

Chapter 6

Volunteer/Staff Relations

Purposes of this chapter:

- * To appreciate the significance of good staff/volunteer relations
- * To be able to identify and detect any symptoms of staff resistance
- * To have an understanding of potential causes of staff resistance
- * To understand the role of the Manager of Volunteers in volunteer/staff relations
- * To learn numerous ways to promote strong volunteer/staff relations within an organization

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Thought-Provoking Questions Regarding Volunteer/Staff Relations

- 1. Can volunteers be dismissed (fired) from your organization?**
- 2. Have the staff members been trained in the effective use and supervision of volunteers?**
- 3. Do management level personnel use volunteers?**
- 4. Are employees ever evaluated on their use of volunteers?**
- 5. What percentage of your staff members are enthusiastic about using volunteers in their program(s)?**
- 6. Do you have diversity among the volunteers serving your organization?**
- 7. Does the organization delegate significant tasks to the volunteers?**
- 8. Is there a high turnover of volunteers serving your organization?**
- 9. Do your volunteers and staff feel a part of a team effort?**
- 10. Does the staff have a role in the planning and evaluation of the agency's volunteer program?**
- 11. Do you have a written policy manual for the volunteer program?**
- 12. Are volunteers well-screened before being invited to be part of the team?**

Significance of Good Volunteer/Staff Relations

Effective operation of a volunteer program requires that there is a supportive working relationship between staff and volunteers. If either group does not understand the needs of the other, or if either group is distrustful of the other, the volunteer program will not function effectively.

Often your biggest challenge is to convince your administrator or boss that you need to spend time building team support and countering any resistance before bringing (more) volunteers into your organization.

As Manager of Volunteers, if you do not attend to this matter, your careful work of job design and recruitment may all be for naught. If the volunteer experiences resistance when entering or working in the organization, he/she will quickly leave and find a more inviting environment. If you have staff who for a variety of reasons are not supportive of volunteers, you may begin to experience the "revolving door syndrome" with volunteers. Due to the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of resistance, staff members can sabotage your best efforts to establish a good program.

There are many symptoms which a sensitive Manager of Volunteers can begin to detect in an organization. These must be surfaced and dealt with. Staff have many reasons to resist volunteers in their organization, some of which have resulted from poor previous experiences and some from lack of resources and training to do the job well. For whatever reasons, the Manager of Volunteers must deal with them and begin to make joint plans to counter the issues that are causing resistance.

It is equally necessary that the volunteers understand the needs and concerns of staff. You need to think of the volunteer/staff relationship not as a contest between two groups, but rather as a relationship involving the staff, the volunteers, and the Manager of Volunteers. The role of the Manager of Volunteers in the relationship is to keep working with staff and volunteers to maintain balance and understanding.

Symptoms of Staff Resistance

The following observations may be related to staff and/or administrative resistance:

- * high turnover in volunteers
- * few volunteers in organization
- * volunteers “look” like staff (no diversity)
- * reference to “**your** volunteer program” or “**your** volunteer” (referring to Manager of Volunteers) rather than “**our** volunteer program”
- * many reasons to keep volunteers out (i.e., confidentiality and legal issues)
- * lack of any rewards for staff who use volunteers well (i.e., not included in annual evaluation)
- * no training on use of volunteers in the organization
- * management not using volunteers
- * many staff choosing not to use volunteers
- * work space not adequate for volunteers
- * Manager of Volunteers’ position is low level and poorly paid
- * volunteers given mostly menial jobs

Do you notice any of these in your organization?

Reasons for Staff Resistance

When staff members are given an opportunity to express their feelings, they give many reasons for their lack of receptiveness to volunteers. Some are:

- * fear of job replacement
- * loss of control (volunteers may not do the job well)
- * lack of involvement in the planning of the volunteer program
- * no way to dismiss a volunteer who is not working out well
- * lack of clarity in staff and volunteer jobs
- * volunteers take too much time
- * no rewards for doing the job well
- * volunteering is not a priority for the top administrator
- * no skills to supervise volunteers
- * no quality control on volunteers brought into the organization
- * volunteers are too needy, take up personal time
- * bad former experiences with volunteers
- * others _____

Source: Stallings, Betty B., Building Better Skills

Role of Manager of Volunteers in Volunteer/Staff Relations

It is a primary role of the Manager of Volunteers to assure that volunteers and staff are able to work effectively and agreeably together. There are 3 areas on which to focus:

- (1) Volunteers, staff and the organization should all feel that the benefits of volunteering are worth the work involved. This is the magic of balancing needs and benefits so that everyone wins. The Manager of Volunteers is the person who needs to monitor this delicate balance.
- (2) The staff must have the feeling of control over the process of volunteer utilization, including the ability to shape how volunteers will be involved and the ability to screen out volunteers they feel are not suitable for their jobs.
- (3) Managers of Volunteers must develop a climate of acceptance that says "We are proud of **our** volunteers" rather than, "**Your** volunteer is not working out," which reveals a sense that the volunteers belong to the Manager of Volunteers and that he/she is responsible when things go wrong.

The next page is a list of methods and suggestions for promoting good volunteer/staff relations.

Methods of Promoting Good Volunteer/Staff Relations

1. Make certain there are **clear written policies** regarding volunteers — policies that endorse their involvement and delineate their roles and relationships with paid staff.
2. **Plan with staff** for the involvement of volunteers, **not for them**. Help staff members identify tasks they would like to delegate — their “dream” and “drudge” lists.
3. **Plan common experiences** for the staff and volunteers (i.e., staff meetings, social occasions, etc.) so that they will get to know one another better.
4. Have **written job descriptions** for volunteers that outline work to be done, reporting relationships, schedules, expectations. Make certain that both the volunteer and supervising staff member have a copy of it. It should be reviewed and may be modified as they begin to work together.
5. Allow **staff to have the final say on the jobs** they want the volunteers to perform, skills needed to do those jobs, and the final selection of the volunteer.
6. **Orient all staff** to volunteers and volunteerism. Help them understand the types of people who volunteer, their diverse motivations, range of skills, abilities, interests and needs. Let them voice their fears and reservations. Take their concerns seriously.
7. Hold an **annual assessment** of the volunteer program, getting input from the staff, volunteers and administration.
8. Encourage **organizational recognition** be given to **staff people** who have worked effectively with volunteers.
9. **Ensure that volunteers have**, or develop, the **skills** needed to do the job. Require training, if necessary.
10. **Orient and train volunteers to what paid staff do**, their skills, training, motivations, needs, and pressures.
11. Provide **joint recognition** of the volunteers and staff. (Support the notion that, as a team, they accomplished many things.)
12. Maintain **supportive relationships** with all staff and teach them to trust that you're looking out for their interests. Learn to mediate without taking sides. Be a “win-win” person.
13. Let your **enthusiasm**, personal commitment and energy be contagious: about volunteers, about the program, about the good work paid staff do. Be a continuous promoter.
14. Keep yourself and your volunteers **focused on the mission**, purpose and the values of the program. “Keep the dream alive.”

Source: Stallings, Betty B., Building Better Skills

Futher References

Volunteer/staff relations

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