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Overview of the GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration (Generate, Educate, Mobilize and Sustain)

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Abstract: *To organize and coordinate the efforts of many volunteers, a framework for volunteer engagement is needed. The "GEMS" Model of volunteer administration was developed to assist Extension professionals and volunteer coordinators to effectively administer volunteer programs without delivering the program themselves. The GEMS Model is illustrated in a spiral, depicting the continuous process of involving volunteers in community programs and organizations. GEMS consists of 18 steps, which exist in four distinct categories, including: Generate, Educate, Mobilize, and Sustain. The GEMS Model is a tool that will help volunteer administrators and leaders achieve the goals of the organization and its clientele.*

Introduction

Volunteers are an important part of American society as well as a critical element of Extension programs. As Extension programs continue to grow, more volunteers will be needed. Extension professionals will need to become experts in volunteer administration in order for programs to flourish (Seevers, Baca, & Van Leeuwen, 2005). Working with and involving volunteers is a long-standing Extension tradition (Patton, 1990). Through volunteers, the outreach of Extension programs is extended to audiences that would otherwise not be served. Extension professionals should

position themselves for changing audiences, clientele, and volunteers. This can be accomplished by updating and implementing programs to meet the evolving needs of the clientele in the communities that they serve. Therefore, the tools that Extension professionals use to manage and develop programs for changing audiences should also change with the times.

Boyd (2004) identified four studies identifying the deficiencies of Extension professionals in coordinating volunteers and volunteer programs (Collins, 2001; Culp & Kohlhagen, 2001; Deppe & Culp, 2001; Hange, Seevers, & VanLeeuwen, 2002). To effectively and efficiently disseminate quality educational and service programs, Extension needs to engage many volunteers. To organize and coordinate the efforts of many volunteers, a framework for volunteer engagement is needed. In response to rapidly changing needs of Extension professionals, the "GEMS" Model (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998) of volunteer administration was developed. GEMS consists of 18 steps which exist in four distinct categories, including: Generate, Educate, Mobilize, and Sustain. "GEMS" is displayed in a spiral, depicting volunteers moving from step to step as they progress throughout the process.

The GEMS Model

The GEMS Model consists of four categories, which include: Generating, Educating, Mobilizing, and Sustaining. These four categories collectively comprise 18 steps. Generating consists of needs assessment, identifying, recruiting, screening, and selecting. Educating includes orienting and teaching. Mobilizing includes engaging, motivating, and supervising. Sustaining contains evaluating, recognizing and redirecting, and retaining or disengaging. Illustrated in a spiral, the GEMS Model indicates that volunteer administration is an ongoing process (Figure 1.)

Generating Volunteers

Generating involves six steps. Volunteer opportunities are identified through a *needs assessment* and defined in written *position descriptions*.

Potential volunteers are *identified* and *recruited*. Volunteer identification includes developing a list of qualified individuals and groups to be contacted. Targeted recruitment is based on the marketing premise that everyone is not a prospect for every product or service. Because Extension should use resources effectively, recruitment efforts should target the most likely prospects.

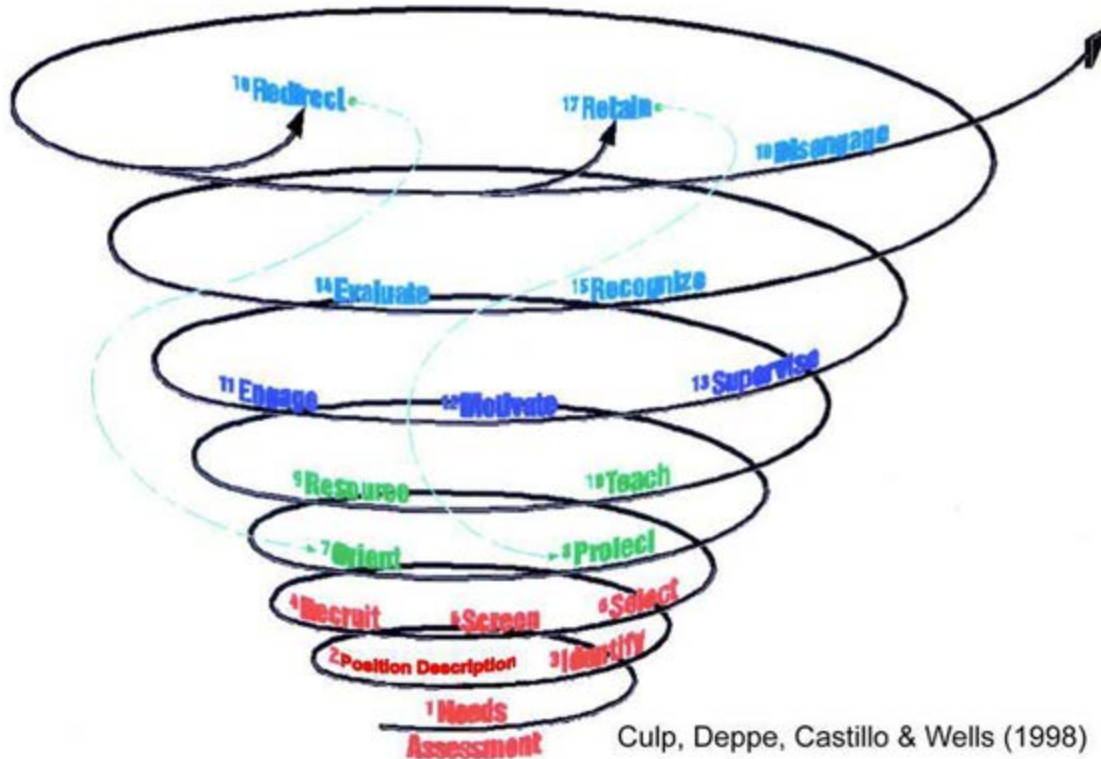
Figure 1.

The GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration

GEMS Model

A Spiral Profile of Volunteer Administration

Generate Educate Mobilize Sustain



Culp, Deppe, Castillo & Wells (1998)

Volunteer needs, interests, knowledge, skills, backgrounds, and attitudes are surveyed through the *screening* process with *selection* based upon the volunteer's ability to perform the appropriate activity or task. Additionally, the screening and selection steps also present the initial opportunity for the organization to practice risk management. Volunteer recruits presenting a risk liability could be screened out during this process or be given additional attention during orientation.

Educating Volunteers

New volunteers have varying levels of organizational knowledge. Educating includes *orienting* volunteers to the organization and to their specific responsibilities.

Orientation can ensure that volunteers have accurate information regarding the organization's purpose, programs, policies, and expectations.

In today's service arena, volunteers should also be *protected* by being oriented about risk and liability management. Protecting volunteers includes teaching specific strategies to avoid or deal with risk as well as reducing liability. Informed volunteers represent the organization positively, carry out their responsibilities effectively, and have a positive attitude toward the organization.

Additional *teaching* or in-service education related to specific skills and knowledge may be needed to help the volunteer successfully carry out responsibilities.

Education should be ongoing and may be conducted individually, through group meetings, workshops, or classes.

Volunteers should be informed about the *resources* available to use in their volunteer role. Resources include programs, materials, and curriculum, or program, professional, administrative or financial support.

Mobilizing Volunteers

In Mobilizing, volunteers have the opportunity to *engage* in the task or activity they have been selected to perform. Individuals are *motivated* to participate in volunteer activities for a variety of reasons. By understanding these motives, Extension professionals can enhance the volunteer's experience.

The needs, skills, and knowledge of the volunteer will depict how much and how often *supervision* is needed. Guidance, support, and advice from the Extension professional or management volunteer can help lead to a positive and productive experience.

Sustaining Volunteers

The first step in sustaining is *evaluation*. A performance evaluation will determine whether the goals of both the volunteer and the organization are being met.

Documenting work to learn from past accomplishments and mistakes is important. Written documentation can provide a framework for decision-making when considering new assignments, promotions, and recognition, and providing recommendations for the volunteer. Evaluation should be ongoing throughout the four GEMS categories and should be conducted both formally and informally.

Strengths, weaknesses, achievements, and areas needing improvement as related to the previously identified volunteer position description should all be included in an

effective evaluation.

Volunteers should be *recognized* for their positive contributions to the organization and its clientele. Whether formal or informal, recognition helps volunteers feel they are making a meaningful contribution.

Retaining should be planned. Retention contributes strength and continuity to the program. Retention begins at the point of entry, continuing to the onset of the next service activity. The first-year experience usually determines whether the volunteer will continue serving. Retention is best accomplished when the volunteer's needs and motives to continue serving the organization are met.

A volunteer may be retained in the same capacity or *redirected* to another role within the organization. In either case, a volunteer may continue back down through the spiral, re-entering the Educate category. If retained, the volunteer benefits by acquiring additional skills to carry out responsibilities. If redirected, the volunteer will reenter the GEMS spiral at orientation, receiving new position responsibilities, knowledge, and the skills necessary to perform effectively.

In some cases, even after redirection, a volunteer may *disengage* from the organization. If this is necessary, the process should be clearly defined and objective. At other times, a volunteer may choose to leave the organization for any of a multitude of reasons, many of which are positive and a natural evolution of volunteer engagement. Extension professionals should remember that disengagement is a natural component of the process and should to make this phase as positive and smooth as possible.

Conclusions and Implications

The most effective volunteer-driven organizations will utilize a framework for volunteer involvement. The GEMS model addresses emerging issues and necessities relevant to contemporary volunteer programs.

GEMS contains 18 steps, illustrated in a spiral, depicting the continuous process of involving volunteers in Extension programs. GEMS is a tool that can help Extension professionals achieve organizational goals and serve more clientele.

GEMS may be implemented at any step, based upon the current needs of the organization, its volunteers, and Extension professional. GEMS helps the professional identify the phase the program is currently operating in, or has the biggest needs, and then proceed with managing the program by following the model.

GEMS may also be used as a framework for any member-based or non-profit organization. The concepts provide an effective structure for successful implementation of an organization's mission and volunteer development.

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