

Job Aids for Volunteers: Tools to Help Them Successfully Complete Their Jobs

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In most organizations, when a person volunteers he or she is given a job description. But such descriptions usually give only an overview of the job and little detail on how to fulfill it. All too often, volunteers start with plenty of energy but become discouraged when that energy is wasted trying to figure out what the job really is.

If a volunteer is to be satisfied and successfully complete a job, then he or she needs to know in clear detail just what is expected. It is important for administrators to remember that no job is so simple that some preparation would not be constructive. Job aids, combined with orientation and training, can provide volunteers with the details and tools needed to help them successfully complete their job.

WHAT IS A JOB AID?

In the simplest terms, a "job aid" or "performance aid" refers to anything that assists an individual in the process of completing a task or making a decision.

Job aids are used every day at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Recipes, shopping lists, step-by-step assembly instructions, troubleshooting guides on copy machines, emergency instructional pamphlets on airplanes, tax tables and flowcharts are all examples of job aids. Job aids are based on an analysis of what the intended user must do to complete the job. In essence, they are designed to improve human performance by providing information on what to do, how to do and when to do.

WHY USE JOB AIDS?

Volunteers make up an important part of the workforce in many organizations and some could not function without them. Volunteers are staff members, and,

like other staff members in the organization, they need to be provided with the tools to perform their jobs effectively.

There are five major reasons for using job aids with volunteers:

1. Job aids focus the volunteer on performance, not on policy, history, personal opinions, backgrounds, or interpretations. Since they are related specifically to the task, they provide concise instructions on how the task is to be performed.
2. Since job aids present information in an easy, logical format, they help the volunteer remember critical components that might otherwise be forgotten.
3. Job aids cost less money and require less time to develop than other forms of instruction.
4. Job aids are more flexible than other forms of instruction and are easier to revise when performance procedures change.
5. When they are used to support training, job aids shorten training time and speed the acquisition of knowledge and skills required by the job.

WHEN SHOULD JOB AIDS BE USED?

Job aids can be used at all four stages in the L-O-O-P volunteer management process (Fox, Penrod, 1989).

Stage 1: Locating volunteers.

During this stage, the emphasis is on recruiting and selecting volunteers to do a variety of jobs within the organization. Here the job aid can be a useful tool in helping to fit the right job with the experience, interests and time constraints of the volunteer. The job aid lets the volunteer know what will be expected as well as the

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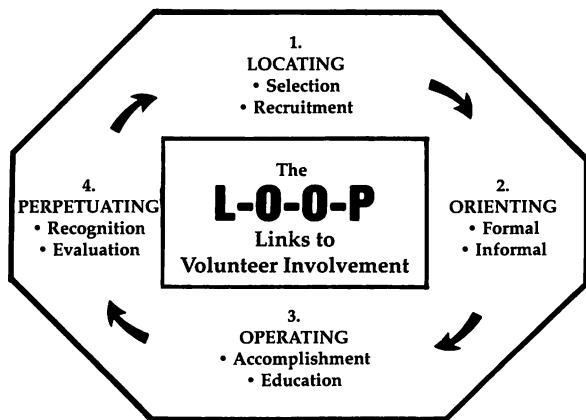


Figure 1
The L-O-O-P Volunteer Management Model

time commitment required before agreeing to the assignment.

Stage 2: Orienting volunteers.

Orientation usually occurs after the volunteer accepts or is in the process of accepting the job. During the orientation stage, the volunteer comes to more clearly understand his or her job and how it fits into the total organization. The manager should go over the steps outlined in the job aid with the volunteer. As they proceed through the steps, the manager should point out what resources are available and where to go for assistance.

This is an important process since it helps the volunteer understand how to use the job aid and provides an opportunity to ask questions. Remember: volunteers repeatedly complain what they don't understand what is expected of them. Use the orientation stage to solve this problem.

Stage 3: Operating with volunteers.

During this stage, two factors play an important role in the satisfaction level of the volunteer. The first factor is whether the volunteer has had the opportunity to grow through acquiring new skills and knowledge. The second factor is whether the volunteer can see the impact or accomplishments resulting from the time and energy expended.

The use of a job aid allows volunteers to continually check off their progress towards completion of the job. They can measure what they have done, what they are doing now and what they have left to

do. As the job changes, the job aid can easily be changed. Or, after using the job aid, the volunteer may have suggestions for refinements. In fact, this input from volunteers should be standard operating procedure and is a way to show the volunteers that the manager recognizes the value of their input.

Stage 4: Perpetuating the involvement.

Perpetuating the involvement of volunteers includes both evaluation and recognition. Using the job aid, a careful comparison between the volunteer's performance and the expected performance can be made. Accurate evaluation allows for positive growth and directed volunteer development. Volunteer recognition is critical to volunteer satisfaction. Time, attention and a sincere respect of the volunteer are the most meaningful forms of recognition.

HOW ARE JOB AIDS FORMATTED?

The format used depends on the type of performance desired. Job aids can be separated into two categories: deductive and nondeductive (Porta, 1979). Nondeductive job aids are characterized by content that is procedural in nature. The user merely follows a sequence of detailed instructions to complete a task.

On the other hand, deductive job aids require the exercise of logical thought by the user. In a purely deductive aid, the user cannot rely on a detailed set of instructions to lead him or her through the task. Successful performance is achieved only when the user selects those portions that apply to the task at hand and relates that information to perform the task. Using this rationale, Table I illustrates how the various job aid formats are classified.

Table I
Formats For Job Aids

Nondeductive	Deductive
Step-by-Step Directions With Illustrations	Flowchart Decision Table
Without Illustrations	Worksheet
Checklist	
Form	
Procedure Table	

Step-by-Step Directions—numbered sequential list of all the steps or actions involved to complete a particular task. They are used for tasks that have no or only a few simple decisions to make. Illustrations are often added to text for increased clarity.

Checklist—similar to step-by-step directions containing a sequential listing of steps, but also including a place to check off each step as completed. Checklists often contain information on when (month, day) steps need to be done. The checklist format is often used to help volunteers plan, conduct and evaluate events and activities.

Form—provides blanks to ensure that all data/information is completed and properly formatted.

Procedure Table—similar to the step-by-step directions, but presented in a table format.

Flowchart—a simple sequence of instructions arranged in a logical graphic order that leads directly to the correct decision. Flowcharts are often laid out in a tree format with decision points which result in branching to subtasks. The user's response to the first statement leads to the next relevant statement and so on until the task is completed.

Decision Table—a table format with IF, THEN and AND columns used to make decisions based on multiple contingencies. Branching should be fairly simple.

Worksheet—similar to a form with blanks to collect data or information, but the worksheet also requires the user to perform some operation on that data or information.

DESIGNING JOB AIDS

Designing good job aids will take some practice. Basic starting steps are:

1. Identify Target Audience

The first step is to take a close look at the volunteers who will be using the job aid. Remember, volunteers enter your organization with varied educational backgrounds and experi-

ence. These volunteers are in a variety of different jobs with each job requiring a unique set of skills and expertise. The needs of the volunteer who answers the phone are quite different from one who is chairing a committee. Be sure to identify the needs, skills and knowledge for those volunteers who will be doing the specific job for which you are designing the job aid.

2. Conduct Task Analysis

Next a task analysis should be done to determine the scope of the job and the step or decisions involved in its performance. Include all essential information including tools and equipment needed. The task analysis is the most time-consuming part of the process and the most important. The task analysis provides the essential information that must be included in the job aid itself.

3. Select the Job Aid Format

The same format is not appropriate for all jobs. The type of performance required can be used as a clue to determine the most effective format. Table II provides some general guidelines for determining which job aid format to use (adapted from Line-

Table II
Decision Table for
Selecting Job Aid Format

IF	THEN
THE TASK INVOLVES:	CONSIDER:
Action sequences	Step-by-Step directions Checklist Flowchart Procedure table
Decision making	Flowchart Decision table
Calculations/ documentation	Checklist Form Worksheet
Mixture of step-by-step procedures and decisions	A combination of step- by-step list with embedded decision table

berry & Bullock, 1980). A field test of different formats with volunteers may help to determine which is the easiest to use and the most effective.

4. *Develop Job Aid*

In developing the job aid itself, the following things should be kept in mind. The job aid should:

- use language that the volunteers can understand.
- meet the needs of the volunteers.
- be tailored for use in the work situation.
- present only "essential" information needed to perform the job.
- be easy to use.

5. *Train Volunteer*

For maximum results, the volunteers must be trained in using the aid. Training should include an overview of the job, and instructions on when, where and how to use the job aid. Training also ensures that the job aid will be compact and simple to use.

6. *Evaluate*

Be sure to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the job aid. Are the volunteers using the job aid?

What is the quality of their performance? Do changes need to be made?

SUMMARY

Developing a system for implementing a job aid program within your organization may go a long way to enhancing volunteer job satisfaction and increasing productivity. Job aids have proven to be valuable tools at all four stages in the volunteer management process. They can be useful in recruiting and orienting the volunteer about what the job entails. They serve as tools to help the volunteer perform the job at an acceptable level. And finally, they serve as an excellent way to evaluate the volunteer's performance.

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