

Volunteer Management Tip Sheet #6



www.massvolunteers.org

Benefits realized from working to secure staff support and investment in volunteer management may include:

Increased funding and resources for volunteer engagement & management.

Appreciation of the value and professionalism of volunteer managers.

Raised profile of the role of volunteers among internal and external stakeholders.

Volunteers feel valued and involved.

Diverse roles for volunteers and expanded ways in which volunteers contribute to the organization.

Volunteer program representation at board and senior management meetings.

Obtaining Staff Acceptance and Support for Your Volunteer Program

Getting staff acceptance and support for the volunteer program is crucial. By helping staff members see the value that volunteers can bring to the task of fulfilling the organization's mission, volunteer managers increase senior management support (and resources) for the volunteer program, and allay concerns that direct service or administrative staff might otherwise have about how volunteers will affect their work. These concerns may range from fears that volunteers will replace roles currently done by staff, to the sentiment, "I don't have time to babysit" – i.e. the fear that volunteers will add to, rather than ease, the work of busy staff.

Volunteer managers should invest time and effort to garner support from senior executives **and** from clinical, programmatic, administrative, or other direct service staff. Here are tips for engaging each level of the organization in each phase of the volunteer management process:

1. **Involve staff in planning and assessment.** Not only are staff members' perspectives a key part of identifying areas for expansion and growth of the volunteer program as well as evolving needs and opportunities for new volunteer roles, but including staff in volunteer program decisions also contributes to a positive organizational climate for volunteers.

One way to do this is to involve representative staff members (along with other key stakeholders) in a volunteer program assessment (see [Tip Sheet #3](#)), a volunteer program steering committee, or an ongoing evaluation of the volunteer program. You may also want to conduct interviews or focus groups with selected staff members, or to facilitate a discussion about volunteer roles at a department or total staff meeting.

2. **Provide staff training and development about working effectively with volunteers.** Your "training toolbox" may include just-in-time methods such as orientations, in-service training, newsletter and e-newsletter tips, videos or webinars. Being flexible in your strategy for training delivery will increase staff members' willingness to attend.

Opportunities to provide staff training include:

During new staff orientation; when a new volunteer project is initiated; during agency reorganizations; at the first meeting of a committee or task force; or during staff or departmental meetings. Ask to provide in-service training at several meetings during the year, or ask for a brief regular time on the agenda of each meeting, to provide information and education on effective volunteer management.

Topics to consider when developing professional development for staff include:

Basic skills in volunteer recruitment, supervision and recognition (See www.massvolunteers.org, [Tip Sheets #1, 4 and 5](#).) Benefits of volunteer contributions for the staff and organization; Challenges for staff when using volunteer resources; Expectations and responsibilities of staff regarding volunteer orientation, training, supervision and recognition; Volunteer policies & procedures.

Training Busy Staff to Succeed with Volunteers: the 55-Minute Staff Training Series by Betty Stallings (Energize, Inc., 2007) is a wonderful – and very affordable – resource for volunteer managers wishing to train staff members to work effectively with volunteers. Purchase the entire 12-module set (complete with PowerPoint slides and handouts) for \$69 [individual use license, appropriate for using with a single organization], or individual modules for \$10 each. Order from [Betty Stallings' Bookstore](#) or from the bookstore at [Energize, Inc.](#)

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WHY INVOLVE STAFF?

By engaging staff in thoughtfully exploring both the potential benefits and the responsibilities of including volunteers in delivering the organization's core services, volunteer managers can enhance the design of volunteer roles.

When staff members contribute additional information about organizational or programmatic needs as well as constraints, it is more likely that the roles created will provide benefit to the organization.

Staff members that have helped assess needs and design roles will also be more willing to "buy into" their own role in supporting volunteers once they are engaged.

Obtaining Staff Acceptance and Support for Your Volunteer Program

3. Craft a strategy for engaging each level of your organization: senior managers and staff.

For senior managers:

- Decide on clear and realistic objectives for your volunteer program
- Identify who you need to influence/approach to gain executive support.
- Identify key messages to convey.
- Select the methods you will use to get your message across.
- Create a work plan with: Objective, Target Audience, Activity, Date, Intended Result.
- Recognize **barriers** and identify solutions to overcome them.
(Click link above for "Barriers and Potential Solutions" handout.)

For direct service and administrative staff:

- Keep staff informed on volunteer accomplishments.
 - Invite staff to participate in volunteer orientations/trainings.
 - Look for ways that volunteers can lighten colleagues' work-load or increase their deliverables.
 - Cultivate good working relationships with as many co-workers as possible to ensure group support in your efforts to implement new volunteer policies and procedures.
4. **Execute the strategy.** Be realistic in setting targets for success, so that you can see incremental progress and make changes as needed along the way.
- Do plenty of research and back up your arguments with evidence.
 - Reach clear agreements with senior decision-makers.
 - Follow up any promises that are made.
 - Follow through with your own plans and action points.
 - Make time and plan ahead.
 - Be proactive and make your voice heard.
 - Choose your timing carefully . Be aware of other people's deadlines and commitments.
 - Be proactive in sourcing additional funding for the volunteer program.
 - Put yourself in the shoes of the people you are trying to influence. Find out what is important to them in performing their jobs.
5. **Recognize and appreciate staff as part of your annual Volunteer Recognition Plan.**
- Include staff when recognizing the positive impacts that volunteer contributions make.
 - Recognize staff for their involvement with volunteers or the volunteer department.
 - Advocate for staff getting the support they need to be successful in working with volunteers, e.g.: training in supervisory skills, time to participate in the planning process.

Resources:

Leading the Way to Successful Volunteer Involvement

By Betty Stallings, with Susan J. Ellis. Energize, Inc. 2010.

<http://www.bettystallings.com/books/leadingtheway.htm>

Influencing Up, A Guide to Gaining Executive Support For Volunteering and Volunteer Management
Volunteering England. 2010

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/94598609/Influencing-Up>

Involvement Planning for Volunteers in Literacy . Chapter 3: Involving and Developing Staff
National Center for Family Literacy. 2006. Funded by UPS. Amy Wilson, Chapter 3 author.

<http://www.familit.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/planning-for-volunteers-in-literacy-3.pdf>