



TRAINING & MOTIVATING VOLUNTEERS

Sue Froggatt, Management & Training Consultant, gives guidance on managing volunteers.

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There are several critical steps involved in the process of recruiting and managing volunteers and there are huge rewards for associations that invest in setting this up professionally. In this article two steps in the process are highlighted – training volunteers and keeping them motivated.

There are many areas where training volunteers can be useful. Take for example a volunteer role that involves leadership, which might require training in many areas:

- ✦ Planning and running effective meetings
- ✦ How to hold an on-line meeting or teleconference session
- ✦ Recruiting, training and motivating volunteers
- ✦ How to handle difficult people or situations
- ✦ Report writing
- ✦ Negotiating techniques
- ✦ Presentation skills
- ✦ A review of the mission, purpose and objectives of the association.

It is likely that many volunteers will keep a mental note of what they will receive for volunteering their time and energy and the training experience might be the main reason for a member volunteering. You will need to balance the need to get the project completed on time, with the volunteers desire to learn new skills. You should start by identifying for each task the skills that are essential and those for which you are willing to provide training. You might already have training resources for some of these areas for members. If you don't, you could set up a complimentary arrangement with another membership association that does.

You need to consider the training options available. In the training industry the current trend is to use a 'blended learning' approach and this uses a combination of training formats. The traditional face-to-face classroom style training or manuals and handbooks are now being complimented with on-line e-learning, teleconferencing, one-to-one coaching or CDs.

You need to consider more than just the content. Professional training providers also consider:

- ✦ The different ways in which people learn ie different learning styles
- ✦ How people learn ie the learning process
- ✦ The strengths and weaknesses of each of the training formats
- ✦ How to create the right environment for people to learn

- ✎ How to make the right training interventions to encourage and embed the learning. For example you can use discussion groups, a helpline to answer questions or offer a second opinion, proactive follow up calls or send out tips in an e-bulletin or newsletter.

The task of keeping members motivated is often overlooked and here are seven ways you can achieve this.

1. Know and clarify the outcome required for you and the volunteer at the start. There is nothing more de-motivating than being unsure if you are achieving what is required!
2. Make the task fun. Give it a humorous theme and atmosphere. For example if you are looking for members to help with a mailshot, set up an 'Executive Stuffing Circle'. Set up the room you are using with party music, offer ice cream and paper hats. Get your CEO to sit in and help for half an hour. For some volunteers the social element is very important.
3. Recognise their contribution. Mention their names at meetings, on your web site and in newsletters. Use their photos. Let their boss or partner know how valuable they have been. Send them a certificate or a small personal gift. Often the smallest things make the biggest difference!
4. Remove any barriers or obstacles. For example cover out-of-pocket costs and sort out the hygiene factors like parking. Promote the importance of volunteers internally and make sure that full time staff are aware of the value and importance of volunteers.
5. Members volunteer for a wide variety of reasons and it is important to match the assignment to the right person. Have they volunteered to make new friends, gain recognition, learn new skills or because they want to give something back to the community?
6. Design valuable and meaningful assignments. Make them have a real and visible impact. This will also help attract volunteers.
7. On-going training and regular two-way communication helps volunteers stay motivated all the way through the project. Does your volunteer management process ask them for feedback on the task after it is completed?

Every volunteer opportunity for members should be thought through and planned from the start. Good preparation will help you prevent problems that could result in delays and frustration.

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Visit www.volunteering.org where there is a whole section of the web site dedicated to supporting volunteer management and managers.

Did you know...? Volunteers contribute over 1.2 billion hours of their time each year to sport – equivalent to over 720,000 additional full time paid workers and valued at approximately £14 billion.