**5 Tips for Reviewing Your Volunteers and Volunteer Programs**

Do you have evaluation methods for both your volunteers and volunteer program? If the answer is “no,” you are not alone; in fact, you’re in the majority. However, these components can provide crucial quantitative measures that help nonprofit organizations make informed decisions and determine their next steps. The goal of this article is to break down the process of developing and using these assessment tools into easy, manageable pieces.

To many volunteer coordinators, the notion of actually evaluating volunteers may seem unexpected. After all, volunteers are freely giving their time. Putting them through an evaluation may seem unmerited and even unappreciative. The truth is, however, that these helpers are anticipating something in return for their efforts. Among other motivations, they expect a well-run program filled with dedicated and competent volunteers. By completing evaluations, you’ll send a clear message that you are running a serious program.

Tip 1: Outline Your Volunteer Review Process: Once you’ve decided that you are going to evaluate your volunteers, it’s time to think about the process. Even though the tendency may be to interact with volunteers more casually than with paid staff, some experts recommend making sure the volunteer evaluation process closely mimics that of the one used for those on your payroll. In fact, you may even want to use an identical process. This means you won’t be doubling your efforts by creating a whole new set of forms and systems specifically for volunteers.

Tip 2: Decide on a “Probationary Period” for Volunteers: Once you’ve honed in on your process, you’ll want to decide how often you are going to give feedback. One of the best evaluation devices most businesses use is the “probationary period.” This is also a great way to set the tone for your volunteers. Letting them know that for the first 30, 60, or 90 days they will be receiving a lot of instruction and feedback both assures them they won’t be thrown to the wolves and lets you keep a close eye on them. In addition, this creates a sort of forced reflection point to see if the volunteer and the organization are a good fit for each other.

Tip 3: Determine Volunteer Review Frequency: Of course, you will also want to decide how often volunteers will be evaluated after the probationary period. Most of your successful volunteers will probably welcome the opportunity to receive feedback, and some of the marginal candidates may weed themselves out. All in all, evaluations will help significantly aid in the volunteer management process, which will ultimately help your program.

Tip 4: Develop Your Volunteer Review Template: The last step in setting up your volunteer review framework is to create standard documents to use as review tools. This should include both a form for a volunteer coordinator or other supervisor to rate the volunteer and a survey for the volunteer to give his or her thoughts on the organization, and more specifically, its volunteer program. Let’s start with developing a review of the volunteer. A common evaluation technique is to devise statements that reflect what you expect out of volunteers. These may include:

• Volunteer clearly understands the organization’s mission.

• Volunteer reports for duty as assigned.

• Volunteer accomplishes tasks as assigned.

Once you have all this data, of course, don’t just tuck it away in the volunteer’s file. Set aside time to sit down and talk with the volunteer about the overall score and touch on what she or he is doing well and what may need some work.

However, this task just completes half of the picture. Not only should this be a time to let volunteers know how they are doing, but also an opportunity for volunteers to give a view of your organization from their standpoint. Volunteers are in a unique position of seeing some of the inner workings of your organization from a fresh vantage point and may be able to provide valuable suggestions. You may want to use a rating scale for some areas, such as orientation and supervision. Open-ended questions are also good, such as:

• Are there any skills you would like to develop through your volunteer work?

• What could we provide to make performing your tasks easier and/or faster?

• What suggestions do you have for the organization as a whole?

• What suggestions do you have specifically for our volunteer program?

Making evaluations a two-way street opens lines of communication and strengthens both volunteers and your organization.

Tip 5: Translate Feedback & Data Into an Action Plan

Now, with your numbers and feedback analyzed, it’s time to look forward and create an action plan and a new set of goals:

• Develop and distribute updated volunteer recruitment flyers

• Run volunteer recruitment ads on local TV and radio

• Increase focus on volunteer recruitment in social media avenues

Although it does take effort to formally review volunteers — and your volunteer program in general — the process can be invigorating. It’s an opportunity for staff and volunteers alike to re-evaluate, refocus, and recharge.

*Thanks to Volunteer Hub.*