CHAPTER 7:

Supervision and Management of Volunteers

Contributing Author:
Noemi Aguilar

Introduction

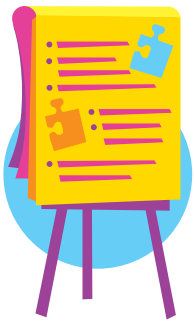
Deciding to use volunteers is a complex decision, as you've no doubt seen throughout this guide. Volunteers can be an asset for all types of programs serving parents and children. If nurtured, volunteers provide much needed support to participants and staff alike. As such, the supervision and management of volunteers is not limited to just documenting hours and assigning tasks; it also includes providing guidance, volunteer training, opportunities for personal growth, and regular affirmation.

Volunteers can strengthen services and may even allow for program expansion. Programs utilize volunteer services in many different ways. For example, volunteers can be tutors, child care providers or mentors, and can provide clerical support. Whatever their role, volunteers bring valuable talents and experience to family literacy programs.

> "Volunteers have been the lifeblood of my program. The services they provide to families change lives and make our community stronger."
>
> —Sandra Padilla, Even Start Program Manager

As a result, volunteer management and supervision cannot be left to chance. The following example of a literacy program illustrates how having a volunteer management plan is crucial to effectively utilizing volunteers.

Program Description



The English School for Migrant and Refugee Services provides educational opportunities for families from all over the world. Families from Cuba, Haiti, Somalia, Liberia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and other countries enter this program daily. Such multi-cultural programming relies on many volunteers to be successful. Volunteers provide services such as teaching, tutoring, mentoring, and child care. Organizing all of these efforts is an ongoing challenge.

The program has 10 full-time paid staff members, 11 part-time weekly teaching volunteers, 12 weekly tutors, 24 tutors/mentors who work with children, and 55 mentors who make home visits. Without a strong management system, the program would have difficulty directing all of these services and ensuring that they are all of high quality. Roles and responsibilities of staff need to be well-defined, including their responsibilities toward volunteer management.

For example, the Volunteer Coordinator handles scheduling and volunteer placement, while also ensuring that materials and lessons are provided to the volunteers. To ensure that data collection is being performed accurately and consistently, the Community Resource Director is responsible for recruiting,

interviewing and meeting monthly with home mentors to collect reports. This data is often used when applying for matching grants, ultimately leading to greater program sustainability.

In the example above, two primary staff members (not to mention the many other staff involved in training) are responsible for large portions of volunteer management and supervision. Many programs, of course, can little afford to have one person to manage volunteer efforts, much less two. However, when balanced with the needs of the English School for Migrant and Refugee Services and the needs of the families it serves, it was determined to be a good expenditure of resources to assign two staff members to oversee the volunteer program.

A study by the Urban Institute (Hager & Brudney, 2004) concentrated on nine management practices that impact the capacity of an organization to use volunteers effectively:

- Regular supervision and communication with volunteers
- Liability coverage or insurance protection for volunteers
- Regular collection of information on volunteer numbers and hours
- Screening procedures to identify suitable volunteers
- Written policies and job descriptions for volunteer involvement
- Recognition activities, such as award ceremonies, for volunteers
- Annual measurement of the impacts of volunteers
- Training and professional development opportunities for volunteers
- Training for paid staff in working with volunteers

Creating a Volunteer Management Plan

Hopefully, you began your volunteer endeavors by assessing your program's need—good! Now you are ready to develop a volunteer management plan (*Template M*). This plan will outline the process for incorporating volunteers into your program's services. Following are some tips as you begin considering what elements your management plan should address. Many of these have been discussed in previous chapters.

1. **Define specific areas of need**—It's important that your volunteer program fulfills specific needs and is not a "stop gap" measure. Consider volunteers to be an ongoing asset to your program, providing services that otherwise could not be accomplished as effectively or efficiently.

2. **Involve all staff at all stages**—Staff need to be part of the planning process, as well as of the implementation process, and their commitment to making volunteer efforts work is critical to the success of those efforts.

3. **Define the characteristics of volunteers you'd like to involve in your program**—Although volunteers are sometimes a welcome extra set of hands, eyes or ears, it's important to think about the characteristics you most need to fulfill specific needs. For example, if your program serves families with infants and toddlers, do you want high school volunteers with little experience caring for young children?

4. **Define volunteers' roles**—Defining the roles you expect volunteers to fulfill will impact many areas in your management plan, from recruitment to training. You also may want to determine a timeframe of commitment—10 weeks, six months, one year—whatever is appropriate to match need and interest. This will provide a frame for evaluation, giving both you and the volunteer options for continuing the commitment.

5. **Integrate recruitment strategies**—Consider not only how to attract volunteers to your program, but also how to recruit appropriate volunteers with the skills you need. Be sure also to include evaluation as part of your recruitment strategies, recording what efforts worked best and what did not.

6. **Develop a volunteer training process**—Building from the roles you anticipate volunteers will fill and the skills you expect them to arrive with, consider the types and amount of training you'll need to provide. Remember, too, that training and professional development should be an ongoing process.

7. **Engage a volunteer advisory or support group**—It's always smart to include volunteers in the decision making process. Involving volunteers demonstrates that you value their opinions and often volunteers will be able to offer a keen perspective on ways to overcome obstacles or improve a process.

8. **Be flexible**—You likely will need to adapt your management plan as new concerns arise and new strategies are tested. Revisit your plan frequently to ensure it is meeting your volunteer management needs.

9. **Design a volunteer data collection process**—Be sure to have a process in place for documenting volunteer hours, achievements, job descriptions, trainings, etc. This can be especially helpful for demonstrating the benefits of and the need for volunteers when seeking additional support from funders or collaborators.

10. **Plan volunteer recognition and incentive strategies**—While you'll want to be sure to recognize volunteers on a daily basis (a simple "thank you" will work wonders), also plan events specifically to honor their contributions and let them know how much their work is appreciated.

Supervising Volunteers

Supervision is a critical element in managing volunteers. While most volunteers will not want to be told exactly what to do at every turn, all will benefit from clear instruction and regular feedback. Remember, volunteers are adults and bring with them many talents, experiences and skills. The key to supervision is making sure that those talents, experiences and skills are put to good use in serving your program's needs and the goals of your students.

The volunteer supervisor's role may range from initial interviewing and placement, to assigning tasks, conflict resolution, ongoing evaluation, and volunteer recognition. According to Wadud and Nagy (2004), there are several benefits to be gained from effective supervision:

- Consistent supervision can help identify potential issues, such as volunteer burnout, before they become full-scale problems. The negative experience of one volunteer can adversely affect others in the program.
- Supervision can ensure that program needs and volunteer needs are being met on a regular basis, and that the volunteer's contribution is clear to the volunteer, the staff and the students.
- Providing ongoing, constructive feedback not only helps volunteers improve their performance, it also demonstrates that they are viewed as important members of the program team.
- A well-supervised volunteer staff works more efficiently and effectively, making your program more successful (by being able to serve more families, by providing individualized instruction, etc.).

Daily supervision

The volunteer supervisor will have daily routines to perform to keep the volunteer team satisfied and productive—from making assignments, to ensuring that necessary materials are available, to evaluating the day's volunteer interactions. But Oddis, et al. (2000) sum up volunteer supervision this way:

> The most important responsibility of a supervisor of volunteers is creating an environment that empowers the volunteers to perform their duties. Empowered volunteers are willing to take responsibility for what they are doing, contribute more than expected, and perceive themselves to be important members of the organization's staff. (p. 13)

One of the best ways to ensure consistent daily supervision is to plan for it. Designing a daily process will help all staff understand their roles and any specific duties they may have in the process.

Some elements of your daily supervision plan might include:

- **Daily "meet and greet."** This can be both a functional time spent with volunteers—assigning tasks, reviewing instructions, answering any questions—as well as a motivational time, letting volunteers know their work is valued and that you're really glad to have them on your team. This also provides a time when supervisors can remind volunteers to document their hours accurately and record any other information needed, and also make announcements about upcoming program events. Of course, you also may have volunteers who come to the program on a weekly or monthly basis. Each time a volunteer enters your program, take a few minutes to review any important information and make him or her feel welcome.

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- **Daily reporting**. Volunteer time, miles traveled, and activities performed (in and out of the classroom) are invaluable to a program that needs to demonstrate an in-kind match to a grant-making entity. Also, documenting volunteer participation can help you establish credibility with other organizations in the community, as a testament to the level of community commitment to your program (see *Template N*).
- **Ongoing, regular communication.** Keeping the lines of communication open with volunteers is vital to making the relationship work. Some programs create a monthly volunteer newsletter (which could be written, designed and mailed by the volunteers themselves) to keep their volunteer pool in the loop, while others use regularly scheduled e-mails and phone calls. Keep volunteers connected to the program by sharing success stories and program accomplishments, news about upcoming events, even new research that relates to instruction—the key here is to keep volunteers motivated and interested in the activities in your program.

Supervising volunteers doesn't have to be a time-consuming effort, but it does need to be a well-organized one. There are many stories of volunteers who became disenfranchised with an organization because they didn't feel welcome or didn't feel they were making a true contribution. Perhaps one of the most important elements of successful supervision is consistency. Volunteers who know what to expect from their volunteer experience are more apt to put forth the extra effort to exceed those expectations.

Evaluating Volunteers

Evaluation and assessment of volunteers can be a tricky yet necessary responsibility. The benefits of evaluation include ensuring that volunteers are placed appropriately in positions they enjoy and that they have the skills to accomplish the tasks they are assigned, and determining any professional development needs. Evaluation is yet another opportunity for you to let your volunteers know how important their work is to your program. Volunteer self-assessment can lead to suggestions about ways to improve program and volunteer services.

As you create a volunteer evaluation process, you may first want to consider how paid staff are evaluated. Evaluating volunteers is certainly a little different, because how a volunteer's performance is rated will not affect his or her salary. However, the goal of volunteer evaluation is the same as staff evaluation—to enhance personal performance, and ultimately, improve services offered to students.

When evaluating a volunteer, start with clear objectives and be sure that the volunteer knows and understands those objectives when beginning an assignment. Also, be sure that the volunteer understands that his or her progress toward accomplishing those objectives will be evaluated. Here again, making sure that volunteer job duties and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood by both volunteers and other staff will be very important. (See the chapter on "Defining Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities.")

Keep in mind, of course, that some volunteers may resent your attempts to evaluate their work. After all, they're contributing their time and talents to your program for free! However, when handled correctly—with professionalism and sensitivity—most volunteers will appreciate constructive feedback. Putting the goals of the program and of the students ahead of any personal goals will go a long way to ensuring that feedback remains objective.

As you begin to develop an evaluation process, some points to consider include:

- Evaluate only those performance areas for which you can or have provided support and guidance. For example, don't evaluate a volunteer's tutoring skills if you have not or cannot offer training in that area.
- Start with the positive, then offer suggestions for improvement if needed. If a particular assignment was not completed satisfactorily, ask the volunteer for feedback on how to adjust the process to make the assignment more successful in the future.

- Collect feedback regularly from staff who work with a volunteer. Invite staff to provide both accomplishments and areas for improvement. Be sure to let volunteers know that the observations from other staff will be included in their evaluations.
- Because documentation of service hours is so important, you may want to use the evaluation process as an opportunity to ensure that volunteers are documenting this information accurately. Let volunteers understand how you use this information.

Another valuable tool is a volunteer self-assessment. Self-assessment allows volunteers to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and to consider what areas they would like to improve through professional development. A self-assessment also can be an opportunity for volunteers to set personal goals, which then can be matched to the roles and tasks they are assigned. For an example of a volunteer tutor self-assessment, see *Template L* in the "Training and Development for Volunteers" chapter.

The primary goal of evaluation and self-assessment is improved personal performance that leads to improved program services. According to the National Crime Prevention Council (1998), feedback is most effective when it is:

- Specific rather than general
- Descriptive rather than judgmental
- Takes into account the needs of both the receiver and the giver of feedback
- Directed toward behavior that the receiver can do something about
- Solicited rather than imposed
- Well-timed
- Checked to ensure clear communication
- Verified by others to ensure accuracy

Motivating Volunteers

Understanding volunteers' motivation and remaining sensitive to their needs are essential to retaining volunteers. People volunteer for many different reasons, and sometimes those reasons change over time. According to Oddis et al. (2000), people choose to volunteer for three primary reasons:

- Power—a person motivated by power may need to be independent or have control over a project

- Achievement—a person motivated by achievement may seek to learn new skills through participation in a project
- Affiliation—a person motivated by affiliation will be drawn to the social aspects of the work

McNamara (2000) suggests three basic principles for motivating volunteers:

- Motivating volunteers starts with motivating yourself; if you are enthusiastic about the job, volunteers will be too
- Understand what motivates volunteers by listening to, observing, and asking them about their motivations
- Realize that motivating volunteers is a process, not a task; it will take some time to get to know what motivates your volunteers and to put proper support into place

Recognition

As mentioned in this chapter and in others, one of the best ways to keep volunteers motivated is through recognition. That's not to say that volunteers choose to support your program because they are looking for praise. Still, everyone likes to know they are doing a good job and that their work is appreciated and valuable.

There are many ways to recognize the contributions of volunteers, both internally and externally. Certainly, the daily welcome and announcement of accomplishments is a great place to start. Thank you cards, holiday cards, awards and certificates, and a year-end celebration are other good ways to honor volunteers. Keep in mind, though, that no one wants or needs insincere recognition. Volunteers want recognition for a job well done, and recognition should never seem routine or perfunctory.

Be creative! How about recognizing the "volunteer of the month" by providing a special parking space or posting a picture inside the classroom? Issue a press release about the accomplishments of your volunteers, sending it to the local newspaper and the school newsletter. Invite an experienced volunteer to accompany you to a presentation at a civic organization. Ask your students to write a letter, thanking your volunteers for their support. Sometimes just a well-timed phone call will be all volunteers needs to rejuvenate their commitment.

Putting It All Together

Being a manager or supervisor of volunteers can be challenging but extremely rewarding. Planning, organizing and delegating are all important elements of leadership. Below are some final tips as you start on this exciting journey:

- Anticipate potential issues from the start. Plan, plan, plan. Setting short- and long-term goals will help keep volunteer efforts in perspective.
- Prioritize how you will integrate volunteers into the program by focusing on program goals and needs.
- Help volunteers set their own goals and work together to help them achieve those goals.
- Give credit for a job well done, both publicly and privately, and do so sincerely.
- Respect your time and the time of others.

Volunteer Management Planning Steps

TEMPLATE M

After you have assessed your program's need for volunteers and decided to develop a volunteer management plan, the following steps can help you turn your management plan into an action plan.

What are your program's areas of need? _____

_____

_____

What are the characteristics of the volunteers who can meet those needs? _____

_____

_____

Define the roles volunteers will fulfill. _____

_____

_____

What are some ways to recruit volunteers (experienced and inexperienced)? _____

_____

_____

What kind of training might you need to provide to volunteers, and how will you provide it?

_____

_____

What are some ways to integrate volunteers and staff through team-building strategies?

_____

_____

What data will you collect about your volunteer program, and how will you collect it?

_____

_____

How can you recognize volunteers and provide incentives for their participation? _____

_____

_____

TEMPLATE N **Volunteer Timesheet**

Name	Date	Site	Time In	Time Out	Name of Student(s)	Activity

References — Supervision and Management of Volunteers

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