

For the Newcomer:

A BRIEF LOOK AT VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION

Compiled by The Council for Volunteerism

The following tips were compiled by the Council for Volunteerism in Champaign, Illinois, as a first-year project in support of Daring Goals (the Give Five Coalition). Drawing from several past issues of *Voluntary Action Leadership* and other resources, the Council published its work in a useful booklet called "Volunteer Administration: A Beginner's Guide." We are pleased to have permission to present many of the book's concise presentations.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Recruiting prevents volunteer administrators from becoming lonely. The real question is *how* to recruit rather than *why*. Only after careful planning should recruiting be considered.

Methods of Recruiting

- Try the local Chamber of Commerce for groups.
- Talk about the program—create interest.
- Recruit friends.
- Put items in church bulletins.

The Council for Volunteerism is a professional organization open to all members of the volunteer community in Champaign County, Ill. Members are mostly staff members of organizations which involve volunteers. One of its main purposes is to provide professional development and continuing education opportunities for people concerned with the advancement of volunteerism.

- Give small talks at organizations (get a contact person's name at each).
- Don't overlook the lady at the market or the guy on the bus.
- Suggest established volunteers bring a friend to an activity.
- Get lists of newly retired people from a local large employer.
- Hold out for the right person—don't take the first warm body in the door.
- Accept "no" when a prospect is not interested.
- Be honest when describing time and skills required.
- Remember—guilt does not a good volunteer make!
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Be fair.
- Be objective.
- Have a definite plan for follow-up of inquiries about the program.

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Summer 1986

INTERVIEWING

Why?

When someone volunteers, it simply means she wants to volunteer; it doesn't mean she is the right person for the job. This is precisely the reason each applicant should be interviewed. An interview offers an opportunity to learn about individual skills and interests and gives the potential volunteer an opportunity to learn about the organization—its expectations, its goals and its objectives. Take the time to make the right choice.

How?

- Make the appointment.
- Be familiar with the organization's needs, goals, objectives and its business climate.
- Listen to the individual's skills, interests and reasons for volunteering.
- Prepare an application form.
- Treat the individual courteously and in a business-like manner.
- Be flexible—an interviewer knows what she wants, but can't be sure of what she gets. Be prepared to make use of multiple skills, talents, interests and work schedules.

Cautions

What if this isn't the right person for the job? Don't despair! Here is a person who has expressed interest in the organization—so find out what she *can* do, what she *wants* to do and then design a position for her. Whenever possible, don't turn a volunteer away. Help each volunteer find a niche!

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1979 and Summer 1986

ORIENTATION

Regardless of the particular job assignment or the expertise a volunteer brings to the job, there are basic facts about your agency that all volunteers must have. It is this "must have" information that constitutes orientation. Without this introduction to the agency or program, a volunteer cannot function effectively and become a productive, committed volunteer. During this upbeat, informative and friendly session, attempt to answer the volunteer's basic question, "What makes this use of my time and talent worthwhile?" The overall goal of an orientation is to help the volunteer feel as comfortable and confident as possible. A well-oriented volunteer understands the organization's function and its mission.

How?

Orientation can be done individually or, preferably, in a group. Things you might include:

- Overview of the agency: philosophy, purpose and history of the agency; relationships with other agencies in the community; description of clients and services offered; organizational structure and introduction to key board and staff members; definitions of basic terms and technical jargon peculiar to your agency; funding sources and fundraising policies; tour of the facility.
- Opportunity for questions and answers.
- Volunteer program information: role of the volunteer within the agency; policies and procedures, such as dress code, scheduling, absence procedures, confidentiality, client relationships, training expectations, safety procedures, etc.; benefits, such as insurance, reimbursement of expenses, free meals, recognition system, opportunities for continuing education, etc.; introduction to co-workers and other volunteers; logistical information, such as parking, bathrooms, coat room, where coffee is available.
- Opportunity for the volunteer to make a polite exit if he realizes this is not the agency or position for him.

Cautions

Hold orientations frequently, timing them as soon as practical after the volunteer has agreed to participate in the program. A volunteer can retain only so much information at one time; provide written material in a volunteer manual, if possible.

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1985

TRAINING

No one ever volunteered to do a bad job! By providing adequate training, the volunteer administrator can enable the volunteer to do the best possible job while enjoying the experience. Ideal training will continually develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes of volunteers. Training should also produce happy, confident and satisfied volunteers who will be important advocates for your agency.

How?

Depending on the skill level involved, training can range from short, specific, on-the-job training to a formal classroom session lasting a number of weeks. There are two basic types of training that should be offered: job training and inservice training. Remember:

- Job training provides practical information about how to do the specific job or task which has been assigned to the volunteer.
- In-service training or continuing education provides opportunities for the volunteer to grow, enhance her development and take on more responsible or complicated tasks.
- Planning is the *key*—decide in advance:

WHAT

knowledge
attitudes
skills

HOW (variety is important)

lecture
slide show or film
role play
demonstrations
case study

WHO

the volunteer administrator
staff
other volunteers
clients
outside experts

WHEN AND WHERE

location
physical requirements
supplies
schedule (including breaks)

- Finally, don't forget evaluation—deciding how well you did trained. Take the results seriously, amend, change and try again!

Cautions

- Fit the training to the job. Training should never be more complex than the task that is to be accomplished.
- Don't limit training to a formal classroom presentation. We remember 10% of what we hear and 90% of what we do!
- Be aware of differences in training needed for adults and youth.
- Train for success—the trainer has a responsibility to build, not destroy, the self-concept or ego of the volunteer.

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Winter 1986.

SUPERVISION

Supervision of volunteers on the job makes it possible for a administrator to: raise or lower the level of tasks being performed, relocate a volunteer from an unsuitable task to one which is more satisfying, hear the volunteer's opinion about how the work methods might be improved, and to become better acquainted with the skills and interests of the particular volunteer.

Try These Ideas:

- Listen to the volunteer—really listen—for hints of discontent.
- Expect the same quality of work from the volunteer as from those getting paid.
- Insist on punctuality.
- Keep in touch with other supervisors.
- Be tactful and considerate.
- Be available to the volunteer.
- Be flexible and know the world will still turn even if you goof once in a while.
- Make demotions seem like lateral changes—"I think you're ready NOW to stuff envelopes!"
- Develop methods of praise which aren't patronizing.
- Remember, the volunteer administrator is not a warden.
- Use tact—no volunteer *tries* to do a bad job.
- Expect good work and recognize it.
- Remember, like fine cars, volunteer administrators go in reverse now and then.
- Evaluate the volunteer administrator as a supervisor.

STAFF-VOLUNTEER RELATIONSHIPS

The volunteer administrator must keep in mind that not everyone will be open to working with volunteers. The job then is to reverse the resistance of paid staff *and* to make the volunteer feel like a valued member of the group. Tall order? Here are some tips:

Is There. . .

- Lack of staff involvement in planning for volunteers?
- Fear of losing control of the quality of services when "free people" get involved?
- A sense of fear among staff members of being replaced by volunteers?
- Lack of staff training to understand and work with volunteers as team members?
- Lack of apparent rewards for staff for utilizing volunteers well?

This Might Help:

- Involve staff in both planning and defining the job descriptions for volunteers.
- Help staff consider volunteers as non-paid staff; hold volunteers accountable; never lower standards just for the volunteers.
- Help staff realize that volunteers make great advocates in the community for services they believe in and are involved in delivering.
- Conduct staff orientation and training regarding working with volunteers (including attitudes as well as skills); also use team training and volunteer management seminars.
- Get top-level executive and board commitment to the volunteer program.
- Include appropriate staff members in recognition ceremonies as team members with volunteers.
- Include a place for rating "use of volunteers" on staff performance evaluation forms.
- Include letters of commendation in staff personnel folders for exceptionally fine utilization of volunteers.

Cautions:

Be sure that staff-volunteer problems, real or imagined, are resolved as quickly as possible. Do not ignore even the smallest conflict.

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Spring 1981.

RECOGNITION

Think of recognition as a volunteer's salary. Many times it is at least part of the reason why an individual continues to volunteer. Even if it does not help to *attract* volunteers, it may help *keep* them.

A recognition event can also be used as a public relations tool to help promote a particular program. If an event is newsworthy, notify the media!

Ways to Recognize Volunteers

- Thank you cards
- Thank you cards for family
- Recognition event (meal, party, outing, etc.)
- Certificates/awards/plaques, etc.
- Added responsibility
- Newsletter "thank you"
- "Volunteer of the Month" article, plaque, parking space, etc.
- T-shirts, bumper stickers, pens, pencils, etc.
- Coordinate participation with special volunteers during Volunteer Week
- Be innovative! Co-sponsor events to make them "bigger and better," investigate donations from community businesses (classes, trips, discount coupons, etc.)

Cautions

Remember that every volunteer will have a different perspective on recognition. A simple "thank you" may be to one what an engraved plaque is to another. This means that the volunteer administrator must be sensitive to the type and the degree of recognition a volunteer will appreciate. When an individual insists he doesn't want recognition, believe him. To force him to become "volunteer of the month" may cost the program an excellent worker.

When planning an event, make sure it will be enjoyable and accessible to all of your volunteers.

Source: Voluntary Action Leadership, Winter 1985

FIRING A VOLUNTEER

Yes, the volunteer administrator can and should fire volunteers who fail to perform in an acceptable manner, or place them in other positions where they will be more comfortable and productive. A dissatisfied and/or ineffective volunteer is not a good advocate for the program and can, in fact, hurt it. It is best to deal directly with this situation. Failure to terminate an unsatisfactory volunteer will only result in greater problems at a later date.

To Minimize the Occurrences of Having to Fire:

- Recognize that the planning for unpaid staff (volunteers) is as important as for paid staff.
- Write the volunteer job descriptions so that they clearly define the roles, specific duties and expectations of each volunteer.
- Be sure the job description states the minimum acceptable qualifications, required training and supervision to be received.
- Supervise all volunteers adequately.
- Evaluate all volunteers appropriately.
- Deal with problems as they occur.
- Interview, orient and train!

When Firing Becomes Inevitable:

- Take care of the matter privately, professionally and confidentially.
- Have dated, written records of occurrences that have brought about this decision.
- Explain to the volunteer how the work done did not meet the requirements of the job and/or the expectations of the program.
- Remember to thank the volunteer for her efforts and good intentions.

Cautions

Always check to see if the volunteer being fired can fit into another job—and turn a potential failure into a success!

Source: *Voluntary Action Leadership*, Fall 1979.

EVALUATION

Evaluation that is *planned* and *ongoing* makes a program more effective in its use of volunteers—whether this evaluation is formal or informal. In order to be most effective, a program needs to know where it has been and where it wants to go. A yearly evaluation of the staff, volunteers and program can be checked against the program's goals. This will uncover a program's strengths and weaknesses and help the program coordinator redirect, redefine and/or reemphasize the goals of the program.

Evaluating the Staff and the Program

The evaluation may measure the:

- Quality of the volunteer training
- Degree to which the training information transferred to the volunteer work
- Volunteer's desire for advanced training or input into the training program
- Quality of the staff supervision of the volunteer
- Specific strengths and weaknesses of the program
- Accessibility of the staff to the volunteers
- Overall quality of the program
- Effectiveness of the staff in working with volunteers
- Treatment of volunteers—were they treated as paid staff?

Evaluating the Volunteers

- Demonstration of competence
- Dependability
- Growth/ability to broaden scope or be promoted
- Commitment to the program
- Ability to work with paid staff
- Fulfillment of responsibilities outlined in the job description
- Satisfaction in the job—for example: Did the work match the job description? Was the work rewarding and worthwhile? Was adequate time allowed to do the job?
- Plans to continue with the program

Cautions

This is an easy area to look at and say, "Well, there are more important things to do," but there aren't! An evaluation will strengthen the program.