

MAINTAIN YOUR COMPETITIVE EDGE: INVESTING IN VOLUNTEER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Description:

When economic times are tough, people can be your most critical assets. Yet many non-profits concentrate very little time and resources to working with and maintaining their human resources. This is especially the case when budgets are tight. To ease the strain on their budgets nonprofits leaders often feel compelled to make tough decisions in order to preserve critical positions and programs. In this workshop you will explore the potential benefits of investing in your volunteer program during tough economic circumstances. Come and explore how volunteers can be the competitive advantage for your organization!

Goal of Workshop

The goal of this workshop is to explore the benefits of investing in volunteer program management for nonprofits and to build the case for nonprofit administrators and CEOs to enhance the capacity of the organization in order to effectively harness the full potential of volunteers, specifically skilled volunteers.

Learning Objectives

By the completion of this workshop, participants will:

- Identify human resource needs of their programs that could be met by utilizing volunteers
- Understand the benefit of investing in volunteer program management for their organizations
- Identify the factors that signal whether or not their organization has the capacity to fully engage volunteers, specifically skilled volunteers
- Identify the key characteristics of Volunteer Program Champions

ASSESS YOUR VOLUNTEER RESOURCE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES:

Visioning Exercise:

Imagine how your program could be enhanced if you had 20 skilled committed volunteers.

- What tasks do you dream of accomplishing in your organization?

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- What project do you have “sitting on the shelf” that has never been funded? Does this project include research that a specifically skilled volunteer could begin? Are there other tasks volunteers with specific skill sets could complete?

Identifying Barriers:

- What are the realistic barriers that prevent you from creating this vision?
- What can you do to diminish these challenges so you can get closer to your vision?

BUILDING THE CASE FOR ENHANCING VOLUNTEER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Question: How many of you have heard or uttered the phrase “we couldn’t do this without our volunteers”? or, “Volunteers are the heart of our organization”

Lecture:

There is some truth to these mantras. Four in Five nonprofits use volunteers and nine in ten report that their organization benefits from volunteer involvement (*Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations, Urban Institute, 2004*)

The investment of human capital fuels a lot of infrastructure that keeps non-profits afloat. The value of volunteers is more than a simple tally of hours and time. Volunteers bring a generative value: they bring a passion for mission, good PR and an infusion of skills and money.

Findings from the Urban Institutes 2003 survey of volunteer management capacity among nonprofits demonstrate that the cultivation of a well-managed volunteer program can maximize benefits and minimize challenges of working with volunteers:

- Investments in Volunteer Program Management Yields Higher Net Benefits:
Net benefits of managing volunteers is the value of the benefits that volunteers bring to the organization when the costs of dealing with recruitment and management challenges are taken into account.

Two major dimensions of volunteer management capacity:

- The adoption of a range of recommended management practices (such as screening - matching of volunteers to appropriate assignments)
- The employment of a staff member or a dedicated volunteer who can devote a substantial amount of time to the volunteer program.

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- Organizations that rely on volunteers report higher net benefits
 - Nonprofits benefit from giving volunteers a variety of options to contribute to the operations of the organization, ranging from direct service to bookkeeping to advocacy and fundraising.
 - When nonprofits use volunteers primarily for office tasks, net benefits scores are notably lower.
 - Nonprofits that rely less on volunteers, or that give volunteers a narrow range of options to use their skills, score lower on net benefits.

Benefits reported by nonprofits engaging volunteers:

- Increases in the quality of services or programs you provide 68%
- More detailed attention to the people you serve 59%
- Services or levels of service you otherwise could not provide 60%
- Increased public support for your programs, or improved community relations 63%
- Cost savings to your organization 67%
- Access to specialized skills possessed by volunteers 35%

The biggest challenge reported by nonprofits engaging volunteers:

- Lack of funds to support volunteer administration

A Volunteer Match study as well as numerous studies of volunteers finds that the infrastructure for volunteer service is lacking. How so?

- Volunteers are treated in a casual haphazard way when they arrive to serve.
- Staff is openly dismissive of their efforts.
- There is no flexibility in how the person can serve.
- Tasks assigned are mind numbing busy work.
- The most serious indictment is that a person calls or emails to volunteer and no one responds.

Some compelling trends and realities:

Today's Volunteer Climate:

- Corporate volunteerism is on the rise, bringing and infusion of highly skilled volunteers and expectations of professionalism
- Boomer volunteers demand flexibility in hours and expect short term projects and more leadership opportunities
- Gen X expects options, social opportunities and a range of commitment levels
- Millennials bring optimism and a passion for social change. They expect skills to be fully utilized and to have access to opportunities that reward them with personal growth.

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In 2006 20 million volunteers stopped volunteering.

The most commonly cited reasons for leaving:

- Volunteer activity did not meet expectations
- Organization was disorganized
- Volunteer Activities were not interesting

ASSESSING YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO ENGAGE VOLUNTEERS:

Indications of Resistance

Indications that commitment may be lacking include:

- No written philosophy for the engagement of volunteers in the organization
- Non-management position for the person overseeing the volunteer program
- Volunteers leaving prior to the conclusion of their commitment
- No training and/or recognition for staff who supervise volunteers in the course of their work at the organization
- Unresolved issues that job security may be threatened by volunteer replacement
- Fears that volunteers will be utilized as justification for reducing a budget
- Lack of interesting volunteer positions available

Individual Exercise:

Complete Volunteer Program Management assessment

Group Exercise:

- Group discussion of results
- Brainstorm strategies to improve capacity:

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAM CHAMPIONS

Acknowledging the need to improve and promote the stature of our volunteer programs is the first step. Betty Stallings outlined 12 key activities demonstrated by CEOs that effectively support and invest in the volunteer programs.

Taking these steps is essential to effectively harnessing the full potential of volunteers in your organizations.

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12 Key Actions of Volunteer Program Champions (Betty Stallings):

1. Serve as volunteers themselves and express a strong personal, positive philosophy of volunteer engagement
2. Act on the belief that the volunteer program is essential to accomplishing the mission of the organization and that their support is vital for the program's success.
3. Hire and support a skilled volunteer program manager and understand that the role of the VPM is to empower the organization to be successful in engaging volunteers
4. Place the Manager of the Volunteer Program on the Management Team
5. Contribute to a strong, positive written philosophy/ value statement on the organization's engagement of volunteers
6. Know that volunteers are not free and ensure that the costs associated with managing volunteers are reflected in the budget
7. Provide clear expectations to staff regarding volunteer engagement and ensure that all staff receive training, recognition and evaluation for their work with volunteers.
8. They believe that volunteers should be involved in all levels of the organization and they model good volunteer supervision with their Boards and other volunteers
9. They integrate the volunteer program into other key components of the organization, such as development, community outreach, advocacy and personnel and encourage team efforts between these components
10. They involve their Board of Directors in key issues that impact the organization's volunteer program
11. They see the value of the volunteer program beyond just "saving money" to extending services, strengthening the donor base, etc.
12. They effectively attract financial resources to support the volunteer program.

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Resources:

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Betty Stallings, *12 Key Actions of Volunteer Program Champions, CEOs Who Lead the Way*, Energize, Inc, Philadelphia PA, 2005

The UPS Foundation, *A Guide to Investing in Volunteer Resources Management: Improve Your Philanthropic Portfolio*.

Volunteers Can Work Smarter with Volunteers, Inside Philanthropy: a blog on philanthropy and nonprofit news and issues, <http://philanthropyjournal.blogspot.com> , October 13, 2008

Susan Ellis, *8 Tips for Recruiting & Retaining Volunteers in Tough times*, Nonprofit Tools You Can Use, Fieldstone Alliance, January 2009

http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/01-07-09_volunteering_in_tough_times.cfm?disccode=TOOL010709&repvendid=335