Secrets of Successful Health Science Library Volunteer Programs

Cara Marcus, MSLIS, AHIP, Director of Library Services, Brigham and Women’s Faulkner Hospital

Who volunteers in health science libraries?

• Students – LIS, Medical, Nursing, Undergraduate, High School, etc.
• Retirees (including librarians)
• Job-seekers – new graduates and those “between jobs”
• Former at-home parents
• Those who can’t or don’t need to work full-time
• Inquisitive minds and explorers of new careers
• Sources for volunteers include HR, Professional Development, Volunteer, and Community departments. Try schools, senior centers and agencies. Also, consider your patrons!
• BWFH Library engaged 55 volunteers since 2008, who contributed 1,189 volunteer hours over the past year

How can volunteers add value to your library?

• Provide door-to-door service – delivering research and books to your patrons, distributing and posting library flyers (networking!)
• Act as greeters at library tables at health fairs and conferences
• Talented volunteers can create original artwork, or play an instrument or sing at programs
• Students and interns may have a course research requirement that can lead to a valuable project. One of our volunteers mapped data on questions asked to number of library resources owned by format.
• Contribute to library newsletters and write book and media reviews
• Speak on a topic they’re an expert in
• Fundraising – Library “Friends”

Tips for recruitment, training, retention and management

• Interview potential volunteers to find out their reasons for volunteering, and if the library would be a good match
• Write job descriptions with title, qualifications, and responsibilities
• Include volunteers in staff meetings and trainings. Meet one-to-one with each volunteer to provide feedback, and conduct an annual review
• Attend organizational events that recognize your volunteers. Make opportunities for social events.
• Offer opportunities for learning and familiarization with the collection
• Showcase your volunteers’ accomplishments prominently
• Let volunteers interact with patrons

Bibliography


And many thanks to the BWFH Library Services Volunteers for all their feedback on this poster.