



## Managing an Aging Volunteer Corps

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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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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 won't be completed
  - “You won't find someone else to do what I do”

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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.

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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**Thanks for attending!**



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