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Volunteer Position Descriptions: Tools for Generating Members, Volunteers, and Leaders in Extension

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Abstract: *Successful organizations involve members, volunteers, and leaders who engage their talents and interests. Members, volunteers, and leaders all have important roles in the organization and are dependent upon each other to fulfill their roles. Community involvement is necessary for an organization to achieve its mission, vision, and purpose. The mission, vision, and purpose are identified through a needs assessment. After assessing needs and developing position descriptions, potential members, volunteers, or leaders are identified and recruited. Individual interests, knowledge, skills, and backgrounds are explored through the selection and screening processes. Selection is based upon the individual's ability to perform the task.*

Introduction

Successful organizations include a variety of members, volunteers, and leaders who engage their talents and interests. The collective interests, skills and abilities of these individuals can be called to action in order to fulfill identified community needs and serve clientele or audiences. The question is: "What type of participant should recruitment activities target?"

Differences Between Members, Volunteers, and Leaders

Those who join an organization are members. However, not all members become volunteers. Volunteering requires active participation. One may belong to an organization without serving it. Likewise, not all members or volunteers become leaders. An individual who shares leadership skills with a group is a leader. Individuals who are actively involved but do not assume a leadership role are volunteers.

Members, volunteers, and leaders all have important roles in the organization and are dependent upon each other to fulfill their roles. However, organizations have differing needs. For organizations that need to build support or funding capacity, recruiting dues-paying members may be the priority. For organizations whose programs, projects, or activities require additional service, volunteer recruitment should be the focus. An organization may determine that building its leadership base is an important need. "Member interest inventories" can determine member, volunteer, and leader interests. Identifying the organization's greatest need is the first step and can be accomplished by asking the question: "Is the greatest need for the organization members, volunteers, or leaders?"

Assessing Organizational Needs

Community involvement is necessary for an organization to achieve its mission and vision, and accomplish its purpose and goals. Before involving the community, the organization's mission, vision, purpose, and goals must be identified, generally by conducting a needs assessment.

A needs assessment provides a "big picture" look at the organization and its programs (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998). Assessing needs determines what tasks should be performed and is conducted by soliciting input from individuals representing different groups and segments of the community. A needs assessment becomes a basis for programming and determines "How will the organization respond to community needs? What will members, volunteers and leaders accomplish?"

To conduct a needs assessment, questions are developed and posed. Examples include: "Is the organization's mission still relevant?" "In what ways can member, volunteer or leader involvement be increased?" "What member, volunteer and leadership opportunities are needed?"

The first steps in assessing organizational needs include determining if the greatest need is additional members, volunteers, or leaders; identifying member, volunteer, and leadership opportunities within the organization; and articulating opportunities in a written position description. Members, volunteers, or leaders with resources related directly to the organization's goals should be generated.

Describing the Role of Leaders and Volunteers

To aid in recruiting volunteers and leaders, duties, roles, and responsibilities should be articulated. Position descriptions are a written description of the position and constitute an agreement between the individual and the staff member. Position descriptions clarify duties, responsibilities, and expectations. People who don't understand what's expected either won't participate, experience success, or have a positive experience. Cassill, Culp, Hettmansperger, Stillwell, and Sublett (2012) identified the following components of position descriptions:

- Position title
- Time requirement (frequency and duration of service)
- Location
- General purpose (paragraph describing the position, function and purpose)
- Specific responsibilities (bulleted list of duties)
- Qualifications
- Support (clerical, financial, curricular, supervisory)
- Benefits (education, recognition, scholarships, travel)
- Supervisor

A collection of volunteer position descriptions can be found at <<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/4h/oldsite/VolPosDescription/index.htm>>.

Identifying and Recruiting Members, Project Volunteers, and Leaders

After assessing needs and developing position descriptions, potential members, volunteers, or leaders are identified and recruited. Identification includes developing a list of qualified individuals or groups to be contacted and solicited for participation, service, or leadership. With organizational goals in mind, use the following questions to identify qualified individuals or groups: "Who is not involved in this organization that should be?" "What individuals, families, and friends would benefit from belonging to, serving, or leading this organization?"

Recruitment is "the process of actively searching for new members, volunteers or leaders who have previously been identified" (Culp et al., 1998). Targeted recruitment is based on the marketing premise that not everyone is a prospect for every product or service. To use organizational resources effectively, recruitment efforts should target the most likely prospects.

Recruiting New Members, Volunteers, and Leaders

Culp (2011) identified eleven strategies for recruiting. These recruitment strategies include:

- Conduct an organizational needs assessment. Identify tasks to be done.
- Define the tasks and roles.
- Market the organization and volunteer opportunities throughout the community, using a variety of marketing strategies.
- Look around and ask "Who's not here?"
- Recruit for skills, interests, or specific abilities.
- Begin with short-term involvement.
- Appeal to the individual's interests and motivations.
- Use a "wide angle lens" for recruiting.

Send a member to recruit a member. Ask a volunteer to recruit a volunteer.

- Make good use of people's time; identify meaningful service roles.
- Offer "perks," incentives and rewards as recognition for outstanding efforts.

Selecting and Placing Volunteers and Leaders in the Most Suitable Role

Individual interests, knowledge, skills, and backgrounds can be explored through screening and selection, with selection based upon the individual's ability to perform the task or activity. If volunteers are the focus, the screening process would use information from the application, member interest survey, interview, and references to select the most qualified person.

Common screening processes for volunteer organizations include a position description, application, interview, reference check, motor vehicle record check, criminal history record check, and orientation (McNeely, Schmiesing, King, & Kleon, 2002). Organizations whose clientele include vulnerable audiences require the highest screening levels.

Generally, members of an organization don't undergo screening, although contact information is collected, and interest inventories should be completed. Interest inventories reveal what they enjoy doing, what they're good at doing, and projects or activities in which they are interested, and identifies skills, interests and abilities.

People lacking the skills necessary to execute the duties and position responsibilities should not be selected for leadership roles. Additionally, screening and selection also present the initial opportunity for the organization to practice risk management. Recruits presenting a risk liability should be screened out during this process or given additional attention during orientation

Selecting members for leadership roles is an important process that should not be left to chance. Leadership development is the growth of individuals' capacities to facilitate community and organizational development (Sandmann & Vandenberg, 1995). Organizations retaining the same leaders for decades wither, because they lose relevance and do not stay current. Selecting leaders involves placing an individual in the most suitable position based on organizational standards, duties and responsibilities (Culp et al., 1998).

Conclusion

Generating members, volunteers, and leaders is an important component of all organizations. Without new members, volunteers, and leaders, organizations eventually wither and die. A needs assessment may be used to develop position descriptions. Position descriptions articulate the general purpose and the specific duties and responsibilities of the role. Position descriptions are an important tool to use in recruiting members, volunteers, and leaders. Effective recruitment strategies will ensure that the organization remains strong, viable, healthy, and active.

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