

Characteristics of Organizations that Effectively Engage Volunteers

I. Lay the Foundation through Mission and Vision

These characteristics examine the extent to which the organization has a core value for its existence - which is communicated with and shared by staff and volunteers - and the degree to which there is a vision for how volunteers fit into the attainment of that mission.

1. The mission and priorities of the organization are framed in terms of the problem or issue the organization is addressing, not its short-range institutional concerns.
2. There is a positive vision - clearly articulated, widely-shared and openly discussed throughout the organization - for the role of volunteers.
3. Volunteers are seen as valuable human resources that can directly contribute to the achievement of the organization's mission, not primarily as means to obtaining financial or other material resources.

II. Combine Inspiring Leadership with Effective Management

These characteristics examine the extent to which the organization has administrative structures and clear direction which will enable it to encourage and facilitate high-impact volunteer involvement.

1. Leaders at all levels (e.g., policy making, executive and middle-management) work in concert to encourage and facilitate high-impact volunteer involvement.
2. There is a clear focal point of leadership for volunteering but the volunteer management function is well-integrated at all levels and in all parts of the organization.
3. Potential barriers to volunteer involvement (e.g., liability, confidentiality, location of the organization, hours of operation, etc.) are identified and dealt with forthrightly.

III. Build Understanding and Collaboration

These characteristics examine the extent to which staff and volunteers are viewed as valued contributors to the organization and work together to accomplish the work of the organization.

1. Paid staff is respected and empowered to fully participate in planning, decision-making and management related to volunteer involvement.
2. There is a conscious, active effort to reduce the boundaries and increase the teamwork between paid and volunteer staff.
3. Success breeds success as stories of the contributions of volunteers—both historically and currently—are shared among both paid and volunteer staff.

IV. Learn, Grow and Change

These characteristics examine the extent to which the organization is dynamically examining and attempting to improve its operation, including the continuous effort to broaden its volunteer base to include all segments of the community.

1. There is openness to the possibility of change, an eagerness to improve performance, and conscious, organized efforts to learn from and about volunteers' experiences in the organization.
2. There is a recognition of the value of involving volunteers from all segments of the community, including those the organization seeks to serve.