

8 KEYS TO MANAGING VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

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PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The development of volunteer projects, you could say, begins with “definition.”

Define why you need volunteers, what you need them to do, what services they can provide, how their role will strengthen your organization and enrich your programs. Establish outcomes. What do you expect this project to accomplish? Establish a timeline. When do you expect the different objectives of the project to be accomplished? If you have a board, administrators or executive committee to keep informed, make sure you have their support before proceeding.



VALUABLE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Make sure there's a return on your volunteer's investment.

When you're asking people to invest their time, talents and resources, you need to make sure they receive a "return." No, not a financial benefit, but a reward nonetheless for their work, if only a feeling of accomplishment and a motivation to continue. Show how each responsibility fits into the project's or organization's overall vision. Create "job descriptions" by laying out the responsibilities for each job, including general tasks/areas of responsibility; skills, knowledge, abilities needed; other resources that are needed; commitment of time.



RECRUITMENT

For recruitment, target appropriate audiences.

Where you are most likely to find people interested in the work you have set out to do? Who is on your team now? Where would you go to find those who mirror your current team members? Be open and upfront about the commitments expected of your volunteer base. And don't try to "guilt" people into joining in. You want people who want to help, not those who are coerced into helping (for one reason, a resentful attitude might come along with them, and that's no help to anyone). Screen and interview potential volunteers, which shows them that you're taking this project seriously and weeds out those who aren't.



ORIENTATION & TRAINING

Give recruited volunteers the big picture early, then add training.

As you recruit volunteers, set aside a time for orientation that can give them overall organization mission and philosophy, as well as simple housekeeping details like, for example, the location of the restrooms. Then broaden the orientation with more comprehensive training programs. Make them aware of the project's objectives and let them know the plan for reaching these objectives. Supporting them with adequate training will give volunteers a feeling of confidence that they can achieve the tasks at hand – as well as reinforcing a feeling of belonging.



FOLLOW UP

To continue a volunteer's feeling of "connectedness," follow up.

This is easy to forget once training has been done and assignments have been made. But volunteers don't necessarily want to operate in a vacuum or why would they be participating in your organization? Check in to see how the work is going, if the volunteers are satisfied with their work, or if they need assistance addressing any issues. Also, let volunteers know who they can talk to should a problem arise.



COMMUNICATION

If you're working with people, you need to communicate.

There is no skill that is more needed for creating teamwork and smoothing over problems. When you effectively communicate your goals and expectations, provide adequate information about how to achieve those goals and expectations, follow up to keep volunteers on track, and express appreciation as objectives are met, you will build strong relationships among your volunteers.



COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)

Effective communication is needed in areas of recruitment (in your call for volunteers) as well as in orientation and training (preparing volunteers for their work). Spend some time developing a communication plan that covers your project from beginning to end. It should include your routine communication practices – what methods will you use most frequently to communicate to volunteers? Where should they go for the most current information? Provide a written schedule of events (either in print or on a website or other prominent location). Establish a way to notify volunteers when changes to project or personnel take place. And, as a part of these efforts, establish a volunteer database or use an application like HelpRoot to help maintain up-to-date contact information.



RECOGNITION

Build volunteer recognition into the project.

Demonstrate how much you value volunteer support by making recognition programs a part of your volunteer project. Use these to express appreciation to individuals for a job well done, to motivate your volunteers to continue in their efforts, and perhaps even to encourage the participation of others. You can include both public events where volunteers are recognized as well as personal notes and phone calls. By letting your local media know about these recognitions, you'll also be planting seeds with others to join you as a volunteer.



EVALUATION

Learn from each project.

A volunteer project cannot be successfully concluded without an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. Seek feedback from volunteers, staff, and perhaps those benefiting from the project. Analyze ways to improve services, and give constructive feedback to volunteers that will help them learn and grow – and put their increased knowledge to use when the next project comes around.





DO GOOD. MANAGE WELL.

Helproot is a place on the web to organize volunteer projects,
find volunteers and search for needs in your area.

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