

Strategies for Effective Management of Volunteers

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Volunteering is one of the most wide-spread activities in American society, one which has been a historical tradition. During the current era, over half of the American population regularly becomes involved in some sort of volunteer activity during the course of the year. According to U.S. Census, this amounts to over 100 million people donating time in excess of 19 billion hours a year, valued at over \$150 billion per year.

Some people have argued volunteerism is dead, simply because people in modern time are busier with everyday tasks, because of the increased number of single-parent households and cross country mobility. But it's not true. People still find time to volunteer. Volunteers come from all age groups, educational backgrounds, income levels, genders and type of employment. Almost everyone can be looked upon as a potential volunteer.

Volunteers are often called

the best-kept secret in nonprofits. Nonprofit agencies across the country report new volunteers are coming forward all the time, asking how they can become involved and make a difference. While most volunteers work with nonprofit agencies, a significant portion of them is connected with some level of government. During the last decade, volunteering for government has been one of the fastest growing areas of volunteer involvement.

Probably the biggest change has occurred in volunteering during the last 20 years has been a shift towards volunteers who prefer shorter-term commitments with agencies. This shift has been caused by a variety of factors, including greater portions of households with both parents working and greater demand by agencies for the available volunteers. Therefore, it is necessary to pay greater attention to the needs and requirements of the volunteers, including providing tasks with limited time commitment and greater flexibility in scheduling.

Understanding Why People Volunteer

Volunteers become involved for a variety of reasons. The ten most popular reasons are:

1. They desire to serve others.
2. They have a sense of pride in helping.
3. They want to make a difference.
4. They want to help someone in need.
5. They were asked to volunteer.
6. They want to share their special gifts and talents.
7. They want to feel good about themselves.
8. They are looking for a cause to believe in.
9. They volunteer because no one else has.
10. They volunteer because it is exciting for them.

Other reasons often cited include:

- Interest in the work or activity.
- Wanted to learn and gain experience.
- Had a lot of free time.
- Know someone who was involved.
- Religious concerns.

Why People Do Not Volunteer

Ever wonder why people don't volunteer? Blue Moon Communications, a fund-raising consulting firm in Delaware, conducted a survey and came up with the following reasons:

- Because no one asked me to.
- The work might be too physically demanding.
- I do not have enough time.
- They do not have child care.
- I might have to acquire some financial expenses, such as meals and parking fees.
- I am afraid I won't know how to operate equipment.

Source: "Managing A Nonprofit: How To Write Winning Grant Proposals, Work With A Board, And Build A Fundraising Program," by John Reedle with Tere Drenth, 2002

Volunteer Program Design

In order to run a successful volunteer program, you must understand it requires the same type of managerial effort any other program operation would require. Before your agency starts recruiting volunteers, you have to realize why the agency wishes to utilize volunteers and what the benefits and problems are likely to be of volunteer utilization.

Possible benefits include:

- Delivery of services at a reduced cost.
- Access to additional expertise and technical assistance.
- Better contact with the community/public recognition.
- Better assistance to clients.

Possible disadvantages include:

- Lack of control and reliability of volunteers.
- Time demands of volunteer management and supervision.
- Potential negative impact on paid jobs.
- Difficulty in recruiting enough qualified volunteers.

There are six basic strategies in the design and running of an effective volunteer program:

Job Development and Design

The work must be meaningful and significant, both to the agency and to the clientele. The work must be needed and should be interesting to someone. This means your volunteer job must have a goal or a purpose the volunteer can work to accomplish and can feel good about having achieved. Thus, volunteers need clearly defined jobs that have been thoughtfully prepared.

The keys to recruiting, motivating and supervising a volunteer are built into the job description. The job description is your planning tool to help your volunteers understand the results to be accomplished, what tasks are involved, what skills are required and other important details about the job.

Recruitment

The first rule of recruiting volunteers is to make every prospective volunteer feel

special. When people feel wanted or needed, they are more likely to respond to your appeal for help, even when they are already busy. Be enthusiastic when asking people to volunteer.

When your agency needs a large number of volunteers for a short period of time (as in a special event), you should use the following basic methods for dissemination of information about the program/event: distribution of brochures; posters; speaker's bureaus; notices in periodicals; word of mouth.

Sometimes your agency is attempting to recruit target groups of volunteers already familiar with your agency or with the problem you are addressing. One of the most effective recruitment techniques is having your staff or volunteers ask their friends and acquaintances to volunteer.

Screening and Interviewing

Guiding the entire process of an interview must be an idea you are looking for the best qualified person to fill the job. The interview questions should reflect the job for which you are conducting the interview. The interview could be an "oral test" or a "friendly chat" depending on the skills needed for the job. The main point in interviewing is to listen to what the candidate has to say and allow him/her to answer your questions free of interruptions. Remember, the volunteer is also checking out you and your agency.

Orientation and Training

Orientation involves giving volunteers an adequate background on the agency, its operation and its procedures.

A good orientation program will provide the following types of information: description and history of the organization; description of the overall programs and clientele of the organization; the sketch of organizational structure; orientation to the facilities; knowledge of gen-

eral policies and procedures; description of volunteer management system.

On the other hand, training is the process of instructing volunteers in the specific job-related skills. It is designed to tell the volunteer: how they are supposed to perform their particular job; what they are not supposed to do in their job; what to do if an emergency or unforeseen situation arises.

Supervision

Supervision of volunteers is no different than supervision of any other type of staff for an agency. It requires the same care and skills for interpersonal relations.

Volunteers must be treated as individuals — their motivations are different and their styles are different. The supervisor must be able to accommodate individual variations.

Volunteers can suffer from burnout just like any staff member. Rotate volunteer positions when time and conditions permit.

Recognition

Volunteer recognition is a very important process of rewarding and motivating volunteers who contributed their time and energy to the organization. Remember to send a thank-you card or note, and not just when their job is completed. People need to hear how much they are appreciated at other times.

There are two basic types of volunteer recognition efforts: awards (certificates, pins, group photographs, T-shirts, caps and other small gifts) and events (lunches and dinners, picnics, parties and celebrations, field trips, National Volunteer Week celebration, etc.).

Sources:

- "Managing A Nonprofit" by John Reedle with Tere Drenth
- "Essential Volunteer Management" by Rick Lynch and Steve McCurley, available for sale from VMSystems/Heritage Arts Press, 1807 Prairie, Downers Grove, IL 60515 (708-964-1194). Excerpts from the book are online at <http://www.casanet.org/program-management/volunteer-manage/index.htm>

5-Day Grantsmanship Training, Sept. 12-16

The Grantsmanship Training Program will be offered to the Lincoln community Sept. 12-16 at the Lancaster Extension Education Center. The intensive, "hands-on" workshop covers all aspects of researching grants, writing proposals and negotiating with funding sources.

Designed for both novice and advanced grant seekers, the program participants are given follow-up services, including expert grant proposal reviews for a full year following training. To maximize personal attention, the group size for the five-day program is limited to 30 participants. The cost of the training program is \$825.

Since 1997, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension has hosted The Grantsmanship Training Program. Approximately 150 individuals representing various Lincoln agencies, surrounding communities and states have participated.

To apply for a scholarship or register, contact The Grantsmanship Center at 800-421-9512 or online at <http://www.tgci.com>. For local information, call Gary C. Bergman, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension at 441-7180.

