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Anita Matechuk discovered the technical communication (tech comm) field when her quilt pattern designing hobby crossed her job search. Intrigued by the field’s software programs, she decided to go back to school to get her Technical Communication Certificate from Simon Fraser University.

She joined Society for Technical Communication (STC) in 2020. Soon after, she started volunteering for the Instructional Design & Learning (IDL) special interest group (SIG) in the Secretary and Student Liaison roles. Although new to the tech comm field, she has a BASc in Electronic Systems Engineering and 14 years of experience in the banking industry.

While practicing her tech comm skills, she converted her local quilting guild into a thriving virtual guild. Her success led to teaching virtual quilting classes and motivated her to focus on the audience experience. In addition, Anita uses her skills gained from converting her quilting guild to find and encourage interested volunteers to join the IDL SIG team.
We have a choice when we search for volunteers. We can look for individuals who are willing to help us with our work or look for individuals interested in trying our work.

**IDL SIG volunteer opportunity**

Early in 2021, the IDL SIG expanded its student outreach program to include a networking event called the First Fridays at 5 (FF@5). The volunteer team mentored the student liaisons to create and present a PowerPoint presentation on what STC and the IDL SIG have to offer students.

The first presentation reached a very small audience, but the networking was enjoyable. So the team decided to try it again, with the students selecting a topic for a general IDL SIG audience. Also, the team added a webpage for the students to share articles on their presentations.

**How I use the opportunity**

I took on the role of finding and supporting FF@5 presenters. When I offer the opportunity to present, I usually receive the response, “Sure, what would you like me to talk about?” My response is always, “Whatever you want. Remember, this is for you.” We discuss what they hope to get out of it and where to find ideas for topics. I also reassure them they don’t have to do this alone and that the team provides any help they need.
Even the best product in the world still needs marketing.

STC’s greatest resource is its members, and we need to advertise how our members can connect.

**IDL SIG volunteer opportunity**

When I joined STC in 2020, I didn't know how to find anyone or anything. The only contact method I could find was the option to volunteer for the Instructional Design & Learning (IDL) special interest group (SIG) leadership team. I didn't expect my offer to be accepted, as I felt I had zero qualifications. However, I was pleasantly surprised to be welcomed to the group and found them interested in helping students learn more about STC.

**How I share the opportunity**

If I hadn’t volunteered for the IDL SIG, I probably would’ve continued to believe STC membership was about knowledge resources and not people. Instead, I began reaching out to other students and new members, wanting to share what I had gained from my STC membership. I found students on Slack and at STC events. Through these discussions, I found I wasn't alone in feeling I didn’t speak the language and didn’t belong at first.
Through our communication, I found that some individuals just needed a little direction to get started in STC, and others were interested in volunteering to experience all that STC offered. The level and type of participation need to match the individual, and I found that offering small steps worked best.
Individuals are often interested in what volunteering can provide them.

By having a conversation around what the individual is looking for, I can offer a starting point that suits them. For example, some want to become active members of the SIG and join our networking events, while others are ready to meet the volunteer team and get started on a project.

Many of the individuals I found were interested in volunteer opportunities that are hard to find through other areas:

- Knowledge resources
- Networking opportunities
- Résumé and portfolio-building opportunities
- Mentoring and support
Before I have a conversation with a possible volunteer, I need to discover who is interested. Of course, STC’s platforms aren't the only option to find possible volunteers, but the platforms are easy to use and provide me with new contacts.

Not every conversation brought in a new volunteer for the IDL SIG, but we did see an increase in our volunteers in 2021. The IDL SIG tried several new ways to attract and keep volunteers, and some were quite successful.
The IDL SIG maintains a website, STC Slack channel, and various social media platforms. While we can always improve on advertising our volunteer opportunities, one option that really worked for us this year was our toe-dip classified advertisements.

Our engaging classified ads listed available short-term roles and projects and attracted individuals who felt they didn’t have the time or experience for a leadership role. Not only did we have a volunteer to look after these toe-dips, but we started the conversation about additional volunteer opportunities.

Other options exist to help volunteers find your community. Maintaining active communication on the platforms that STC advertises your community is a good start. Don’t forget to include how to volunteer in your communication. Also, having a member attend STC New Member Meet-ups is a great way to let new members know about your community’s volunteer opportunities.
Don’t wait for a volunteer to contact you. Offer to communicate with anyone who provides you with their contact information. If they post in STC’s Slack that they are interested in volunteer opportunities or topics your community covers, send them a message offering to discuss their interest. Posting your LinkedIn profile or other contact information in the chat during STC’s New Member Meet-ups and KnowledgeXchange is another way to start the conversation.

Reaching out can feel a little vulnerable, but remember you are offering your time and opportunities. It does get easier with practice, and the ones that respond are grateful you took the time to connect.

Your community’s mailing list provides access to your members without requiring them to reach out first. Consider advertising a volunteer opportunity and how to volunteer for it in some of your email blasts.
Sure some parts of volunteering are work that someone needs to do, but for the most part, we volunteer because we want to. In addition, we all enjoy different things and are at different stages of our careers. So the odds are that someone else is interested in volunteering to do some of the work your community needs.

My first position with the IDL SIG was Student Liaison. My responsibilities included replying to any emails I received, attending leadership meetings, and letting other students know about the SIG. Basically, I was a SIG member, but the title gave me the confidence to feel I belonged and the desire to volunteer for other tasks.

I offer each individual something different based on their interests and what is happening in the SIG. My goal is to connect them to the SIG as quickly as possible and then expand our interactions from there.

Individuals have accepted my offer for:
- meeting the team
- mentoring
- networking
- meeting one-on-one
- portfolio building
You don’t want your new volunteers to feel abandoned or that they are only there to complete one task. The IDL SIG Volunteer Orientation Guide provides new IDL SIG volunteers with directions on finding things, expectations, and reassurance that they don’t have to do it alone.

Keep in touch with your volunteers. A simple “Hi, how are you?” opens the communication channels. Also, asking them if there is anything else they are interested in can lead to shy volunteers taking on a larger role they might not have otherwise.
The IDL SIG didn’t start with everything at once. We added a little more as we had time and ideas. Start with what works for your community now and expand as you go.
Thank you

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