Firm Foundations

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Developing an effective, well-integrated volunteer program within an organization requires a variety of skills taken from numerous disciplines. An individual accepting the responsibility for creating or recreating such a program can develop many of these skills in the process of building a successful program or can delegate tasks to others with the needed skills. Such an individual must, however, have an understanding of four basic elements required to insure success as well as the ability to manage the interaction of these elements: These four elements form the "Four S's in Foundation":

1. Support
2. Structure
3. System
4. Savvy/Self

Each of the four elements will be explored in detail in this workshop to assist the new volunteer director to understand how they impact on program development.

SUPPORT

The term "support" is used in many different contexts and has a variety of meanings. In this context, support will be defined as "that which enables one to do what one wants/needs/has to do." Frequently we feel that somehow we are not supported enough or in the right way. In order to assure that needed support is forthcoming, the volunteer director must determine:

a. <u>What</u> kind of support s/he needs and wants;
b. <u>Who</u> must provide the support;
c. <u>How</u> s/he will acquire that support;

To assist in identifying the who and what, and in planning the strategies for gaining support, the Volunteer Program Support Grid may be helpful.

Once the volunteer director has identified the support needed and has identified, through a brainstorming process, some possible means of gaining it, s/he must then prioritize the strategies, beginning with those most likely to yield the most involvement and support for the least effort (an assessment of basic cost-effectiveness). Then go for it.

STRUCTURE

The volunteer director needs to take the time to clearly understand the formal and informal structure of the organization in which the program is operating. In gaining such an understanding, s/he can then put the above efforts where they are going to do the most good. What are some of the areas to look at in analyzing the organization? Ask yourself the following questions:

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Internal Structure: How does the organization function?

1. Formal:

- What does the organizational chart look like?
- Who reports to whom?
- How are titles and responsibility determined?
- Where is the volunteer program placed in relation to other departments?

- Whom do you report to?
- What are the implications of such placement relative to access to decision making and power people in all parts of the organization?

- What is the mission of the organization?
- How clearly is it stated?
- Who knows what it is?
- Does the goal setting/budget planning process of the organization reflect a clear understanding of the mission?

- What are the formal communication channels?
- How do people find out things officially?
- Who talks to whom? and where are the taboos?

- Where is the formal power in the organization?
- What are the basic styles of leadership in the organization that are rewarded and reinforced?
- How do those in power lead? (Note: It is useful here to consider various management theories related to leadership, particularly Douglas MacGregor's Theory X and Y; and Ouchi's Theory Z.)

- How much red tape is there?
- Are there lots of policies and procedures to wade through whenever a decision is being made or you want to try something new?

2. Informal:

- How much do people rely on the grapevine to give them information about things happening in the organization?
- Who seems to have the most influence in the organization? Is it the same people who have official power? (Often it isn't.)
- Where do they get their power from?

The External Structure: What is the organization's relationship to others?

1. What is their public image?
- Other similar organizations?
- Neighborhood?
- Community-at-large?

2. How much outreach is done?

3. What is the emphasis on external relationships?

These and many other questions allow you to determine what your limits may be, who you must win over in order to accomplish your goals, what strategies are most apt to work, where you may have most difficulty and what things are not in your control. In knowing this, you will then be able to measure goal attainment in a more realistic manner. If it is possible for you to ascertain these things (or at least some of them) before accepting a position, it can help you decide if your style is compatible with the organization and how likely you are to be happy and productive there.

SYSTEMS

The system that you set up for managing the volunteer program should meet certain criteria.

1. It must work for you. Systems for systems sake are frequently cumbersome and difficult to follow through on. If the system cannot be managed, or is apt to be sloppily/ inconsistently used, then it is not the one for you. Just because someone else says that it is the way to go, you must evaluate your data needs, basic standards for the professional management of a program, and samples of other programs and then decide for yourself.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM SUPPORT GRID

Whose support Do I need/want?	Administrator	Paid staff	Volunteers	Etc...

What is the nature of that support?	-authority
	-money
	-endorsement
	-trust
	-time
	-recognition
	    etc....
		-supervision of volunteers
		-acceptance
		-open-mind
		-involvement
		-loyalty
		-credibility
		    etc....
			-loyalty
			-skill sharing
			-reliability
			-confidentiality maintained
			-good P.R.
			-feedback
			-participation
			    etc....
				Etc...

How can I gain support?	-give as much information as possible
	-timely reports
	-communicate needs
	-ask for time
	-ask them to speak
	    etc....
		-orient/train
		-ask them to train
		-conduct needs assessment that assures their in-put
		-ask for their feed-back
		-find the best vol-unteers etc....
			-give clear job descriptions
			-make expectations specific
			-evaluate performance
			-involve in planning
			    etc....
				Etc....

2. It must be compatible with the structure of your organization. Management-by-Objectives (MBO) may be wonderful, but if the organization does not use it you may be doing lots of extra work. Learn the budgeting system used by others in your organization and adapt it to your needs.

3. It must support the achievement of your organizational and program mission. Be sure to reflect your program goals off the goals of other departments with which you are working. You are in a position to assist them in the achievement of their plans. When you do that, you will gain additional support in the achievement of your own.

Examples that I have found useful are flowcharts (see Appendix A) and the supervisory diagram in Appendix B.

SAVVY/SELF

Know yourself--your style, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses, values, knowledge and skills.

Be as self-aware as you can possible be. This is an ongoing process, of course. As you become increasingly aware of your own abilities, you can make better decisions about your need to delegate. You don't have to do all the work yourself. One of the most exciting suggestions made by Sue Vineyard in a workshop I attended was to keep the very best volunteers for yourself. Sound selfish? Well just think how much more effective your program can be or how many more volunteers you will have when you manage this way.

During the past five years, I have had a volunteer to whom I have delegated record keeping, volunteer file management, and quarterly and annual statistical reports. Although I can do these tasks, they are extremely time consuming. She is wonderful and truly loves her work. This then frees me up to do other things. In addition, she is sufficiently physically handicapped so as not to be competitively employed and far too bright to be satisfied with a sheltered work setting. This then provides her with needed challenge, recognition, and a reason to get going. I have five other volunteer positions which also increase my ability to manage an effective program.

Knowing yourself will help you to manage time more effectively by being sure that you do what you can do best and give to others that which they can do best. It also helps you to examine your relationships with others so that you can work in a way that helps all involved to achieve their goals.

SUMMARY

In summary, there are many skills needed to manage a successful volunteer program but the greatest of these is savvy. Know your organization, its people, their needs, your own style and abilities and how you can relate effectively with others. Then use all that you know to make the program more efficient and effective.

(A)-Administration
(S)-Staff
(VC)-Volunteer Coordinator
VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FLOWCHART (C)-Combined

(A)→(C)

(A) | PLANNING PROCESS—
SET VOLUNTEER PRO-
GRAM PROCEDURES
AND POLICIES

(S) DETERMINE
NEEDS FOR
VOLUNTEERS

(VC)(S) DEVELOP
JOB
DESCRIPTIONS →

(VC) RECRUIT
VOLUNTEERS

(VC) SCREEN APPLICANTS-
APPLICATIONS
REFERENCES
INTERVIEW

(VC) HIRED INTO AGENCY?

YES →

NO

LETTER OR CALL
REFERRAL

(S) PLACEMENT
INTERVIEW

(S) PLACED?

YES

(VC) INITIAL
ORIENTATION →

NO

REFERRED ELSEWHERE
IN OR OUTSIDE OF
AGENCY

SET UP RECORD
ON INDIVIDUAL
VOLUNTEER

(S) ON-JOB-
TRAINING

ONGOING
INSERVICES

(S) SUPERVISION

(S) INDIVIDUAL
EVALUATION OF
PERFORMANCE →

(S)(VC) CONTINUATION
TERMINATION
PROMOTION
TRANSFER

(C) RECOGNITION

(C)→(A)

PROGRAM
EVALUATION AND
PLANNING

(A)

APPENDIX B

Needs Assessment

Job Description

Recruit/Screen

Set Goals

Negotiate functions

Transfer

Terminate

Promote

Orient

Coach

Train/Conduct Inservice

Evaluate

Provide Group Support

Supervise