Competencies Required in Volunteer Administration

Volunteers are often coordinated by individuals with minimal experience in volunteer administration. A study of the membership of the Association of Volunteer Administrators (AVA) in 2000 revealed that 77.8% of volunteer administrators surveyed had received no formal training in volunteer administration prior to their first job experience as a volunteer administrator (Brudney & Schmahl, 2002). More than 26% of the members responding to the survey stated that at the time of the survey, they still had not received formal training in volunteer administration. Numerous studies have identified the deficiencies of Extension professionals in coordinating volunteers and volunteer programs (Deppe & Culp, 2001; Hange, Seevers & VanLeeuwen, 2002; King, 1997; Culp & Kohlhagen, 2001). Such lack of skills can negatively impact programs in a variety of ways, including quality of work and programming, participation, as well as organizational liability and risk management issues.

In their study to identify trends that will affect volunteer leadership in the next ten years, Culp and Nolan (2000) identified the professional development and training of volunteer administrators as the second most critical trend impacting nonprofit organizations. Sue Vinyard, a noted author and speaker on leading volunteers, states:

> The volunteer coordinator of the next century will have to command a broader and broader range of expertise to be able to meet the challenges of leading volunteer efforts within organizations. Far deeper than knowing how to plan, organize, staff, direct, control, and reward, the Volunteer Program Executive will have to move far beyond these basic functions of management to embrace techniques and strategies that are both complex and interdependent. (Vinyard, 1993, p.129).

Boyd (2004) groups competencies required by volunteer administrators into the following four areas:

**Organizational Leadership** - Determining the role of volunteers in meeting the mission of the organization as a whole.

- Developing a **shared vision** - A commitment to and communication of the organization’s mission and vision to volunteers.
- **Planning & needs assessment** - Determine the needs of clientele and the organization and match with the needs and abilities of volunteers. Ability to develop programs that effectively utilize volunteers.
• Program evaluation and interpretation - Using volunteers in data collection, analysis, and reporting of data related to the effectiveness of programs and comparing that data to appropriate criteria. Use the information to determine the value of programs and disseminate this data to the appropriate audiences.

Systems Leadership - Understanding the agency’s organizational system and sharing leadership and power within the organization through delegation and collaboration.

• Working with boards and advisory committees
• Building middle management volunteers to foster the development of leadership skills in volunteers in order to increase utilization and satisfaction. Helping experienced volunteers develop the skills needed to lead other volunteers.
• Delegation and power sharing - Ability to delegate responsibilities to the “right” person for the job and give volunteers the opportunities and resources to accomplish those tasks assigned to them. Ability to balance control of the program between the volunteers and the professional.
• Group dynamics - Work with groups of volunteers and foster a spirit of unity and camaraderie. Includes:
  o Building effective teams
  o Using accepted theory to foster group development
  o Knowledge of group member roles
• Collaboration - Working with various volunteer groups on a single program and facilitating the combination of resources, people and information.

Organizational Culture - The set of key values, assumption, understandings, and ways of thinking that is shared by members of an organization and taught to new members.

• Creating/changing your organizational culture - Helping others within the organization to understand the philosophy of volunteerism and how volunteers contribute to the mission of the organization. Act as the liaison between volunteers and the paid staff. Communicate the needs of volunteers to upper management and the goals of the organization (and how to reach those goals) to the volunteers.
• Positive culture - Encouraging a spirit of appreciation for and dependence upon volunteers to deliver the programs of the organization.
• Inspiring trust - Set high standards for volunteers to keep and trust them to meet and exceed those standards. Communicate your trust to volunteers.
• Motivating volunteers - Keep volunteers focused on the vision of the organization and keep them excited about their role in delivering the programs with which they are involved. Help volunteers understand the value they bring to the organization.

Volunteer Management - Those functions necessary to creating and maintaining a successful volunteer program. These include, but are not limited to:

• Recruiting - Ability to find and select individuals who possess the time and skills the organization needs to conduct its programs. Marketing. Recruiting volunteers from underutilized groups.
• Screening & placing - Assessing the interests and abilities of volunteers and lining them up with responsibilities that fit them. Also assessing the background of potential volunteers to protect the safety of clientele.
• Orienting & training - Provide an interesting, motivating, and informative orientation for new volunteers. Provide training to teach volunteers necessary skills and provide continuous training for seasoned volunteers to take on new challenges.
• Protecting volunteers, clients & the organization - Insuring the physical, emotional, and mental health of volunteers, clients, and the organization.
• Evaluation & recognition - Evaluate the work of the volunteers and provide timely and tactful feedback on their contributions to the organization. Intrinsic and extrinsic recognition of volunteers’ efforts. Obtaining feedback from volunteers on how they feel about their role within the organization and responding to their suggestions.
• Retaining volunteers - Keeping volunteers satisfied and challenged in their role within the organization so that they will continue to provide support to programs. Ability to release those individuals who may need to volunteer elsewhere.
References


