

Managing Volunteers: Creating A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Volunteers are arguably the base of any nonprofit organization. Without them, the budget conscious, understaffed organization would not have the resources to do their work. Individuals who volunteer do so for multiple reasons: personal growth, bringing about social change, friendship, recognition, and achievement to name a few. Individuals tend to stop volunteering with an organization when: the organization is disorganized, there is lack of board support, and/or there is limited training and orientation, among other reasons. However, several will remove themselves from an organization when the organization is inefficient, especially when it wastes the volunteer's time or makes their assignments more difficult.



Managing volunteers can easily be a challenging, yet rewarding effort, for all involved. However, many individuals, on top of their "regular" organizational responsibilities, are charged with this additional responsibility. It can sometimes be a frustrating experience to oversee the work of unpaid individuals. Just because individuals have kindly offered their time does not mean your organization can take them on board without monitoring their work or behavior. It will help to come up with a structured process on volunteer management.

Start Out on the Right Foot.

Training and orientation are great ways to welcome volunteers and make them feel like part of a team. A training session should present an overview of expectations for volunteers and provide them with the information they need to succeed.

- a. Draft a volunteer manual that clearly defines all procedures in writing and use it as an outline for the training session.
- b. Provide volunteers with other helpful materials like brochures and contact lists.
- c. Formally introduce volunteers to members of the organization and the board and indicate names, positions and departments.

In addition, consider the following:

1. **Set a meeting schedule with the realization not everyone will be able to attend.** Between work and children, and everything else, one meeting time just will not work. Set a standard schedule, attempting to accommodate everyone's schedule and whomever can make it will be there. Finish a project meeting schedule a week or two ahead of time so individuals are given enough time to reschedule conflicting appointments, if possible. After the meeting remember to forward the minutes of the meeting to everyone's attention.

2. Give volunteers possession over their responsibilities. Volunteers are motivated when they are given encouragement and delegated a responsibility. They need to feel vital to an organization. Delegation is probably the most important element in the management of all organizations or programs.

3. Provide adequate time for volunteers to complete a task. Each of us has been pressed to complete a project under a short deadline. Although the challenge of doing so can be fun for some individuals, others find it frustrating. When assigning a task, ensure the volunteer is comfortable with the deadline. If they are not, perhaps assign more than one volunteer to the project. This will help ensure the project is completed on-time, and will also help build teamwork within your organization.

Note: If a volunteer is not getting items done on-time address the issue with them as soon as this becomes apparent. Do not re-assign a task to another volunteer or an in-house employee without discussing the reason with the volunteer first. If you know what the critical element is for a project, make sure you assign truly committed volunteers to this area.

4. Provide adequate feedback when the volunteer is completing a project, as well as reward. The reward can be something as simple as a t-shirt from a fundraising event completed last year. Providing a reward can also be as simple as stating “Good job!” or “Thank you!” Although simple in nature these comments can go a long way in encouraging volunteers to commit to another project and continue supporting the organization.

5. Understand that volunteers are just that – *volunteers*. They are not employees. As such, you may hope they are as passionate about the cause as you are, but they may not be. You cannot use a carrot and stick method for volunteers; there are not any bonuses or reviews.

Ultimately, be prepared for surprises.

Remember to stay flexible. People may be wonderful, but some may be difficult. Effective volunteer management creates a feeling that everyone is working together to advance the organization’s overall goal. Focus on the satisfaction of a job well done to receive the best reward.

The Art of Delegation

Define responsibilities clearly with the volunteer. Leave no questions unanswered and leave the door open for additional questions as the project moves forward.

Provide support through sharing knowledge and information with them. In doing so, you will be helping them while keeping yourself “in the loop” just in case any issues arise where additional help is warranted.

Set goals and performance standards together. By beginning a project with the expectations on the table for both parties the project should be smoother.

Please Note:

Recording or disclosing volunteer hours (if applicable) properly in your financial statements can be complex. Contact your accountant for help regarding the correct procedures.



Your Success Is Our Business

121 Executive Circle
Daytona Beach, FL 32114-1180
Telephone: 386/257-4100
Toll Free: 888/805-2172
Fax: 386/255-3261
dab@jmco.com

5931 NW 1st Place
Gainesville, FL 32607-2063
Telephone: 352/378-1331
Toll Free: 888/387-6851
Fax: 352/372-3741
gnv@jmco.com

2477 Tim Gamble Place, Suite 200
Tallahassee, FL 32308-4386
Telephone: 850/386-6184
Toll Free: 800/386-6184
Fax: 850/422-2074
tlh@jmco.com

www.jmco.com