



Inclusive Program Readiness

Creating an accessible and inclusive Volunteer Program

With this preparatory work completed, your organization will be better equipped both philosophically and practically to involve persons with disabilities as volunteers.

Raising Awareness

Attitudes

Raise awareness about the existing diversity of your organization. Have volunteers and staff identify gaps in your volunteer work force and start thinking about barriers that may exist. An open discussion with your current employees and volunteers will help you chart a plan of action.

They may already be very knowledgeable about and comfortable with the area of disability. If not, determine what kind of education they require. You may want to:

- Contact one or more disability organizations in your area to provide you with information, attend one of your organization's meetings, or provide a presentation for you. They could provide training to:
 - Dispel stereotypes and stress the value of individual differences in order to ensure that each volunteer with special needs will be regarded as a productive individual with many skills and talents.
 - Increase understanding of specific kinds of special needs and their implications for the volunteer workplace (Lautenschlager, 1992).
- Ask a person with a disability whether an outsider or someone already involved with your organization to provide some information on the types of barriers and opportunities they may have encountered in volunteering.

Consider Training

Have disability sessions that are geared for specific disabilities, such as visual, mobility, Deaf or cognitive.

Policy and Budget Implications

Once your staff and volunteers are knowledgeable about disability, your organization will have a more welcoming climate. You should also consider ways in which your policies or procedures may need to be adapted to increase accessibility.

Recruiting Volunteers

Once you have worked with your team to create an open environment and attitude, you have already made your organization more accessible. You are now better prepared for volunteers with disabilities to come through your doors.

However, people with disabilities may still not know that your organization is inclusive. Having experienced possible negative reactions to previous attempts to volunteer, they may not reach out to you unless you display your accessibility proudly and prominently.

You can evaluate your organization's openness through your recruitment materials and through your interviewing practices.

City of Bloomington Volunteer Network

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hrs: 8am - 5pm Monday-Friday • ph. 812.349.3433 • fax 812.349.3483 • volunteer@bloomington.in.gov



Recruiting Volunteers

Recruitment Materials

Look at your volunteer recruitment materials and any other standard information you distribute. Chances are they do not explicitly mention or show your commitment to diversity among your volunteers. To remedy the situation, you can:

- include images of people with disabilities in brochures, flyers, application packets, videos and other recruitment tools.
- ask local organizations that deal with disability to review your materials for accurate language use and positive portrayals of people with disabilities.
- include a TTY (Teletypewriter) or operator relay service number, and encourage individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired to call. Make sure that the person answering the calls is familiar with the TTY and/or relay service.
- include a statement to indicate that you are willing to provide your materials in alternate formats.
- use the international access symbol (a stylized wheelchair) on your materials.
- prepare an accommodation statement to appear in all published materials. It could run something like this: "Organization X welcomes all members of the community, regardless of race, sex, national origin, color, political affiliation, religion, age or disability." (Finisdore, 2000)

Once your materials reflect your commitment to and interest in involving volunteers with disabilities, consider the way in which you distribute and use those materials. How can you take an active approach to ensuring people with disabilities approach your organization as potential volunteers?

Targeted Recruitment

You may wish to consider specific outreach into the disability community, so that potential volunteers know about the opportunities that exist at your organization, and that you would welcome their participation. Clearly, the recruitment strategy would not be to look for, for example, blind volunteers. Rather, it would be to recruit people who are blind into volunteer positions that would be open to anyone. Proactively reach out to inform both potential volunteers and organizations working with clients with disabilities.

Relating to People with Disabilities

Remember:

- ✓ **The person is not their disability**
They are a person first. Focus on the individual and the issue at hand, not the disability.
- ✓ **Deal with the person as a capable individual**
Always direct communication to the individual with the disability. If they are accompanied, do not direct your comments to the companion.
- ✓ **Offer and provide assistance with sensitivity and respect**
People with disabilities, like all people, are experts on themselves. If you are uncertain what to do, ask.
- ✓ **Respect assistive devices as personal property**
Leaning or hanging on to a person's cane or wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is a part of the personal body space of the person who uses it. Never pet a service dog unless the owner grants permission.
- ✓ **Don't be overly careful with your words**
Don't worry about using the wrong word to describe an activity. Persons who use wheelchairs go for 'walks', people with visual impairments 'see' what you mean, and so on.

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Involving Volunteers with Disabilities: An Organizational Profile

When working with your staff and volunteers to raise awareness about accessibility, consider the following questions for discussion:

1. How many volunteers are involved with your organization?
2. How many of these volunteers have disabilities?
3. What disability awareness training / staff development has your organization conducted?
4. What accommodations would you be willing to make to increase your accessibility?
 - Making physical facility accessible
 - Modifying work areas
 - Adjusting work schedules
 - Restructuring tasks
 - Providing assistive devices

Policy and procedure questions for your organization to consider:

1. Have volunteer recruitment strategies been developed to target the recruitment of individuals with disabilities?
2. Are volunteers with disabilities actively recruited for volunteer openings?
3. Are all staff members and key volunteers provided with disability awareness training?
4. Are all board members provided with disability awareness training?
5. Do program planning and design reflect input from volunteers with disabilities?
6. Are resources allocated to support specific program initiatives for volunteers with disabilities?
7. Does the organization's strategy for program evaluation include receiving feedback from participants with disabilities?
8. Are staff development/training and mentoring opportunities available to volunteers with disabilities?
9. Have volunteers with disabilities been promoted or placed in positions of higher responsibilities in the organization?
10. Has the organization been successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers with disabilities?
11. Are there any policies that limit the number of volunteers with disabilities in the organization?
12. Have networks been developed that can be used to access potential volunteers with disabilities?
13. Are staff who are active in advancing the inclusion of volunteers with disabilities recognized, supported and acknowledged?
14. Is an exit interview conducted when a volunteer with a disability is leaving the program to learn about practices that may be more successful in retaining volunteers with disabilities? (Pyle, 1997)

(Excerpted from Volunteer Canada's *Volunteer Connections: Creating an accessible and inclusive environment* - 2001)

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