

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers



Community organizing committees should ensure that each participating site provides sufficient volunteers and/or staff at each property to manage visitors adequately.

Your organizing committee may want to appoint one person to act as a Volunteer Coordinator. This person, if required, could assist site owners and operators with recruiting and managing volunteers. They would also coordinate any volunteer recognition initiatives.

Volunteers and/or staff at community Doors Open Ontario sites:

- ensure public safety (crowd control, removal/marking of hazards)
- provide information to the public (direct visitors to entryways, exits and washrooms; answer questions; provide directions to other Doors Open Ontario sites in the community)
- guide tours and provide interpretive materials/experiences
- protect the site (act as security attendants – security attendants should not be responsible for providing public information as it distracts their attention)
- ensure each site is easily identifiable from street through well-posted signs

Recruiting Volunteers

- Your Doors Open Ontario event should be fun and exciting. The volunteers in your community will perform important roles at each of the participating sites. When an event is perceived as fun and rewarding, it may encourage long-term volunteerism at sites where strong volunteer groups never existed before.
- Participating in Doors Open Ontario allows volunteers to contribute significantly to a regional and province-wide heritage tourism initiative. Volunteers do not need to be historians to join in the fun. Volunteers are needed in many capacities to make the event a success.
- Students and young people in your community should be encouraged to participate. Contact local high schools and have your event registered as one of the volunteer opportunities students can participate in to accumulate the 40 hours of volunteer service they require to obtain their high school diploma.
- Be patient and flexible with your volunteers. Many people are anxious to participate and assist with your event. But, it may take some guidance and encouragement until you find the right role for them.

- Volunteer recognition is important. A volunteer that feels their time was well spent and their efforts were appreciated will return to help in future years.

Suggestions for recognition:

- Check with museums and galleries in your community to see if they would be willing to provide you with complimentary passes to their attractions. Then, hold a draw after your Doors Open Ontario event concludes. Or, if you have secured enough passes, you may be able to provide something for everyone who assisted.
- Seek a corporate sponsor who may be able to provide, T-shirts, refreshments or incentive gifts for your volunteer group.
- Hold a launch event or post-event reception to recognize your volunteers.
- Send a thank you letter to each volunteer and the site owners/operators from the community organizing committee.

Managing Volunteers

How many volunteers are needed at each Doors Open Ontario site?

- The number of volunteers required at a property depends entirely on the size of the site and how the interpretation of property is managed. If you have flyers, interpretive panels, multimedia shows, lectures, exhibitions and/or informal tours that enable visitors to learn about the site through self-guided instruction, the number of volunteers required will be reduced.
- Many previous Doors Open Ontario community participants have found that six to eight volunteers per site, per shift are sufficient.
- Ideally, each site should be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. You could have two three-hour shifts – which means you will need twice as many volunteers – or one six-hour shift.
- If you opt for longer shifts, appoint a “floater” who can relieve volunteers throughout the day. Ensure that each volunteer has an opportunity to take a break during the shift. See *“What are the roles of the volunteers?”* below for information on the “floater” or “key contact” person.

How should you prepare your volunteers before the event?

- Identify the capabilities and interests of your volunteers. Assign roles that are appropriate for each volunteer.
- Hold an information session where all volunteers can meet to discuss their roles. Ensure that everyone understands his or her role. Remember, volunteers do not have to be a heritage expert or historian to participate.

- Ask your volunteers to work with site experts to develop answers to questions that visitors commonly ask. Most visitors will just want the highlights.
- Provide information packages to your volunteers with key messages and information about the site and the Doors Open Ontario program.
- Let volunteers know if someone asks a question that they cannot answer, they should direct them to someone who may know more – for example, a key volunteer who is an historian or heritage expert.
- Each volunteer should know where the washrooms and exits are located, as well as the locations of – and directions to – other participating sites in your community.
- Each volunteer should know basic procedures in case of an emergency. The “key contact” (see below) should be in charge of each site each day of the event. This individual will organize visitors and volunteers should an emergency arise.
- If merchandise is available at your site, ensure that volunteers know where to direct visitors should they wish to purchase something.
- If visitors wish to contact the Ontario Heritage Trust, have volunteers refer them to the *Doors Open Ontario Guide* for contact information. (The *Doors Open Ontario Guide* – supplied by the Ontario Heritage Trust – should be distributed along with your local Doors Open community event brochure/guide/map.)
- Ensure volunteers are familiar with the survey they will be distributing to visitors who tour the site.

What roles can site volunteers play?

- **Greeters/Visitor Counters:** Ideally, two people should be positioned at the main entrance of each site to count (either manually or with a mechanical counter) visitors as well as provide basic information about the site. An accurate head-count is vital to measure the success of your community event and in future planning of the Doors Open Ontario program. Distribute handouts to all visitors as they arrive. Let them know which rooms are open in your site. If there is a guided tour, direct them to an area where they can wait for the next tour to commence. If members of the media visit, direct them to the Key Contact who will ensure that they get the information they require. Greeters should also give visitors a Doors Open Ontario Visitor Survey (supplied by the Ontario Heritage Trust as part of the Resource Centre Materials) or your locally designed survey.
- **Sales Agents:** Sales agents, if required, may be needed to conduct any cash sales at the site (merchandise, refreshments, etc.). They may also be responsible for re-stocking inventory, managing the cash float, and preparing sales reports after each shift. Money should be handed off to the Key Contact at each site.

- **Information Agents:** At least two people should be assigned to this post. Information agents will either conduct guided tours of the site, or they will be positioned in key locations throughout the site to answer visitors' questions.
- **Floater:** One person may act as a Floater. The Floater should be able to do all of the above jobs. The Key Contact (see below) may double as the Floater if you find that you do not have sufficient volunteers to cover all shifts. The Floater may relieve each volunteer for a break during the day, assuming the roles and responsibilities of each volunteer during that break time. The Floater also ensures that all volunteers are prepared and comfortable with their roles.
- **Key Contact:** One person should be on hand to oversee all volunteers. This individual could also be the central resource for all media. The Key Contact sets up interviews with volunteers or visitors and assists in determining the best locations for photographs. The Key Contact is also in charge should an emergency arise. At the end of each day, the Key Contact ensures that the site is secured, the money and Doors Open Ontario Visitor Surveys are collected, and that all Doors Open Ontario signs are brought inside and secured.