Organizational Leadership - Communicating Volunteer Efforts

A key competency for any volunteer administrator is the articulation of volunteer efforts and accomplishments to multiple audiences. Support for the volunteer program comes from the formal leadership of the agency, from clientele who benefit from the volunteer effort, and from the public at large.

Communicating to agency leaders
Communicating the results of your volunteers’ effort to agency leadership is important to justify the resources the agency spends supporting volunteers. It also provides ammunition for the CEO to use in marketing the agency to outside funding sources and to the general public. Communicating volunteer effort to agency leadership can also be used to highlight the need for additional resources to support or expand the volunteer program. Ways to accomplish this:

- Encourage agency leaders to “lead by walking around.” Have them walk through volunteer areas and visit with volunteers about their jobs. Have them attend events or programs led by volunteers.
- Report on volunteer accomplishments/impacts regularly at staff meetings.
- Have regular updates to the Board of Directors that emphasizes the contributions of volunteers.
- Have agency leaders send thank-you letters to volunteers. Draft the letter for them – they’ll have to read it before they sign it.
- Use many communication channels such as electronic newsletters and e-mail.

Communicating to clientele
The clients served by your agency may only have contact with a small number of the agency’s volunteers. Why inform them about other volunteer efforts for which they have no contact? Because clients who have benefited from your agency’s services can be your greatest advocates, it is important for them to have a broader picture of your agency than just the few volunteers with whom they have contact. Ways to accomplish this:

- Invite clientele to attend other agency programs
- Invite clientele to serve as volunteers themselves
- When conducting programs, describe other agency efforts or programs and opportunities for clientele involvement
Communicating to the public
Communicating volunteer accomplishments to the public has the potential to generate new resources for the agency in the forms of funding, additional volunteers, in-kind contributions, and general public good will. Ways to accomplish this include:

- Providing the press with human interest stories about your volunteers or clientele
- Make the volunteer’s work the focus of press releases and communications, as well as programs presented to civic organizations
- Inviting the press to volunteer recognition events
- Having members of the press become active volunteers in your organization
- Training volunteers or clientele to speak to the press about the impact of your agency’s programs

By showing the public the accomplishments and contributions of volunteers, it can be assumed that more people would want to become involved in such programs.

Summary
Recognition of volunteer efforts both inside and outside of the organization reaps many benefits for the agency and its clientele. Frequent recognition communicates to the volunteers their value to the organization. Communicating volunteer effort in a compelling way is a key competency to the successful leadership of volunteer programs.