



Doing Training

Do volunteers welcome or resist?

Orientation and training are unarguably important components of any effective volunteer program. New volunteers need to be prepared for the work they will do and the organization needs to assure that services will be provided skillfully. Once volunteers are engaged in agency activities, continuing education opportunities keep them sharp as well as motivated.

So why is it that volunteer program leaders find it a challenge to get volunteers to training sessions? Attendance at training is rarely 100 percent. Participation is highest at the beginning of service, since enthusiasm runs high at the start of any enterprise. But ongoing training sessions throughout the year frequently attract only a small percentage of active volunteers. If the material presented is truly important, organizations must deal with this issue. Offering training is not enough; if service excellence is the goal, volunteers must be held accountable to keeping their skills current.

If you cannot get volunteers to attend training, diagnose what's going on and take action based on your conclusions. For example:

- Have you surprised new volunteers

with a training requirement after the recruitment and application process? Educational sessions often obligate time above and beyond a volunteer's regular schedule. If people do not know about or agree to participate in such programs from the start of service, you are on shaky ground to impose new expectations after the fact.

Fun and games without some true content will eventually make some volunteers feel they are wasting their time. Balance training that is immediately applicable with friendly, supportive exchange.

Recommendation: Make sure that required training is discussed in all recruitment materials and during screening interviews. That makes it an expectation that is established from the beginning.

- Similarly, how recently have you instituted in-service training opportunities? If this is a relatively new thing, long-time volunteers may see it as unnecessary. They may

even take offense, inferring that the organization is dissatisfied with their work.

Recommendation: When you introduce any new training, be sure to clarify why you are offering it and what the benefits will be to the volunteers, to the organization and to the people served. Perhaps even more importantly, involve representative volunteers in creating the training sessions themselves. Doing this with, rather than to, volunteers is essential.

- Is the training any good? Sometimes new volunteers hear from veteran volunteers

that the sessions are a waste of time. So, it's not surprising they don't attend. Similarly, is this really training? Frequently what are called workshops are really chat sessions, or worse, simply a way for the organization to distribute materials and give news updates. In other words, the sessions are for communicating "down," rather than genuine educational exchange or skills improvement.

Recommendation: Continuously assess the usefulness and quality of any required training -- and make it so good who volunteers will hate to stay away. Again, the more you involve volunteers in the planning and even the presenting of training, the less resistance you will face. Consider both the content and the delivery style of your sessions. Even useful material offered in a deadly dull lecture will hardly entuse anyone. Fun and games without some true content will eventually make some volunteers feel they are wasting their time. Balance training that is immediately applicable with friendly, supportive exchange.

- Are the content and format of volunteer orientation and training set in stone? In other words, do you cover the same material in the same way for everyone, regardless of their job descriptions or credentials? If so, you will imply volunteers are interchangeable parts and run the risk of insulting some while going over the heads of others.

Recommendation: Everyone -- regardless of status or background -- deserves consistent orientation (and welcoming) to your organization. This includes a facility tour, introduction to other workers, and important emergency or safety procedures. But be flexible in how you present such basic points as dress code and "behavior." What you tell

continued on page 54

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ON VOLUNTEERS *continued from page 50*

teens ought to be different from how you approach these subjects with middle-aged business people. As to job-specific training, allow truly skilled volunteers to demonstrate if they can skip certain sections of the curriculum (just as college students may "test out" of basic requirements). Don't assume competence, but don't assume ignorance either.

- How flexible is the training schedule and do you have options for people with conflicting commitments? Does everyone have to be available on the same day? During

the day or evening? Weekday or weekend? Do you expect volunteers to come to multiple short sessions over time or can someone finish the course in an intensive weekend?

Recommendation: Especially if it's a requirement, make it as easy as possible to complete the training. Run the training several times at different schedules/days. Make a video or audio tape available. Consider on-line distance learning options.

As time goes on, Web technology will make this an increasingly viable way to dis-

seminate information to volunteers. Even now you can devote password-only Web site pages to posting training materials, or develop a listserv/discussion group among volunteers, or even place an audio tape of a live session that can be downloaded.

Finally, a key question is: What happens to people who don't attend training? If there are no consequences to nonparticipation, don't be surprised that volunteers don't take this "requirement" seriously. If you genuinely feel that the education you provide is necessary to effective work performance, then don't compromise. Do not allow a volunteer to start or continue an assignment until the training is completed. This may, in fact, be

the best "risk management" action you can take to protect everyone. The critical thing is to state the consequences of nonattendance clearly and then enforce the rules uniformly.

If training is presented as optional (particularly continuing education), there cannot be consequences to nonparticipation. But you may still want to raise voluntary attendance levels. Talk to volunteers who are attending and learn what they feel is useful about the sessions to them. Talk to volunteers who haven't taken part and find out why. Develop alternative methods of training, as already suggested.

Learning is a powerful motivator to start and continue in a volunteer position. When agencies have trouble getting volunteers to attend useful educational sessions, it's usually because of one or more of the factors just described. Work with volunteers themselves to design training they can be enthusiastic about.

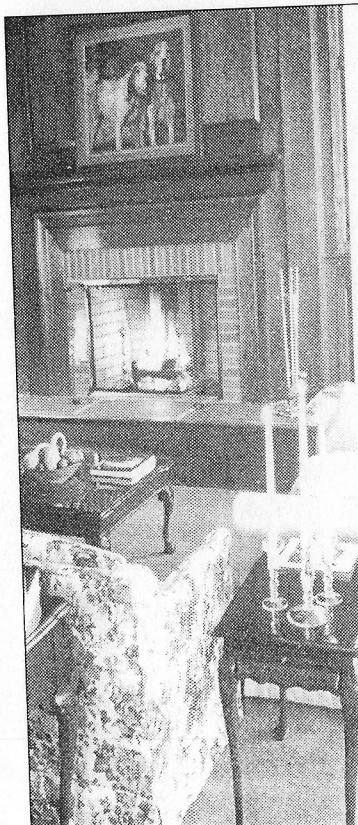
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Lobbying Against Association Taxes

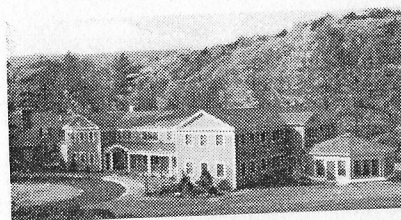
The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) has been lobbying both houses of Congress against an element of President Clinton's proposed FY 2000 budget that would raise upwards of \$1.4 billion in taxes from 501(c)(6) organizations.

If the administration's plan goes through, such associations would be subject to unrelated business income tax on non-dues income, including interest, dividends, rents, capital gains and royalties over \$10,000, a floor not indexed for inflation.

At press time, the federal budget battles



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