

## The 12 Elements of a Successful Volunteer Program

### Element #1: Planning and Resources

Planning is the key to success for all organizational projects, and volunteer program development is no exception. Planning for volunteers, who will be your organization's unpaid personnel, includes a variety of decisions about: climate/readiness for volunteers; goals and objectives; budget and resources; staff preparation; and an implementation plan.

### Element #2: Staffing

By definition, volunteers are part-time staff with widely varying schedules. Add to this the diversity and backgrounds of the people who volunteer, and the resulting work force is a logistical challenge. A volunteer program must have a clearly-designated coordinator to handle all the activities outlined in these thirteen management elements.

### Element #3: Volunteer Work Design

Developing volunteer assignments that are meaningful to the organization and attractive to prospective volunteers requires both planning and vision. It means analyzing what needs to be done (whether to assist staff or to provide a service directly to clients) and then creatively designing tasks doable in short bursts of time, by a variety of people with different skills. Expectations and qualifications for such volunteer positions need to be defined in writing.

### Element #4: Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of encouraging people to give their time and energy to an organization as volunteers. Successful recruitment requires the support of the entire organization and is closely tied to overall public relations and marketing efforts.

### Element #5: Interviewing and Screening

Effective initial interviewing of prospective volunteers prevents many types of supervision and management problems. It also allows candidates to be matched with the most appropriate and appealing assignment for them.

### Element #6: Orientation and Training

*Orientation* is the overview of the total organization necessary for every volunteer, regardless of specific assignment. It places the work in context and allows for consistent introduction of policies, procedures, rights and responsibilities.

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*Training* of volunteers should be customized to the requirements of each position description and the background each volunteer brings to the organization. There is initial, start-up training, plus the need for ongoing, in-service training. Much training is dependent upon giving clear instructions and is integrated into supervision.

### **Element #7: Volunteer/Employee Relationships**

The interrelationship of volunteers and employees can be the single biggest obstacle to effective volunteer involvement, unless steps are taken to encourage teamwork. This requires training, evaluation and administrative attention. It is also important to pay attention to the relationships between long-time volunteers and newcomers.

### **Element #8: Supervision**

As with employees, volunteers need support from those in a position to see the total picture and who know what work needs to be done. A key aspect of the supervision of volunteers is access to someone in charge during the time the volunteer is on duty. Not all volunteers are supervised. Some require liaison or reporting contact.

### **Element #9: Recognition**

Recognition is a form of compensation for volunteer efforts. It includes thanking volunteers for their efforts and welcoming volunteers' input. An organization can provide annual formal recognition through certificates and dinners, but equally important are daily support and informal expressions of appreciation.

### **Element #10: Recordkeeping and Reporting**

If volunteers are important to the work of the organization, it is important to know what volunteers are doing. Documenting their work assists in recruitment, training, recognition and even fundraising. Recordkeeping is also necessary for insurance coverage and to support the income-tax deduction claims of volunteers. Once records are kept, they are of little meaning if they are not reported. Reports of the cumulative achievements of volunteers should be shared with volunteers, as well as with administration, other staff and funding sources.

### **Element #11: Evaluation**

Because volunteer time is too valuable to waste, it is imperative to evaluate the impact of volunteer services regularly and to discover whether those services are still the most meaningful ones to deliver. Along with program evaluation, it also is helpful to conduct individual performance reviews with volunteers. This practice maintains standards for the program and also recognizes each volunteer.

### **Element #12: Volunteer Input**

Some organizations want help from volunteers, but not input. Volunteers are in a position to observe an organization and can take more risks in criticizing. They also are effective community advocates when they observe things going well. It is important to create a channel for volunteer comments. Also, having the opportunity to voice opinions and make suggestions encourages greater participation in all aspects of the volunteer program.