

Needs Assessment Create New Volunteer Positions



Often nonprofits engage volunteers in established positions and miss the opportunity to think strategically about engaging additional volunteers to achieve the nonprofit mission. Here is one way to approach the subject.

1. Consider your current culture or organizational attitude toward volunteers
 - a. It is easier to think of new ways to engage volunteers when they are valued.
 - b. If you already engage skills-based volunteers it will be easier to think strategically about new positions.
 - c. If there will be resistance to volunteers in new positions, do some training as you begin. Find your allies and work from there.
 - d. Get buy-in and participation from leadership.
2. Prepare staff for the process
 - a. Help them see the broad and strategic role volunteers can play. This is not just about tasks, but achieving your mission.
 - b. Make sure you have the time it takes to think strategically, and then do the follow up.
 - c. Be ready for questions and resistance. Staff may remember a bad experience with a volunteer or be concerned about volunteers doing higher-level projects.
3. Use a *to-do list* approach and ask questions
 - a. What tasks or projects do you anticipate in the next 6-12 months? What help do you need? Answers to the question "what can a volunteer do to help" will be limited by that person's current perception of volunteers.
 - b. What current projects aren't being accomplished?
 - c. Can you clearly define the work and desired outcome?
4. Or use your strategic priorities
 - a. What are the goals in your strategic plan?
 - b. What services do you want to expand? What skills are needed?
 - c. What skills are missing on your staff? Could a volunteer fill the gap? Think IT, HR, marketing or similar skills.
 - d. What's on your dream list and how could someone help make your dream come true?
5. Make it happen
 - a. Once you have the ideas, create a position description or project scope.
 - i. Is this realistic? Don't begin something without the ability to follow through.
 - ii. What skills, resources, timing are necessary.
 - iii. How would you recruit, vet and supervise the volunteer?
 - b. Do you have the resources, knowledge, space, and technology to accomplish the task? Be sure you can follow through before you begin something new.
 - c. Keep it moving. A timeline and regular follow up will help accomplish the goal.
 - d. If you are engaging a pro bono or skills-based volunteer for the first time, do some research on how this process may differ from your standard volunteer process.
 - e. Work hard to ensure success. If this doesn't work the first time, there may not be a second time!

Bonnie Andrews
Manager, Volunteer Milwaukee
Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee