Keys to Effective Training

Designing the Training Program

Standard instructional design strategies are used in building a training program for volunteers. Those steps are:

1. Assess volunteer training needs.
2. Define learning objectives.
3. Develop curriculum.
   - Collect content materials.
   - Determine instructional strategies.
4. Conduct the training.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness.

Assessing Training Needs

The need for training must first be determined. In the Generating Phase, you determined the need for volunteers and wrote descriptions for each volunteer job identified. These descriptions contain a list of the knowledge and skills required by volunteers for each position. By examining the volunteer applications and your notes from the volunteer’s interview, the gap between the volunteer’s knowledge/skills and the needs for the task can be determined.

Current volunteers' training needs must also be examined. The opportunity to learn new things is a strong motivational factor in retaining volunteers. Ask the existing volunteers what type of training would help them do their jobs better, as well as other topics on which they would like to receive training.

Defining Learning Objectives

Learning objectives describe the outcomes that are expected of the training. What should the volunteer be able to do as a result of the training? Learning objectives should begin with an action verb and be very specific as to the outcome. Examples of training objectives include:
As a result of this training the volunteer will be able to:

- Enter data accurately into the information management system
- Teach the four basic strokes of canoeing
- Organize a meeting for the youth club that includes an ice-breaker, educational activity, recognition of the participants, and announcements of future activities.

Develop the Curriculum

The educational content for the training must be either collected from other sources or written by the trainer. Curriculum materials may be collected from many sources and adapted for the organization's specific needs. Writing an effective curriculum can be a time consuming process and should involve experts in instructional design, as well as content experts.

Selecting the appropriate instructional strategies to match the content is also part of this step. If the acquisition of knowledge/information is the objective, then traditional lecture, reading materials, or audio/video tapes may be used. If the volunteers are to perform a skill, then active demonstrations with guided practice are more appropriate.

Conduct the Training

The training should be done in a comfortable location that is easily assessable to the volunteer and is appropriate for the training. Rooms with adequate seating and work space are important. The room set-up should be flexible to allow the instructor to use a variety of activities and training methods. For example, tables and chairs are necessary for the lecture/discussion portion of CPR training, but open floor space is required for the hands-on practice of the technique.

Evaluate the Training

The purpose of evaluating the training is to determine if the training was effective and how the process can be improved. Questions to guide the process include:

- Are the volunteers able to perform as expected?
- What activities worked? What activities did not work?
- Were the time and location the best for the volunteers?
Volunteer performance may be evaluated through observation or testing. The trainer may observe the volunteer performing the task in either a mock session or as they work with the agency's clientele. Feedback may be given to the volunteer at any time. If technical knowledge is important, other methods of testing may be used to assess their competence. Many adult learners are uncomfortable with paper and pencil tests. This method should only be used if absolutely necessary. Oral questioning and group discussion may be a better method to assess volunteers' knowledge, as well as evaluate the program itself.