



Eight Helpful Tips for Developing an Exemplary Volunteer Program

Most nonprofit organizations use volunteers to perform tasks that regular staff members lack the time to do. Also, with an unstable economy, resulting in budget cuts for many organizations, developing and maintaining a volunteer pool is critical to nonprofits. An organized and well executed volunteer program can provide many benefits to the organization, from improving operations to saving money. This article provides eight helpful tips in developing and implementing an exemplary volunteer program.

1. Prior to recruiting volunteers, the organization should carefully consider the type of volunteer program that would best meet its needs. For example, how many volunteers will the organization need? What types of skill sets should the volunteers have? How will the organization recruit volunteers? Will volunteers need to complete an application and be interviewed? What type of training will be provided to volunteers initially and on an ongoing basis? Does the organization want to have a volunteer recognition program and, if so, what should it look like?
2. Once the organization decides on the type of volunteer program it desires, it should identify the types of volunteers it will need. For example, do you want your volunteers to perform clerical tasks, such as answering the phones, entering data, and assembling and mailing packets? Or do you want your volunteers to perform more advanced tasks, such as planning events or contacting donors and sponsors for fundraising events? Once you decide on the types of volunteers you need, it will make your recruitment efforts much easier.
3. The organization should have a plan that specifies how it will recruit the types of volunteers it needs. Will it contact a local volunteer center, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP), or membership organization; request possible names from staff members, board members, or other stakeholders; or pursue other options, such as posting an announcement in its newsletter or on its website?
4. The organization should develop a volunteer application and ensure that all potential volunteers complete it. Besides collecting demographic information, the application should require potential volunteers to identify their strengths, skills, talents, and attributes, as well as any prior volunteer experience they have had. It should also include a section for references, as you will want to contact them to ensure you get the best candidates possible.
5. The organization should develop a confidentiality agreement and make sure that volunteers understand and sign it prior to beginning work. Volunteers are often around client files and other

confidential documents. Although you cannot always prevent a breach in confidentiality, it is important to take those steps necessary to reduce the likelihood of this happening.

6. The organization should consider interviewing all volunteer applicants. You'll want to ensure that the potential volunteer is passionate about your mission, understands and respects the need for confidentiality, and has the appropriate strengths and skills for the volunteer opportunities you have in mind. Volunteers shine when their skills are aligned with the tasks they need to perform.

7. The organization should have some type of training program in place for its volunteers, including initial and ongoing training. Training can include information related to the organization's mission, programs and services, and eligibility requirements, as well as other items volunteers should know to understand the organization and how what they are doing contributes to and improves the organization's overall operation.

8. The organization should develop a volunteer recognition program. Whether the program includes sending thank you letters following a specific project, recognizing volunteers in newsletters or the organization's annual report, or hosting an annual dinner, volunteers do appreciate being recognized. If you take care of your volunteers and show them how much you appreciate them on a consistent basis, they will be more likely to take on additional tasks and remain a volunteer.

If you don't currently have a volunteer program or your existing program needs to be revamped, consider the above tips. If you take time to determine the type of volunteer program and volunteers you need, develop a plan to recruit volunteers, develop a volunteer application and confidentiality form, conduct interviews prior to bringing volunteers on board, provide initial and ongoing volunteer training, and develop a volunteer recognition program, you are well on your way to developing an exemplary volunteer program.

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If you want to make positive changes in your professional life, and create the job or career you desire and deserve, then working with Executive & Life Coach, Sharon L. Mikrut, is the solution. Although her specialty is in partnering with nonprofit executive directors and managers to maximize their resources in a competitive environment, she is passionate about working with all individuals committed to personal and/or professional growth. Visit her website at <http://www.createitcoaching.org> or Nonprofit Professionals blog at <http://www.createitcoaching.com>, and sign up for her free monthly newsletter that provides information and resources designed to help you manage your nonprofit organization in a more effective and efficient manner. You can also visit her Empowerment blog at <http://www.createitcoaching.net>, and sign up for her free monthly life coaching newsletter.