Bloomington Volunteer Network's

Thinking Big Workshop Activity Notes

Thursday, July 9, 2015

Why make a place for highly skilled or leadership volunteers in your organization?
In the best of all worlds, what "positives" could they bring to your organizations?
Positives

- Skills
- Relieve Staff
- Saves money
- Brings diversity
- Networking options
- Relieve stress from overwork – people are more creative
- Getting time to do things you've always wanted to do
- "Authentic" voices in mix
- Add new programs/people
- Add professional, neutral voices
- New "fresh-eyes" thinking
- Adds strengths, talents, expertise
- Increases community buy-in

How can you make the transition easier?

- Get staff involved in writing job descriptions
- Actually having job descriptions
- Ask "if I had an assistant, what would that assistant do?"
- Treat volunteers like employees – exit strategies
- Set clear expectations and goals of volunteers and employees – have a set of agreements
- Strategically recruit volunteers
- Making sure volunteers know your mission and will follow through
- Do skills inventory of volunteers – utilize volunteers to their strengths
- Keep "non-skilled" volunteers and bring them up the ladder when possible
- Let them do what they are good at
- If you delegate, be accepting
- Getting development people on board to assist w/volunteers
- Understand that volunteer management takes time and money
- Have a volunteer handbook
- Deliberately have staff job descriptions that they cannot fulfill without volunteers

What might be some "cons" to having highly skilled or leadership volunteers in your organization?

- Staff and management need to buy in to the idea. Both staff and volunteers need to be trained. Staff need to develop job descriptions for volunteers after assessing needs
- Understanding volunteer roles and expectations
- Unclear lines of authority
- May increase communication needs
- Potential culture clash
- Minimize cons through clear communication, clear lines of authority, clear expectations, clear role descriptions and timelines; very good screening or promoting current volunteers who you know; bring up ladder gradually; thorough training

Chalk Talk Activity

What are all the ways an organization might successfully recruit volunteers that are highly skilled or leaders? (and put them in the corresponding positions)

- Evaluate current volunteers
- Skills assessment of volunteers
- Sending out surveys
- Getting to know current volunteers better through interviews
- Have a clearly written job description and use it to advertise as if for actual employment
- Utilizing current volunteers after a review or discussion of their skill set
- Attend local events (Farmers' market, 50+ expo, festivals, volunteer fairs) with literature describing all your awesome volunteer opportunities
- Spend time/$'s to develop a consistent marketing effort to recruit new volunteers/develop current volunteers
- Make it know visually that you need these volunteers: signage, brochures, Volunteer Network
- Promote positions via social media
- Ask current highly skilled volunteers and leaders to bring a friend to an event
- School career centers – students are great!
- RSVP 55+ Volunteer Program helps recruit older volunteers
- Get to know the community and those organizations that share your mission
- Have an informational page on your website with photos of happy volunteers
- Network – talk about your organization
- Develop clearly defined roles
- Promote externally and internally
- Utilize services of Volunteer Network
- Give presentations about your organization and its volunteer needs to other groups (civic clubs, churches, businesses, retirement groups, Newcomers Club, Active Aging Coalition, RSVP volunteer center)
- Get good at asking

What professional development or infrastructure improvements need to take place to prepare volunteers to take positions?

- Think about how to celebrate what your volunteers do and give
- Offer opportunities for ongoing training education for admin and programs
- Staff needs to buy in to the idea. Staff needs to be trained as do the volunteers
- Think about exit strategy for volunteers to gracefully step out or down the ladder
- Have a trained volunteer coordinator who can do the interview, orient, and monitor the volunteers. Can be paid staff or a highly skilled volunteer.
- Include professional development dollars in budget
- Admin needs to recognize need for time for volunteer manager to develop training, orientation, etc.
- Conduct regular performance reviews (two-way input)
- Real training must be provided
- For students, outline office expectations
- Recognize that some people are volunteers for professional skill-building. They may have professional development goals and expectations
- Handbook that leaves you room to grow (or shrink)

How can volunteers be encouraged to take on new roles in an organization? Up or down the leadership ladder based on their circumstances?

- Spend time talking to them (not just about their assignment)
- Know your volunteers. Check in with them when their circumstances change. Ask if they want their loads lightened or want to add responsibilities.
- Conduct volunteer focus groups and surveys
- Open communication – both informal and scheduled
- Provide information about new volunteer positions on a website/Facebook
- Let them know what's available
- Think of it as a jungle gym instead of a ladder
- Be willing to learn from your volunteers
- Get to know their interests better. Invest time in them. Learn about their previous vocations and avocations.
- Let them pair up with someone else or join/create a new committee
- Ask successful volunteers to mentor new volunteers
- Post new volunteer opportunities just like new jobs
- Tell the stories of your volunteers – who they are and how they are serving your organization and post
- Find what they are interested in. Make sure any changes are their decision – not yours
- Ask them for more involvement. You don't know if you don't ask.
- Make sure they know it's ok to step up or step down (some won't commit if they have a vacation, or go to Florida for the winter; Others will worry about the void they will leave if they move up or down)
- Ask volunteers and the organization's members who you know already
- Do skills assessments of current volunteers
- Check in with current volunteers about needs, what works, other projects they may have taken on without your knowledge
- Let them do what they're good at
- Get development people on board
- Give people stair step goals
- Have clear lines of authority
- If they're retiring, ask them how they want to reinvent themselves in their retirement
- To develop staff buy in and good, solid positions, ask staff what else would they be able to do if they had an assistant.