**Volunteer Program Building Blocks**

Every great volunteer program is based on the same, basic building blocks. A strong foundation is key to having a program that retains engaged volunteers. Below are things that should be considered when adding volunteers to your organization.

* **Before building a program**:
  + Be sure to have a clear, concise goal: why does your organization *need* volunteers?
  + How will they contribute to the organization?
  + Consider the advantages and disadvantages of hosting volunteers: cost, time, labor, cost-savings, benefits to clients, benefits to organization
  + If determined to be beneficial to move forward, obtain buy-in from all departments working with or interacting with volunteers
    - Include department representatives in planning for the volunteer program, enlist support of senior leadership
    - Ensure staff members see the value in having volunteers
    - Ensure staff members understand the purpose of the volunteers
  + Do the planned volunteer tasks and program align with your organization’s mission? Core Values? Strategic priorities?
  + Decide on the requirements for your volunteers
    - Minimum age
    - Commitment (X number of hours, Specific time of year, etc.)
    - Medical requirements (i.e. TB test, tetanus, etc.)
    - Will they be reoccurring (year-round) or one-off events?
      * The set up and organization for these is typically very different
  + Determine the structure of staff support for your volunteer program.
    - Consider the best option for your organization:
      * Outsourcing - rely on other well-established nonprofits or public agencies, such as United Way, or volunteer clearinghouses, to assist in recruiting volunteers. Could contract to add placement and evaluation as well.
      * Decentralized – Each department within an organization is responsible for own volunteer recruiting, placing & training, tailoring the program to their department’s specific needs
      * Centralized – single office or department responsible for coordination of the program including recruiting, screening, placing. Volunteers deployed to and supervised by department.
* **Beginning the Program:**
  + Security protocols:
    - Do your volunteers require a background check? How in depth should you go?
    - What platform will you use? The same for staff, or something different?
  + Recruitment:
    - Who are your target markets for volunteers?
    - Could a university/community/corporate partnership be considered?
    - How will you advertise to potential volunteers?
    - How will potential volunteers let you know they’re interested?
      * Online application? Paper apps? Will you accept applications year-round or have set application and program timeframes?
    - Have a selection process in place – you should always be able to justify your “Yes” and “No” candidates.
  + Onboarding:
    - How in-depth of training do your volunteers need?
      * How long should it be?
        + This should be determined by the commitment your volunteers are making and potential risk factors.
      * What information can your recruits be responsible for learning on their own (Handbook, certain policies, etc.)
      * What information should be delivered in person (emergency protocols, expectations while volunteering)
* **Throughout the Program:**
  + Communication – how frequently will you communicate with your volunteers? What type of information will you share with them?
  + Reporting success of your organization. Be able to measure the impact of your volunteers – how are they helping the organization? How do you want to communicate this?
  + How will you recognize your volunteers?
    - One-time volunteers vs long-term volunteers
    - Is there anything your organization can offer as a “thanks” that is unique?
    - Dinner or Banquet? Appreciation party?
  + Feedback. Always be open to input on the program from your volunteers – this can come in many forms, but it’s up to you to set the standard:
    - Yearly survey, 30 days after training, 90 days after training, etc.
    - Program evaluation (great for one-time events, internships, etc., can be used to improve future ones)
    - Exit surveys

**Volunteer Software Examples**

* Volgistics: <https://www.volgistics.com/>
* Volunteer Impact (Better Impact): <https://www.betterimpact.com/volunteer-impact-volunteer-management-software/>
* Volunteer Hub: <https://www.volunteerhub.com/>
* Give Effect (Volunteer system): <https://www.giveffect.com/volunteer-management-software>
* VOMO: (for group volunteers or episodic volunteering) <https://vomo.org/>
* VSYS: <https://www.vsysone.com/pages/vsysfamily>

**Background Check System Examples**

* Fastrax Select: [www.fastraxselect.com](http://www.fastraxselect.com)
* Marcus Background Investigations: <http://www.marcusbackgroundinvestigations.com/>
* Verified Volunteers: <http://verifiedvolunteers.com>
* First Advantage Volunteer: <http://www.fadv.com>

**Check out Examples of Handbook, Volunteer Job Descriptions, Volunteer Applications, and Volunteer Surveys on the HAVA website!** <https://www.hava.org/>