

## Section 6: Orientation and Training

Every volunteer has high hopes for his or her first day on the job. It may have taken some courage to offer to get involved with your organization, but your initial interview made the volunteer feel welcome. Now, how well Day One goes will have a lasting impact on this volunteer's long-term commitment.

- Cause: Why should I be working here?
- System: How will I be working here?
- Social: Where do I fit in with everyone else?

A volunteer who does not “feel” right about these three aspects of volunteering will cease to feel a part of the organization. Orientation should “seal the deal” between the organization and the volunteer.

The best way of understanding the importance of orientation is simply to consider its basic definition. “Orientation” is the process of learning one's direction and bearings in the world; a person without orientation is, to put it simply, “lost”.

### 6.1 What is included in Orientation?

#### The Greeting

Welcome the volunteer warmly. If he or she must first report to a receptionist, make sure that staffer knows that the volunteer is due and says something along the lines of “Oh yes ... welcome aboard!” It's amazing how motivating it is to feel that you are expected. You may want to consider posting a welcome sign in the lobby for the new volunteer.

#### Physical Orientation

Apart from the things you will want to tell the new volunteer about the actual work to be done, recognize that all newcomers need to get their bearings in an unfamiliar environment. Show the volunteer such creature-comfort things as the coat closet, where a purse or briefcase can be left safely, the rest rooms, and where to get coffee. Begin your tour with the volunteer's own work space, pointing out where colleagues and supervisors sit.

Depending on the volunteer's job description; you may need to plan some time to demonstrate the use of basic office equipment. These days, one can't assume that all telephone systems are intelligible (which buttons transfer calls) or that every person knows how to operate a computer, a copier, or a fax machine.

#### Initial Work Assignment

Nothing says “we need you” more effectively than having work prepared for the volunteer to do right away. Conversely, having the volunteer wait while you “pull something together to keep you busy” sends quite the opposite message. Select work that permits the volunteer to ease into your methods of doing things. It is better to prepare more work than less work – again because volunteers want to feel there is really something with which they can help.

How much formal training volunteers need will vary with the demands of each specific assignment and with the background of each volunteer, but whether or not you offer “training,” every volunteer needs good, initial instructions to do the job right. Be as clear as possible about your expectations for how work is to be done. Don't assume something is easy, but don't insult the intelligence of the volunteer either.

Having basic procedures written out is useful. Be aware of jargon and abbreviations. Most of all, remain accessible to the volunteer as she or he begins the work. Some questions can't be formulated until the person has tried to do a task for a while.

### **Formal Orientation**

All volunteers, regardless of their assignment area, deserve to receive an orientation about the organization itself. This formal session may or may not be given on the volunteer's first day, however. As long as it occurs sometime within the first month or so, it has a positive effect.

Such an orientation usually includes a full tour of the facility, some history of the organization, a discussion of all the services provided and how volunteers participate, basic standards and expectations, and any other information that sets the context for each volunteer's contribution.

### **Ending the First Day**

Be around when the volunteer's shift has ended. Review work done and give some feedback. If it is good work, say so. If there is something wrong, remind the volunteer that she or he is still in training and that improvement will come with practice. But do explain what was done wrong.

Verify the next time he or she will be coming in and express pleasure at having a new member on the team. Such courtesies are not just for show. They are part of the process of making the volunteer want to return again and again.

## **6.4 Training the Volunteer**

Training is the process of providing volunteers with the ability to perform specific types of work. Determining what training volunteers may need requires answering three questions:

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

**Coaching** is the process of teaching or upgrading skills. It can be used in formal training sessions or in on-the-job-training. Coaching will likely be the most used technique at places such as food shelves, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters -- when tasks need to be learned in a short amount of time with large groups of individuals. It will most often be provided by the supervisor of the volunteer or a more experienced co-worker. Effective coaching follows a three-step process:

**Demonstration** of the skill to be learned or improved

**Observation** of the volunteer trying out the skill

**Feedback** and analysis