



Managing an Aging Volunteer Corps

Jennifer Bennett, CVA
Senior Manager, Education & Training
VolunteerMatch
jbennett@volunteermatch.org

August 22, 2012, 10:15 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.
2012 MOWAA Annual Conference
Gaylord National Harbor Hotel



Agenda



- Why do volunteers age in place?
- Managing an aging volunteer corps
- Strategies for creating change and recruiting new volunteers
- Preparing your organization for change
- Create a transition and communication plan
- Strategies for ending the relationship

Why do Volunteers Age in Place?



Volunteers can age in place for a variety of reasons

- Volunteers become entrenched
 - Volunteers have ownership or control over programs
 - Hard to introduce new volunteers to shifts or teams
 - Attitudes hold the culture hostage
 - Intergenerational communication issues

3

Why do Volunteers Age in Place?



- Focus on “volunteer tasks” rather than engaging volunteers in meaningful work
 - Traditional programs aren’t appealing to younger generations (boomers, Gen X, etc)
 - “I can’t find anyone interested in doing this anymore.”
- Lack of strategic plan or goals for volunteer engagement
 - Volunteers only entrusted to do certain work
 - Little support from organization leadership
 - Rigid rather than flexible program structure

4

Managing an Aging Volunteer Corps



- Identify health or ability concerns
 - High and lower risk activities
 - Implement policies for all volunteers
 - Regular records updates
 - Be sensitive to aging spouses
- Address changes in ability openly but honestly
 - Don't ignore it, it won't just go away, and it won't get better unless you act
 - Use tact, opportunity for a meaningful conversation
 - Can bring relief, but be prepared for anger or denial

5

Managing an Aging Volunteer Corps



- Create real recognition opportunities
 - Honor work and commitment to organization
 - Organization or program historian
- Create pathways for further contribution
 - Promote volunteers to supervisor/trainer
 - Plan for succession and ask volunteers to lead
 - Create roles or opportunities that build on organization knowledge or understanding of organization

6

Transition to Retirement



Aging in Place → Emeritus Status

- Lack of physical ability
 - not able to complete tasks, or unable to complete them acceptably
- Loss of mental acuity
 - tasks take longer to complete, or work needs to be redone
- Manage risk while respecting contributions
- Concerns that tasks or roles wont be completed
 - “You wont find someone else to do what I do”

7

Transition through a Dual Program



Traditional Model → Diverse Volunteer Engagement

- Issues around ownership and change
 - Can cause resentment or misunderstanding
 - What does it mean to be a volunteer?
- More work initially but can revitalize program
 - Start small
 - Engage volunteers in new ways on an ad hoc basis
- Honor all contributions in meaningful ways
 - May be different for new model volunteers
- May redefine paid and volunteer staff roles

8

New Volunteer Engagement Model



- Engage earlier
 - Allow them to ask the big questions, look for the answers and develop the outcomes
- Program design, vision and implementation
- Old Model – build the position and the volunteer will come
 - New Model – you identify the need/problem and the volunteer creates the position
- Buy in, richer experience for both volunteer and organization

9

Engaging Younger Volunteers



- Engaging Younger Volunteers:
 - Increases capacity beyond staff limitations
 - Increases organizational impact
 - Expands skills
 - Extends the circle of influence
 - Frees employees to handle critical initiatives

Engaging younger volunteers allows you to move the focus of your work beyond the daily tasks to the strategic work of the organization.

10

Preparing your Organization



- Identify the problem
- Articulate and validate the problem – Build the case
 - Identify the issues or concerns
 - Negative impact on strategic initiatives of organization
 - Risk to volunteers, clients, and programs
- Discuss Problem or Issue with Supervisor and Leadership
 - Engage leadership volunteers if appropriate

11

Preparing your Organization



- Provide solutions or recommendations
 - Pros and Cons
 - Potential legal issues or liability concerns
 - Budget or cultural impacts
 - Timing
 - Responsibilities
- Consider the option to discontinue programs or positions
 - Successful program change may be more work and cause more conflict than ending programs

12

Strategies For Managing Transitions



- Clear communication strategy
- Open and transparent communication
 - Reasons and outcome for change
 - Negative impacts of change
- Hear and validate concerns
 - Actively listen
 - Be open to feed back
- Honesty about organization realities
 - Money, Programs

13

Strategies For Managing Transitions



- Engage all Parties in Solutions
 - Ask For Help/Brainstorming
 - Role Playing
 - Ensure Equal Representation
- Identify Early Adopters/Champions
 - Elevate to Leadership Positions
 - Run Meetings
 - Public Voice – not paid staff telling volunteers how it's going to be

14

Strategies For Managing Transitions



- Address behavior and attitudes
 - Early and continuously
 - Address negative energy directly
- Utilize and honor volunteer's organizational knowledge
 - Historical consultants
 - Ask them to be change agents

15

Strategies for Ending the Relationship



- Mentally prepare yourself
- Consider and plan for negative impacts
 - Budget shortfall
 - Loss of major donor or community connector
- Maintain trust and morale of remaining volunteers
 - Communicate difficulty of decision
 - Protect confidentiality
 - Quell gossip
- Keep volunteer's integrity intact
 - Behaviors and issues, not personal attack

16

Strategies for Ending the Relationship



- Be Decisive, Professional and Efficient
 - Once Decision is Made – Act
- Is it Amicable? Does it Require Legal Counsel?
- Letter of Commendation
 - Contributions and Work
 - Personalized and Heartfelt
 - To an Organization Leader

17

Strategies for Ending the Relationship



- Public Acknowledgement of Contribution
- Difficult Termination
 - Engage Outside Professional if Needed
 - Inform Leadership and/or Security of Date, Time, Location
- Last conversation, not a time for negotiating or introducing new concerns

18

Thanks for attending!



Join us online:



Like us on Facebook: www.Facebook.com/VolunteerMatch



Follow us on Twitter: [@VolunteerMatch](https://twitter.com/VolunteerMatch)

Learning Center

Find upcoming webinar dates, how-to videos and more

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/learningcenter/>

For any questions contact:

Jennifer Bennett

(415) 321-3639

jbennett@volunteermatch.org