

the Volunteer

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Mentor Activities Checklist

Does your organization have a mentor program in place? If so, it's helpful to provide mentors with a list of activities from which to choose.

Depending on the type of organization you represent, here's a partial list of mentoring activities you can refer to as you develop a list of your own:

- Give a tour of your workplace.
- Play catch.
- Visit a museum or art gallery.
- Discuss what it means to care about others.
- Work on homework together.
- Exchange ideas of your dream vacations.
- Learn about the person's hobbies.
- Attend a concert or play.
- Play a video game together.
- Talk about career plans.
- Make a poster.
- Play miniature golf together.
- Share lessons life has taught you.
- Visit someone in a retirement center together.
- Discuss money management.
- Participate in a daylong volunteer project.
- Go to a movie.
- Have lunch and review table etiquette.
- Go to a ball game.
- Study a map.

MODELS YOU CAN ADAPT

Organize Your Own 'Family Volunteering Day'

By Erin Sandage

Giving kids the opportunity to volunteer early helps plant the seed of volunteerism that grows throughout their lives. Consider organizing a Family Volunteering Day to provide a safe introduction to both volunteering and your organization.

The Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona (Tucson, AZ) has offered a monthly Youth and Family Volunteer Day since 2014. Since the organization normally requires volunteers to be at least 16, the family day is a way to engage volunteers as young as six, along with their parents, says Community Engagement Specialist Rosario Becerra.

"We often received requests for opportunities for young children, and since we weren't able to offer that on a consistent basis, we felt this would be a good alternative," she explains. Here's how they make it work:

1. **Consistent communication between families and staff.** Becerra says both families and staff from the different departments are informed about what's involved. Parents receive details during the initial inquiry and registration. Parents also receive a brief rundown of rules when dates are confirmed and are asked to sign a waiver that states the rules will be followed in the warehouse. "And just before the tour begins we review some of these housekeeping rules to ensure everyone's safety," she adds.
2. **Family-accessible dates.** Family volunteering opportunities are scheduled during typical school hours, ideally when kids have a school vacation day, and during a time when the food bank has fewer visitors.
3. **Extra staff supervision.** Since the day requires more supervision to ensure the volunteer tasks are accomplished safely, staff support is essential, says Becerra. "There are liabilities, as with any other volunteer, and in order to avoid these we always conduct the Family Volunteer Day in a team of two to ensure that we have constant sight and sound of all attendees, including adults. We also work closely with parents to ensure that children are supervised at all times, because restroom or water breaks are typical."
4. **A well-rounded experience.** Each day begins with a tour of the facilities. Families learn about the food bank's services, see where the food is stored and what happens once it leaves the warehouse. The opportunity gives parents and kids a chance to connect while volunteering and asking questions.
5. **Age-appropriate jobs.** Becerra says little ones can work in the sorting area as quality control, checking cans for expiration dates and packing fruit and veggies for client distribution. Outdoor opportunities are available at the organization's community farm harvesting or seed packaging. "The kids are able to utilize small motor skills and learn about what the seed will become and also utilize math because they count the number of seeds that go into a small bag. It's a win-win!"

Source: Rosario Becerra, Community Engagement Specialist,
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Take Steps to Strengthen Relations Between Staff and Volunteers

Q *What specific actions have you taken to help staff understand and more fully support your volunteers?*

"Managing volunteers is a small piece of our site staff's jobs. In order to make sure that volunteers are trained, supported and recognized, we have taken a lot of care to make sure that our staff are equally trained, supported and recognized when it comes to managing volunteers.

"One of the gaps that staff have voiced is with support when it comes to volunteer engagement. As an organization, we have made strides to fill this gap. We will be utilizing an online volunteer management system that will allow all volunteers to apply, sign up for activities/roles, track volunteer hours, share documents, access trainings and connect with staff all through one system.

"We have also completely revised our volunteer policies and procedures to ensure that all of our practices are safe and supportive. This next year will have a focus on volunteer engagement. At our all-staff summer engagement conference, we will be training staff on proper volunteer screening techniques, how to utilize the volunteer management system, learning new volunteer policies and procedures and how to tell our story through service.

"Staff are required to participate in annual volunteer management training and are given tips and tricks on recruitment, retention and recognition. We are also working on volunteer engagement plans with staff so that they can make goals around how they would like to involve and engage volunteers at their sites.

"In order to allow staff to provide more day-to-day, hands-on support with volunteers, the volunteer management department at our administrative office will be facilitating volunteer training. Ongoing trainings will be offered to both staff and volunteers alike on a variety of topics including but not limited to (for staff) managing volunteers, how to have difficult conversations, recognizing volunteers, retention efforts, setting expectations and much more. For volunteers, trainings will include how to work with specific student-age groups, cultural competency, effective communication, recognizing sexual abuse, supporting young people in the wake of violence and trauma, trauma-informed care, setting expectations, mentoring 101 and more.

"When staff and volunteers feel comfortable and supported, there is no telling the impact they can make."

— *Sophie Archuleta, Volunteer and VISTA Manager, Communities In Schools of Mid-America, Lawrence, KS.*
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"One of the things that Heartland does to help staff understand what our volunteers do is each new staff member sits down in a one-on-one meeting with me. In this 10- to 15-minute meeting, I explain to them why hospice volunteers are needed, what our volunteers do/do not do, the recruiting process, the on-boarding process and a map of where our volunteers are located. Our volunteers are mainly assigned to one location/facility and usually there are only one to two nurses that serve that location/facility as well. This way, employees and volunteers become familiar with one another. I believe that this helps to strengthen the bond between staff and volunteers, because each feels like they know and have developed a friendship with one another.

"Helping staff to fully understand and support our volunteers is an ongoing process. I believe that success relies on educating staff about volunteer services as well as familiarizing them with our volunteers."

— *Jennell Loeffler, Volunteer Coordinator, Heartland Hospice, Rochester, MN.* Phone (507) 424-9874.

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VicNet Gives Volunteers Online Access

Volunteer administrators use their volunteer management software daily to track, recruit and recognize volunteers, but they also spend a fair amount of time performing clerical tasks like updating contact information and scheduling shifts. VicNet, a secure online portal and companion tool to Volgistics volunteer management software, allows volunteers access to their records, giving them some control over their information.

“I love Volgistics; it’s user-friendly and most of our volunteers love it too, because it is easy to use,” says Karen Clowers, manager of volunteers, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden (Richmond, VA).

VicNet is accessed by volunteers with an e-mail and password through a URL, which can be linked from an organization’s website. VicNet allows volunteers to download handbooks, update addresses, add themselves to a schedule, review hours and more.

Georgann Roth, volunteer resources coordinator for the Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties (Lincoln, NE) says they’ve been using Volgistics for more than seven years as their volunteer database and utilize VicNet to enable volunteers to update their personal information.

“The more I’ve been able to learn about its capabilities, the more I’m able to utilize it to fit our volunteer service’s needs,” she says.

VicNet interacts seamlessly with Volgistics, and organizations have complete control over what a volunteer has access to; any change a volunteer makes is instantly seen by the manager, says Garrett Barber, a member of Volgistics support team. Clowers says besides using VicNet to review hours, they’ve started to give access to a specific group of off-site volunteers to enter their own time. “They can’t hurt or harm anything,” she adds. She says they also use it to allow all volunteers to sign up for special volunteer opportunities outside their normal schedule.

All volunteer information is stored in a secure data center in Grand Rapids, MI, and information is encrypted in transit, using the same technology banks use to protect customer information, Barber adds.

Volgistics can accommodate 50 or fewer volunteer records, up to more than 100,000. Pricing is determined by the number of volunteer records and number of system operators. For example, for 50 or fewer the price is about \$9 a month; 1,000 records is about \$50 a month.

Roth says her volunteers also say it’s easy to use, but she found it had a learning curve and training is given online or by CD, which may not be ideal for a new volunteer administrator.

“If you have a volunteer administrator with a good number of years under their belt and is comfortable using and learning new software, then it could be a good fit,” she says. But, she adds, if an organization doesn’t need to be detailed with tracking, it is probably more power than they need.

Clowers manages 650 active volunteers and has about 750 in her system. She says it’s worked great for their organization, and the online tutorials cover about everything she’s needed to know. The company boasts an online response rate of five minutes.

Sources: Karen Clowers, Manager of Volunteers, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA. Phone (804) 262-9887. E-mail: karenc@lewisginter.org. Website: www.lewisginter.org

Georgann Roth, CVA, Volunteer Resources Coordinator/Foster Grandparent Program Director, Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties, Lincoln, NE. Phone (402) 875-9320. E-mail: groth@communityactionatwork.org. Website: www.communityactionatwork.org

Enlist and Educate Volunteer Advocates

Q. *What specific methods do you employ to recruit and train volunteers to serve as advocates for your nonprofit organization?*

“Some of the ways we recruit and engage advocates, include:

- “A section on our website (www.azhumane.org/get-involved/be-an-advocate) with current information/ways to get involved.
- “An e-mail alert sign-up for advocacy news and urgent alerts.
- “Social media outreach.
- “An advocacy guide (www.azhumane.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/AHS223_AdvocacyPDF_F.pdf).
- “Fact sheets and guides for proposed legislation.
- “Resources for advocates including how to contact officials, information on current laws, a guide to writing letters, etc.
- “For calls-to-action, we send e-mails with the background on legislation, elected official contact information and speaking points for advocates.”

— Heather Beshears, Director, Marketing, Education and Advocacy, Arizona Humane Society, Phoenix, AZ. Phone (602) 997-7585, ext. 1058. E-mail: hbeshears@azhumane.org. Website: www.azhumane.org

“Our food bank offers a variety of ways for volunteers to become advocates. We offer a three-hour Advocacy 101 training based on Feeding America’s Advocacy Academy in partnership with the Congressional Management Foundation. This training introduces volunteers to the importance of public policy advocacy in meeting our mission, how to engage with elected officials and what our policy agenda is.

“We also have an advocacy newsletter and send out policy and event updates, as well as calls to action. We have done a few letter writing campaigns and have taken volunteers and community partners to lobby days and conferences. Additionally, we have an advocacy committee made up of community advocates and volunteers.”

— Randi Lynn Quackenbush, Director of Community Impact, Food Bank of the Southern Tier, Elmira, NY. Phone (607) 796-6061. E-mail: randi.quackenbush@foodbankst.org. Website: www.foodbankst.org

Volunteer Exit Survey Seeks Answers to Key Questions

To boost volunteer retention rates, introduce an exit survey to determine the cause for volunteer departures. Create a form asking the following key questions to learn more from departing volunteers:

- What is your reason for leaving our organization?
- How would you improve the volunteer experience with our nonprofit?
- Do you feel our volunteer program strongly supports our mission? If no, please explain.
- Do you feel you gained new skills and knowledge while volunteering in our program? If yes, please detail what skills you learned.
- How did your volunteer experience compare to your original expectations?
- Would you be willing to return as a volunteer with our organization? If not, why? If yes, when can you return?
- What additional comments would you like to make about our volunteer program?

Reinforce Confidentiality Among Volunteer Ranks

Many volunteer positions require high levels of confidentiality. In those circumstances, what are you doing to get the message across to volunteers?

Volunteers will be more aware of the need to maintain confidentiality if you convey its importance often and in various ways. Here are five ideas for doing so:

1. Include a confidentiality statement in volunteer position descriptions.
2. Go over specific confidentiality instructions during orientation and include them in your handbook.
3. Reiterate the need for confidentiality as volunteers begin new jobs.
4. Post signs regarding the need for confidentiality, and make mention of it in written communications.
5. Point out consequences for not adhering to rules of confidentiality.

Share Your Volunteers' Impact in Multiple Ways

Q. How do you go about sharing the impact of your volunteers' work?

“As we strive to share the impact of our volunteers' work, we tend to share stories, making an effort to articulate the narrative each volunteer is a part of. Each quarter we invite volunteer leaders to attend a roundtable meeting. During this time, we share updates, training and vision casting. We always start these times off with ‘Great Stories.’ It gives our leaders a chance to share about how they see their impact on our community and to feel proud about the work they do.

“We also start our board meetings with what we call Mission Moments. I am frequently invited in to share a story about the impact our volunteers are making in the lives of the homebound, often isolated, population we serve.

“Since we are almost entirely volunteer-driven, it is easy for us to focus on the impact volunteers have. Every meal, safety check and social connection we intend to provide is delivered directly through the care and dedication of our volunteers.

“The area we continue to grow in is in gathering data about how the individual impact each volunteer has is affecting our community altogether. It will continue to take time and a very conscious effort to identify the expected impact our volunteers have on the overall homebound population that is frequently overlooked and forgotten.

“We also provide annual impact reports with simple infographics and newsletter stories and rely on national data about the impact Meals on Wheels volunteers provide to the homebound.”

— *Ginger Tribbett, Director of Volunteer Services, Meals on Wheels of Metro Tulsa, Tulsa, OK. Phone (918) 921-3563. E-mail: ginger@mowtulsa.org. Website: www.mealsonwheelstulsa.org*

VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN CHAPTERS

Provide Volunteer Chapters With Useful Resources

At St. Olaf, alumni chapters are spread around the United States, with the largest chapter being in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN, area. They then have half a dozen “tier two” chapters in large cities with a sizable number of alumni, like Denver, New York City and Seattle. Finally, they have a few “tier three” locations in smaller cities.

For all chapters, volunteers are key. In each location, at least one volunteer is required to plan events. The goal is at least one event per quarter, though some chapters meet monthly. Events can be social engagements, or they're experimenting with higher-impact events, including education opportunities, career-based networking and events targeting different types of alumni (like family-friendly).

Brittany Opem, assistant director of alumni and parent relations at St. Olaf, provides several resources (www.wp.stolaf.edu/alumni/volunteer-resources) to not only help volunteers plan great events, but also to help preserve the morale of volunteers. The resources include event planning checklists and timeline templates. The volunteers also have Opem for assistance; she handles registrations and marketing for all chapter events as well as visits each chapter for annual planning meetings.

According to Opem, there are several tips to ensure productive chapters:

- ✓ Each chapter has its own vibe and goals. Let that thrive and listen to what's working well rather than requiring all chapters to function the same way.
- ✓ Look for volunteers who are self-motivated, excel at follow-through and play well with others. Idea people are great, but you need them to also execute.
- ✓ If you have co-chairs or volunteer committees at the chapter level, make sure they are more different than alike to ensure different ideas that will satisfy your varying alumni base.

Source: *Brittany Opem, Assistant Director, Alumni and Parent Relations, St. Olaf, Northfield, MN. Phone (507) 786-3579. E-mail: opem1@stolaf.edu. Website: www.stolaf.edu*

Don't Limit Your Auxiliary to One Group

By Yvette Boysen

It's not uncommon for a nonprofit organization to have one, maybe two auxiliaries. But Genesis Women's Shelter and Support (Dallas, TX) has five support groups, each dedicated to putting an end to family violence in the community.

Genesis' mission is to not only provide safety, shelter and support for women who have experienced domestic violence but also to raise community awareness. And that's where the auxiliary groups come into play.

"The awareness and education component serves as the foundation for each of our auxiliary groups," explains Elizabeth Corley, community engagement manager. "Our goal is to create a societal shift on how people think about domestic violence. In order for that to happen, we need to reach as many people as possible — sharing our message of help and hope and providing an opportunity for people to get involved. Each auxiliary helps us move one step closer to creating that societal shift, as members become ambassadors for Genesis and connect us to their own circles, whether that's within their school, workplace, place of worship or neighborhood."

Although each auxiliary is unique in its membership and role, the groups all function similarly. Corley says members in each group pay annual dues (specific to their auxiliary) and undergo a background check. Genesis staff, an auxiliary president and an elected board of directors oversee each group. According to Corley, these individuals are crucial to the success of the auxiliaries. Each year the nonprofit works to identify individuals to fill these roles. It seeks those who are respected by their peers, are committed to Genesis' mission and continually ask how they can help the agency.

"In order for an auxiliary to grow, you need to have the right people in place — on the agency side and the donor side — who will serve as your cheerleaders and enthusiastically steer the program to its next phase," she says.

Another important note when managing multiple auxiliary groups is recognizing that "one size does not necessarily fit all." Differences can range from programming to volunteer opportunities to meeting frequency to communication styles.

Source: Elizabeth Corley, Community Engagement Manager, Genesis Women's Shelter and Support, Dallas, TX. Phone (214) 389-7714. E-mail: ecorley@genesishelter.org. Website: www.genesishelter.org

Reference Qualifications

Many volunteer programs offer their volunteers letters of reference as a benefit of volunteering. Before serving as a reference however, stipulate a minimum amount of volunteer service:

"References for employment or education purposes are provided upon request for adult volunteers who have contributed a minimum of 60 or more hours of service and for youth volunteers who have completed a minimum of 38 or more hours of service."

Genesis Auxiliary Profiles

Elizabeth Corley, community engagement manager at Genesis Women's Shelter and Support (Dallas, TX), explains the organization's five auxiliary groups:

Genesis Alliance — Women's auxiliary

Membership: 600

Responsibilities: Provide meals, host special gatherings for clients, coordinate lecture series events, assist with holiday program, coordinate donation drives, actively participate in court partnership program, educate and host two membership meetings each year.

Notes: "We consider our Alliance members to be our kitchen table ambassadors — always raising awareness in our community and empowering others to be able to help a friend in need," Corley says.

Genesis HeROs (He Respects Others) — Men's auxiliary

Membership: 300+

Responsibilities: Grill and serve dinner to clients; mentor boys; speak about being a gentle man; attend court hearings; and host networking happy hours, educational membership breakfasts and the fall fundraiser.

Notes: Founded as a grassroots movement, Corley says this group has "led to transformational change."

Genesis Young Leaders — Young professionals, ages 20 to 40

Membership: 250

Responsibilities: Host annual GYL Masquerade Ball, volunteer with children, host game and activity nights and host GYL Sip and Learn educational series.

Notes: "Our GYL members are always identifying ways to support our clients," she says. "Some are attorneys who partner with our onsite legal program to offer pro bono services; others are CPAs who set up financial empowerment classes for our clients."

STAR (Students Tackle Abusive Relationships) — High school students

Membership: 100

Responsibilities: Volunteer with children, implement projects at their schools, host bake sales and donation drives and invite speakers to their classes and school assemblies.

Notes: "We have seen firsthand how educating our STAR members about dating violence can lead to a ripple effect among their peers," Corley says.

Genesis Madrinas — Women who serve and educate the Latino community

Membership: 20

Responsibilities: Volunteer, provide meals, wrap gifts for holiday program and represent Genesis at resource fairs and community events.

Notes: "They serve as our hands and feet in the Latino community — sharing resources everywhere they go and letting others know there is help and hope," she says.

Volunteer Motivation Idea

To motivate your volunteers, host a reception on their behalf. Invite all of your employees to stop by and learn more about a their completed project, and have the volunteers present as the guests of honor.

Evaluations Need Not Feel Like Evaluations

While it might not always be appropriate to conduct a formal evaluation of volunteer performance, the process of conducting a yearly relationship evaluation can serve to point out areas that need improvement.

It can also help point out where certain adjustments on your part might make for a more rewarding and productive volunteer experience.

Make a point to sit down one-on-one with your volunteers at least once each year to conduct a relationship evaluation. Explain that the purpose of the evaluation is to:

1. Get a better handle on the volunteer's perceptions of his or her experience.
2. Learn what can be done to make the volunteer's future service even more rewarding and productive.
3. Point out staff expectations of the volunteer, based on the future direction of your agency and the past year's performance.

Explaining the purpose of the evaluation in this way places the experience in a more positive light and serves to benefit the volunteer as well as the agency.

Choose from among these questions as a way to evaluate both volunteer perceptions and performance:

- What would you do to make your volunteer experience more meaningful and rewarding?
- In your opinion, how did your work contributions this past year match up with your job description? Where did you meet or exceed the job description responsibilities? Where might you have fallen short?
- Based on your past year's experience, what might you do differently to make an even greater or improved agency contribution as we begin another year?
- In your opinion, what could we do to help you become an even more accomplished volunteer?

An evaluation conducted in this positive manner becomes a win-win for both the organization and the volunteers.

Prepare Staff Before Placing Volunteers

Once staff members request volunteer assistance and you supply needed personnel, do staff know what to do at that point? When volunteers show up, will the staff member in charge support them in a way consistent with your expectations?

If you are going to supply departments with needed volunteers, it's important they accommodate those unpaid helpers in a professional manner. Here's how to help:

1. Insist that any personnel desiring volunteer assistance first participate in a brief workshop designed to show the dos and don'ts of working with volunteers.
2. When requests are made for volunteer assistance — and such requests should be encouraged — have a process in place that allows you to get all of the needed facts before enlisting help: How many volunteers will be required? What will they be expected to do? Who will be on hand to assist them or answer questions? What is the time frame of the assigned task(s)? Are there any special qualifications?
3. If possible, check up on the volunteers to be sure everything is going as expected. In addition, be sure they know they can come to you if they have a problem or question that is not being addressed by the department for which they are working.
4. Have a system in place that allows you to survey both volunteers and staff as part of your evaluation of the completed project. Knowing perceptions of both staff and volunteers enables you to make needed improvements.

BE PREPARED

Take Time to Cross-Train Support Staff, Key Volunteers

You've just been informed that a long-time, key volunteer will be moving to another community. Unfortunately, no other volunteers know how to do that job.

To avoid major disruptions in your volunteer program, it's important key volunteers know how to do one another's job. By cross-training these key volunteers — as well as educating support staff of the volunteers' duties so they can step in as needed to fill the gap — you are assured that someone will know how to keep things moving when someone leaves.

Follow these strategies to be sure key volunteers understand each other's jobs:

- Direct key volunteers to schedule some time once a month to teach a colleague his or her responsibilities.
- Have each volunteer produce a detailed report that includes step-by-step procedures of all tasks performed. Include it in your annual operational plan.
- Ask one volunteer to give a report on some aspect of his or her job during each of your regular meetings.

Another advantage: Cross-training enhances teamwork as volunteers develop a greater appreciation of colleagues' responsibilities.

MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

Encourage Group Discussion

Ever have difficulty getting everyone to contribute to the discussion? These techniques will get everyone into the act:

1. **Use the equitable approach.** Issue three tickets to everyone, explaining that each time someone speaks they need to place one of their tickets on the table. When all of the tickets are used, they cannot speak. However, the discussion doesn't end until everyone present has used all of his/her tickets.
2. **Reward positive behavior.** Whenever someone makes what is considered a positive suggestion or idea, those present are encouraged to applaud. A clap indicates the contributor merits a prize, such as free concert tickets.

Strategies to Prevent, Minimize and Resolve Conflict

It's inevitable. As a volunteer manager, you're going to experience conflict. Avoiding the issue may be your natural tendency, or perhaps you're more apt to confront the volunteer. The best solution, however, is to assess each situation and try to avoid automatically slipping into your comfort zone.

While the issue itself will, of course, vary, Tracy Butz, speaker, author, influencer and owner of Tracy Butz, LLC (Thornton, CO), says the cause of conflict will likely stem from either a disconnect in communication or emotions. Do what you can to ensure clear and timely communication with your volunteers, and always remember that human beings are highly emotional and are often at their worst during a time of conflict.

When possible, Butz recommends stopping or slowing undesirable responses.

"When you are able to avoid or slow down a negative reaction, you will be more able to successfully maximize candor and minimize defensiveness, resulting in more collaborative and cohesive relationships with staff, colleagues and those you serve," she says.

To do this, listen actively. Ask questions, paraphrase and clarify what's being said. Focus on facts, and don't let it get personal. If things get too intense, it's okay to take a break. Lastly, avoid blame. Instead, try to encourage ownership of both the problem and the solution.

As you work through the issue with these strategies in mind, Butz recommends a four-step process:

1. First, "Acknowledge or clarify the conflict using the words 'I've noticed that....'" For instance, you may say, "Henry, I've noticed that the last three mornings you have been 15 minutes late for your shift."
2. Next, talk about who and what is affected. When doing so, be empathetic. Butz suggests "caring" words like "Help me understand."
3. Once you've explained the outcome you'd like to see, work with the volunteer to achieve that goal. Ask how he or she would like to see the situation handled. Be open to all ideas, especially those they suggest. In the process, identify potential barriers and ways to overcome them. When appropriate, apologize.
4. Finally, after all possible solutions are on the table, determine how to proceed. Butz says it's important to "attain buy-in, gain clarity and reach consensus versus agreement." If you are unable to reach consensus, bring in a third party. In the end, she says to always remember to "demonstrate accountability over excuses, by taking action on decisions."

Source: Tracy Butz, Owner, Tracy Butz, LLC, Thornton, CO. Phone (920) 450-2118. E-mail: tracy@tracybutz.com. Website: www.tracybutz.com

Teen Advisory Council Serves As a Voice for Area Youth

At the Poe Center for Health Education (Raleigh, NC), teens serve on an advisory council to help address health issues that impact them and their peers. Thomas Ray, senior director of educational programming, says the group meets monthly to address those issues through education, policy and so on with the goal of making the community healthier.

Here's how the teen advisory council works:

1. The group meets for monthly sessions, each focused on a specific health topic related to teens, like sleep, vaping, alcohol, healthy relationships, bullying and nutrition.
2. Each session includes some education, some skill building and some brainstorming around how to take this to a wider audience, like policy needs, event or peer education opportunities or public service announcements. They also offer healthy food because it encourages attendance.
3. Nearly 200 teens are part of the larger network, with 20 to 25 serving on the leadership team. Leadership roles are filled through an annual application process, with the existing team reviewing and selecting incoming members.
4. The leadership team sets policy and holds themselves accountable for keeping up with projects and meetings.
5. Adult members of the team, including Ray, mentor the group to help them navigate but ultimately give the team responsibility and the space to be creative.

Source: Thomas Ray, PhD, Senior Director of Educational Programming, Poe Center for Health Education, Raleigh, NC. Phone (919) 231-4006. E-mail: t.ray@poehealth.org. Website: www.poehealth.org

Identify and Remove Obstacles to Success

You obviously want your volunteers to complete tasks successfully, and so do they. That's why it's important to anticipate any obstacles they might encounter along the way and, if possible, eliminate those obstacles in advance.

Here are three ways to do that:

1. Write out the primary objective of the project along with any secondary objectives. Doing so will help to anticipate any possible road blocks.
2. Visit with volunteers who have carried out the project in the past to learn of any challenges they had to overcome.
3. Develop a task completion checklist for the project — along with deadline dates — that might pinpoint potential problems before they arise.

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Volunteer *INSIDER*

“You can always give something, even if it is only kindness.”
— Anne Frank

THE MONTHLY IDEA SOURCE FOR VOLUNTEERS LEADING THE WAY

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IDEAS YOU CAN ADAPT

The Honeycomb Project Mobilizes Family Volunteers

By Yvette Boysen

As a volunteer, you know there is no shortage of volunteer projects available. However, opportunities are typically much more limited for families wanting to serve together. Eight years ago, two moms decided to change this by creating The Honeycomb Project (Honeycomb; Chicago, IL).

“The Honeycomb Project is a Chicago-based organization dedicated to family volunteering,” explains Kristina Lowenstein, executive director and co-founder. “What we do is create fun, hands-on, impactful projects in communities throughout the city of Chicago for whole families to participate in together.”

When her children were young, Lowenstein says her family frequently discussed a variety of issues plaguing their community; however, opportunities for actual service work were difficult to find because of age restrictions, time requirements and the limited resources of nonprofit organizations. So, she and her friend, Catherine Tannen, came up with the idea of The Honeycomb Project.

Here’s how it works. Honeycomb works with its more than 45 partner organizations to determine community needs. From there, Honeycomb staff and volunteers create projects suitable for families. They range from making sleeping mats for the homeless to mulching trails and planting native species in a nature preserve to hosting a potluck for women living in a homeless shelter.

Families interested in an event simply need to sign up and show up. Honeycomb provides the supplies and a project leader leads each project. Guest speakers or representatives from partnering organizations often attend the events, as well.

“One of the things that is most important to us is not just the day-of work activity, but really connecting families at a deeper level with the issues at hand,” Lowenstein says. “We really hope that Honeycomb families walk away from the day inspired to do more work, wanting to tell their friends and neighbors about the issues they’ve addressed and staying involved.”

Although each service opportunity is unique, the overall experience remains the same.

“We always say that a Honeycomb experience is part volunteer project, part fieldtrip and part party,” she says. “We want families to walk away with a deeper understanding of the organizations that we’re working with, but also really have fun together.”

If you’re interested in introducing a similar project in your community, Lowenstein suggests talking with local nonprofits to determine their needs. From there, create a service opportunity for your family and friends. As interest and need grows, you can slowly expand the program.

To date, more than 15,000 youth and their families have impacted the lives of 1.5 million people through The Honeycomb Project.

Source: Kristina Lowenstein, Executive Director and Co-Founder, The Honeycomb Project, Chicago, IL. Phone (773) 750-7120. E-mail: kristina@thehoneycombproject.org. Website: www.thehoneycombproject.org



Exemplary Volunteering: Under Promise, Over Deliver

Whenever you agree to take on an assignment, follow the old axiom: under promise and over deliver.

How does that apply to your work as a board member or volunteer? Here are a few principles to follow:

- **Do more than is requested of you.** If you’re expected to call three people, call six. If you’ve been asked to enlist five people, enlist 10 instead.
- **Beat the deadline.** Tell yourself to complete the project in less time than has been allotted for it.
- **Be a person of action.** If others are involved in the project, spur them on to complete their work on time. Look at the big picture and take on those tasks that are in need of someone’s attention.
- **Pay attention to detail.** It’s not enough to complete the assignment as asked. Rather, go the next step and see that it is completed as thoroughly as possible.

Not only will your dedication be appreciated by the staff, your example will raise the bar for others around you.