HOW TO START

Before you begin recruiting volunteers (see How To Recruit Volunteers), you should come up with an outline of the projects you need help with, and create a schedule that involves a few different volunteering opportunities.

Volunteer Schedules

Different organizations have different schedules for their volunteer programs. Because Asia Catalyst volunteers are mostly students, we usually follow a four-month term. Whichever time period works for your organization, it's a good idea to make it a set term with a beginning and end, and include the following:

1. A recruitment period, where you reach out to new volunteers
2. An orientation, when all new volunteers are trained
3. A regular schedule of projects
4. A mid-term evaluation meeting with each volunteer
5. An end-of-term exit interview
6. A meeting or event to thank everyone

Benefits Of A Scheduled Cycle for Volunteers

- It's a good bonding experience for new volunteers to start and go through orientation together.
- If the volunteer is not a good fit for any reason—for example, she may be unsuited to the job or cannot get along with others—you have a chance to end the relationship naturally at the end of the term.
- If the volunteer is great, you can offer her a promotion or new responsibilities at the end of the term.

Designing A Schedule

If your organization has never had a structured volunteer program before, we recommend designing a volunteer schedule with just one or two weekly projects that require small groups of volunteers.
Perhaps a few times a year, add on a work party or public event/action where all the volunteers and other supporters are invited to participate.

An example of a simple program for a new group of sex workers

☑ Street-level outreach to sex workers | A group of volunteers commits to spending two or three hours on one night a week talking to sex workers on the street and in their work places, and distributing condoms and health and safety information.

☑ A weekly activity night for kids | One evening a week, the office is open to anyone who wants to bring children by for group activities, while the parents have tea and chat. A group of volunteers is responsible for opening the office, buying refreshments, planning activities for kids, and coordinating the activities.

☑ A monthly meeting | Once a month, all members and supporters of the organization meet to discuss what happened in the past month, what could have been done better or differently, and what they will do for the next month.

☑ An annual night of commemoration | Once a year, all volunteers come together to light candles and remember colleagues and friends who have been lost in the past year.

These projects do not require a high level of expertise and can be taught in one-day training. Volunteers who do well at the basic tasks can take on more responsibility, or leadership roles by becoming more vocal and active in the monthly meetings.

A Few Things To Keep In Mind
- Set a clear time commitment. Discuss with the volunteer how much time she can commit, and encourage her to be realistic. Give her a lighter load to start with to assess how fast and how well she works, and adjust accordingly.
- Make it easy for volunteers to succeed. Make it very clear what the goals are for each project, and set goals that are easy to achieve. This will make it easier for volunteers to feel successful.
- Set clear guidelines and steps for the project. This will help everyone to keep up with what is happening and who is responsible for what.

> Volunteers who feel that they have failed, or that they have taken on more responsibility than they can manage, will stop coming in.

- Include gradual steps in which volunteers can take on greater responsibility and develop new skills. Let new volunteers know that if they are successful, there are opportunities for them to grow in the organization and take on more leadership. Someone who comes often and contributes a lot could become the head of a volunteer project later, or could have the opportunity for special training or travel.

This exercise should result in a volunteer projects list that includes the following:
- A greater number of volunteer jobs requiring minimal skills and short, concentrated effort with a clear goal.
- A smaller number of volunteer jobs that involve more challenging tasks, and more responsibility for coordinating other people.
- Clear time slots for each volunteer so that the work is shared and scheduled in advance.

DESIGNING A PROJECT

Begin by assessing what areas you need help in, and what skills are needed for each area. This will determine the kinds of people you need to recruit. For instance, if you are publishing a magazine, you may need people to help with planning the issue, writing articles, editing them, designing the magazine, finding pictures and getting permission to use them, and distributing the magazine. You may need people who are good writers, or who are very detail-oriented.

A very different project would involve visiting women at home who have health problems and giving them support and assistance. For that project, you might need people who are empathetic, who know a little bit about medicine, who know something about the local hospital system, and who can help women to get the medical care they need.

> For each project, you should be able to answer the following questions:
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> ☑ What is the project, and why does it need to be done?
> ☑ What are the steps involved in getting it done? ("First we need to do X, then we need to do Y…")
> ☑ How many people do you need for the project, and what skills do they need to have?
> ☑ How much time each week does each person need to spend to get the project done?
> ☑ Is there an end date for this project, or is it an ongoing service?
> ☑ Do you need security checks for the volunteers (for instance, if they will be working with children, or handling funds)?
> ☑ Will you have to provide transportation for volunteers?

Based on your answers to the questions in the box, you will be able to fill out the Template | Project Chart. You will also want to keep track of your volunteers with the Template | Volunteer Database.