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Orchestrating Volunteer Orientation: Introducing the O.B.O.E. Model

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Orchestrating Volunteer Orientation: Introducing the O.B.O.E. Model

Abstract

Volunteers generally come to their new role with varying levels of knowledge about the organization. An effective orientation program introduces the volunteers to the organization as a whole and to their specific job responsibilities. Orientation can be beneficial in assuring that volunteers have accurate information regarding the organization's purpose, programs, policies, and expectations. The volunteer orientation model (O.B.O.E.) can be adapted to fit any Extension program or non-profit volunteer organization. Divided into four main topics, the orientation program is easily presented in a 90-minute session. Orientation topics of the O.B.O.E. model include: an **O**pening, **B**ackground, **O**rganizational safeguards, and **E**valuation.

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Introduction & Review of Literature

When utilizing the GEMS Model to coordinate volunteer programs, generating volunteers is the first step in volunteer administration (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998). After potential volunteers have been identified, recruited, screened and selected, they may then be educated to conduct their service activities. The initial step in volunteer education is orientation.

Orientation is the overview of the total organization necessary for every new volunteer, regardless

of the specific assignment. It places the work into context and allows for consistent introduction of policies, procedures, rights, and responsibilities (Ellis, 1996). Orientation provides the volunteer an opportunity to become acquainted with the role, organizational culture, and environment (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells). Orientation provides new volunteers with generalized information and a "big picture" look at the organization and its volunteer program (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells).

Volunteers generally come to their new role with varying levels of knowledge about the organization. An effective orientation program introduces the volunteers to the organization as a whole and to their specific job responsibilities. Orientation can be beneficial in assuring that volunteers have accurate information regarding the organization's purpose, programs, policies, and expectations. In today's service arena, volunteers should also be oriented in risk and liability management (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998).

Volunteers often assume roles with a high public profile on behalf of a nonprofit organization. Clientele who participate in and benefit from participation in programs administered by non-profit organizations often have their greatest contact with volunteers (DeWitt, 1995). Informed volunteers will represent the organization positively, carry out their responsibilities effectively, and possess a positive attitude toward the organization for which they are volunteering (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998).

In planning any orientation, one must consider the question "What would someone need to know to feel comfortable and competent in carrying out this position?" The answer to this question should lead the volunteer administrator to design an effective volunteer development program; the initial step of which is orientation (Stallings & McMillion, 1999). Orientation benefits new 4-H leaders who are preparing for service. Adult volunteers found orientation sessions to be relevant and increased their knowledge and preparedness for their volunteer roles (Van Winkle, Busler, Bowman, & Manoogian, 2002).

A study of 4-H agents in Ohio showed that they believed volunteer orientation to be an important component of volunteer administration. The study further identified that agents lacked a structured volunteer orientation program as well as feedback regarding the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and educational programs (Deppe & Culp, 2001). As a result, the 2003 Volunteer Administration Academy (Culp & Stivers, 2003) developed a Volunteer Orientation Model as a tool to be utilized by Extension professionals.

Discussion

The volunteer orientation model (O.B.O.E.) can be adapted to fit any Extension program or non-profit volunteer organization. Divided into four main topics, the orientation program is easily presented in a 90-minute session. Orientation topics of the O.B.O.E. model include: an **O**pening, **B**ackground, **O**rganizational safeguards, and **E**valuation.

Components of the orientation program include the welcome, introduction and mixing activity, the history of Extension, mission and values of Extension, the organizational structure, volunteer expectations, risk management, communication channels, resources, program evaluation, question period, evaluation, and a tour of the facility.

The Opening component sets the stage for the orientation session. A warm welcome is extended to the participants, introducing the outline for the session. The opening should also include an icebreaker allowing the group to bond, fostering the development of a harmonious support system among the volunteers.

The history of the organization, its mission and values, and the organizational structure are accompaniment pieces of the Background component. This is where the professional can arrange the program to fit his or her own organization.

Organizational safeguards include volunteer expectations, risk management strategies, effective communication channels, and available resources. This topical section protects the volunteer, the clientele, and the organization as well as the volunteer administrator from risk and also serves to establish parameters within in which the volunteer is expected to perform.

The orientation program concludes with the components of program evaluation, a question period, evaluation, and a tour of the facility, all of which are included in Evaluation. This section, which establishes the rhythm of the program, provides the opportunity for participants to clarify, question, and determine the success of the program and its impact upon the volunteer participants.

Uses and Implications

1. Extension Agents can use the OBOE Orientation Model to provide a unified and accurate message concerning the purpose of the organization.
2. Orientation provides the first opportunity for agents to develop a cohesive relationship with Extension volunteers.

3. Agents should use orientation as an opportunity to develop awareness of liability issues, risks and has the potential to reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors.
4. Volunteer orientation provides a foundation for evaluation.
5. During orientation agents should provide a listing of available resources and technical support available to volunteers.

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