

Section 4: Staffing

Decisions regarding the staffing of the volunteer program deserve careful consideration. How you go about designating or hiring the leader of volunteer involvement will be influenced by your strategic plan for volunteers. While it should be obvious that your staffing plan must fit the number and functions of volunteers you anticipate, it may not be obvious how to develop a formula to determine the right “fit.”

4.1 Identifying a Leader

The vast majority of people who lead volunteer engagement do not do so as a full-time job. Rather, they work part-time coordinating volunteers while primarily filling a different function in the organization; they have been asked to assume leadership of the volunteer effort in addition to their other responsibilities. In many cases, they were “anointed” into the leadership of volunteers; they did not seek the extra responsibility and felt they had little or no option when their administrator offered it to them. Additionally, they continue to view their original job description as their priority and try to “squeeze in” volunteer-related responsibilities as a secondary set of tasks.

Logically, someone who sees volunteer leadership as secondary (perhaps even as distracting) will rarely give the type of direction that will ensure volunteers achieve their true potential. So why designate a reluctant director of volunteer involvement?

The first step is to decide whether you are able (or willing) to create a new budget line for a designated leader of volunteers. A special fundraising event or a special grant request might create the first year’s salary, especially if you plan to begin with a part-time staff member. At least this part-timer will devote all of his/her on-site time to the subject of volunteers. And the time will be devoted willingly and enthusiastically because it will be this person’s primary job responsibility. The difference in possible achievement of goals because of this factor of primary responsibility cannot be overestimated and outweighs even the time limitations of a shorter work schedule.

If a new budget line is absolutely not possible, then you should begin by discovering who on staff might actually want to learn about volunteer management. Even if the interested staff member functions in a work area that seems tangential to what you plan for volunteers, the factors of free choice and enthusiasm should weigh heavily in favor of giving that staff member the responsibility for volunteers.

4.2 Defining Expectations

If you are a full-time employee assigned to volunteer coordination as a part-time task then it is important to consider these points at the time you accept the volunteer-related tasks:

- What exactly does “part time” mean? How many hours of the day or week will I be allowed to devote to volunteer management?
- In what ways will my present workload be decreased in order to “make room” for my new volunteer-related responsibilities?
- At what level of program growth will my part-time status be reviewed to determine whether more time is needed for volunteer management or if the agency is ready for a full-time director of volunteer involvement (not necessarily me)?

- What other agency resources will be made available to me in support of our volunteer engagement strategy?
- Does my immediate supervisor understand and completely accept the fact that my previous work patterns will now have to change, especially in terms of decreasing my former output in my primary area of service?

In all too many cases, these questions are not raised by either the new leader of volunteers or the CEO. Because so many of these issues require decision-making authority, it would be helpful for the executive to consider these and other questions before selecting an existing staff member to take on the added responsibility of volunteers. Otherwise, volunteer management becomes nothing more than an addendum to an already busy schedule and, in fact, produces stress and tension among the staff as a whole.

It is just as pertinent to consider some of these issues even if a brand-new employee will be hired to focus on volunteer involvement as a sole responsibility but on a part-time schedule. For example, at what point will you start thinking about increasing the number of work hours for the director of volunteer involvement? Or, if you do not want to expand this position, at what level of growth will you consider volunteer participation “capped”?

[REDACTED]