



VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch Learning Center  
Advanced Practices

# Build Staff Buy-in for your Volunteer Engagement Program

Jennifer Bennett, CVA  
Director, Education & Training

Follow this webinar on Twitter to join the conversation:

#VMlearn

@JenBennettCVA

Post-Presentation Questions?

Email Jennifer: [education@volunteermatch.org](mailto:education@volunteermatch.org)

# Agenda

- Communication Is key
- Create a strong foundation
- Provide training and support
- Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate
- Working with unions
- Q&A

# What is the Problem?

## What is your organization's attitude towards volunteers?

- Volunteers are great, but you can't give them important work because they might not show up.
- Volunteers are great for support work, but we can't let them work with children, or with client records.
- liability issues
- Volunteers don't have anything else going on. They live to come to our organization.
  - ~ lack of respect for time
- Great – let's get tons of volunteers in here. Volunteers are free – right?

# What is the Problem?

## What are individual's attitude towards volunteers?

- I'm already so busy. I don't have time to work with a volunteer ~ volunteers are more work than they're worth
- I'd love to work with a volunteer, but what if my manager thinks I can't do my job?
- Am I training my volunteer replacement?
- What if a volunteer can't do the things she says she can do? ~ qualification concerns

# Before you Start talking to others

## What do you want to say?

- Do you have goals for the volunteer engagement program?
- Do you have a personal or organizational philosophy for volunteer engagement?
- Is volunteer engagement part of your organization's strategic plan or initiatives?

# Communication is key

Who in your organization is invested in the volunteer engagement program?

# Communication with stakeholders

## Communication with existing volunteers

- Volunteers have ownership or control over programs
- Hard to introduce new volunteers to shifts or teams
- Attitudes hold the culture hostage
- Intergenerational communication issues



# Identify stakeholders

## The stakeholder engagement continuum

- “I’m evaluating our volunteer engagement program. I’d love to get your ideas”
- One-on-one conversations
  - Opportunity for you to learn – don’t defend or attempt to change minds
- Group stakeholders into champions, those seeking more information, and those opposed to expanding volunteer engagement.

# What did they have to say?

Are there themes or trends? If they want more information what kind of information are they looking for?

- Case studies
- Pilot programs
- Feedback from existing volunteers

## Communicate the process

- What are you doing to ensure that you find the right volunteer for each position?

# Keep the story going

Create ongoing communications to share information about the program

- Successes and challenges
- Ongoing work on pilot programs
- New processes or better screening and training plans
- New positions
- And – of course – recognition!

Build Buy-In on a  
Strong Foundation

# Building Buy-In

## Engage supervisors or program managers in the process

- What does a volunteer need to know, do or be to be the right volunteer?

## How will you ensure that you find the right volunteer

- Clear and comprehensive position descriptions
- Interviews and screening process
- Screen for culture and fit not just for skills and traits

# Building Buy-In

What does a volunteer need to know before they start?

- Do they know it already? Skills based volunteers
- Are you training them? Who, how, when?

What does a volunteer need to know before they start?

- Does everyone know what they are? Where they are?
- Living policies evolve to fit the program as it changes
- Do they include conflict resolution procedures?

# Provide Training and Support

## Managing volunteers can be challenging

- Many staff members may have never managed anyone before!
- Start with the basics – what are the expectations?
- Don't assume that rudimentary skills exist. Role play and situational training.
- Include information on theory and philosophy
- Your philosophy, the organization's philosophy, books, articles, blogs on volunteer management and engagement

# Provide Training and Support

## What do you need but take for granted?

- How do you communicate goals and expectations to a volunteer?
- Can you tell a volunteer that the work isn't right or up to your standards?  
How?
- Create in-house trainings for staff. Informal support groups.



# Provide Training and Support

## Staff working with volunteers

- I know you know this, but I wanted to include you in this refresher.
- Model the type of interactions you want others to engage in with volunteers.

## Don't abandon them after initial trainings

- Daily interactions can cause confusion or conflicts.
- Ongoing check-ins with staff or meetings with staff and individual volunteers.

Ensure that the process is smooth.

Evaluate

# Evaluate

## Things rarely work well the first time

- Build on regular check-ins.
- Share questions or information across staff members.
- What could we be doing differently? What's working? What isn't? Solicit feedback from the volunteers too!
- This is good information for your communication channels.

# Working with unions

Build on foundation processes and clear procedures to create a use-case for unions

- Clear and comprehensive position descriptions for paid and volunteer staff
  - Is there a separate word for a volunteer position description?
  - Be aware of terminology issues.
- Identify discrete tasks or auxiliary positions
- Work or skills outside of position descriptions.

Thank you!

# Resources

## The Learning Center

- Find upcoming webinar dates, how-to videos and more
- <http://learn.volunteermatch.org>

## VolunteerMatch Community

- Ask and answer questions after the webinar  
<http://community.volunteermatch.org/volunteer>

## Related Webinar Topics:

- Creating a Comprehensive and Engaging Volunteer Training Program
- Where Do I Go From Here? Evolving your Volunteer Program for More
- Walking the Walk: Engage Volunteers in your Volunteer Engagement Program