

Working with volunteers

Workshop notes, D.Nelson.

Queensland State Conservation Conference, Samford Village, 1998

Workshop Outline

Introductions	
What do you want to learn about working with volunteers?	10 mins
Why do people want to be volunteers?	5 mins
Why is it important to manage volunteer workers well?	5 mins
Intro: Role Play and discussion	45 mins
What we love/hate about working with volunteers?	10 mins
Introduce five R's model	
Break into groups of four	
Each tell one volunteer success story, one disaster story.	10 mins (5each)
Come back to the group - share stories.	20 mins
What makes a good volunteer?	5 mins
What obstacles do we face in utilising volunteers?	10 mins
How can we manage volunteers better/	
How can we ensure we manage volunteers well?	
Introduce Rights and responsibilities	15 mins
How can we manage volunteers well? a step by step process tools,policy and procedures	15 mins
Evaluation	

The basis of sound volunteer management is a shared understanding of the relationship between the volunteer and the organisation with which they are choosing to spend their time. A sensible voluntary organisation will have a clear policy based on a philosophy about volunteers and how they fit within the organisation.

In the environment movement, volunteers are engaged in a multitude of roles including:

- as consultants offering specialised skills to discreet projects,
- as members of campaign and action groups,
- as managers on the boards of large and small organisations,
- as project managers and workers
- as educators
- as researchers
- as administrators
- and fundraisers.
- as members of large teams for public events - community participation in events - eg Walk Against Want

For many environment groups, volunteers are not only integral to the achievement of the organisation's immediate aims, but vital to its long-term sustainability.

"However laudable and genuine your concern for animals and conservation might be, don't let it eclipse the fact that you want to do this for yourself. Then ask what you can give in return." Tess Lemmon, BBC wildlife

Source: "So you want to be a volunteer" BBC Wildlife - July 1991 pp.490-4 (A nice example of an information sheet which could be adapted and given to a prospective volunteer)

Role Play: First Day in the Office

(Need seven volunteers)

You are determined to achieve the task: set by your manager whilst maintaining your cool. (p.s. you don't know where the report is. You don't know how to use the photocopier)

Volunteer Manager - Lisa

Welcome the volunteer and ask them to make 10 copies of the 1996 Inquiry into Coral Bleaching and distribute them to the committee members. Tell them where the photocopier is and that you are unsure about who has a copy of the inquiry - maybe Jane had it last?

Mark - Employee

- You are extremely busy and have a volunteer of your own to manage (choose some one with out a card to be your volunteer). Tell the volunteer that the report is in Jane's office on the third shelf and ask which committee it is to be sent to). Say that you can't really help them beyond this point. You are hassled and mildly aggressive. The volunteer seems like a real pest. Any way you have a bone to pick with the volunteer manager (take up lots of their time) (resources - human)

Anthony - Employee

(you are on the phone and have an important meeting to attend in 10 minutes.) You can't stop to help this new person. You explain what you are doing in a string of complex acronyms which makes the volunteers think you are speaking another language. (Culture)

Jane - Employee

- Whatever you say just make sure you dump your baggage on this new volunteer. Complain about the office, other staff, the amount of work you have to do - your pet, your mother. Be a real time waster. Don't answer any of the volunteer's questions. Tell them all about your campaign and how important it is and how it really hassles you that you can't find any decent volunteers to work with you. Whinge about your previous volunteer. (respect)

Karen - Employee

You know that the report is in Jane's office, but you're not sure where. Why not use this as leverage to help you chat up this sweet new thing . Hover around them and try your smoothest pick up lines.

Here's some in case you can't think of any:

So, do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? How about you do a bit of typing for me - then I'll have an excuse to take you out to lunch!

You look really stressed - I could give you a quick massage. I bet you're a really sensual person. (rights and responsibilities)

Peter

- You don't know of the report the volunteer is looking for but you can show them where the photocopier is (by the way, it is out of order). Some one will have to tell Karen, so that we can get the maintenance people here. Jake was supposed to get someone out here last week. (resources and reliability)

Jake - Volunteer

You really like being here for the social side of things. It so cool - except for Jane, shes a real Nazi - she thinks she can make all the rules. It's not hip - the laid back approach is what this organisation needs.- and direct action- lots of it - why is everyone just sitting around in the office- get out there and be active Dudes! Try to encourage the new volunteer to come on a blockade with you tomorrow. (realistic expectations)

Debrief

What did you observe?

What does this mean for your the way you work with volunteers

How could this be applied ot the way you work in your organisation

What do we really dislike about working with volunteers??

- Unreliable
- Unskilled
- they don't understand the pressure paid workers are under.
- they are demanding - they don't give back as much as I give them
- they don't like criticism - I feel like I have to hide my frustration
- they take up space and resources which could be utilised on a more effective worker - if only we had the money
- they don't understand the issues
- they don't listen to my instructions
- Misfits - can't get a real job?
- they are less committed to the cause
- they have nothing to lose - you have to protect your position
- they don't take responsibility
- they don't accept no for an answer
- they don't fit in - they don't understand the culture of our organisation

Key words

- sometimes when we are frustrated it helps to try to structure our frustrations - to get to the root of them.
- Reliability, respect, rights
- realistic expectations, resources
- they don't like criticism - I feel like I have to hide my frustration

Pair exercise

Break into pairs - share stories - one story of success one of failure or even disaster. Use the Five R's model to analyse why they were successful/ unsuccessful.

What is stopping us from using volunteers well - what are obstacles

Obstacles

- Lack of resources
- Lack of clear roles
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of policy - how to deal with problems - opens doorway to grievances etc
- Stressful work environment - organisational culture
- Attraction of unsuitable volunteers - lack of selection processes
- Staff unable to delegate - too busy, poor delegators

What makes a good volunteer? Pick someone from group - do as sticky label exercise

- reliable - honours commitments
- clear about the role they want to fill. - be sure that they want to do the work offered

workshop resource material

source: <http://www.environmentaladvocacy.org>

- conviction - the volunteer is convinced of the worth of the work they plan to do
- able to adapt to the work environment and understand and respect the rules and culture
- Welcomes supervision - loyalty to the organisation and ability to cope with constructive criticism
- efficient - skilled and trained for the tasks they are to perform
- willingness to learn
- communicates effectively - speaks up about problems and things they don't understand
- team player (desirable??)
- respects the rights of those working in the organisation

What rights should they have? (Hand outs) - what can you add to this list?

refer to volunteer rights

hand out sheets.

Doesn't the organisation have rights?

Generate a corresponding list for organisation

TOOLS

A flow chart for volunteer management

Research:

Identify needs/ what is the culture of our organisation

(Who are we)/

how can vols benefit from involvement?

When shouldn't we use volunteers??

(use the answers to develop an information sheet for new volunteers)

Where do we need volunteers?

Draft job descriptions based on your results

Where do we most need volunteers?

Prioritise positions available - its no use having some one to develop your web page if you can't get someone to answer the phones while you talk to them.

Recruitment

Where will we find who we are looking for?

Develop and implement a recruitment strategy based on needs - existing channels/agencies

Newspaper community service, newsletters, web sites, announcements at meetings, organisation's membership, direct contact with professional associations, posters

interview applicants / pre-induction

assess applicants

Appointment

appoint volunteers - induction - work based/culture based

Induction

trial period - initial training

review period - refer to initial Job Description
post review period - more thorough training - ongoing tasks
introduce projects

Evaluation and review

review projects/ review basic duties
reward/acknowledge successes
review training needs /offer incentives
independent work - encourage reporting - accountability.
develop work plans - identify obstacles

Deal with after flow chart:

what makes a good volunteer manager?

Have a clear policy based on a philosophy about volunteers and how they fit within the organisation

Key Issues

Retaining Volunteers

Assessing your organisation's need for volunteers

Recruitment

- clever advertising
- using established channels
- agencies
- using the campaign to recruit vols - integration

Rights and Responsibilities

- Vol's Rights and Responsibilities
- Org's Rights and responsibilities

Dealing with Conflict / Avoiding conflict

Volunteer Administration

Managing large groups for major projects

(putting it all into action) = building the network

Supervision, Training and Incentives

Incentives -

Training - some ideas - consultative processes, making it a priority,