

Effective Relationships Between Staff and Volunteers

Developing and maintaining effective relationship(s) between paid staff and volunteers is often a challenge for Provincial Sport Organizations. Outlined below are some ideas and tips for how to make that relationship as effective as possible. By fostering a positive relationship between these two parties, you are going to strengthen your association and operate much more efficiently.

Staff can create barriers to volunteer involvement:

- Staff frequently see volunteers as "passing through" because of their relatively short time involvement.
- Volunteers may be seen as "marginally" committed because of their limited time schedules.
- Staff may feel disconnected from volunteers who work outside of normal hours or who work outside of the office setting.
- Staff may feel that volunteers disrupt the normal flow of work with their short assignments and short hours.

These feelings are generally not the result of an inherent or intentional dislike of volunteers. They happen because it is difficult to integrate volunteers into the day-to-day social fabric of the organization. Strategies must be implemented to eliminate or minimize these real or perceived barriers.

An effective volunteer program requires cooperation between staff and volunteers and a commitment from both parties to encourage and respect the contributions of the other.

"A principle learned in the customer service discipline has great relevance when translated to the field of volunteer involvement: 'Staff will tend to treat volunteers in the same way that management treats staff.' Supervisory styles tend to flow downhill, and an organization in which leadership fails to empower staff will have great difficulty in encouraging staff to empower volunteers. An organization in which staff feel a lack of respect will also tend to not respect volunteers." (McCurley, 1995, p. 3)

Keys to Building Understanding and Collaboration:

- Paid staff are respected and are empowered to fully participate in planning, decision-making and management related to volunteer involvement.
- There is a conscious, active effort to reduce the boundaries and increase the teamwork between paid and volunteer staff.
- Success breeds success as stories of the contributions of volunteers - both historically and currently - are shared among both paid and volunteer staff.

Today's volunteers have many options and opportunities for sharing their time and skills. Volunteers will generally avoid environments that are negative or hostile or simply indifferent. Volunteers are freer than paid staff to make choices to avoid unpleasant situations and most volunteers will choose to "invest their time and energies in organizations where the major effort is devoted to fighting the problems of the world, not fighting each other." (McCurley, 1995, p. 3)

Volunteers are drawn to programs with a true sense of a team effort. They want to feel a part of the team, an equal partner in the work. This occurs most effectively when staff and volunteers understand the connection between their efforts and the mission of the agency.

Ideas to foster effective teamwork between staff and volunteers:

- Ensure staff and volunteers have a common sense of what they are trying to accomplish together.
- Volunteers and staff should be encouraged to talk about the mission and the unique contributions each can make to the mission.
- Staff needs to understand that volunteers are held to performance standards just as staff are held to performance standards.
- Volunteers and staff are both selected for their abilities to perform the work and meet accepted expectations.
- Teamwork is fostered when expectations are clear, individuals are accountable, and all members of the team are recognized for their unique contributions.
- Creating effective teams depends upon the elimination of boundaries and distinctions between staff and volunteers.
- Sharing stories of the contributions of volunteers, both historically and currently, is a powerful tool for building teamwork.
- Shared stories help to highlight the unique contributions that individual volunteers bring to the organization as it strives to fulfill its mission.

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International Volunteerism Websites:

www.energizeinc.com
www.charityvillage.com
www.volunteer.ca
www.pointsoflight.org

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