

3.6 Volunteer Management

Section I: Developing a Plan for Involving Volunteers

Marion Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, is a strong believer in the importance of service to others, and she's not alone. In 1995, approximately 93 million Americans, or almost half of the adult population, volunteered. The hours spent each year by volunteers on different projects would take over nine million full time employees to equal.

Most nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers in varying degrees for a lot of the work that they do. The jobs done by volunteers are as varied as the people who do them. A volunteer might be a high school student who takes care of children in the nursery during Sunday morning service; she might be an accountant who offers to help the director apply for tax-exempt status; or he might be a retired gentleman who cooks up lunch every day at the local soup kitchen.

Regardless of the actual tasks they do, however, all of these volunteers have at least one thing in common: The time, energy, and resources they bring are critically important to an agency's (or program's) success.

Because of the enormous amount of help available potentially from volunteers, an important question for program directors and volunteer coordinators is, "How can we best tap into this resource?"

Why volunteers?

Maybe you're not sold on the merits of volunteers, at least for your organization. "Volunteers are too much trouble," you might think; "they're not reliable; it takes too long to train them, and once you do, they just leave. Also, we're liable for their actions--that's a problem that we just don't need right now. It's easier to do our work with paid staff."

Despite these challenges, however, consider some of the different advantages of using volunteers as part of a thoughtfully developed plan.

- *Volunteers save money.* This obvious advantage of volunteers can be a lifesaver for some organizations. The "dollar value" of volunteer time in 1997 was \$13.74 per hour. Many organizations, such as the Red Cross, function almost entirely on volunteer labor--and by doing so, they can do a lot of very good work without a lot of money.
- *Volunteers bring needed skills.* Many volunteers have specialized knowledge such as computer programming, advertising, or conflict mediation that your organization occasionally needs, but not often enough to hire someone to do the work full-time. A volunteer who donates his or her skills on an "as-needed" basis can be the perfect complement to your office staff.

- *Volunteers bring renewed energy and excitement.* Even the most dedicated people can get burnt out working on the same thing when they are doing it 40 (or more) hours a week. Volunteers can bring a fresh perspective and enthusiasm for the work. This can help revitalize staff, and may help move projects in exciting new directions.
- *Volunteers increase community ownership.* The more community members are involved in your project, the easier it will be to gain support for your work. Also, by using volunteers from throughout the community, you can be sure that your goals are “in tune” with what the community wants, and not just what organization members think they want.

Simply put--involving volunteers helps you do (and do well) what you set out to do.

Why plan?

Why should you plan the involvement of your volunteers? As with anything else your organization does, planning your volunteer program will help it run more smoothly and easily. Additionally, a well-developed plan helps stop potential problems before they start. That way, you can have all of the advantages of volunteer help without most of the headaches.

For example, above we talked about some of the problems of having volunteers, such as liability, a lack of reliability, and a tendency of volunteers to not stay long with a given organization. By planning, you can take these problems into account: the organization might take out insurance against liability; consequences of being unreliable can be decided upon and written down to be given to volunteers; and ways to keep good volunteers can be discussed and put into practice.

Who should develop the plan?

Your organization's plan for volunteer involvement will touch many people, so it 's often best to include many voices when designing it. Some of the key players might include:

- Organizational leaders, such as the Commander, Senior Enlisted Advisor or other people in leadership roles.
- Staff members. These are the people who know best what work needs to be done, so their involvement is vital. Also, by involving staff members in the planning process, you help alleviate fears that volunteer workers might replace them.
- Prospective volunteers. If your organization already has volunteers, or you know whom you would like to recruit, ask them to help develop the plan. That way, your plan is sure to be developed in the volunteers' best interest, as well as in the interest of agency staff.

- If your organization doesn't already have one, you might consider appointing a volunteer coordinator. This person, who often reports to the supervisor, may be a staff member, or could be a volunteer.

Typical tasks of a volunteer coordinator:

1. Recruits volunteers
2. Communicates with different departments and program coordinators to find out what needs to be done and how much volunteer time is needed to do it
3. Educates staff on the roles and responsibilities of volunteers
4. Interviews and screens potential volunteers
5. Takes charge of volunteer orientation and training
6. Expresses volunteer opinions and ideas to other staff members, and facilitates collaboration between volunteers and paid staff members

Smaller organizations, groups that need fewer volunteers, or those whose future is uncertain, may find that a volunteer coordinator is unnecessary for their purposes. For them, the duties usually assumed by the coordinator can be split among other members of the organization in ways that make sense for the organization.

How do you plan the involvement of volunteers?

First of all, use the principles of strategic planning. Strategic planning is a process of determining how to get from "here" (where we are now) to "there" (where things ought to be). But planning for the involvement of volunteers will have important steps of its own. These steps are listed below. These are especially applicable for organizations having the resources and need for a comprehensive program for volunteer involvement. Smaller organizations, or organizations that rely less heavily on the use of volunteers, may want to adapt the plan suggested below, or might simply pick the parts which make most sense for their organization.

10 steps of an effective volunteer program:

1. Have reasons and a rationale for wanting volunteers
2. Develop job descriptions
3. Recruit volunteers
4. Screen potential volunteers
5. Conduct orientation of volunteers
6. Train volunteers
7. Supervise volunteers
8. Retain volunteers

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Evaluate volunteers10. Recognize efforts and achievements |
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Let's go through these one by one.

1. Have a rationale and reasons for wanting volunteers. You may have several reasons for wanting volunteers in general, and other reasons for asking for the help of specific people. It's important that you can articulate these; you might even want to write them down. When a potential volunteer asks, "Why do you need volunteers?" or "Why do you need me?" you should have answers ready.

These are two different questions, and should be thought about separately. First, what is your rationale for your organization having volunteers in *general*? To increase the quality or amount of services you provide? To increase community involvement? There are many good reasons for welcoming new volunteers into your agency; which are true for you?

Some examples of different rationales include:

- "We think community involvement is really important to helping us stay on track."
- "We want every child in our community to have caring adults to talk to, and we're a long way from that goal."
- "Volunteers can help us reach our goal of financial independence."
- "We believe that by using volunteers, we can establish a network of tutors who can significantly reduce the illiteracy rate in our city."
- "Our organization wants to become financially independent, and none of us have the first idea of how to do it."

Your rationale doesn't need to be terribly specific, and it isn't meant to be unchangeable. As your organization grows and develops, so will your need and reasons for having volunteers.

Along with the general rationale behind your program, you need a good idea of what you want volunteers to do. What skills are needed? Do you just need warm bodies to help clean up the park after the local arts festival, or do you need people with specific talents, such as experience with newsletter layout, or public speaking skills? If you don't have distinct reasons for having volunteers, your program may reflect that. Volunteers may feel unneeded--and eventually, they may feel like leaving.

2. Develop job descriptions. Now that your organization has decided exactly why it wants volunteers, you may want to write a formal job description. This is unnecessary for some tasks, especially those that are one-time events, such as passing out water to runners at your annual 10K run. But for more involved jobs that are longer term, a written description is an excellent way to explain the details to potential volunteers. It

also shows that your office is professional and well-organized --the type of place where people want to work. Also, this is a good way for you to think even more clearly about how many volunteers you need and what you need them for.

A volunteer job description, much like the description of a paid job, should include the following:

- Title
- Rationale/Purpose
- Nature of job/Responsibilities
- Qualifications
- Time requirement
- Proposed starting date (and, if applicable, end date)
- Boundaries: Authority invested in position, reporting relationships/supervision
- Benefits

3. Recruit volunteers. The next step in the process is to find the people you need--and convince them that they need you, too.

Recruitment is covered in the next section, so we won't go into too much detail on it now. The two main components of recruiting, however, are worth mentioning here:

- First, find out what potential volunteers want. What do they want to do? What things will make it easier for them to do that? What will make your agency more attractive? One excellent way to find this information is to conduct a needs assessment with potential volunteers.

Susan Ellis, an expert in the field of volunteer management, offers some advice. She writes, "Divorce, single parenthood, and caregiving to aging parents are only a few factors to which successful volunteer programs will adapt. Volunteer opportunities that respect people's limited time, welcome children to come along, and meet the social needs of adults to make new friends will be the ones that attract today's volunteers."

- Second, find ways to tell potential volunteers how volunteering for your agency can give them what they want. Recruiting can take place in many different ways: volunteers can tell their friends about the organization; you can have informational meetings; ads can be placed in the local paper; and there are many, many other possibilities. It's up to your organization to choose the recruitment tactic (or tactics) that make most sense for your program, budget, and needs.

4. Screen potential volunteers. A well-run recruitment effort should dig up many people offering their services to your organization. That's terrific, it's just what your organization needs! But some of these people may not be appropriate for your agency, or for the job they offer to do.

Why not? Well, some of them may not be suited for the job they apply for, and others may actually pose a threat to your agency. Additionally, as with paid staff members, your organization is legally responsible for what volunteers do while they are on the job. Organizations (and, in some states, individual executives and board members) are responsible for the actions committed by their volunteers while working.

What does this mean? Well, if a volunteer is going to the store to get paper for the newsletter, runs a red light, and hits someone, she may be personally liable for the accident. However, the person she hits could choose to sue the organization she works for as well, hoping that the organization is richer than the individual.

Here's another example: if a volunteer has a history of molesting children, you don't want him or her to run the childcare center at your clinic. First of all, the children may be at risk. And as with the situation above, the parents of any child who is harmed at your clinic may choose to sue the organization for allowing such a person to work with children--even if you didn't know about his or her history. In this case, too, most states have laws that forbid a person with a history of molestation to work with children--and again, even if you didn't know the person's history, you would still be breaking the law.

Screening volunteers is a good way to minimize these risks. For example, if the position involves a lot of driving, you might want to ask about a candidate's driving record. If it turns out she has had several speeding tickets in the last year, you might decide that a different job would be more appropriate.

Different agencies choose to screen volunteers in different ways. How you choose to screen your volunteers is especially dependent on what the volunteer will be doing, how much responsibility he/she will have, and the duration for which the volunteer will be working. Some of the most common screening tools include:

- A written application
- An interview with organization staff members and/or volunteers
- Letters of reference
- Essay questions can tell you more about the person as well. These may be part of the written application form, or may be offered individually. Some typical examples include, "Why do you want to work for our agency?" and "What are the values that guide what you do?"

Essay questions can also be tailored to the job a volunteer will be doing. For example, a crisis counseling hotline essay question might be, "What would you tell someone who calls and says that her boyfriend never listens to her, and doesn't seem to care about her feelings?"

- Criminal checks, which are done through the police department, are called for in some cases, such as when the volunteer will be working with children.
- Some organizations ask that the volunteer sign a work agreement, usually with the director of the organization or the volunteer's supervisor, which lays out what the volunteer will and will not do.

5. Conduct orientation of volunteers. When you have chosen volunteers from your pool of candidates, the next thing to do is explain to the new volunteers the basics of the organization, its philosophy, and what they will be doing. For larger volunteer programs, those that require extensive training, or those that will include a long time commitment with the agency, this often takes the form of a formal orientation session. These generally lasts for an hour or two and includes a tour of the facilities, and introduction to important staff members. Volunteers are often given copies of written materials (for example, a volunteer training manual, or brochures describing the group's work).

Less formally, someone in the agency might introduce a new volunteer to others in the office, show him around, get him started working, and offer to answer questions as they arise.

6. Train volunteers. More complex tasks may require extensive training of volunteers. For example, Headquarters, a crisis-counseling center in Lawrence, Kansas, requires over 100 hours of training before volunteers speak with clients. Other types of programs, too, might have long training programs before volunteers actually go into the field.

7. Supervise volunteers. Even though volunteers aren't on the payroll, you won't want to leave them to their own devices, without any sort of supervision and direction. Many people look on their volunteer experience as a time to learn, and gently delivered constructive comments can help the volunteer to grow. Further, what your volunteers do will certainly reflect back on your organization as a whole, so it's important that someone (the volunteer coordinator, if you have one, or perhaps the director in a smaller organization) keeps tabs on what people are doing.

8. Retain volunteers. Once you have excellent people working with you, you want to keep them. Just having a well-run program will go a long way to keeping volunteers--people like to feel they are involved with something useful, and not that they are wasting their time in an inept organization.

There are also more specific things that the group can do to make sure that volunteers want to stick around. These include:

- Paying special attention to the jobs that volunteers are given. The volunteers--tasks should include challenges that build on skills the volunteer already has while allowing him to learn even more. For example, if a volunteer is artistic, you might ask her to help design the agency brochure. That way, she can use her talent as an artist, and she also has the chance to learn about layout.

It's important, however, not to give a volunteer more work (or more challenging work) than he can realistically take on. The volunteer and his supervisor should talk together honestly about how much he can sensibly hope to accomplish while still feeling he is getting the challenge or satisfaction he desires. This is a delicate balance, and one that both the volunteer and his supervisor should think about thoroughly.

When trying to match jobs with volunteers, it might be a good idea to have a database that has the names of all of the organization's volunteers, their availability, and their interests. That way, when a specific job comes up, you can see who might be available and interested in doing it, before going outside of your organization.

- Recognizing and thanking volunteers is also very important in convincing people to stay. This is talked about more in #10 below.

9. Evaluate your program. In a comprehensive volunteer program, you should evaluate how well volunteers are doing. This includes how well they are meeting their goals, as well as how well their work is helping to fulfill the agency mission. Often, volunteers (like paid staff) are evaluated every six months or year.

An important part of the process is self-evaluation by the volunteer. How well does he feel he is doing? What would help him work more effectively? Are there other programs or projects at the organization that he would like to take part in? A self-evaluation is often forgotten by supervisors, but is often enormously helpful in increasing volunteer productivity.

How do you fire a volunteer?

Sometimes, a volunteer simply isn't working out the way you hoped. Often, people are wary of firing someone, especially when that person isn't paid. But when someone isn't doing the job they agreed to, you need to take action. Often, you can come to an understanding of why things aren't working out, change those conditions, and the volunteer can turn into a fantastic resource in that position.

But sometimes, our best efforts fail, and you need to take a person off of the job they are doing. How do you do that? Different things may be appropriate, depending on the reason you need to let them go. Be simple and honest. You might say:

- "I think we have a job better suited to your talents than the one you are doing now."
- "I'm afraid your actions aren't in keeping with the agency's philosophy. You might be happier volunteering somewhere else."
- "We've found someone better suited to the job you're doing."
- "We no longer need your help on this project."
- "I'm sorry, we need to let you go."

10. Recognize efforts and achievements. This is one of the most important things you can do for your volunteers. It's always important to recognize the work of your employees, and this is especially true for volunteers, who don't, after all, receive monetary compensation for what they do. Everyone wants his or her efforts to be noticed! If someone feels important to the organization, too, it's much more likely that they will remain an active member.

You can recognize the work of your volunteers in many different ways. Some of the more common possibilities include:

- Awards (e.g., plaques and certificates)--these can be agency awards, or you might nominate your volunteers for other awards, such as those which are city or statewide competitions.
- Celebrations, such as lunches or award dinners.
- Media attention--you might have a volunteer of the month whom you write about in the organization's newsletter, or you might submit a story about an outstanding volunteer to the local newspaper or television station. Many local newspapers have regular columns celebrating the accomplishments of community volunteers.
- A personal touch. Greet volunteers by name--people appreciate being remembered.
- Gratitude. Don't forget to smile and say thank you--and say it often!
- Sometimes, you might ask an outstanding volunteer to take on more responsibility.

A Word of Caution

Please be sure to follow the regulations established for USMEPCOM volunteers.

Section II: Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers is any way in which you ask people to be part of your organization without pay. You can recruit them as formally, with forms, a job title, etc., or as informally as asking your sister to help build an agency float, or anything in between.

You might recruit volunteers to fill a specific duty at a specific time, or simply for any help they can give. Recruitment does not have any set time limits -- you might recruit for a certain event, for a certain block of time such as six months, or for an indefinite period. Recruiters should seek volunteers who reflect the diversity found in the community, and they should also try to enlist volunteers who have ties with other agencies.

Why should you recruit volunteers?

- To give your organization the power to do more work
- To reduce the burden on paid staff members
- To give your group a larger, and therefore more diverse, membership
- To increase awareness and understanding of your organization through your recruiting as well as through the work the volunteers do
- To get as much done as possible within the confines of your budget
- To act together to achieve a shared purpose

When should you recruit volunteers?

Anytime is a good time to recruit volunteers, but you might step up your efforts when:

1. You have upcoming products, events, etc., with which you will need special assistance
2. You are expanding your organization's services
3. Your staff has become smaller or is not able to handle the amount of work you do
4. You are holding an annual "volunteer drive"
5. During National Volunteer Week or any official national day/week that corresponds to your organization mission (e.g., a coalition that works to reduce tobacco usage might increase volunteer efforts before the Great American Smokeout)

How to recruit volunteers: some basic steps

Research sources of potential volunteers in your community

Determine the makeup of your community, or its community sectors. Some community sectors include schools, churches, neighborhoods, businesses, service organizations

and clubs, youth groups, senior groups, media, grassroots groups, etc. Having a thorough understanding of the sectors in your area will help you to be aware of who is available as a volunteer in your community. It is essential if you wish to target your recruiting towards a specific population.

Learn who is interested in volunteering in your community, and who might be interested specifically in volunteering for your program. Determine:

- Why current volunteers volunteer
- What motivates them
- How they were recruited
- What their demographics (age, sex, income, etc.) are

You might do this by simply asking current or potential volunteers, or by looking for information from local and national studies on volunteers. Check with local researchers or a local volunteer center to see what data are available on volunteers in your community.

Plan and implement your recruitment strategy.

Think about potential volunteers as consumers. There are a lot of ways motivated individuals can give their time and talents in any particular community. Decide what your agency offers that is special and might draw in potential members. This step might include implementing a recruitment strategy. Your strategy might include:

- Defining target groups to recruit;
- Defining particular people within each target group;
- Defining a specific strategy to recruit both the target groups and the individuals within the groups;
- Implementing the strategy;
- Evaluating the strategy.

Finding volunteers

When looking for potential volunteers, brainstorm different ways to reach the greatest number of people. Some ways to find potential volunteers might include:

- Hold an annual appeal for volunteers that is modeled after traditional fund-raising drives;
- Use personal contact with current volunteers and staff. (This is the primary way people become involved in volunteer activities);

Also, consider recruitment strategies that focus only on a certain demographic group, such as teenagers, the elderly, etc. But also remember that the best way to recruit a potential volunteer is to make personal contact. Both everyday experience and well-documented research suggest that's the best approach. Ideally the contact should be:

- Face-to-face (a phone call is second best with a personal letter falling third);
- With someone the volunteer knows, likes, and respects.

It is usually helpful to make a very specific (and generally small) request with a smaller request as back-up, if the longer option is not possible. A follow-up call or letter can be very helpful for those who are uncertain.

Convincing potential volunteers to become active volunteers

Show that volunteering with your organization offers both tangible and intangible rewards. (e.g., "Your work can make a difference in the life of an at-risk child, and at the end of your training, you will be given a certificate stating that you have completed the Red Cross life saving course.")

Give volunteers their choice of jobs, or, let the volunteers create their own job description.

Invite potential volunteers to the agency headquarters to meet other volunteers and get a real "feel" for the agency.

Write a letter to potential volunteers--either a general letter, if you are recruiting a large number of people, or a warm, personal note. Both types of communication should explain what your organization does, why you need help, and why you need their help in particular.

Why should you recruit people from different groups to be volunteers?

To broaden the range of opinions and ideas to which your organization has access.

By encouraging diversity in your organization, it will have a more universal appeal; different ethnic populations are much more likely to respond if they believe that your group has members who share a similar heritage.

Possible barriers to be aware of when recruiting from specific populations:

- Many potential volunteers might like to volunteer, but are unable to afford related expenses such as travel costs.
- Potential volunteers are sensitive to screening, particularly if they perceive the screening process to be a means of excluding them. If your agency does use an extensive screening process, make sure it is used both fairly and flexibly, and explain the meaning of each step of the procedure.

- Some of the things your agency does might seem strange to some groups, and will need additional explanation. For example, it may seem alien to some groups of potential volunteers to volunteer outside of their own church or faith.
- Some organizations or meetings may be located in places that are not wheelchair accessible, and assistance may not be available for blind or hearing-impaired volunteers.

Tools

Tool #1: Ways to recruit members of specific populations

- In promotional materials, conversations, etc., explain how your organization's goals are in keeping with the interests and beliefs of a particular potential volunteer's background and beliefs.
- Highlight the achievements of volunteers from different cultural groups in your local newspaper.
- Do what you can to make your organization accessible for people for whom English is a second language. For example, if your organization is in an area with a strong Hispanic community, consider writing brochures, newsletters, etc., in Spanish, and hiring Spanish-speaking staff (or actively recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers!)
- Actively recruit a diverse paid staff.
- Make your agency an appropriate, comfortable place for potential volunteers to "check out."
- Offer opportunities for families to volunteer together.

Tool #2: 101 ways to give recognition to volunteers

by Vern Lake, Minnesota Department of Public Welfare

Smile · Put up a volunteer suggestion box · Treat to a soda · Reimburse assignment related expenses · Ask for a report · Send a birthday card · Arrange for discounts · Give service stripes · Maintain a coffee bar Plan · annual ceremonial occasions · Invite to a staff meeting · Recognize personal needs and problems · Accommodate personal needs and problems · Be pleasant · Be of use in an emergency situation · Provide a baby-sitter · Post an Honor Roll in the reception area · Respect their wishes · Give informal teas · Keep challenging them · Send a Thanksgiving card to the volunteer's family · Provide a nursery · Say "Good morning" · Greet by name · Provide good pre-service training · Help develop self-confidence · Award plaques to sponsoring groups · Take time to explain · Be verbal · Motivate agency VIPs to converse with them · Hold rap sessions · Give additional responsibility · Afford participation in team planning ·

Respect sensitivities · Enable to grow on the job · Send newsworthy information to the media · Have wine and cheese tasting parties · Ask client-patient to evaluate their work-service · Say "Good afternoon" · Create pleasant surroundings · Welcome to staff coffee breaks · Enlist to train other volunteers · Have a public reception · Take time to talk · Defend against hostile or negative staff · Make good plans · Commend to supervisory staff · Send a valentine · Make thorough pre-arrangements · Persuade "personnel" to equate volunteer experience with work experience Admit to partnership with paid staff · Recommend to prospective employer · Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops · Offer advocacy roles · Utilize them as consultants · Write them thank you notes · Invite participation in policy formation · Surprise with coffee and cake · Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements · Nominate for volunteer awards · Have a "Presidents Day" for new presidents of sponsoring groups · Carefully match volunteer with job · Praise them to their friends · Provide substantive in-service training · Provide useful tools in good working conditions · Say "Good night" · Plan staff and volunteer social events · Be a real person · Rent billboard space for public laudation · Accept their individuality · Identify age groups · Provide opportunities for conference and evaluation · Maintain meaningful life · Send impromptu fun cards · Plan occasional extravaganzas · Instigate client-planned surprises · Utilize purchased newspaper space · Promote a "Volunteer of the Month" program · Send a letter of appreciation to employer · Plan a recognition edition of the agency newsletter · Color code name tags to indicate particular achievements (hours, years, unit, etc.) · Send commendatory letters to prominent public figures · Say "We missed you" · Praise the sponsoring group or club · Promote staff smiles · Facilitate personal maturation · Distinguish between group and individuals in the group · Maintain safe working conditions · Adequately orientate · Award special citations for extraordinary achievements · Fully indoctrinate regarding the agency · Send Christmas cards · Be familiar with details of assignments · Conduct community-wide cooperative, interagency recognition events · Plan a theater party · Attend sports events · Have a picnic · Say "Thank you" · Smile

Tool #3: If you want my loyalty, interest, and best efforts, remember that?

By President J. Donald Philip, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan

1. I need sense of belonging, a feeling that I'm honestly needed for my total self, not just for my hands, not because I take orders well.
2. I need to have some sense of sharing in planning our objectives. My need will be satisfied only when I feel that my ideas have had a fair hearing.
3. I need to feel that the goals and objectives are within reach, and that they make sense to me.

4. I need to feel that what I'm doing has real purpose or contributes to human welfare; that its values extends even beyond my personal gain, or hours.
5. I need to share in making the rules by which, together, we shall live and work toward our goals.
6. I need to know in some clear detail just what is expected of me: not only my detailed task, but where I have the opportunity to make personal and final decisions.
7. I need to have some responsibilities that challenge, that are within the range of my abilities and interest, and that contribute toward reaching my assigned goal, and that cover all goals.
8. I need to see that progress is being made toward the goals we have set.
9. I need to be kept informed. What I'm not up on, I may be down on. (Keeping me informed is one way to give me status as an individual.)
10. I need to have confidence in my superiors, confidence based upon assurance of consistent fair treatment, on recognition when it is due, and trust that loyalty will bring increased security.

In brief, it really doesn't matter how much sense my part in this organization makes to you. I must feel that the whole deal makes sense to me. I would add, hopefully, the whole deal makes sense to everyone involved: the client, staff, volunteer and you.

Checklist

Here, you'll find a checklist summarizing the major points contained in the text.

- ___ You understand what it means to recruit volunteers for your organization
- ___ You understand why you should recruit volunteers
- ___ You know when you should recruit volunteers
- ___ You are familiar with the basic steps to recruit volunteers
- ___ You researched sources for potential volunteers in your community
- ___ You planned and implemented your recruiting strategy

___ You found volunteers

___ You convinced potential volunteers to become active volunteers

___ You understand the challenges and benefits of recruiting volunteers from varied cultural and ethnic groups

___ You understand why you should recruit people from different groups to be volunteers

___ You know the ways to recruit members of specific populations

Section III: What information should you cover during an orientation session?

If your group is like many others, you depend on your volunteers for many things. Their jobs may range from doing the agency taxes to taking care of children; or from licking stamps to running career fairs. Whatever jobs they do, however, one thing is almost always true: Your organization needs their help to function effectively.

In the previous section, we talked about how to recruit new volunteers. Once you've got them in the door, however, your work has just begun. Your volunteers need to be received as you might meet a guest, and shown around the organization. You need to carefully explain what's happening (and what might happen), because if the coast looks dark and unwelcoming, the new recruit might turn around and walk right back out that door.

To help welcome new volunteers into the organization, some groups hold orientation programs to start new volunteers start on the path of becoming seasoned hands.

What is an orientation program?

First, let's think for a moment of what we mean by orientation. Even though we might not think of it that way, orientation really starts from our initial contact with the new volunteer.

When you speak to a prospective volunteer over the phone, or when you meet that person for an interview, orientation has actually begun. You are giving your recruit a sense of what your organization is all about. More than that, you are inevitably communicating something about:

- The way your organization does business;
- Your attitudes towards the outside world;

- Your seriousness of purpose;
- Your sense of humor;
- Your general expectations about the content of the job, and;
- Your general expectations about the way in which the job should be performed.

You communicate much of the information in this initial orientation non-verbally. You may not even be aware that you're doing it. But this "informal" orientation is important because your recruit's first impression of you and your organization will be based in it. There's plenty of scientific research to indicate that first impressions are formed very quickly, and that those impressions are hard to shake.

You probably wish to supplement this implicit orientation with more explicit and formal instruction, in which you will systematically communicate certain general information about your organization and the job. That formal instruction is what we mean by an orientation program, and that is the focus of this section.

On the next few pages, we will discuss why your organization should hold an orientation program, how to design and present orientations that make most sense for your circumstances, and finally, how to evaluate what you've done.

Before we go any further, an important distinction to make is that an orientation program is not the same as a training program. A training program, as discussed in the next section, goes into great detail about how to do a specific job--information that is usually over and above what you're trying to get across in an orientation session.

For example, a program in which volunteers tutor people for literacy might have a training program with several different sessions. These sessions could explain how to best teach people to read and give an overview of phonetics and adult learning.

An orientation program, on the other hand, would take place before this training. It may tell new volunteers how long the program has been in existence, where they will be doing the tutoring (and, generally speaking, to whom), what is expected of them, the benefits they can expect to receive, et cetera. It should not, however, teach them how to teach.

Why should you have orientation programs?

What are some of the advantages of a structured orientation program? There can be quite a few benefits. These include:

- Imparting knowledge. The orientation program will help new volunteers learn about your organization and its mission and goals, and may instruct the volunteer on policies and procedures in your organization.

- Increasing confidence. An orientation program can make future volunteers more comfortable and confident in their work by helping the volunteer better understand what the agency does, and may help him/her see the purpose of what he or she is doing.

For example, Vaiju, a second grade teacher, signs up to help collect donations for a local children task force a bit hesitantly, as she is not used to asking for donations. After the orientation session, however, she understands that the donations she will be collecting will help make sure some local children have enough clothes to keep them warm in the winter months ahead. Understanding the goal and her part in it, she sets aside some of her usual reserve, and becomes an excellent champion for the cause.

Increasing enthusiasm. Volunteer orientation is an important part of maintaining the motivation and enthusiasm that caused people to want to help to begin with. A positive orientation session affirms people's decisions to work for your organization. It reminds them that what they are doing is worthwhile, and shows them that your organization is the place to help.

Avoiding future problems. By explaining important information from the start, you save time and energy that would be spent on questions, misunderstandings, and misconceptions.

What kind of orientation should you give?

Orientation programs, as defined above, vary widely in terms of length, structure, method of delivery, and amount of detail. They can range from a casual one-on-one conversation in the corridor to highly structured classroom sessions in large groups lasting several days. And there are many points in between. So which to choose? Some criteria in making decisions about your orientation program:

- The number of people who need to be oriented right now
- The number of people available to do the orienting (and their available time and expertise)
- The complexity of the job to be performed
- The prior experience of the new volunteer in performing that job or a similar one
- The presence (or absence) of an orientation program that someone else may previously have established

Larger organizations, or those that have many volunteers, will generally have a more formal orientation program. This might take place over an hour or two and is often a requirement for becoming a volunteer. It might take place during the recruitment phase of your volunteer program, or on the volunteer's first day on the job.

Smaller groups, or introductions for volunteers who work on one-time assignments, such as helping cook at the annual fundraising chili feed, may orient new volunteers individually. In these cases, the volunteer director or another member of the organization may simply show the new volunteer around, and (for simpler tasks) show him what he'll be doing.

This section will talk primarily about larger, more official orientation programs. Many of the ideas that follow, however, can be easily adapted to smaller, less formal situations.

How do you run orientation programs?

Again, this will depend on your organization's needs. But here are some things to consider in coming up with a solution that meets your group's needs.

Decide what you want to accomplish with your orientation program. When new volunteers leave after you have completed the orientation, what should they know? What should they be prepared to do? It sometimes helps to write down these goals; then, you can figure out how you will reach them.

Decide how large and formal you want the orientation to be. Will you recruit many volunteers together, or only one or two at a time? Will new volunteers have to come at a specific time for the orientation program, or will it be a part of the volunteers-- first day? How much time (and how many resources) do you want to spend on the program?

There are no set answers to these questions. Instead, it's up to your organization to answer them in ways that make the most sense to you.

Decide who will be responsible for the orientation of new volunteers. The responsibility for orientation may fall to the volunteer coordinator, if you have one; it can be split between two or more people; or different individuals can take on the task at different times. If you are planning on having a more formal orientation program, however, or one that will probably be repeated, it often makes sense to have one person in charge of the orientation, even if some of the tasks will be split. That way, you can be sure that the orientation program is consistent and that new volunteers hear the same things. Also, it's human nature to get better at things the more we do them. Practice may not always make perfect, but it certainly helps!

Get the word out. A brilliantly thought out and executed plan won't do much good if you don't have an audience. Posters might help; a postcard sent out as a reminder of the orientation session can be very helpful for busy people who might have forgotten to write the date on their calendar.

Arrange the logistics of the situation, especially when you are hosting a more formal orientation session. Will the meeting room be free when you need it? Do you have enough copies of the volunteer manual for everyone who is supposed to come, plus a few extras? Enough chairs? Is the meeting area accessible for people with disabilities--The devil is in the details; try not to get caught unaware!

Be sure you have taken care of everyone's physical comfort when they arrive. Is the room too cold? Too hot? Do they need something to drink, and do they know where the bathrooms are? If people are physically uncomfortable, they will have a hard time listening to you and participating in the discussion and activities. And when they are uncomfortable, most people become less open to new ideas, either to thinking of their own, or to listening to those of other people.

Even if you can't do much, you'll probably find that there are some basic comforts everyone will find important, and you will want to take care of them before the meeting. Some possibilities include:

- Soft lighting
- Comfortable chairs
- Access to restrooms
- Making sure the temperature is comfortable for everyone
- Taking breaks when the orientation goes on too long
- Refreshments (at an absolute minimum, you'll want to be sure there is water available)

Set people at ease. Often, orientation sessions are made up of people who don't know each other, and they may be a bit shy about really getting involved in the discussion, or asking questions--even important ones that everyone needs to hear the answers to. Icebreaking activities can be used to break this tension, and the person in charge of the orientation program may choose to use one if the participants are uncomfortable.

Cover the information you have decided is important for the orientation session. Evaluate what you have done. These last two steps are important enough to merit extended discussion. Let's look at them individually.

What information should you cover during an orientation session?

A lot of different things might be appropriate, depending on the size, goals, and functions of your organization. Some of the items that are more commonly discussed include:

- A description of your organization's programs, the community you serve, and your organization's relationships in the community.

- The structure of your organization, including an introduction to key staff members and an explanation of their roles.
- What is expected of the volunteers, including a general overview of the jobs they will be doing.
- A brief history of your organization. Help them understand your organization's mission, policies and main goals, as well as how the volunteer can contribute.
- An explanation of your organization's policies, rules, and procedures.
- A tour of the facilities. Make sure you show the volunteer offices, phones, rest rooms, parking, et cetera.
- The volunteer training schedule, if one exists.
- The volunteer evaluation and performance review system.
- Volunteer benefits. These may be tangible, such as free membership in a nearby gym or free coffee and doughnuts for breakfast. But the job also has more abstract benefits, such as personal growth or the opportunity to obtain new skills. For example, a group helping to build low-income housing may teach volunteers the basics of construction--a skill they will be able to use throughout their lives. A mentoring relationship might give the mentor the satisfaction of having helped a young person succeed in school, or having opened his protégée's eyes to new life possibilities.
- Emergency procedures, such as where to go in case of a storm, where the first aid kit is kept, and related information, should always be explained.

An orientation session should be a time to make new volunteers feel welcome and part of the group. Any orientation, formal or otherwise, should close with a sincere expression of appreciation and welcome.

Written materials for new volunteers

It is often helpful to have some orientation materials in writing. These can range from a one-page tip sheet to a full-length orientation manual. The more complex the job, and the more complex the orientation, the more material should be included. (One variation of this, in large organizations, is to include one or more instructional videos, describing the organization and how it works).

Some organizations have orientation manuals (sometimes called personnel manuals or policy manuals), which are given to new recruits, or at least made available to them. If your organization is large or formal, such as an established agency or school or church, you might consider developing something comparable. Such development can take place over time, with new policies or other information being added gradually, possibly in a loose-leaf binder format. Loose-leaf binders are particularly good because new information can be inserted in its proper place and outdated information removed.

Warning: Written orientation materials should supplement, not replace face-to-face orientation. More personalized orientation can deal with topics that printed materials do

not address. It can also communicate which points in the written material are just there for the record, and those which really need to be followed to the letter. Most importantly, of course, talking with someone can answer questions and allay any fears the new volunteer might have.

Information that might be covered in a volunteer manual:

- Copies of publications such as brochures, articles, et cetera that have been written or produced by the organization
- Staff and volunteer directory
- Record keeping forms and paperwork
- Reimbursement policy
- Termination procedure
- Dress code
- Scheduling changes
- Grievance procedure
- Definitions of technical terms and jargon used by your organization
- Information on client rights, confidentiality, legal restrictions
- Volunteer promotion opportunities
- Use of agency facilities, equipment, services
- A written copy of information discussed during the orientation

Evaluating your orientation

At the end of your orientation session, you want to know how well it went and if new volunteers learned what you hoped they would. Give yourself some credit for taking the time to orient new members--but remember that the fact that you are providing orientation does not necessarily mean it is valuable to them.

An evaluation component should normally be built into any orientation you deliver. It can be as simple as asking newly oriented members to rate the clarity and value (or other aspects) of the orientation, either right after the orientation, and/or at some time in the future. Evaluation could also involve observations of orientation sessions by other staff, or measurement of some aspect of job performance directly related to the orientation. And--the next and last step--once your evaluation data have been collected, then it's your job to use it in practice, to strengthen your orientation program, and help it be the best program possible, within the time and resources available.

Orientation is ongoing?

Your organization will change over time, a natural process, which means that volunteers will need to be kept abreast of changes in the organization. The larger and more hierarchical your organization, the more this is true.

In other words, orientation is an ongoing process. It does not end with an orientation session, but rather in a real way it continues as long as a member is part of your group. How can this ongoing orientation best take place? As before, this will depend on the nature of your particular group, and especially on its size; but here are some options open to you:

Developing an orientation manual, making it someone's job to update it regularly.

Holding "general staff" meetings on a periodic basis for everyone in the organization regardless of function. Use these meetings to present new policies, procedures, developments, and to answer questions. This is also a good place to get useful feedback from your volunteers.

Distributing an organizational newsletter, which can accomplish some of these same purposes in print. Remember that none of this is in any way a substitute for clear day-to-day communication with your volunteers. But these more formal structures can be used to supplement that communication, and to provide added insurance that all your volunteers are "on the same page."

To sum it up:

Organizations often depend on a constant influx of new volunteers to survive and thrive as they try to obtain their goals. To do so, however, it's important that the new volunteers understand that you really are welcoming them with open arms. By skillfully managing orientation programs, you are effectively institutionalizing that welcome and making sure that everyone who wants to help will understand what they are doing and why they do it--and finally, how important their help is to the organization. And that knowledge is one of the best ways to make sure that the volunteers you orient today remain dedicated volunteers in the months and years to come.

Section IV: Training your volunteers

Many volunteers are charged with complicated tasks that take a lot of understanding and knowledge to do properly. Sometimes, your organization will get lucky, and someone with perfect training will show up and be ready to offer their talents for just what you need. An accountant offers his services to help with payroll; a social worker offers to talk with people who have just lost their homes in a terrible flood.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case, nor is it even often the case. Many times, well-meaning people will offer to help your organization, but are lacking many of the skills you need most. A man comes in to be a "big brother," but has no experience with young people. Women sign up to help women who have been raped after a "Take Back the Night," march, but have little idea of what to do. In situations like these when you need many people with the same skills, your group might want to have some sort of formal training program. Because while enthusiasm for your cause is fantastic, it needs to be gathered and focused to truly meet your organization's objectives.

Does this mean you will always need to have training programs when you use volunteers-- Absolutely not! There is a lot of good work that can be done with no training, or a minimal amount. Selling drinks at a concession stand, running the nursery at the annual meeting, and helping to clean up the church grounds after the annual bazaar are three examples of times when volunteer help can be used with very little training required.

This section, then, isn't really geared towards those types of volunteer efforts. While such volunteers probably will need some type of orientation, as discussed in the last section, much formal training isn't really going to be necessary for their purposes.

This section has been written for organizations in which at least some of the volunteers do work that require more extensive training. Examples of this include peer and crisis counselors, volunteer health workers, teachers, and maybe volunteers in your organization. If so, then let's continue.

On the following few screens, we will discuss the advantages of a formal training session, how to decide who should conduct the training, and different ways to train volunteers. We'll also include a discussion of the principles of adult learning, to help ensure that people are really getting what you hoped out of the training sessions.

Why should your organization have training programs?

Sometimes, your organization doesn't really have a choice; volunteer training is an absolute necessity. To be a lifeguard, for example, the candidate will have to be trained in CPR.

But for many groups, the decision whether or not to have a training program is not so clear-cut. Some of the advantages to consider when deciding whether or not to have a training program include:

New volunteers get to know the people, the program, and the job quickly and efficiently.

Training your volunteers establishes that there is a minimum competency which all volunteers are expected to obtain.

Many volunteers see training as a benefit of being part of an organization. Training teaches them skills that may be helpful to them elsewhere, and may even help them get a paying job.

It publicly acknowledges a necessary level of proficiency. By training your volunteers, you are making the statement that the organization is professional, and capable of doing important work--and doing that work well.

Some organizations use training as a "weeding out" technique, making sure that volunteers who have signed up will be likely to live up to their commitments.

Who should train new volunteers?

Once your organization has decided that it wants an official training program, you should next decide who should run it. Of course, this will depend greatly on your situation: how many volunteers need to be trained, how much training they need, and the resources you are able to put towards training, to mention just a few of the variables. So it will be up to you, or another member of your organization, to decide what makes most sense. Some of the typical possibilities include:

Some organizations have a director of training as a member of staff. This makes particular sense for organizations that do trainings year round for moderate-sized or large groups of people. An organization may also have someone on staff for which one of their duties is to coordinate new volunteer trainings.

If your organization has a volunteer coordinator or director, he or she will almost always play a role in training sessions, and may take charge of the trainings in smaller organizations.

Other volunteers are often an integral part of training, although they run the programs more rarely. In smaller organizations, the entire training might take place by one volunteer shadowing another for a few days; for larger, more formal trainings, volunteers can give trainees an important perspective on "what it's really like."

Incorporating volunteers into training programs has benefits for the volunteer trainers as well as for the organization and trainees. As training director Lisa Rasor puts it, "We encourage experienced volunteers to be trainers because that's one way for them to refresh their skills and to feel more connected to the agency-- to have more of a stake in what's going on."

If no one in the group excels at the task in which you are training volunteers, you might even want to go outside of the group to find someone to run the training. This could be someone you hire on an ad hoc basis--or would he be willing to offer his services for free?

How do you develop training programs?

As with any other plan you will develop, there are certain steps to developing a training program. They include:

Decide what you want to teach volunteers. Why are you training volunteers? When new volunteers leave, what should they know? And just as importantly, what do they want to know? Both the trainer and the trainees will have goals for the training program; it's important that the trainer develop a training program that focuses on both of these. It might even help the person doing the training to write these goals down. If the trainer doesn't have clear ideas of what volunteers should leave knowing, chances are the volunteers will leave the training session pretty confused.

Typically, a training session will try to impart four things to new volunteers:

What to do--What is expected of them, as new volunteers? What will their responsibilities be?

How to do it--It's one thing to tell someone, "pour cement for the porch," but if you don't explain how to do it, things will likely be very messy indeed. Explaining how volunteers can best accomplish their tasks is the crux of training, and will probably take up the largest chunk of time.

What not to do--are there certain things volunteers are not allowed to do? For example, should they not talk about clients, for the sake of confidentiality? Are there situations in which they should automatically call for staff backup? Training should make a volunteer's (and the agency's) limits very, very clear.

What to do in an emergency--if the volunteers had an orientation before training began, they will have already heard this information, but it's worth going over again. The

location of the first aid kit should be known by everyone (and possibly some first aid techniques as well), as well as what to do in a fire or a severe storm.

Decide how you will teach them. What kind of training program do you want to give new volunteers? Simpler possibilities are good for smaller organizations, simpler tasks, and groups that don't have the resources for a full training program. Two such possibilities are the use of the "Buddy System" and shadowing. In the "Buddy System," a new volunteer works with an experienced person at first, and the experienced person answers questions and makes suggestions. Shadowing is very similar, but the new volunteer is more passive, and watches more than she does at the beginning.

For a larger group of people, more challenging work, and groups with sufficient resources, a more extensive training plan is often more appropriate. This may take a few hours or a few months, or anywhere in between. The amount of material to be covered and the resources available should be your guide.

The following steps are specific to a larger, more formal training plan. Smaller training programs may be able to adapt them to their needs.

Write a budget for your training. Trainings can be done fairly inexpensively, but they are rarely free. Typical expenses include for equipment or room rental, trainer fees, staff time, food and beverages, and supplies.

Decide what materials you would like to use, and what will fit into your budget. You may find videos, workbooks, recorded material, web pages, or other materials helpful. Depending on the type of training you are doing, you should be able to find helpful materials from national clearinghouses, organizations similar to yours, or other sources on information.

Get the word out. Send a note out to new volunteers reminding them of the times and places of training sessions. Also, be clear about how much time training will take. If your training is particularly long, ask for written or oral confirmation that they will be able to make all (or most) of the training sessions.

Make sure all of the logistics have been worked out before each training session. That is, that the room is empty and prepared; there are enough chairs; the speakers know what time to show up, and similar details.

Pay attention to the physical comfort of trainees. This is the first thing you should do when people arrive. Is the room too cold? Too hot? Do they need something to drink, and do they know where the bathrooms are? If people are physically uncomfortable, they will have a hard time listening to you and participating in the discussion and activities.

Set people at ease. When trainings begin people may be shy about getting involved in the discussion or about asking questions. Understand this nervousness, and try to find

ways to reduce it. A comfortable learning environment can help put people at ease (it's hard to be really uncomfortable on a soft sofa, for example), as can icebreakers. The person in charge of the orientation program may choose to use one if he feels the participants are uncomfortable. See the Tools at the end of this section for an example of an icebreaker.

When people are relatively comfortable, you're ready to start training. Before you write up your lesson plans, however, it can be helpful to understand how adults learn best. Understanding certain ideas and techniques, sometimes called "principles of adult learning," can help in developing a highly effective training program.

Principles of adult learning

Adults must feel a need to learn. It's important that they understand the relevance of what is being taught to what they will be doing. For example, if the trainer is explaining group dynamics to a group of people who will be health educators in local clinics, she will probably have a better audience if the trainees know they will be talking to groups, and not just doing one-on-one counseling. If trainees understand that, the information automatically becomes useful, not just another lecture they need to sit through before they can get to the "real work."

Allow adults to share their previous experiences, and try to relate them to the present situation. Everyone likes to feel that they have something to bring to the discussion; by relating past experiences to the current topic, your trainees will not only feel that they have something to add, but will also have a better understanding of the subject being discussed. It's no longer academic to them--it's something they have experienced, something they know.

People learn better when lessons are centered around solving problems. Instead of a lecture, presenting a problem and helping trainees find the answer is a much more effective way of teaching. People like to puzzle things out; and by presenting a problem, you ask people to think, not just passively accept what they are told.

Training should be interactive. You should lecture very little when training adult volunteers, and you should supplement your lectures with other methods as much as possible. Studies show that we retain only 20% of what we hear in a lecture setting, so consider incorporating discussions, observations, role-playing, demonstrations, and writing in your training program.

Balance support with challenging the learner. This is a delicate balance, which will come more naturally with experience. Try to convey to the trainee--through words of encouragement, written policies, or other methods--that he or she will always have the support necessary to do the job well. At the same time, however, challenge the volunteer to take on more complicated tasks as confidence and understanding grow.

Urge volunteers to use their creativity. Encourage suggestions, ideas, and improvements that the trainees might come up with, both to improve the training and to improve the program or organization as a whole. Since most trainees are probably new to the organization, they will certainly see things differently than people who have been there a while. Be sure to take advantage of their enthusiasm and fresh points of view!

Remember that people aren't the same. People learn in different ways, and may respond better to different approaches. The trainer should pay attention to how people are responding and try to modify the training accordingly.

Develop lesson plans. Now that you understand the principles of adult learning, it's time to write lesson plans. These are very helpful in keeping you on task, keeping an eye on the time, and making sure you cover everything you have intended to cover. A lesson plan may cover several hours of training time: if your training has been broken up into several (or many) different time slots, each one may have an individual lesson plan. A shorter training may only need one lesson plan; if your training is taking place over a large chunk of time (for example, at a weekend retreat), different ideas may be separated into different lesson plans, much like a grade school teacher might do for his different classes.

Individual lesson plans

The learning objectives (i.e., the intended result of the lesson)--for example, "At the end of this lesson, trainees will be comfortable talking about condoms in front of a small group of peers, and will know current slang terms for them."

The time allotted for each activity--although there are no absolutes, this is usually fairly short--under an hour. That way, trainees don't have time to get bored, and are kept on their toes by constantly changing activities.

A detailed explanation of each activity

Ways to evaluate trainee understanding (for example, a quiz at the end of the lesson; asking trainees to do something based on what they learned)

A list of resources needed to carry out the activities (e.g., markers, workbooks)

Evaluate trainees. Evaluation is a very important last step in your training program. By doing a simple evaluation, you will be able to learn what trainees understood from the training. Some possibilities for evaluation include:

- Field testing--that is, give them the chance to demonstrate what they have learned under careful supervision

- Small group evaluation--where trainees might talk together about what they gained from the training
- Pretest--posttest score comparison--the same test is given to trainees when they enter and finish training. This is particularly helpful when you want trainees to get a lot of facts out of the training session, and it can also be useful when you are uncertain of the knowledge trainees originally bring to the classroom. For example, a group training to become AIDS educators might come to a training session with widely differing levels of knowledge about HIV. A pretest-posttest allows the trainer to understand what trainees already know (and modify the training program accordingly), and also how much they learn during the sessions.

Evaluation, however, is a two-way street--trainees should have the chance to give you feedback as well. At the end of the training (or possibly, at the end of specific lessons), you should give the trainees the chance to give you specific and anonymous feedback. Then, you should be sure to incorporate this feedback in to future trainings, to make sure that your organization is constantly improving, and that your volunteers are the best prepared possible, and that they will remain happy and productive at your organization.

Celebrate the end of training. Especially if the training has been long or very challenging, you might want to celebrate the successful completion of training. Some groups even give awards such as certificates of achievement or gift certificates to further recognize the occasion.

Training is ongoing

After the certificates have been passed out and the crumbs swept up, however, training is still not over. Training often continues for as long as the volunteers work at your organization. Annual retreats, classes, or conferences may all serve to refresh and enhance a volunteer's knowledge. Sometimes, these trainings are mandated to renew certification (as in First Aid certification). They may also be given sporadically, as new information or techniques become available.

The important point to remember is that volunteers, like paid staff, can benefit from additional training as they continue at their jobs. And by giving additional training, you show volunteers how valuable they are to your organization. Training offers the chance to grow and change within the organization; volunteers don't need to leave the group to find new challenges.

To sum it up

Teaching new volunteers the skills they need to function effectively as part of your organization can be difficult work. By creating a training plan, however, you can cut down on potential headaches while making sure volunteers have the most comprehensive, effective teaching possible. And in the long run, your work will pay off in the form of skillful volunteers who really are making the goals and dreams of your agency happen.

Tools

Tool #1: "Icebreaker" activities

This activity was suggested by Lisa Razor, Former Director of Volunteer Training at Headquarters Counseling Center, Lawrence, KS

Forced choice exercise.

In this exercise, the facilitator puts signs in three different parts of the room. The facilitator will ask the trainees if they would consider themselves a listener, a talker or a doer. Those are the only three choices, so it's a forced choice--you have to choose one of those areas.

Or another possible question is, "Do you consider yourself adventurous, creative or idealistic?" Sometimes, trainees might say, "Well I can be any of those." But they still have to choose just one possibility.

And so the groups that gather in those different areas will talk about why they chose that area, why they chose adventurous over idealistic. And then, they will just get to know each other that way with that forced choice, and find some things in common. Then, do a few more sets of those, different sets of forced choices.

Additional forced choice questions include:

- Do you consider yourself compassionate, just, or philosophical?
- Are you a realist, an optimist, or a dreamer?
- Are you punctual, serious, or spontaneous?

Sometimes, trainees find themselves in groups with different people; sometimes, they'll go through three sets and have one other person that's in all three sets, and they'll go, "Wow, we might have a lot in common." So this can be a very good group building exercise.

Tool #2: Lesson plan form

This form can be copied and filled out with your own lesson plans.

Lesson ____:

Date:

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, trainees will:

- Activity
- Explanation
- Time
- Materials needed

Tool #3: Trainee evaluation form

Trainee Evaluation Form

In the interest of anonymity, we ask that you do NOT put your name on this form.

Training Session Title:

Session Presenter/Facilitator:

Date:

On a scale of 1--5, with 5 being most useful, how useful did you find this information?

1 2 3 4 5

On a scale of 1--5, with 5 being excellent, how well presented was this session?

1 2 3 4 5

What did you like most about this training session?

What did you like least about this training session?

What would you change about the training session?

Source:
Community Toolbox
University of Kansas
<http://ctb.ku.edu/index.jsp>

Volunteer Management Exercise

Determine if the following statements are true or false.

1. _____ Volunteers save the organization money.
2. _____ A 40-hour training program is required for all volunteers.
3. _____ A job description should be developed for all volunteer positions.
4. _____ People learn better when they try to solve problems.
5. _____ A volunteer coordinator is not responsible for recruiting other volunteers.

Answer:

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False