

marketshare [mahr-kit shair] -noun

1. Is a program of marketumbrella.org, which works to cultivate the field of public markets for public good.
2. These free documents (called "shares") are the best of "lessons learned" from public markets everywhere.
3. Employ as needed, & please feel free to tell us about your results, so that we can share those with other markets.



market day: Recruiting and managing volunteers

Successful markets are those that make effective use of volunteers. In the early months of a fledgling market, volunteers may be your only staff, and are likely to be drawn from the core group of believers in your mission who were responsible for starting your market in the first place.

However, even after your market starts earning enough to pay for key personnel, you will have an ongoing need for volunteers—and an ongoing need to take good care of your volunteers, because they will become some of your most passionate ambassadors in the community.

Ironically, many small organizations resist the efforts of volunteers to help out. The main reason given is the claim that staff doesn't have time to recruit, manage, and reward volunteers because they have their "real" job to do—e.g., manage the market, etc.

As an investment in your organizational capacity, we'd like to encourage you here and now to commit to setting aside the few hours every month it takes to recruit, manage, and recognize volunteers. Not only will volunteers help you do everything from set-up and break-down your weekly market, but through the ranks of your volunteers you will find new board members, identify and vet future paid staff, develop donors of financial and in-kind resources, as well as links to new vendors, community partners, groups of consumers, and problem-solvers for problems you haven't even encountered yet. At marketumbrella.org, volunteers make up our Board of Directors, offer free legal counsel and media mentoring, plan and execute our annual fundraiser, help mount our Peak Season Brigades, staff our weekly markets, and generate a pool of talent from which have arisen many of our paid staff.

Recruiting volunteers

The most obvious place to recruit volunteers is at your weekly market. At our Welcome Tent, we keep a sign-up sheet that asks prospective volunteers for their name, contact info, and availability; a staff member contacts them personally later in the week. We also advertise our need for volunteers on Craig's List, and at local universities and even high schools. (In many communities, high school students must fulfill community service hours as a graduation requirement.) Our current Markets Community Organizer came to us from Americorps, which is another excellent resource for finding volunteers, as are "newcomers" organizations, since many people try volunteering as a way to get to know their new community. Finally, the success of our new Farmers Market Bingo has made us think that senior centers might be additional fertile ground for recruiting volunteers.

The Farmers Market Coalition maintains a library of resources that includes two helpful links on recruiting and managing volunteers (www.farmersmarketcoalition.org). One is from the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Markets, which recommends publicizing your need for volunteers on your website and e-newsletter; when speaking to service clubs like Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary, or when interviewed by local media; at town fairs and other tabling events; and in press releases. They also remind us not to overlook the obvious—like asking friends and family to volunteer; or asking current volunteers to recruit their own friends and family. When done as a group, helping out your local farmers market doubles as a "quality time" activity shared with family and friends.

Managing volunteers

Once on board, we give our volunteers an orientation packet that explains our organizational mission and values, our projects, our Board and staff, and also describes the duties typically asked of volunteers. Historically, most volunteers have assisted with running our weekly markets. We break up the work into three two-hour shifts, so that no volunteer has to work the entire market—and all volunteers also have time to shop!

“Early shift” volunteers help with setting up and staffing the Welcome Tent, including:

- Selling market tokens in exchange for credit and debit cards, checks, and food stamp/EBT/SNAP cards
- Selling drinks and market merchandise (cloth bags, T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc.)
- Keeping an adequate supply of coffee, milk, cups, and related supplies
- Keeping the Welcome Tent, sitting areas, and environs clean
- Greeting shoppers and answering questions
- Delivering beverages to event guests
- Letting staff know of supplies that need reordering
- Handing out special-event information to customers

Other duties as assigned by staff or requested by vendors
Mid- and Late-Shift volunteers help with all of the above Welcome Tent staffing responsibilities and, in addition, the Late-Shift volunteers help box up supplies and break down the Welcome Tent when the closing bell rings.

We utilize volunteers for other market-day activities, too. Volunteers help us with our Hot Crop updates (surveying vendors on new and anticipated product offerings and adding them to the market whiteboard, as well as to our vendor files and website); conducting temperature checks on perishable goods and maintaining our log for proper food handling compliance; cooling our vendors with chilled Florida water on exceptionally hot or humid days; helping staff stock supplies, and clean and stock market bathrooms.

We need additional market day volunteers during special events, which occur about once a month. (Examples include our Bastille Day celebration, CCFM Birthday Party, and the Yamboree.) Volunteers assist our cooking demonstration chefs; take photos, lead kids’ crafts, and

even emcee. Altogether, we maintain a corps of 20-30 volunteers (excluding our Board members and our fundraising committee) about 15 of who work weekly. The Portland Farmers Market posts its volunteer job descriptions online (www.portlandfarmersmarket.org/Volunteers.htm). By making the job descriptions sound fun—as in “Food Squad” to help “Taste the Place,” and “Veggie Valet”—the job postings serve as a recruitment and management tool—letting people know what will be expected of them before they sign up.

As our own organizational capacity has grown, we have begun utilizing volunteers to help us with outreach and delivery of programs like Meet Me at the Market, Farmers Market Bingo, and Marketeers Club. We also use volunteers to conduct price, presentation, and quality comparisons between our markets and local groceries; and serve as “Mystery Chefs” (anonymous consumers who purchase, prepare, and eat a market product and rate its quality). We also utilize volunteers to help in the office with tasks like filing, data entry, and organizing photos. And, as noted, our Board serves in a voluntary capacity, as does our annual fundraising committee. We couldn’t accomplish a fraction of our work without the goodwill and great results of our loyal cadre of volunteers.

Because we’re always recruiting and incorporating new volunteers, our training program tends to be “on the job” learning by doing. A more experienced volunteer will walk a first-time volunteer through the responsibilities of set-up, break-down, or staffing the Welcome Tent, for example, or in the peculiarities of more specialized volunteer assignments, like Marketeers, or Farmers Market Bingo.

Our Markets Community Organizer communicates with our volunteers weekly by sending them an email update on projects that are coming up and opportunities to help out. When we have a lot of new programs and needs for assistance on the horizon, or a sizable batch of new volunteers, we might hold a half-day training program. Coming together as a group helps build esprit de corps among volunteers, but the difficulty of finding a time that all can attend makes group training sessions a rarity.

Make sure your liability insurance policy covers volunteers, and be sure to get signed parental consent form and emergency contact information for any volunteers under the age of 18.

Appreciating volunteers

The most important way to acknowledge your volunteers is to treat them appreciatively whenever you see them—just as you presumably treat your paid staff. The number

of quality people who work for praise alone consistently amazes us—so give it to them! It’s also great to think of innovative ways to honor your volunteers—with a dinner or luncheon, write-up in the market newsletter or on the website, a PSA mention, or some other form of appreciation.

We reward our volunteers with a market T-shirt, identifying them as VOLUNTEERS, at the conclusion of their third market-day shift. During their shifts, we also invite them to help themselves to Welcome Tent beverages. Some of our vendors offer discounts to our volunteers. We don’t make it a policy; vendors typically do it out of genuine appreciation for their assistance. During the holidays, we give volunteers market bags stuffed with goodies—some bought and some vendor-donated—along with market “tokens of our esteem.” In the past, we have hosted a volunteer appreciation party with Slow Food

leader Poppy Tooker, who has donated her home and a cooking demonstration for an event that is both social and educational. From time to time, there are other benefits—like free tickets to the Jazz Fest, participation in vendor site-visits, or free admission to our gala fundraiser in exchange for minimal assistance, like taking coats, refilling bar ice, or selling T-shirts.

We like to think that our volunteers are rewarded most of all by the satisfaction of helping marketumbrella.org fulfill its mission. Our volunteers tell us that we’re right: they don’t do it for the benefits or glamour. Still, there are times when prestige and financial remuneration do ensue: four current staff members—including Executive Director Richard McCarthy—started in the ranks of volunteers.

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Thank you for using a share document. This 4M worksheet below is to help you think through what you just read and how to apply it to your situation. Read the share titled “The Strategy of the 4Ms” to learn more about this marketumbrella.org teaching tool.

Is this issue or strategy covered in your current mission (or values)? _____

Does your management structure allow you time to handle this, or is there another organizational partner to help?

How will you communicate to others about this issue or strategy (marketing)? _____

When and how will you measure the impact of this resolution of this issue or the completion of this strategy?



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