



Invitation Strategy: Four Easy Steps

Why do some committees, organizations, or other groups seem to have more volunteers than they need while others say, “We can’t get anyone to help?” There are many possible reasons. One key factor is an effective invitation strategy.

Before You Start

- **Establish a prayerful setting**
 - You are inviting others to share in a ministry of the parish. In a very real way, you are partnering with Christ who invites.
- **Get organized**
 - You should be informed about the program and be enthusiastic and personally committed.
 - You should enlist the help of parish staff and other lay persons.
 - Set up a timeline for inviting for each successive season.
- **Four easy steps**
 - Introduce the method (outlined below) to those you have invited to assist in the discernment, making sure that all understand.
 - Strongly encourage those who are participating to think of parishioners who are not already involved in more than one parish activity. It is important to invite those who are not involved in order to succeed in the long term.

The Four-Step Invitation Method

The first thing to do is nominate someone to act as secretary for the meeting and to record the proceedings.

Materials needed: Large sheets of newsprint and markers; paper and pens

1. Personal Reflection

Prior to the meeting, provide each person with the list of responsibilities of the volunteers who are to be invited as

- small-community leaders

- invitation ministry volunteers
 - parish mission team members
- Each person reflects prayerfully about those people he or she knows in the parish and about the gifts they have that equip them for one of these roles.
- Each person writes down the names that come to mind.
 - Next to each name, each person makes a note of the qualities the person has which would make him or her suitable for the particular role (e.g., someone with leadership skills, a creative thinker, an organizer, someone who is welcoming and accepting of others).

2. Communal Reflection

- At the meeting, all those involved in the process come with lists of names and qualities of potential candidates. The papers are all placed at the center of the table for a time of prayer. All pray for themselves, that they may be open to the Spirit, pray for those whose names are on the papers, and pray, too, that the team will be open to new names that come to mind during the process.
- Next, one person in the circle takes his or her paper and reads one name and the qualities listed. The meeting secretary puts the name on the newsprint. If others in the group have brought this same name, then they name any additional qualities. The meeting secretary puts a check mark next to the person's name on the newsprint.
- If no one else has the same name, the next person reads the first name on his or her list along with the qualities, and any others who have that name can add whatever else they may have noted.
- The process continues in the same way until everyone in the circle has read all the names on his or her list and all candidates have been listed on the newsprint.

3. Discernment

- The parish team coordinator invites everyone to reflect prayerfully on the list of names during some time of silence. This time may be brought to a close by praying the Lord's Prayer or some other familiar prayer.
- The parish team coordinator reminds the group that they are looking for those who are not already involved in more than one parish activity or ministry.
- Then the floor is opened for any additional reflections. Together the team draws up the final list of candidates to be invited.
- Sometimes a member of the group may say, "Oh, N__ will never say yes," or "She just has too much to do." It is always better to let the person make his or her decision rather than rule someone out ahead of time.

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4. Invitation

There are five stages to the invitation process:

1. **A decision** is made regarding who will invite each of the candidates. This decision may be based on how well one of those in the circle knows the person, who is most likely to get a positive response, and so forth. (Normally it is not necessary for the pastor to do the inviting, but sometimes he may be the best person.)
2. **Preparation** for the invitation.
Those who are inviting others
 - receive a list that includes the qualities for which each person is recognized and their contact information
 - contact the candidates to set up a time to meet to learn about *ARISE* and, eventually, to be invited to serve. Never invite over the phone or by email.
3. **Meeting with the candidates**

At the agreed time, those who are inviting meet with the candidates and

- with energy and enthusiasm describe why *ARISE* is being implemented in the parish, why it is important and helpful.
- describe the role of a leader and explain that there will be formal training as well as on-going support as the process unfolds. Assure candidates they do not have to “have all the answers.”
- clearly invite the candidates to serve in the new ministry, letting them know all the qualities that have been recognized in them and how the group has prayerfully discerned to call them.
- bring the meeting to a close
 - If the candidate has agreed,*
give him or her written information regarding the leader’s role.
 - If the candidate has not immediately agreed,*
offer to give him or her some time to think it over and ask if it would be alright to get in touch again in a few days for an answer.
- end with a short prayer and assure those who are still discerning that you will continue to pray with them.

Important! Do not leave it to the candidate to get in touch with you. It is much more effective to leave the person space so that he or she can pray, reflect, talk it over with a family member, but do set a time when you will speak with the candidate again, and you should take the initiative to make the contact.

4. Follow-up

- if the person said yes immediately: make another contact and offer to answer any other questions that may have arisen since the meeting
- if the person declined immediately: contact the candidate in person or through a letter or note, thanking the person for giving of his or her time and willingness to meet
- for those who are taking more time to make the decision: at the appointed time, contact them to ask how they are doing with their decision, answer any questions. If more time is requested, grant the time, but always arrange it so that you are the one who gets back to them.

When candidates accept, take care to give them the necessary materials before they come to their first meeting.

5. Integration

Invite the new parish team members to a meeting. Introduce and welcome them.

After their training workshop, spend some time discussing the role and responsibilities of a leader and continue to assist them.

Conclusion

Many a great program has gone awry and many great volunteers have dropped out because volunteers were not sufficiently integrated into the program, because they were not trained or because they felt unsupported once they were given their responsibilities.

A solid invitation strategy is a good start. However, it is not enough. Once your volunteers are onboard, it is your responsibility to tend to training, mentoring, and supporting them so that they will experience success and gain confidence.

When we set out to invite others, it is helpful to reflect on Jesus' experience of invitation—his successes (Matthew 4:18-22/ Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 9:9/Mark 2:13-14), and his disappointments (Mark 10:17-30; John 6:52-66). When we invite, we are the voice of Jesus and the heart of Jesus. Many will accept the invitation, but—as Jesus did—we need to leave them free to accept or to walk away. It is God's work we are doing, not ours, and God will take care of it.

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