

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS—Part 2

Building a Foundation

It is important that any program our schools engage in has purpose and direction. Recognizing our long history of engaging volunteers in our schools, we will have a natural tendency to rely on the structure we've established in the past. Reliance on the past can be good and bad for our programs.

In establishing and strengthening volunteer programs, we need to have in place a clear set of priorities, a solid base of support and a plan for action.

❖ **Develop an advisory group or program committee**

Involving a number of people in the direction of your program will increase the knowledge and expertise involved in decision making and increase overall investment in volunteer programs throughout your school.

- This can be as simple as a group of people you consult with on a periodic basis for feedback and advice, to a multi-disciplinary committee that meets on a regular basis to advise or direct.
- Offer alternatives for people who are short on time or cannot commit to participation at this time.
- Involve teachers and other staff, students, parents, current volunteers and other interested community members in your decision-making.

❖ **Engage in a broad (or not-so-broad)-based needs assessment**

Inform the people at your school that you are establishing priorities for the school volunteer program. Let them know that their input can be very helpful to you and the students.

- Create a method or two for requesting information
 - Personal conversations (schedule times if possible)
 - Meet with groups
 - Surveys (use this common method strategically)
- Include a variety of people and keep track of who has responded.
 - Teachers
 - School Administration/Leadership
 - Parents
 - Students
 - Community Partners
- Show their input is important. Create a brief summary or report on:
 - Who responded
 - What you learned
 - Next steps based on their responses

❖ **Clearly outline program goals and objectives**

Establish a plan that is helpful for you and that people at your school can easily understand.

- Create a mission or purpose statement that will guide your efforts.
 - Make sure other people can understand the statement
 - All program elements should contribute that mission or purpose
- Establish Program Goals that are specific and realistic. Examples:
 - Long term goal: Increase parent involvement in the school by 25%
 - Short term goal: Recruit 12 new parent volunteers by the end of November
- Set timelines and outcome measures
 - When will action steps begin or be completed?
 - How will we know that we have been successful or need to refocus our efforts?

❖ **Identify needed volunteer positions and develop job descriptions**

Based on the program goals and objectives:

- Identify specific roles for volunteers that you will focus on initially and over time.
 - Use the tools on the following pages to help identify volunteer priorities
 - Consult with your advisory group
- Outline job specifications, including:
 - Specific job responsibilities
 - Desired characteristics
 - Required skills or knowledge, and training available

Note:

It is essential that you establish roles for volunteers that the school has the capacity to support.

For instance, if you need people to tutor math, but cannot afford the staff time to either recruit people with those specific skills or provide training to otherwise qualified people, then this effort will likely fail and you should focus on more realistic priorities. Similarly, if you have struggled in the past to recruit someone to coordinate the yearly auction, your efforts might be better spent identifying more productive ways that people can and will help with the auction. If you decide to commit to finding math tutors or an auction coordinator, that will affect your ability to attend to other priorities.

❖ **Anticipate challenges**

Without dwelling on the negative, identify how you will address things that you expect to be a challenge or have been challenging in the past such as:

- Staff and volunteer time
- Financial resources
- Communication

Suggestions for Identifying Priority Volunteer Roles

- ❖ **Be creative and specific.** Glance at the following page of volunteer roles and titles. Consider what roles will be most helpful and applicable for your school.
- ❖ **Identify the need.** Ask yourself and others what volunteer positions would most effectively respond to the goals of the volunteer program
- ❖ **Use, or have others use, the Brainstorming Jobs for Volunteers sheet (included in the following pages.)** What could we do if we had more time? What is not being done right now that someone else could do?
- ❖ **Use the self-survey (see attached)** to determine which roles are most crucial for volunteers at this time.
- ❖ **Initiate discussions** with staff /colleagues/community partners to identify collaboration opportunities.
- ❖ **Survey parents and other potential volunteers** about their talents and interests. *(see example)*
- ❖ **Create a Wish List** on your own or collaborate with others, establishing priorities for volunteer staffing.

The word “Volunteer” is a pay classification, not a job function. Use job titles.

Identifying Volunteer Roles

Consider these roles that someone might fill at school. What would someone in this position do? How much do we need a person to do this at our school?

- ❖ Chief Volunteer (*perhaps that is you!*)
- ❖ Computer Coach
- ❖ Tech Assistant
- ❖ Expressive Reader
- ❖ Writing Coach/Editor
- ❖ Reading Coach
- ❖ Book Discussion Facilitator
- ❖ Guest Presenter
- ❖ Travel Agent
- ❖ Activities Assistant
- ❖ Homework Partner
- ❖ Donations Director
- ❖ Artist
- ❖ Party Host
- ❖ Secretary
- ❖ Resource and Supply Coordinator
- ❖ Book Sleuth
- ❖ Internet Investigator
- ❖ Good Housekeeping Expert
- ❖ Interior Decorator
- ❖ Public Relations Expert
- ❖ Appreciation Coordinator
- ❖ Events/Opportunities Director

Adapted from Joanne C. Wachter, *Classroom Volunteers: Uh-Oh! Or Right On!* Copyright © 1999, Corwin Press, Inc

These people are often just called “Volunteers” in our schools. Being more specific will help volunteers to understand their role, and help other people in school to understand what they do for us.

Brainstorming Jobs for Volunteers

**Tasks you don't like to do, but
someone else may not mind doing**

**Time-consuming tasks someone
else could do leaving you more
quality time with all of your students**

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Create a Volunteer Job Description

Role _____

Tasks the person will do:

--

Skills/Qualities the volunteer will need:

--

Orientation/Training you can provide:

--

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Volunteer/Tutor Job Description

(Sample)

Objective:

To help Motivate and guide students, challenging them to increase their learning skills and academic success.

Duties:

A tutor provides support to a student by:

- ◆ Committing to a regular session schedule.
- ◆ Helping individual students or small groups with schoolwork or other learning activities.
- ◆ Helping motivate students to improve study skills, self-esteem, and goal attainment. Making learning exciting, relevant, and fun.
- ◆ Communicating with Volunteer Coordinator regarding student needs, progress, and tutoring strategies.
- ◆ Completing tutoring log describing session activities and student progress.

Qualifications:

- ◆ Basic knowledge of reading, writing, and math skills.
- ◆ Willingness to commit to working as a tutor for entire school year or as agreed upon.
- ◆ Ability and desire to motivate young people to improve their academic skills.
- ◆ Effective communication skills.
- ◆ Dependability, patience and flexibility.

Benefits:

- ◆ The satisfaction of having a positive impact on students by helping them to gain skills and providing encouragement and motivation for academic and social skills improvement.

Training:

- ◆ Orientation is provided. Tutor training is available.

Survey Form for Potential Volunteers

(Sample)

Dear Families:

As we plan our volunteer program for the year, we are curious about the kinds of interest and talents that might be available. We would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to jot down answers to the following:

What hobbies, collections, or other interests might you be willing to share with our youngsters if they fit in with our curriculum?

Have you taken any trips to areas of our country or other countries that might be covered in our curriculum?

Do you have a special interest in sharing your talents in any of the following areas?

- Computers
- Editing
- Planning parties or other special events
- Reading aloud
- Secretarial Skills
- Planning field trips
- Other

What other volunteer expertise might you be willing and able to offer?

Parent's Name _____ Date _____

What's the best way to contact you?

- Email-Address _____
- Phone-Number _____
- Letter to home-Address _____

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