



## **Methods for Engagement of Community Members in Running an Innovation Center Based on experiences at Artisan's Asylum in Somerville, MA**

### **Positions**

1. Teachers
  - a. Find people who are already teaching/training people in something who would like a better/larger/better equipped space.
  - b. Find people who have hands-on skills who'd like to share them, get them to do outreach to help fill their class.
    - i. If charging fees for the classes, split income with instructors proportionally to the number of students, to help incentivize them to help you with marketing.
    - ii. If providing income to teachers, good profile is skilled craftsman/woman who needs some supplemental income.
    - iii. If not providing income, you need someone with skills or talent and free time. Are there individuals who are unemployed or out of school whom you can engage? Disabled members of the community? Someone for whom this activity can offer a sense of purpose and value.
2. Wardens/Management Volunteers
  - a. Offer people the opportunity to help make decisions about the space (tools, programs, layout, governance) in exchange for doing some of the work to keep it running. Have regular meetings in which issues are discussed and responsibilities assigned.
  - b. Responsibilities can include: class scheduling, community outreach, building maintenance, improvement projects, website building/maintenance, special events.
  - c. These people tend to be invested because they want to be in charge of something -- are often the most generous with their time, and the most difficult to manage.
  - d. Certain tasks should only be delegated to volunteers with great care: legal, financial, crucial IT infrastructure. Make sure to get the opinion of a few uninterested professionals if you can.
3. Shop Monitors/Teams
  - a. Find individuals who have skills in particular areas to take ownership over that shop/activity. They get some ability to make decisions, and may get free or discounted access to the tools and resources they need. They also often teach classes or provide safety trainings.

- b. Ideally these are skilled individuals who have a clear need and interest in the tools they're responsible for, but who are more interested in teaching than in completing their own product.
- 4. Front Desk Volunteers
  - a. Offer some special access or perk to volunteers willing to sit the front desk, keep the place open, offer tours, and answer basic questions.
  - b. These are people who want to be part of the community, but may not have a lot of practical skills to offer, and don't have a clear picture of what they want to make. Classes and social events are the best benefit for them.

## **Activities**

- 1. Building the Space
  - a. Give enthusiastic members of the community with time the opportunity to help build the space and furniture. It gives them a sense of ownership over the new space, a way for them to meet/spend time with others in their community, and an opportunity to pick up a few new fabrication skills in a way that doesn't feel arbitrary, like a class, and that doesn't require them to have a project in mind.
  - b. This is a great way to first engage people who then might take on any of the roles listed above, and get a sense of their level of commitment, reliability, availability, and attitude.
- 2. Group Fun Projects (Sculpture/ Art/ Random Inventions)
  - a. Similar to 'Building the Space', but for the more creative types, or for children or anyone who can't be trusted with infrastructure or more dangerous construction tools
  - b. A good way to test out someone who wants to take charge of something -- have them manage the project and see how well they do, what they are like with the community members
  - c. A good way to engage as a participant the kind of volunteer who might end up taking on a Front Desk Volunteer position.
- 3. Community Events
  - a. Similar to Group Fun Projects -- a good way to give limited responsibility to new volunteers, and give them the opportunity to help you with outreach to the communities. These can be a good way to get the word out to those in the community who may not understand what it is you do.
- 4. Governance/Board/Vote
  - a. In some cases, it can help to incentivize community engagement if they can elect one or more representatives to your governing board, or can participate in decision-making by voting.
  - b. It's unclear how much of a difference this makes, and there are vastly differing opinions as to whether this is a good or bad strategy -- it's certainly one that has to be handled carefully.

## **General guidelines for volunteer staff**

- 1. Make sure that volunteers don't feel too entitled to their positions
  - a. consider automatically cycling responsibilities every year in order to make sure positions are flexible and responsibilities well-documented.

- b. don't hesitate to fire volunteers with bad attitude - they'll poison the environment for everyone
- 2. Try to avoid volunteer burnout
  - a. cycling positions can help
  - b. if you can, provide avenues to learn skills they want or earn income they need