

10-1-2008

SERVE Model: A Hands-On Approach to Volunteer Administration

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Recommended Citation

Whitson, K. S. (2008). SERVE Model: A Hands-On Approach to Volunteer Administration. *The Journal of Extension*, 46(5), Article 24. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol46/iss5/24>

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October 2008 // Volume 46 // Number 5 // Ideas at Work // 5IAW5

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SERVE Model: A Hands-On Approach to Volunteer Administration

Abstract

There is an increasing need for Extension professionals to understand the needs and expectations of present and future volunteers. The SERVE Model for Volunteer Administration represents a good starting point to begin to understand the purposes, needs, and positions of volunteers. The model has seven stages that allow volunteers and volunteer administrators to move freely from stage to stage according to the needs of the organization. SERVE, an acronym for strategize/search, educate/energize, recruit/resource, volunteer/volunteer administrator, and evaluate, is designed to help volunteers and volunteer administrators work hand-in-hand on various projects to fulfill one another's needs.

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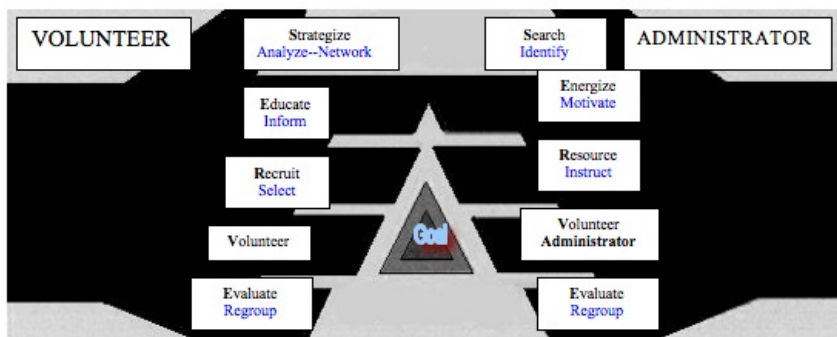
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Many organizations, including 4-H, rely on volunteers to help deliver educational programs to their communities. The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines volunteers as persons who do unpaid work (except for expenses) through or for an organization (2005). There is an increasing need for Extension professionals in 4-H to understand the needs and expectations of present and future volunteers. Vines and Anderson (1976) stated, "Without the cooperation and energy of tens of thousands of volunteers, it's inconceivable that Extension could succeed in rallying the resources it has to help solve individual and community problems" (p. 92). The Volunteer Administration Model described here was designed to help aid administrators in their efforts to educate volunteers who are valuable to their organizations.

SERVE Model: Working Hand in Hand

The SERVE model is based on the premise that administrators must be willing to serve their volunteers by identifying and providing for their needs (Figure 1). It operates on the basis of teamwork and cooperation more than management. The diagram of the open hands represents someone who is willing to serve, and each finger on the diagram represents individual components of the model. They work together to serve a purpose, but can also operate independently of one another, much like fingers on a hand.

Figure 1.
SERVE Model Diagram



The SERVE Model was developed primarily for use by 4-H Extension Agents, although it will work in any organization. It attempts to encourage administrators to practice what they teach when working with volunteers. In this model the administrator and the volunteer work together to accomplish a single task with a unified goal in mind. Since one of the components of the 4-H organizational structure includes the hands as part of its model; it is only fitting that the model followed by 4-H administrators be of the same philosophy.

Each stage represents components that are interchangeable between the volunteer and the administrator thus, allowing the administrator to learn through the process as well. In today's changing society it is important for administrators to, "lead by example" in order to have a successful volunteer development program.

The SERVE Model is a diagram that represents volunteers and administrators working together as a team using a "hands on approach." The design of the model allows the administrators to move through the stages in sequence or to focus on the stages that best fit the needs of the organization. They also have the freedom to adjust the model or regroup when necessary.

The left side of the model includes components that primarily involve the volunteer, while the components on the right side primarily involve the volunteer administrator. Nevertheless, they are interchangeable and may be used by both the volunteer and the volunteer administrator at any time during the process. This allows volunteers to learn administrative techniques that assist them with the supervision of other volunteers and equip them to become administrators themselves.

Strategize/Search

The first step on the SERVE Model (Figure 1) contains three components that can be performed simultaneously, analyzing, networking, and identifying. This is represented by the components being placed on the model at the same level and opposite one another. Before the administrator begins the search for a volunteer, he or she should use several strategies that involve the help of other volunteers when assessing the needs of the organization. This process makes up the first component on the model: **Analyzing**.

- The administrator, along with a core group of volunteers, identifies the needs of the organization through a series of activities, such as brainstorming.
- Afterwards, a position description is designed by both volunteers and volunteer administrators.

Once the position description is developed, the administrator recruits the help of other volunteers and moves into the next stage: **Networking**. This can be done using various methods.

- The administrator obtains recommendations from other volunteers.
- Volunteers may help search for new volunteers at their place of employment or church.
- Positions may also be posted on various web sites where volunteers network together.

After the networking process has been completed it is up to the administrator to **Identify** the proper volunteer for the position.

- At this stage, a potential volunteer completes an application and provides references, as well as agreeing to a background check. If the volunteer agrees to these terms, they advance to the **Educate/Energize** stage of the model.

Educate/Energize

The Educate/Energize stage contains two important components that help lead to the success of the volunteer and the program: informing and motivating. During the **Informing** stage, the administrator and volunteer leaders educate the potential volunteer candidate about the organization and the position for which he or she has applied. If the volunteer lacks the inspiration to accept the position, the administrator is prepared to take the next step to **Motivate** the individual.

- Some volunteers will be self-motivated and will not need to be inspired, but others will require motivation (pep talks or personal phone calls) from the administrator to energize them to get started.

Recruit/Resource

Once the proper volunteer has been identified, the administrator moves into the Recruit/Resource stage. The recruiting process requires the administrator and volunteer leaders to evaluate the information given by the potential volunteer and **Select** a candidate for the position.

- The selection process involves interviews (also conducted by volunteer leaders), orientations, and recommendations from references.

When this phase is complete and the volunteer has been selected, the administrator begins to **Instruct** the volunteer through the use of Resources.

- Many resources (lesson plans, books, seminars and conferences) should be available for the volunteer.

Volunteer/Volunteer Administrator

During the Volunteer/Volunteer Administration phase, the volunteer fulfills his or her role where the need is identified. The administrator assists with the resources needed to perform the task. Both work together as a team and share the responsibilities of the project. Administrators of volunteers also serve as a volunteer administration "consultant" to other employees in the agency who utilize volunteers (Boyd, 2004).

Evaluate

The evaluation phase is the final phase and consists of one component. This phase of the model is one of the most important steps in the process but is most often overlooked by administrators. In order to maintain the involvement of volunteers in a program, evaluation and recognition are needed. This process allows the administrator to gauge the progress of the volunteer, the program, and the effectiveness of the model. It is a two-fold model because the administrator can also be evaluated by the volunteer.

The most important aspect of the evaluation phase is for the administrator to have the opportunity to **Regroup** once they obtain the evaluation results.

- This component encourages the administrator to go beyond the standard evaluation process and to analyze his or her own progress, along with the progress of the volunteer.
- The administrator and/or the volunteer can then regroup and return to any level of the model to reorganize if needed.

Conclusion

Every member involved in the SERVE Model--the volunteer administrator, the volunteer, and clientele--all follow the same model and learn from one another during the process. With such a high reliance on volunteers to implement programs, there is a necessary level of care, education, and support that must be provided by Extension agents to ensure a volunteer's success. There is an increasing demand for Extension agents to meet perpetual needs and expectations of current volunteers, while attempting to meet the needs of prospective clientele (White & Arnold, 2003). This makes it imperative that Extension agents, as volunteer administrators, understand the factors that motivate and discourage volunteers (White & Arnold, 2003).

Although the SERVE Model for Volunteer Administration may not include every resource that the administrator may need in any given situation, it does represent a good starting point to begin to understand the purposes, needs, and positions of volunteers. The use of this model can assist administrators in identifying organizational needs and strategically searching for prospective volunteers, strategies that may minimize future problems by ensuring that the volunteer is a good fit for the organization.

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