 9/11. This helps bring a focus around our volunteer efforts.” Several other participants noted that they would try this strategy in the future.

The bar graphs below show the percentage of respondents who said “yes” they found success using the identified approach to promote family volunteering.



**Establishing strong partnerships**



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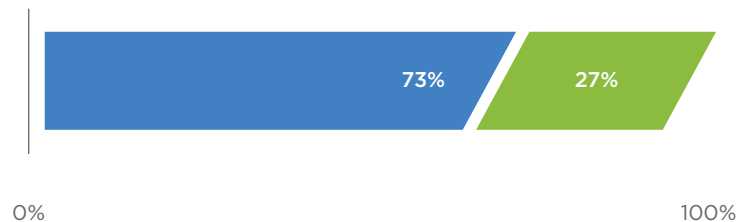


Organizations found success by connecting with other organizations that already use volunteers or are specifically looking for service projects, including schools (especially those with service requirements or honor societies), Scout troops, YMCA locations, church youth groups, youth sports teams and other youth serving organizations.

- “We encouraged the **schools and centers that were going to benefit from the event** to help wrap all the toys that were donated...”
- “A lot of schools and **churches** were already wanting to do a community service project and were able to connect/partner with us to get it done.”
- “Establishing partnerships helps to **increase familiarity** with our organization and **builds credibility**. This makes our events more attractive.”



### Engaging organizations that already served youth

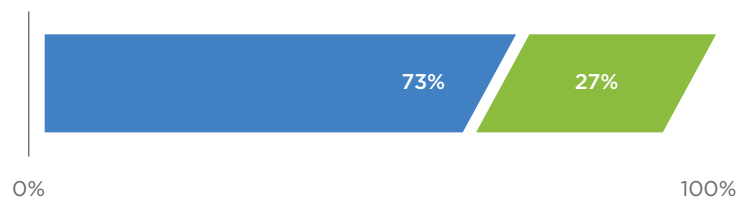


The majority of respondents also said it was important to involve aforementioned local organizations that already serve youth.

- “Start with organizations who already encourage parent/child team volunteering such as **National Charity Leagues, Boys Team Charities.**”
- “I think reaching out through the **schools** gave us the greatest impact in generating volunteers.”
- “We worked with **Kiwanis**, which already has a strong reputation for working with kids.”



### Expanding on targeted communication efforts



Triangulated communication methods (including email, face to face, social media, etc.) were widely cited as ways to best reach families for volunteer opportunities.

- “I believe communicating the opportunity in multiple ways (**in person, online, through their children**) is why we are able to support a volunteer opportunity each month. We are able to hit each family’s favorite method this way.”
- “We had a **parent ambassador** at the school who spread the word for us and engaged many who did not know about our organization and volunteer opportunities there.”



## Challenges and Solutions Faced By Program Leaders

### Challenges

### Suggested Solutions

#### Availability and Timing:

Families typically have a full calendar of events and activities already, so it can be difficult to narrow down a day or time for a service project. Also, conflicting schedules made it hard to find a time that will work with everyone's availability.

- “By having our family weekend the **same time each year** has helped our families plan ahead.”
- “**We made it possible to volunteer in more than one way**—for families that have time, we asked that they join us at the event; parents who don't have time, we asked to bring supplies to support the animal shelter.”
- “...We had volunteer opportunities that began **at the end of school** so that families could stay and help at pickup and also scheduled volunteer activities for **later in the evening** for those families with working parents.”
- “...Our main volunteer event is from 4–6 p.m. on Wednesdays, which generally works well for high schoolers but not for their working parents... many **high schoolers have brought their grandparents in lieu of bringing their parents**... now we have some very faithful senior volunteers...”

#### Youth Tasks:

Creating opportunities for the whole family where everyone can have a role and meaningful tasks to complete.

- “We had **stations of educational activities** that the kids could do with their parents during lulls in the action or slow times, and had enough volunteers that they could rotate between doing a job and learning about the environment.”
- “Purposefully **define and assign simple tasks** into achievable pieces to encourage either parent/young child or older child/younger child teamwork.”
- “**Having a range of duties**, some of which can be done by younger kids (like setting out signs), and others that teens can take on (like setting up tables), and finally something the parents enjoy (putting out displays).”

#### Recruitment:

Making sure that parents knew about the volunteer opportunity and encouraging them to sign up for the project with all their competing priorities.

- “We pulled in a few key families early on in the planning, and they helped a lot with **getting others excited** about the project.”
- “...if people can **relate** more to what they are volunteering for, then they are **more apt to help out**. When you make it impact the community in which they live, you will get more families in that community willing to help.”

#### Commitment:

Getting volunteers to show up proved to be a challenge. When one family member gets sick, you can lose the whole group at the last minute.

- “**Follow up** with potential volunteers and express the need.”
- “Stay in **constant contact** with families who volunteer to keep them updated on the event scheduling and activities.”
- “Make it **easy to participate** with various options for how to be involved and how much time is needed”



**“Families that volunteer together have priorities that are higher than your event: location and well-being of their children during the event, may be late arriving due to logistics of bringing the entire family.”**

JL, Florida

## Beneficial Strategies and Learnings

Include **youth voices** in the planning of a project and any explanations during the event.

- “Be sure that the project/opportunity is one that the youth had a say in planning, so they are enthused about it.... Use your youth as recruiters to sell the volunteer opportunity.”
- “Get the kids interested in doing it. Parents are busy and may not prioritize it, but if they know their child wants to do it, they will make it more of a priority.”
- “Educate the public. Let the kids explain it since they tell the truth and use simple words.”

**Communicate** (using multiple methods) well in advance and follow up with reminders.

- “Have a day itinerary and ‘job description’ printed for each individual—even if their task is cleaning windows.”
- “Pictures can say 1,000 words and convey a feeling of community.”

Create a **family-friendly environment** that includes fun activities and food/drink.

- “Create buzz around the event. Make it fun!”
- “Plan a small event along with the volunteer work, such as playground cleanup AND a picnic.”



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**Reward** volunteers and also make sure they know about the impact of their service.

- “Give an added benefit (e.g., extra credit, service hours, special privilege, reward, etc.) in some way to kids whose parents volunteer with them.”
- “Have sign-in sheets—people like to feel they are getting credit or recognition for volunteering.”
- “We featured volunteers on social media.”

Start early to ensure **organization and careful planning** of a service event.

- “Assign specific tasks to be accomplished by individual families.”
- “Have one point person who will be there all day. They can designate others and eliminate confusion for larger groups.”
- “Make sure all youth are paired with experienced adult staff or volunteers.”
- “... have a sign-in sheet for volunteers that has... name, how they heard about you... and their e-mail address (required going forward within the Points of Light application process).”



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