

# Volunteer Tips and Strategies

## Topic 4: Developing Volunteers: Training, Supervising and Supporting



### “Developing” Volunteers

The most successful organizations that use volunteers understand their value as a resource and provide training, supervision, and support – similar to that received by paid staff. The way in which volunteers are managed and developed will have an impact on how comfortable they are with their volunteer assignment as well as your organization. Volunteers who drop out quickly probably did not get the training and supervision /support they needed to feel successful in their assignment.

In addition, being very engaged with your volunteers (without micromanaging) helps you build a relationship with the volunteer and be able to detect issues as they arise and before they become problems.

- Train staff and lead volunteers to be good supervisors and managers for your new volunteers.
- Make sure you have the support of staff who will be supervising volunteers

### Training Volunteers

All volunteers should receive at least a brief overview of your organization and what you do as part of an initial orientation/training . Even if you don't think a volunteer on a relatively short-term assignment needs to know organizational specifics to complete their task, remember every volunteer is a potential “evangelist” for your organization.

- Treat volunteers with respect, help them to understand what you do...and they will naturally talk about you in the community, helping raise awareness.
- Make sure to train volunteers about any policies and procedures that affect them and/or their service.
- Make sure they know to whom they report to and from whom to ask questions, etc.

If the nature of the volunteer's work is fairly basic or routine, then a volunteer might require only a general introduction to the task they are to complete.

However, if the volunteer's work is more complex, then the volunteer will likely require more detailed training about what you expect them to do and/or provide necessary skills.

### Supervising and Supporting

The words supervision and support are often interchanged as though they mean the same thing but though closely related and inter-dependent, they have distinct functions.

**Supervision** involves setting tasks and targets for work objectives and measuring progress towards these.

**Support** is often an informal process which identifies what encouragement and help a

volunteer can expect to assist them in achieving certain objectives.

- Support is about people and the stimulus they need and involves motivating,
- Tailor support/supervision to the needs of the volunteer and their role.
- Consider the advantages of group and peer-to-peer support
- Supervision is a tool for achieving good performance and motivating volunteers

### Communicating

Maintaining regular communication with your volunteers is essential for success. There are many options. Ask your volunteers how to best communicate with them.

Learn which method is effective  
 Develop groups  
 Exploit technology  
 Be ready to learn new technologies and change your attitude  
 Demographic preferences and the composition of your volunteer pool must guide your path

Have a regular way of communicating with your volunteers  
 Personalized E-mail blasts and letters  
 Use a professional tool like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp  
 Link/post email blasts to your Facebook or Blog



## Tips for Handling Issues

*When volunteers aren't performing well – You may need to give volunteers extra training and introduce additional support such as mentoring or buddy systems. It may sometimes be necessary to find alternative work for volunteers to do if they are unable to meet the standards of performance required by a specific task.*

Giving feedback is an opportunity to tell a volunteer they have performed well but also where performance or behaviour can be improved.

Find out how the volunteer feels about this before taking action. Begin by asking the volunteer for their understanding of the situation or event you/they wish to discuss.

- ✓ Comment on what you see and hear, not on what attitudes or qualities you are guessing at;
- ✓ focus on behaviour that can be changed;
- ✓ comment on things that they are good at as well as areas for improvement;
- ✓ ask questions as well as make statements;
- ✓ limit yourself to the most important aspects;
- ✓ be specific.

When giving or receiving feedback, be honest and direct but also be sensitive. Do not feel that you have to treat them with kid gloves and therefore accept bad performance from them.

*(Adapted from: The Complete Volunteer Manager, WCVA Volunteering 2004)*

## Tools and Resources

*For more information on this topic:*

### **Leading the Way to Successful Volunteer Involvement: Practical Tools for Busy Executives**

*by Betty B. Stallings with Susan J. Ellis*

Energize, 226 pages,

Checklists, worksheets, idea stimulators, real-life examples, self-inquiry assessments, and other practical how-to tools can be used immediately to guide planning and decision-making. Find tools for developing a statement of philosophy about volunteers; developing a budget for volunteer involvement; writing a case statement to secure funding for volunteers; writing a position description for a director of volunteer involvement; asking good questions when interviewing candidates; integrating support for volunteers into every unit and department of your organization; and much more!

## Useful Websites:

### **Kansas Volunteer Commission**

[www.KanServe.org](http://www.KanServe.org)

### **Hands On Network**

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/nonprofitgov/toptools>

### **National Service Resource Center**

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>

### **Volunteer Match**

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/resources/>

## Best Practices/Notes