

impact

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programs that are making a
difference in Idaho.

Volunteer Expo connects citizens to organizations needing volunteers

AT A GLANCE

Lemhi County could not function without volunteers for the many community organizations. The Volunteer Expo provided an opportunity for citizens to meet directly with organizations.

The Situation

Lemhi County could not function without volunteers and volunteer organizations. The challenge for organizations is to find volunteers. The challenge for potential volunteers is how to find/contact organizations. Many organizations, such as search and rescue, the fire department and Whitewater Amateur Radio Club, do not have a “store-front” where potential volunteers could just stop by.

The Volunteer Expo was the idea of two Whitewater Therapeutic Recreational Riding Association (WTRRA) board members discussing how they would like to grow the program but needed more volunteers. As they discussed it, they came to realize they were not the only organization needing volunteers.

Our Response

A committee was formed that included University of Idaho Extension, 4-H, WTRRA, the library district and Sacagawea center. Members of the committee were all facing the same problem – finding volunteers. As we discussed how to connect potential volunteers to organizations, we decided to host a volunteer expo. This would be a “one-stop-shop” where interested citizens could visit with organization representatives.



Eliza Lish, 4-H assistant, visits with potential volunteers at the Volunteer Expo. Photo by Shannon Williams.

The committee brainstormed a list of organizations that utilize volunteers to accomplish their mission, and each committee member contacted people on the list. A Microsoft form was developed for organizations to use to register for the expo. The form collected contact information, the mission of the organization and how and when volunteers were utilized. This information was used to develop a volunteer directory.

Each organization paid \$10 to help cover cost of renting a venue and advertising. They were furnished with an eight-foot table and two chairs for the event. Eighteen different organizations participated.

A flyer was developed to invite the public to attend and was sent through various email lists. A “Voice of the Valley” spot on KSRA radio also advertised the event.

Facebook was the major advertising venue. Many organizations advertised the Expo on their Facebook pages. Each organization also had the opportunity to donate a door prize.

Program Outcomes

The Volunteer Expo was held in February 2026 at the Elks Lodge in Salmon from 4-7 p.m. Each organization participating received a copy of the volunteer directory. As citizens arrived, they signed in, provided their contact information and received a copy of the volunteer directory.

Community members browsed the booths and engaged with the volunteer organizations. At each booth, they were given a ticket for a chance to win door prizes that were donated by the volunteer organizations.

As people left, we asked them to complete a four-question survey where they ranked responses from one to four, with one as strongly disagree to four as strongly agree. We had 40 of 50 participants complete the survey. Participants were asked if volunteering made them feel more connected to the community. Ninety-eight percent of the participants strongly agreed with this statement. When asked if they planned to volunteer for an organization represented that night, 83% said yes. Eighty-three percent felt they were more aware of positive things happening in the community. Additionally, 100% said they learned about an organization that utilizes volunteers that they did not know about before.

At the conclusion of the expo, each organization was asked four questions. Was it worth their time? Should we do it again next year? Any suggestions for improvement? Did they gain new potential volunteer contacts?

All the organizations felt it was worth their time. They also felt we should hold it again next year, and some wanted another one in six months. Most organizations reported gaining a minimum of six new potential volunteers.

Volunteer engagement provides measurable economic value to communities. The Governor's Commission on Service and Volunteerism estimates the value of volunteer time at \$27.79 per hour. If each organization added one new volunteer who volunteered for 50 hours annually, this equates to:

- An estimated 900 volunteer hours (18 organizations x 50 hours)
- An economic value of approximately \$25,001 in donated service annually.

By connecting individuals with local organizations, University of Idaho Extension helped strengthen the capacity of local organizations and increased civic engagement in Lemhi County.

The Future

As the committee met to review the event, it was decided to continue the Volunteer Expo. It will be hosted April 2027 so those who leave for the winter will have returned. Flyers will be sent to the schools with the hope of attracting high school students and young families.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Whitewater Therapeutic Recreational Riding Association
- Lemhi County Public Library Association
- Sacagawea Interpretive Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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