



The Part-Time Volunteer Manager

Focusing on key elements is vital to program success

While the number of full-time directors of volunteer services is growing, the majority of people responsible for leading volunteers are handling that role as one of several other professional "hats." Such staff members have limited time and resources with which to do the complex job of volunteer administration.

Not every organization needs a full-time director of volunteers, especially if only a small number of volunteers are required. However, as soon as an organization invites even one person to volunteer, it takes on the obligation to support that volunteer well.

Size is not as significant as vision. Volunteers, whether in small or large numbers, have enormous potential to further an organization's mission. If they are perceived as "add-on" helpers, they will be dealt with as add-on helpers, and they will end up being only add-on helpers.

Conversely, if an organization can envision all the possibilities of volunteer participation, its approach to the management of volunteers will be as resource development—with real rewards.

There is a direct correlation between the quality of attention given to volunteers and the quality of their contributions. Therefore, especially if your organization expects someone on staff to develop a volunteer effort as only one part of his or her job, it is very important to focus on key elements. And, if you ask a staff member to run a volunteer program in addition to other work, offer realistic support.

The vision for volunteers

Have we clarified why we want volunteers, what we hope they will accomplish, and who we most wish to recruit? The staffing of a volunteer project must be consistent with the goals set for the project. Realistic expectations will allow the part-time coordinator to do the best job.

The meaning of "part-time"

When someone is asked to lead volunteers on a part-time basis, it is crucial to define exactly how much time "part-time" means. Can specific hours of the week be designated for the volunteer program? Will this employee's other responsibilities be reduced to allow for the new function? Will there be schedule flexibility for evening and weekend meetings or external speaking engagements?

What's in a title?

The person responsible for the volunteer program needs an operational or working title that appropriately designates that staff member as being responsible for volunteers. Otherwise that person's various job functions will blur together in everyone's mind.

It must be clear to the public that the person who is speaking, signing letters, etc. is the organization's leader of volunteers. One approach is to add words to an existing title, as in Director of Activities and Volunteers or Coordinator of Volunteers and In-Home Services. Another option is simply to adopt two titles, using each when appropriate.

If your organization has found a volunteer to accept the responsibility of running the volunteer program, it is even more vital to have an agreed-upon title. This volunteer deserves the respect and clout that come with being identified as Director of Volunteers (or any variation thereof). The leadership role is verified by this title, allowing the person to represent the organization officially in matters related to volunteers.

What is the chain of command?

For everyone's sake, establish a chain of command that is workable and understood by all. The head of the volunteer program

must have access to the decision-makers in the organization for policy questions and overall direction of this key community resource. The "higher up" the person's supervisor, the better.

Volunteers need to feel directly tied in to the organization's administration or else they will suspect — and correctly so — that they have no effective voice. Similarly, employees need to know that volunteers are viewed as a subject of consequence by top administrators.

The issue of position in the organization hierarchy can be complicated by the staff member's other job responsibilities. The volunteer management role may require a different chain of command than the one which governs that employee's other functions.

This has implications for the person's relationship with her or his current direct supervisor. What criteria will be used to evaluate job performance in both arenas and who will assess each piece?

Another chain-of-command question involves independent, self-led volunteer associations such as an auxiliary or "friends" group. What is the role of the person who has been asked to head the volunteer program in relation to this affiliated group of volunteers? Who has final authority? Do these volunteers have direct access to top administration or does communication go through the staff coordinator? Who will be held accountable for this group's activities?

Volunteers taking precedence

Commitment to having effective volunteer involvement is demonstrated by allowing the part-timer to give the volunteer program priority at certain hours of the day and week. The attitude cannot be to fit it in when you find the time.

The program head must deliberately make time. There will inevitably be de-

mands pulling the program leader into other work, but volunteers must be seen as equally important as everything else, not as the function that can always be postponed.

Scheduling status reviews

Commit to examine regularly whether and how the volunteer program is changing over time. Is it necessary to adjust the part-timer's job description to allow more time with the volunteer program? Are we ready for a full-time director of volunteers? Are the original goals and objectives for the volunteer program still relevant? Have volunteers been planned into new projects? Pose these questions consciously to avoid allowing volunteers to grow in number and degree of involvement without adapting the leadership structure accordingly.

A word of caution: The question of appropriate staffing for the growth of volunteer participation is separate from the personal career goals of the current part-timer. It is possible that this particular employee does not want to pursue full-time volunteer management as a job and that is fine.

But one of the responsibilities of any volunteer program leader is to help the organization recognize when the effort deserves full-time staff attention and to encourage the hiring of a trained volunteer manager who is enthusiastic about this focus.

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