

# Volunteers at Orienteering Events

## A Report on the Volunteer Survey

A few months ago a survey was sent to club presidents and others about volunteers in the Orienteering USA clubs. This report has three parts. The first includes some general thoughts about the responses to the questionnaire and other communications with people about who is and who makes a good volunteer. The second part involves summaries of the answers to each question asked on the survey. And third, all the responses to the questionnaire are included. This will allow you to draw your own conclusions from the responses.

In no particular order, here are some general thoughts...

- The volunteer who runs the club web site gives purpose to the club, and encourages the volunteers and is exceedingly valuable. Praise these individuals.
- Clubs with JROTC units should encourage them to run events and, perhaps, donate to their program.
- Incentives for our volunteers are often appreciated and some of the ways to reward them are through the ability to “earn” meet fees or club dues. Volunteers also are much happier when they get to run a course, so meet workers should work in shifts.
- To be happy volunteers, they need to know what is expected of them. Old hands are happy doing a variety of jobs; new ones need help, but don’t micromanage.
- Some clubs (generally the larger ones) organize events so you “have your event” that you plan for and know is “yours.” Sometimes this is done on a two year rotation. Officers of the club also may be happy to have set terms of office, such as 2 years, so that they realize they are not in it “for life.”

## Questionnaire Summary

What follows are summaries of what was said in response to the questions of the survey. The summaries are just that and may not be perfect generalizations of the responses. After these summaries all of actual responses to the questions are listed so you can draw your own conclusions. The questions are in **bold** print.

### **Approximately how many local meets do you have a year?**

Clubs run between 6 and 30 events, depending on the size of the club. Some clubs try to run an A-meet on a regular basis.

### **How many volunteers, on average, help out at these meets?**

As a general comment, many responses were just numbers, they ranged from “1 -2” to 14

It seems that many clubs run on the “one man show” until the day of the event. The meet director is also the course setter but volunteers show up for the event. Sometimes, there are one or two other people involved initially such as the course setter.

Larger clubs are able to divide the pre-event day duties among a larger group but the critical time seems to be on the day of the event.

**What are the first three characteristics that you think make these people quality volunteers? Among club members: passion for orienteering (and introducing it to others), technical or organizational skills, reliability?**

Basically, good volunteers are reliable and can do the task assigned to them. The tasks vary in difficulty with course setting being something not everyone can do while checking people in is something that can be taught quickly.

Qualities of good volunteers included: reliability, attention to detail, “not having small kids to deal with,” knowledge of the sport so that they can talk with people about orienteering, and that they volunteer and then volunteer again.

**What things do you think make these volunteers keep coming back and volunteering?**

Volunteers come with different skill sets and one person said “alive, breathing without assistance” is good and comes and helps when I ask. The best ones are the regulars who know how to do their jobs and do them well year after year. They enjoy the sport, enjoy working with people and feel appreciated. In small clubs with small meets, often family members are the “volunteers.” Sometimes you have to ask them to come but they come and enjoy it.

**How many new volunteers have you gotten in the past year to work at your meets?**

It seems that some clubs get lots of new help and others very little. It may be that meet directors just need to ask new people if they would like to help at a meet. New people in the group may not think that they can help. Some clubs see a real need for new blood because the clubs will die if they don't have new people helping out.

**What reasons do you think caused these people to start volunteering?**

The answers to this question were all over the map, no pun intended. The responses ranged from “only because I ask” to they think it is fun. Some people are thinking enough to realize that help is needed and then offer to help out. It was mentioned that new members feel wanted if they are asked to help. There doesn't seem to be any magic reason for getting people there.

**What benefits do you give your volunteers? This might include “just a pat on the back,” “free passes to future local meets,” or something else?**

Mostly, clubs just give a pat on the back to the volunteers and monetary rewards are limited to free entry to the local meets. For A-meets, some clubs provided housing if it is an issue or pay for travel

expenses for people working on major tasks. Coupons for local meet fees seem to be quite common and essential people for A-meets may get more. Some give people “chances” in drawings for prizes for each time they volunteer and other such things to make people feel that their efforts are acknowledged. Other “benefits” are also given to reward people but many clubs also write about the volunteers on their web pages to emphasize the efforts made.

**Do you see more or fewer new volunteers recently? Do you see trends?**

People come and go from clubs and it generally has to do with age. Some people get so old that they can't participate, others stop helping as they start to raise families, and the college kids tend to stop because they move away from their local clubs or are too busy. Most clubs seem to say that it has been harder to get volunteers in the past few years.

**What thoughts do you have, if any, that might help other clubs increase the number of volunteers at their meets that your club does or doesn't do?**

Volunteers like to do their jobs without being “micromanaged” while at the same time if they have questions, they want to have answers. One club gets groups together to put on meets and members of the group want to know when “their” week is. Clubs need to create a “community” so that people feel welcome and a part of the process.

**Below are the responses that were given to the questionnaire from various clubs. Some of the details in the responses may be more helpful than the summaries that are given above.**

**Approximately how many local meets do you have a year?**

Clubs run between 6 and 30 events, depending on the size of the club. Some clubs try to run an A-meet on a regular basis.

**How many volunteers, on average, help out at these meets?**

As a general comment, many responses were just numbers, they ranged from “1 -2” to 14

- a. In the past roughly 8, this year 15.
- b. The same 5-6 club members, aside from meet director and course setter, and up to 12 student volunteers (we have an official assisting school for each event, and we donate \$200 to their program in thanks)
- c. Local - average 6 (low 4, high 12) A-meet - 30+
- d. Meet director + 1 - 3
- e. About a half dozen day of event at every meet
- f. About 3-6 people per meet.
- g. 8-10, in addition to the course setters

- h. In general, our local events are all “one-man-shows,” up until event day. Then sometimes one other person is planned to help out with registration and instruction, while various members will pitch in as they arrive and may be needed. This has changed a bit in the last couple years as we now usually offer SI e-punch, and that requires one more person pretty much dedicated to that task. The SI person also has to do some pre-event work to get the course data on their computer, etc. Our club currently has only two people who can perform this task, and it is something of a potential staffing bottleneck.
- i. Core group of 6 people
- j. Average amount of volunteers, including control pickup is 7
- k. 1-2 for each meet

**What are the first three characteristics that you think make these people quality volunteers? Among club members: passion for orienteering (and introducing it to others), technical or organizational skills, reliability?**

- a. Empathy for meet directors/course setters, loyalty to the club, ability to get out to the farthest controls after running a course (in Tucson, we don't care about quality; we'll take anyone with a pulse)
- b. 1) They show up as promised 2) Attention to detail, attempt to do the work correctly 3) Intelligent, make suggestions to improve the process
- c. Enthusiasm for orienteering
- d. Most are the meet director's family members or meet directors from other meets returning the favor.
- e. Experience. Willingness to help. Unencumbered by small kids.
- f. Reliable, want to help out, experienced
- g. Free time, knowledge of orienteering, desire to have others enjoy the sport as they have.
- h. 1) That they volunteer. 2) They volunteer again. 3) They know what they are doing, set good courses; handle registration, instruction, etc. for the meet; and generally all around do a good job with all aspects of the meet.
- i. 1) Their interest in having the meet, and therefore the club, be successful. 2) Some volunteers are susceptible to begging and nagging, which we occasionally have to do to get enough volunteers.
- j. Knowledge (and experience, of orienteering, map-updating, and more). Reliability (and “work ethic”). Personality (Microsoft doesn't think that's a word, but you have to be able to be friendly for several hours -- in sometimes trying circumstances -- if you want people to have a positive memory, and maybe come back; that ain't easy for curmudgeons like me, but I try).
- k. Enthusiasm, skill & friendliness
- l. They enjoy setting meets. They have the skills to do it well
- m. Willingness, experience, knowledge
- n. They are longtime members. They are committed to orienteering. They know how to run meets
- o. Dedication to the sport and club, willingness to give back, and suckers... I mean these are the ones the club's schedule benefits most so they should be helping out.

- p. Love of sport, knowledge of orienteering, love of Alaska

**What things do you think make these volunteers keep coming back and volunteering?**

- a. Alive, breathing without assistance, IQ above 100.
- b. Primarily their passion for orienteering -- most of the regulars do the same job at every meet, some of them year after year. They help run the meets so that they have opportunities to go out and orienteer.
- c. Fear that the club will fold if they don't help out
- d. 1) Enjoyment of the sport and they realize it doesn't happen without volunteers. 2) Challenge and satisfaction, they are doing their part to keep the club viable. 3) The club returns appreciation, orienteers thank the volunteers before leaving the meet site.
- e. Generally because no one else volunteers
- f. They enjoy the sport and they know without their help, the club could not continue. They also enjoy helping and interacting with other participants at the meets.
- g. They love coming to meets and they just want to help. Apart from the Meet Director incentive, I'm not sure there is anything else in particular that makes them want to do it, except for maybe some camaraderie. The exception maybe control pickup which is a chance to get in a little more orienteering before they go home.
- h. Many are same people that always volunteer. Often the meet director recruits family and friends.
- i. Free meet entry
- j. Free time, having fun working with other volunteers, having fun teaching new people, desire to make the next meet better than the last one based on what they learned from the previous experience.
- k. If we didn't do it, it wouldn't happen
- l. They love the sport and enjoy helping others enjoy it. Except for setter and vetter, everyone still gets to compete.
- m. They like orienteering a lot
- n. They come back for the orienteering. They volunteer because they recognize that the meets could not take place without their help.
- o. Love of the sport. Visiting and working and sharing with those in our local "O" Community. Seeing that developing courses and updating maps and setting controls are all good activities for furthering your own "O" skills. Doing what you can to offer opportunities for orienteering to both the veterans and the newbies in order to continue and grow the sport.
- p. John, our Club President, praises in newsletter and sets a great example by doing most of the work
- q. Their work is appreciated. There are no internal conflicts in the club
- r. Combination of sense of obligation and desire to keep events happening
- s. See last question
- t. I get the meet directors and the course setters, the meet director is in charge of getting volunteers. Who says they come back, I get meet directors and course setters to put on one

meet a year. Most of the rest of the board then help out usually at the meets. The core group of people who pick up controls is the same 4 guys who go out after for beer and burgers. We have made it known that we do this to most people.

- u. Love of sport and need for volunteers
- v. I ask them to come back.

**How many new volunteers have you gotten in the past year to work at your meets?**

- a. 1-2, 10, 2 or 3, 3, 5, about 10, 1, 5, and 4 were the number answers.
- b. I would guess we got about 7-10 new volunteers this year, mostly brought in by existing volunteers to help with easier meet jobs. About 5-7 volunteers who moved up to the more technically demanding jobs. It's highly variable from year to year.
- c. We have maybe 2 - 4 new and have lost about the same in the past several years.
- d. Quite a few (but don't have a specific number)
- e. A small handful, maybe up to 5 people??
- f. None, really. We've had a good number of "new" volunteers in the sense that they are new to us, but they're established orienteers who have moved to our area and become involved in our club. We've had no genuinely new blood for a long, long time. It will be a point of discussion at our upcoming semi-annual meeting. Although our club is a good solid club and has been for some time, it is clear that it will die out in not too many years unless something changes.
- g. 10-12, not counting boy scouts who help at a meet to get their merit badge and then never contribute again, sometimes never come to another meet at all
- h. I don't think we added anyone in the past year, but I could be forgetting someone. We added one new local Meet Director in 2010, and we have slowly added a number of people who are willing to pick up controls after an event (which I have not been including previously in my discussion of volunteers; while useful, I don't see this in the same class as helping to create, develop, run events).
- i. About 12 rotate
- j. For meet directors and course setters 5 total, that did not do this last year.
- k. 10-20 percent attrition and replacement per year

**What reasons do you think caused these people to start volunteering?**

- a. Excitement after discovering orienteering, and the desire to help evangelize to others
- b. Nobody steps forward in Tucson. They all are responding to begging. Therefore, they had no reason.
- c. A good president who pays attention to potential volunteers and ASKS. And is careful to match them to the right job. We usually get them first as control pickup helpers, which is the easiest job for any orienteer, but then you have to let them in on what it takes to take the next step and back them up with training and mentors.
- d. They simply realized we were short handed and offered to help
- e. All the new people see the dire need.
- f. Newly interested in orienteering and just want to lend a hand.

- g. Being asked. A new VP for events brings in new people.
- h. Recognized that volunteers make the meet go, and a way to be in the group
- i. Just learned about the sport, thought it was fun and wanted to help out, and the desire to help out friends.
- j. Guilt; no really that orienteering attracts good people.
- k. Enjoyed orienteering and enjoyed the other core members of the club.
- l. Usually, they are people who have come to several previous meets and have seen that others were volunteering in order to make the meet happen. Then, they want "to do their part" and volunteer themselves.
- m. We (the older hands) thought they were ready, and we asked them to do it. You have to ask (and tell them you think they are now quite capable, and that you and the rest of the club will back them up and help as needed). Only a very few just volunteer out-of-the-blue.
- n. President asks
- o. Lots of enthusiasm
- p. New member enthusiasm; being asked to help.
- q. Interested in orienteering, or particular interest in the spot we're using
- r. Same answer as no. 2
- s. Love of sport and need for meet directors
- t. I asked

**What benefits do you give your volunteers? This might include "just a pat on the back," "free passes to future local meets," or something else?**

- a. Mainly it's pats on the back. For our two-day events, where lodging is generally necessary, the meet director and course setter get lodging paid for by the club. In the past, we've "comped" meet fees for the rest of the season for those that serve as meet director or course setter for any event. However, most people voluntarily paid anyway, so that's no longer an official policy; in some cases where income was an issue, due to unemployment, for example, we quietly don't charge those volunteers anything.
- b. Thanks in the meet write up. At the end of the year, course setters and meet directors are thanked again in "The Saints of Orienteering" article which states how many events they have set/directed. No swag.
- c. All volunteers, no matter how small the job, get a free coupon for entry at a local meet. Meet directors & their families get free local meet entry for a year, plus \$75 stipend toward their expenses. Plus pats on the back and thanks on the GAOC net and at the AGM. Offers of solutions/assistance if problems occur, minimize criticism.
- d. No fee if they want to run a course on the day they volunteer.
- e. Meet directors get free club family memberships. Those who help get mentioned and thanked in the meet review which is posted along with results on our web site.
- f. Meet Director gets free entries to all local meets for entire family for a year. They also are generally course setters for their own events. Other "on the day" volunteers get a "one free entry" pass.

- g. NEOC has tried several, including free passes to a future local meet, season pass for meet directors, volunteer raffle at the end of the year. However, this year NEOC membership includes free passes to all local meets, so the Board of Directors has discussed (but not reached a conclusion) on possibly giving away merchandize to meet directors (such as a Nalgene).
- h. Free meet entry ; enter their name for each time they volunteer in MNOC annual volunteer prize drawing (around 25 prizes ~ \$15 value, can only win once)
- i. The benefits are pretty much just a "pat on the back." We haven't thought much about any more than that.
- j. Mostly pats on the back; we plan to institute free passes, probably more for the big jobs like setter and vetter.
- k. I think our club members go out of their way to acknowledge and thank the volunteers for each meet, and praise the courses. The courses are almost always good courses, with good maps and good map printing, so the praise is sincere.
- l. Volunteers have their entry fee waived for a course where they volunteer. For course setters/meet directors, they are reimbursed for the things they buy for the meet and the travel they do.
- m. Zilch. Yes, they get the "pat" and our thanks. We (the older hands) try to be sure to reinforce the appreciation for their efforts.
- n. Recognition in the newsletter and two Pizza parties per year
- o. Appreciation. Recognition on the website. Inclusion in more club decision making.
- p. At the HVO AGM, 3 drawings are held... 2 for event helpers--each winner gets \$50 check; 1 for EDs/CSs--winner gets \$100 check
- q. No fees. Thanks. Free BBQ meals at the summer meets, and brownies and hot drinks at the winter ones
- r. This year we offered a season pass and membership to any non board member to put on a meet, this is a \$50 value. Did it really motivate anyone, not sure till I talk to them. But a generous offer.
- s. "Pat on the back" and Orienteering Club engraved beer mug

**Do you see more or fewer new volunteers recently? Do you see trends?**

- a. Nothing.
- b. Fewer -- we've lost some volunteers in the past few years as their kids' other activities prevented them from participating. In general, people just seem busier. Unless they are really passionate about the sport, and have family members who either participate or facilitate, people tend to disappear after a season or two.
- c. The level of volunteers depends mostly on whether the president (or whoever does this) is making an effort to keep up with natural turnover of existing volunteers due to job transfers, injuries, etc. Trends
- d. It has definitely been harder to find volunteers in recent years
- e. Volunteers have been less and less each year for the last several years.
- f. About the same.

- g. We get enough volunteers to get by. This is the same trend that has always existed. I do not see a general decline, or an increase in volunteers.
- h. Less
- i. It's probably about the same. We usually have just enough volunteers for most meet to make it operate, but not much more than that. Oftentimes, any volunteers we get are ones who decide to help out on the day of the meet.
- j. No
- k. No
- l. Less, as in none. However, most of our maps and meets are in Fairfield County, CT, which is the strangest place I've lived in terms of people being opposed to outdoor activities. Here's a quote from a recent meeting at which a proposed expansion of an existing and quite nice hiking trail was discussed, describing what they took as the sort of people who use hiking trails
- m. We have had a few more recently; however, I don't think it is a trend.
- n. Our sample size is just too small to see any trends. I'd say the number of competent orienteers in our club has grown a little over the last few years, and we've been working on incorporating them into our event plans. We have more who are willing to do significant A Meet work than are willing to direct a local meet. But we'll be working on them to broaden their skill sets.
- o. Static
- p. No
- q. Same; No
- r. Fewer, with very rarely any under age 40
- s. About the same, except I did fill the year early with course setters, actually had someone call me to get on before it was too late. Still needed some calls and emails to get the rest of the meet directors.
- t. About steady

**What thoughts do you have, if any, that might help other clubs increase the number of volunteers at their meets that your club does or doesn't do?**

- a. No change.
- b. Our situation is a bit unusual in that about 75% of our participants are high school JROTC units. We need the schools' help in running the events because their large numbers make meets too big for 5-6 club members to pull off. But our assisting schools program has been really successful -- all of these programs are facing school budget issues, and orienteering isn't a big booster sport like football or basketball. So \$200 (\$300 if they go above and beyond; we do spot bonuses on occasion) means a lot. We've gotten new schools to volunteer thanks to these donations.
- c. None. I'm waiting for USOF to do something, anything to help small local clubs survive, even if it's just advice. Glen has not responded to direct requests.
- d. Micromanagement turns off more volunteers than anything. We get new volunteers when we make sure they are comfortable in their jobs, have training, and don't micromanage them.
- e. Working within the same group. We have small meet crews who like to work together to do a meet or two every year. As in, "When is OUR meet this year?"

- f. Too often you see "please volunteer to help" without describing what the actual job entails. The biggest deterrent to volunteering is not knowing the technical aspects. Describe the job, offer training and have written instructions (meet director manual, epunch manual, etc).
- g. **The A-meet director understands his/her #1 task is recruiting and backing up the volunteers.** Ask folks what they want to do, but have a suggestion or two for them.
- h. None. Open to suggestions.
- i. Most of our participants are recreational and not serious or competitive orienteers. Many are JROTC and Boy Scouts, they sometimes help pick-up controls after the meet but most are gone by that time. Yesterday we had our biggest meet this year, over 500 people on the courses. There was the meet director, Mark Chamley who also set the courses and did registration, his wife, Coni who was time keeper. Walter Seigenthaler and myself gave instructions to beginners before we ran the red course and a group of scouts who picked up some white and yellow controls. As you see, we have very little help and the people we have do way too much work.
- j. Engage all new attendees, but in particular those that seem to have a lasting interest, i.e. show up for at least 3 or 4 local meets.
- k. Never stop recruiting.
- l. We have little ideas on how to increase the number of volunteers. We will be looking forward to seeing what you learn from your research that we might be able to apply!
- m. We don't do it but I think the most important thing is to ask people directly if they will help with a specific task.
- n. Not much to suggest. If we have any new ideas after our upcoming meeting, I'll pass them on.
- o. We always make sure that every volunteer (aside from course setters) can run a course if s/he wants to. We split the meet work into two shifts to make this happen.
- p. I wish I had something significant to say here, but if I knew how to do this, I would have done it. All I would say is encourage those who can do things, and yet don't discourage those who can't do things yet. Try to create a community.
- q. Volunteer hours could "earn" meet fees and dues. We would try this if we needed more volunteers.
- r. We haven't had success getting more people involved. It is just the occasional person who chooses to get involved because they enjoy it.
- s. Just ask
- t. 0
- u. On the online registration signup, there is a place to check if they are willing to volunteer at that meet. Also the meet director can call anyone on the registration for that meet and ask them if they would be willing to volunteer also, since they are already coming out that day. Also last year and this year our club did/will sponsor a van trip to a Midwest meet. The club pays for the van and gas. At the St Louis relay champs we had 9 club members take advantage of this offer and we had two solid teams at the relay and won the 8 point division. This improves club members knowing each other and socialization.
- v. Active volunteer recruiting, meet director mentor program, and meet director training
- w. Ask more people.

## **Other comments**

I think it is wiser to simplify events so that you need less volunteers, than to look for ways to increase the number of volunteers. Of course, when the strategic plan calls for increasing volunteers, then that becomes the objective over doing things in a more simple way.

Badger events are generally run by 1 person. They design and set the 2 courses, run registration, start and finish. If they need assistance on the day of the event, I assist or I ask someone there to help out. Control pickup is done by asking whoever is around to pick up. With only 2 courses it isn't so bad if volunteers are in short supply