Establishing Consensus in Volunteer Philosophy

You can't expect everyone to agree on everything, but it's vital to your program's success for staff to share a common philosophy on management of volunteers. One important philosophical agreement is that we manage a system, but we develop a person. The following quiz will make you more aware of your other views. Compare your responses to those of others to see where you have similar opinions about this vital subject.

Use this as a guide to determine where you and other key decision-makers are as you begin.

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS ABOUT VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Mark your feeling about each statement A (agree), D (disagree), N (not sure).

I BELIEVE:

1. That volunteers can educate other volunteers with quality education.
2. That salaried staff will be able to allow volunteers the freedom to be managers of other volunteers.
3. That salaried staff will take a management role with volunteer middle managers.
4. That volunteer middle managers will assume a role between the salaried staff and the local volunteers.
5. That it is important to have continued and regular contact between salaried staff and volunteer middle managers.
6. That it is important for evaluation to consider the risks involved with volunteers assuming the action part of a program and that salaried staff be evaluated on management skills as well as total program.
7. Management is accomplishing something through other people.
8. There are volunteers out there who are willing and able.
9. Volunteers can do anything salaried staff can do if given the same information.
10. All salaried staff in a county need to be informed and educated on the concept of volunteer management so they can be supportive too, even though they may not be directly responsible for managing the volunteers.
11. Volunteer middle managers need to be regarded as a part of the staff and have a position established on the organization chart. They are not just doing something for the staff, they are part of it.
12. That role descriptions must be written for all volunteer managers.
13. That all volunteer managers may not have the same tenure, some one year and some several.
14. In youth-serving organizations, volunteers can be middle managers.
15. That we are willing to deal with potential conflict that may arise from changing a program (in a supportive fashion).
16. Volunteers need opportunities for personal growth.
17. That with volunteers in helping, educating, and organizing roles, the efforts of salaried staff can be extended many times.
18. That our program has a responsibility to:
    a. give information
    b. educate
    c. assist with problem solving
    d. provide opportunities for human development

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19. That 4-H has two primary audiences, youth and adults.
20. It is possible to recruit volunteers to be volunteer middle managers who have not been previously involved in the 4-H program.
21. Volunteers need to represent target audiences and under-represented populations.

Think about your beliefs, understanding and behavior in relationship to middle management. Mark an X on the line where you would place yourself on each of the following continuums.

Do not believe in
concept of volunteers   **Beliefs**   Volunteer
managing other volunteers   management is
                                                                        the way to go

No understanding   Complete &
of volunteer   **Understanding**   comprehensive
management   knowledge of volunteer
                                                                        management

Don't do   Highly developed
volunteer   **Practice/behavior**   visionary,
management   empowered volunteer
                                                                        management system
                                                                        in my organization

To visually clarify where your participants literally "stand" on these 20 questions, ask them to position themselves along an imaginary line in the room, according to their position on the continuum of beliefs.

BENEFITS OF EXPANDING THE ROLES OF VOLUNTEERS

Add your own ideas to this important list.

BENEFITS TO VOLUNTEERS

- Less volunteer turnover resulting in a higher quality program.
- Volunteers grow personally.
- Volunteers develop self confidence.
- More programs are available
- Local support is available.
- Special training may be offered to increase skills.
- Needs of all volunteers are better understood.
- Programs can be tailored to fit needs.
- Help is more accessible.
- Volunteers feel more comfortable asking other volunteers for help.
- Volunteer experience can provide a career ladder.
- Volunteerism allows sharing of experience gained.
- Volunteer roles can be adapted to interests and skills of individuals.
- Tasks can be matched with volunteer's available time.
- Expanded responsibility helps volunteers to take more ownership of program.
- Involvement builds enthusiasm for program.
- Expanded role allows volunteer to have a better understanding of over-all program.
- Volunteer leadership provides a source of recognition.
- Expanded role offers challenges and opportunities.
- Satisfaction is gained from working with youth and other adults.
- Volunteers enjoy sharing their talents and knowledge with others.

BENEFITS TO PROGRAM

- Program quality is improved and strengthened.
- Volunteers add credibility because they are unsalaried.
- Volunteers are objective policy makers.
- Volunteers provide a unique perspective.
- Volunteers are private citizens and are free to be powerful advocates.
- Volunteers offer ideas and are pioneers in creative new ideas.
- Volunteers offer diversity in age, race, social background, education level, income level, etc.
- Volunteers have skills different from those of staff.
- Volunteers can focus on a particular issue.
- Volunteers have immediate access to the community.
- Volunteers' needs are better understood by program.
- Volunteers feel more comfortable asking other volunteers for help.
- More people can be reached,
- More programs can be offered.
- Transition is easier when salaried staff change.
- Volunteers are a valuable communication link.
- Volunteers provide greater visibility for program.

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VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Managing a system that helps people develop is a primary goal. Others, shared by Colorado State University Extension 4-H Specialist Dale Leidheiser, may be the inspiration you need as you create your vision.

- Provide a safe learning environment for youth.
- Ensure volunteers have the skills for the position they are taking.
- Determine the volunteers' attitudes and motivations for involvement.
- Improve communications between staff and volunteers.
- Assess the training needs for volunteers.
- Make the best "fit" between the volunteer and the program.
- Decrease volunteer dropout rate.
- Increase volunteer satisfaction in accomplishing program goals.
- Improve the quality of the educational experience for youth.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities between volunteers and staff.
- Protect the rights of volunteers.
- Protect the rights of the organization.

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