Resourcing & Teaching

In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists

- Eric Hoffer

Providing volunteers with the necessary resources and training to accomplish their assigned tasks are the next steps in the Educating Phase of the GEMS model. The purpose of resourcing and teaching is to send capable, confident, and skilled volunteers to task assignments. By focusing on outcomes, the volunteer manager builds respect for the "product," the skilled volunteer.

Resourcing means providing volunteers with the necessary tools to perform their jobs. These tools may include curriculum materials if their job is to educate others or carpentry tools if they are rehabilitating a home for a family. Essential resources will depend on the unique needs of each volunteer position and program. For example, resources provided for adult literacy volunteers would include such things as resource books and materials, interactive items for exercise and practice, computer activities and games, ideas and tips for verbal instruction/practice, and how to use and apply them.

Teaching/training not only prepares the volunteer to successfully do their job, but serves as a motivating factor for the volunteer as well. Volunteers view the opportunity to learn new things as a benefit of volunteering. Training that is properly documented can also be part of the organization’s risk management process. Volunteers must be properly trained in the safe use of equipment and other procedures to ensure both their safety and that of the agency’s clientele.

Training also decreases the liability for the organization. For example, volunteers working with the shooting sports programs in scouting or 4-H should be trained and certified through a recognized training organization such as the National Rifle Association (NRA). In another example, Master Gardener Volunteers serve the Cooperative Extension program by answering phone calls about controlling lawn and garden pests. These volunteers receive 50-70 hours of training in identifying pests, pest damage, and methods for controlling pests (including the use of pesticides). They have very strict guidelines for making recommendations to the public about pesticide use. This extensive training decreases the likelihood that these volunteers will make a recommendation that will put the homeowner at risk or damage their property.
Both paid staff and volunteers should be involved in designing and delivering the training. Such cooperation may help connect volunteers to those who are already involved in the organization.

Specific topics will depend on the unique needs of each volunteer position and program. For example, a volunteer tutor in an adult literacy program might be provided training in the following areas: learning sight words, applying the Fernald Technique, teaching phonics, practicing syllabication, increasing reading comprehension, or teaching basic life skills.

**Teaching/ Training**

Teaching, or training, is the process of providing volunteers with the ability to perform specific types of work. (McCurley and Lynch). An effective training program is one that identifies the skills, knowledge, and behaviors which are essential in good job performance and then presents the information in a training format which enables the volunteer to learn. Training should be practical, experiential, and tailored to the individual needs of the volunteer.

These three questions should guide you when planning volunteer training sessions:

- What information do volunteers need to successfully perform the work?
- What skills do they need to successfully and safely perform the work?
- What attitudes or approaches do they need to successfully perform the work?

The answers to these questions provide the outline of the training agenda. Training to provide volunteers with this information can be done in three formats:

- formal training sessions
- coaching sessions
- counseling

Formal training can be presented through lectures, demonstrations, role-playing, case studies, and simulations. For best results, training should be conducted at a time and place convenient to the volunteer. For example, training over the lunch hour may be most effective for corporate volunteers. The training could be done at the volunteers’ workplace, ensuring maximum participation.

With advancements in technology, self-study methods have improved tremendously. Some training can be conducted using Internet websites. Properly designed web sites can be interactive, using all of the methods described above. Such asynchronous training methods lack the contact with
others that volunteers often crave, but are helpful in training volunteers who are limited by time and distance from attending face-to-face trainings.

Coaching consists of three important steps:
   1. A demonstration of the skill to be learned or improved.
   2. Observation of the volunteer performing the skill.
   3. Feedback and analysis.

The “coach” should explain why this skill is important and how it will be used on the job. After each step, discuss the experience with the volunteer in a way that they are able to learn from it. The point is to not just give the volunteer an opportunity to see what is being done, but for them to practice it and receive immediate feedback.

Counseling aids the volunteer in solving a problem or improving a behavior by getting the volunteer to acknowledge a difficulty and take responsibility for the improvement. Where coaching demonstrates to volunteers how to improve, counseling guides volunteers to discover how to improve their performance.

**Active Teaching**

Active teaching isn’t a new concept. Rather, it brings together several principles of adult learning into a comprehensive approach to the design and delivery of training. Active teaching’s three components are:

1) activity,
2) variety, and
3) participation.

Activity involves engaging the learners’ minds from start to finish. For example, rather than listening to a lecture about strategy and tactics, the participants are drawn into a discussion about how to apply tactics to various situations.

Variety means using different instructional strategies during the delivery of the class or drill. A key instructional principle maintains that different people process information differently. Visual learners process information primarily through what they see. Auditory learners process information primarily through what they hear and read. Kinesthetic learners process information primarily through what they experience and do. Instructors who strive for variety use different teaching styles so that all learners can process information more effectively.
Finally, participation means that learners are engaged in the learning process. In other words, the learners aren't casual observers; they're active participants in the presentation. Rather than dictating a lecture all day, the instructor asks the participants questions. He routinely asks "Why?" to generate discussion, and the participants are given an opportunity to have input into their learning experience by providing feedback to the instructor.

Here are a few tips to incorporate active training into your day-to-day classes and drills. Present information in moderate levels of content. Psychologists generally agree that the mind can process only a small amount of information at one time. Often called a "chunk," this amount is five to seven bits of information. In terms of hands-on skills, a chunk equals one skill.

In active training, one chunk of information is presented and then applied through questions, activities, problem-solving scenarios or hands-on practice. In short, by presenting the information in small parts, then having the learners apply or practice the information, the instructor has increased the chances that the participant has learned the new information or skill.

Active training involves the use of different instructional strategies during any given class. This includes combining lecture with discussion, class drill with case studies and one-on-one with group activities.

**Training Effectiveness**

Do volunteers actually apply information presented during training to their volunteer jobs? This application of knowledge or skills learned is called “training transfer.” Elangovan and Karakowsky (1999) identified several key factors that influence the effectiveness and the transfer of training. Motivation factors include the perceived relevance of the training, choice in attending training, outcome expectancies, self-efficacy, and job involvement. If the volunteers perceive the training to be directly relevant to the performance of their volunteer job, they are more likely to learn and use that information or skill.

Mandatory training usually hinders the acquisition of knowledge and its subsequent use in the volunteer job; however, this cannot always be avoided. Trainers should compensate for this by communicating the relevance of the training to the volunteers’ jobs and providing time during the training for volunteers to network.

When volunteers attend a training session, they have the expectation that they will learn new material and that the material will improve their task performance.
If expectations are not met, volunteers are less likely to use the information presented and less likely to attend future trainings.

Parents of participants are the primary volunteers in scouting and 4-H youth programs. In 4-H, they serve as club-level managers and project leaders. In scouting, parents serve as den and pack leaders. Both programs are expected to conduct training for these volunteers annually. If the same training format and content is used each year for all volunteers in these positions, some volunteers’ expectations may not be met. More experienced volunteers will already know this content and their expectation of learning new material has not been met. However, if the volunteers are “tracked” according to experience level, content can be tailored to their individual needs.

High levels of self-efficacy are important in determining if volunteers will actually use a new skill in their job. Trainers must give volunteers the opportunity to practice new skills or use new knowledge until they feel competent to perform the task on their own. Using a coaching style of demonstration, guided practice, and feedback develops self-efficacy in a given task.

Volunteers often enter information about the organization’s clientele in databases for easy retrieval and organization. Though most people are more comfortable with computers than they were five years ago, working with unfamiliar software may still cause uneasiness in some volunteers. For this content, the trainer should use a coaching strategy. The trainer walks the volunteer(s) through each step of using the database, providing opportunities for the volunteer to practice each step before continuing to the next. Feedback and assistance are given by the trainer until the volunteer has mastered that step. As the volunteer gains experience through guided practice, their self-efficacy about that task increases.

And finally, the level of job involvement will determine if the volunteer will use the training. Volunteer administrators must give volunteers the chance to use their new skills and improve on them through actual use. Volunteers should be engaged as soon after the training as possible.

References

McCurley, S. & Lynch, R., Volunteer Management: Mobilizing all the Resources of the Community.