

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS—Part 6

Volunteer Orientation and Training

Providing training for volunteers clearly increases their effectiveness and sustains their involvement. They learn more information and strategies for their work with our students, and increasingly feel valued and supported by the school, and part of the community.

Though time commitment can be a factor in engaging volunteers, many volunteers have expressed the need for more training. Our efforts to provide training have been successful. Because resources for school-based volunteer programs have been scarce and scattered, and programs are generally understaffed, the ability for schools to offer volunteer training has been limited.

Some schools with developed volunteer programs have moved toward requiring a certain amount of training for volunteers. Others strongly suggest training, and some simply offer the training and hope their volunteers will come. Framing the training as positive, productive and helpful to the students can help motivate volunteers to participate.

The Bottom Line: TRAIN YOUR VOLUNTEERS!

- ❖ **There are a number of ways that you can train your volunteers:**
 - Offer on-site training yourself or enlist another qualified staff member. Possibly hire a facilitator.
 - District-wide trainings may be offered. Check with the SPS Community Learning Office or have your Principal check with their Education Director for more information.
 - Community-based training is also available, like the free or inexpensive All-City Tutor Training that happens four times per year sponsored by the Seattle Tutoring Coalition.

- ❖ **Offer different kinds of training:**
 - A basic orientation is essential. You should be able to do this on-site.
 - Basic skills and information training, like an Introduction to Tutoring
 - Ongoing enrichment on subject like Motivating your Student, Creative Behavior Management, Learning Styles and others can be very helpful to your volunteers.

See the following pages for training ideas and resources...

Basic Orientation is Essential

There are a number of safety and liability issues, logistical information and procedural issues that volunteers must know to be at the school and work with our students. Though some of our volunteers may already be familiar with the dynamics of working in a school, we shouldn't assume they know what we need them to know.

A basic orientation should be done on site and can be as comprehensive as you need it to be. The typical school-based volunteer orientation seems to take 20-30 minutes with a tour of the school.

- ❖ *Make the orientation an expectation for volunteers.*
- ❖ *Use a checklist for yourself and the volunteer to cover everything. This also allows for other people to facilitate the orientation.*

Note: Some one-time or short-term volunteers who will have plenty of guidance and supervision in their work with the school may not need the full orientation. School staff can use their discretion on who warrants an orientation, but be consistent.

A basic orientation to your school or classroom should include:

- ❖ *A copy of the Seattle Public School Volunteer Handbook (see the www.seattleschools.org) or a site-based version that your school creates*
- ❖ *An emphasis on building positive relationships and encouraging learning*
- ❖ *School rules/norms that might be unfamiliar to new volunteers*
- ❖ *Volunteer procedures*
- ❖ *Confidentiality expectations*
- ❖ *Clarification of volunteer role*
- ❖ *Where to find materials*
- ❖ *Scheduling and communication of tasks*
- ❖ *Who they notify with scheduling issues or absence notification*
- ❖ *How to handle problem situations that arise when working with children*
- ❖ *Time to ask questions*
- ❖ *A tour of the school when appropriate*

More Details on the Volunteer Orientation

Below are some expanded thoughts on information that should be included in the basic volunteer orientation.

Volunteer Handbook—Offering the volunteer written information can expand on issues there is not time to cover during the brief orientation. Some schools have adapted the Seattle Schools Volunteer Handbook to their needs (you should be familiar with the content). Other schools have given their volunteers the SPS Volunteer Handbook with a School Packet that includes a school calendar, list of contacts, special invitations, school information and history, etc. You can also include a Volunteer Orientation Checklist (see example on the following pages)

Building positive relationships and encouraging learning—As with other staff members, volunteers need to help students achieve academically. An essential element of that is helping the student to feel supported and confident. The more we learn about the students, the better we are able to sense their needs and their strengths. Remind the volunteers that building relationships takes time.

School rules/norms—You might know that the school environment has posed particular challenges for volunteers who are unfamiliar with working at the school. There might be specific situations with students or staff expectations that you can inform the volunteers of ahead of time. No need to overdue it.

Volunteer procedures—Make sure the volunteer has filled out the correct paperwork and that they understand the need to sign in and out of the school and wear a name tag at all times.

Confidentiality expectations—Your school has specific legal and moral expectations about sharing information reporting abuse issues. Volunteers should know that academic and personal information they know about the students should be shared only with the appropriate teachers and school staff. Unless special arrangements are made with the teacher and principal, the teacher should handle all communication with parents and other students. In addition while we appreciate volunteers speaking to others in the community about their positive work at the school, information about individual students should not be shared and any concerns or problems should be addressed with the appropriate people at the school.

When a volunteer suspects or knows that a student is in an abusive situation or is being neglected, they have a responsibility to inform the student's teacher or the program coordinator. While the staff person is responsible for following through with the situation in an appropriate manner, we may need the volunteer's help documenting the situation. Students need to understand that this type of situation cannot be held in confidence, even if it risks the student-volunteer relationship.

Clarification of volunteer role—Be clear about what the volunteer will be doing and important pieces of their role to attend to. Provide a job description if possible.

Where to find materials—Make sure the volunteer knows where to locate supplies or materials for the work they are doing. This may simply involve asking for it from a staff person.

Scheduling and tasks—Make sure you confirm a starting date and schedule. In addition, you or the teachers may have different work for the volunteer each time they are working at school. Help them to know how to best know what they will be working on that day. Perhaps the teacher will send them a note, or there might be a logbook with instructions. It may be the student's responsibility to bring their work with them. The teacher might want to communicate briefly with the volunteer before or when they arrive in class.

Notification of scheduling issues or absence—It is wise to let the volunteer know that we understand that scheduling challenges arise, but that it will be most helpful to inform the school ahead of time or call to let you know what is happening. This can be a good time to emphasize the importance of making a realistic commitment that the school can count on. It is also a chance for you to inform them of any schedule issues that they can anticipate affecting them such as holidays, testing schedules, or early releases.

Handling problems—Even if you had all the time in the world, you couldn't prepare the volunteers for every challenging situation they might face at school. However, you should offer some general guidance in this area. Let them know that the teacher should handle severe behavior problems. You or the teachers should also be informed of behavior patterns that interfere with learning. Volunteers should also know who to talk to with to troubleshoot particular situations.

Time to ask questions—Always give them a chance to ask questions. You might need to ask them in a couple of ways to encourage their thoughts.

School tour—No need to take them everywhere and introduce them to everyone. They should know where certain areas or rooms are located, where the staff restroom is, and be introduced to key people like the secretary, the teacher they are working with and support staff they will need to know. It is great to introduce them to the principal as well, when possible.

Also inform them of upcoming training or meeting times.

Volunteer Orientation Checklist

(Sample)

Name of Volunteer: _____

School's Name: _____

Personal Responsibilities

- Checking in and out
- Wearing a name tag on each visit
- Procedures for absence or schedule change (name and number to call)
- Use of school equipment
- Confidentiality between volunteer and student (s)
- Contact Building Coordinator if problems arise

Tour of School

- Introduction to school support system (Secretary, Librarian, etc.)
- Entrances and exits
- Fire drill routes and locations
- Restroom locations (students and adults)
- Location and availability of instructional materials
- Eating facilities and procedure for a cup of coffee
- Parking facilities
- School information (school brochure, map, calendar, and newsletter)
- Discipline procedures
- Use of school phone
- Office telephone number

Activity Information

- Copy of job description for my role
- Location of activity
- Date when activity will begin
- Confirmation of scheduled days and times of activity
- Where volunteer reports to pick up student(s)
- Length of volunteer commitment
- What the volunteer is called (Mr., Mrs., First name)

Basic Training and Ongoing Enrichment

There may be common information and skills that you feel all people in a particular role need to have. For instance, you would like your tutors to use a particular style or structure, or perhaps your PTA needs to know the elements of effective meetings. If you can offer these types of trainings in a quality way to your volunteers, we are confident that their work will be more effective.

Some volunteers will want to learn more and benefit from ongoing opportunities to gather and talk about their work.

Knowing that you are likely not able to provide all the training that you would like to offer because of time or expertise, here are some suggestions for creating and offering training beyond the orientation.

❖ **Identify the topics**

- Prioritize training needs
- What they need (or we need them) to know
- What they want (or we want them) to know

❖ **Identify how you will offer the training**

- Site-based training with current resources
 - You or another staff person can facilitate
- Site-based training that you create
 - Research and learn the information to teach
 - Structure the information into an effective training format (**see examples in the following pages**)
- District trainings that you bring to your school or send your volunteers to
 - The school district may be offering training that is applicable to your volunteers. Check with the SPS Community Learning Office or Professional Development
 - These might be free or available for a small fee.
- Community-based trainings that you send your volunteers to
 - Check with community-based agencies to find out what they have to offer and their schedules.
 - The Seattle Tutoring Coalition, United Way of King County, Schools Out Washington and your local family center are good resources for training.

- ❖ **Connect with other schools**—You might have a school nearby that is already doing the training you need. Combine your efforts.

Do-it-Yourself: Training

You don't have to be a trained facilitator or expert to train people. By following a plan and providing good structure, you can offer a training that will meet the needs of your school. Below and on the following pages are some ideas on how to create and provide training to fit your needs.

❖ Identify the key topics you need to cover

- Identify why this information is important
- Outline the main points
- Consider experiential activities that will compliment the topics

❖ Follow the steps on the following page for creating structure and establishing content. *These are some basic concepts (just one model) that are important to provide in most training. With this structure, you can design training for a variety of content depending upon your needs.*



Sample Training Model

❖ Introductions

- Thank them for coming.
- Introduce yourself, remind/inform people of your role/experience.
- Names—(Get-to-Know-You Exercise? See examples in the following pages).
- Their role—clarification of why they are participating.
- What they would like to learn? (Can do in opening discussion).

❖ Overview of the Agenda

- Explain flow and projected content.
- Set out expectations for learning-goals.
- Ask for questions/clarification.
- Make note/Write down other questions or topics people expect or wish. Suggest that there will be time at the end to address specific questions not included in the training or suggest another way for them to receive the information (i.e. follow-up with you after the training.)

❖ Opening Discussion

- Why? What is important about this topic?
- Ask a couple of specific questions that will get people thinking about the topic and invest them in the training.

❖ Training Content

- Provide Information—present and discuss the skills and ideas you want your participants to gain.
 - Make sure your main points are organized and concise.
 - Cover realistic amounts of information in each section.
 - Consider delegating specific informational sections to other people. This is good for maintaining interest.
 - Engaging in a discussion is more effective than simply presenting the information to the group.



❖ **Group Activity-**

- Facilitate an experiential activity that encourages learning.
 - This can be done in pairs, small group or large group.
 - Consider a low-cost hands-on experience.
 - Role plays, though dreaded by some, can be very helpful.
- Have a group discussion/clarification after the activity to find out what people learned or their feelings on the topic.

❖ **Break**

- This is optional depending upon time. 2-hour trainings or less can go without a break. 3-hour trainings or blocks should have a break.
 - Be specific about time.
 - Reminder about refreshments/water/restrooms.
 - Be clear if you have tasks to complete during the break or if you are open to discussion with participants.

❖ **Training Content-Part II**

- Provide Information—If you have more to present/discuss.

❖ **Group Activity-**

- Again, if time permits and content is extended.
 - Pairs, small group or large group.
- Group Discussion/Clarification.

❖ **Wrap-Up**

- Review of topics covered.
- Offer additional resources.
- Other training.
 - Written Resources
 - Other people
 - Web Resources
- Time for other questions.
 - It is essential to provide some time at the end for extra conversation.



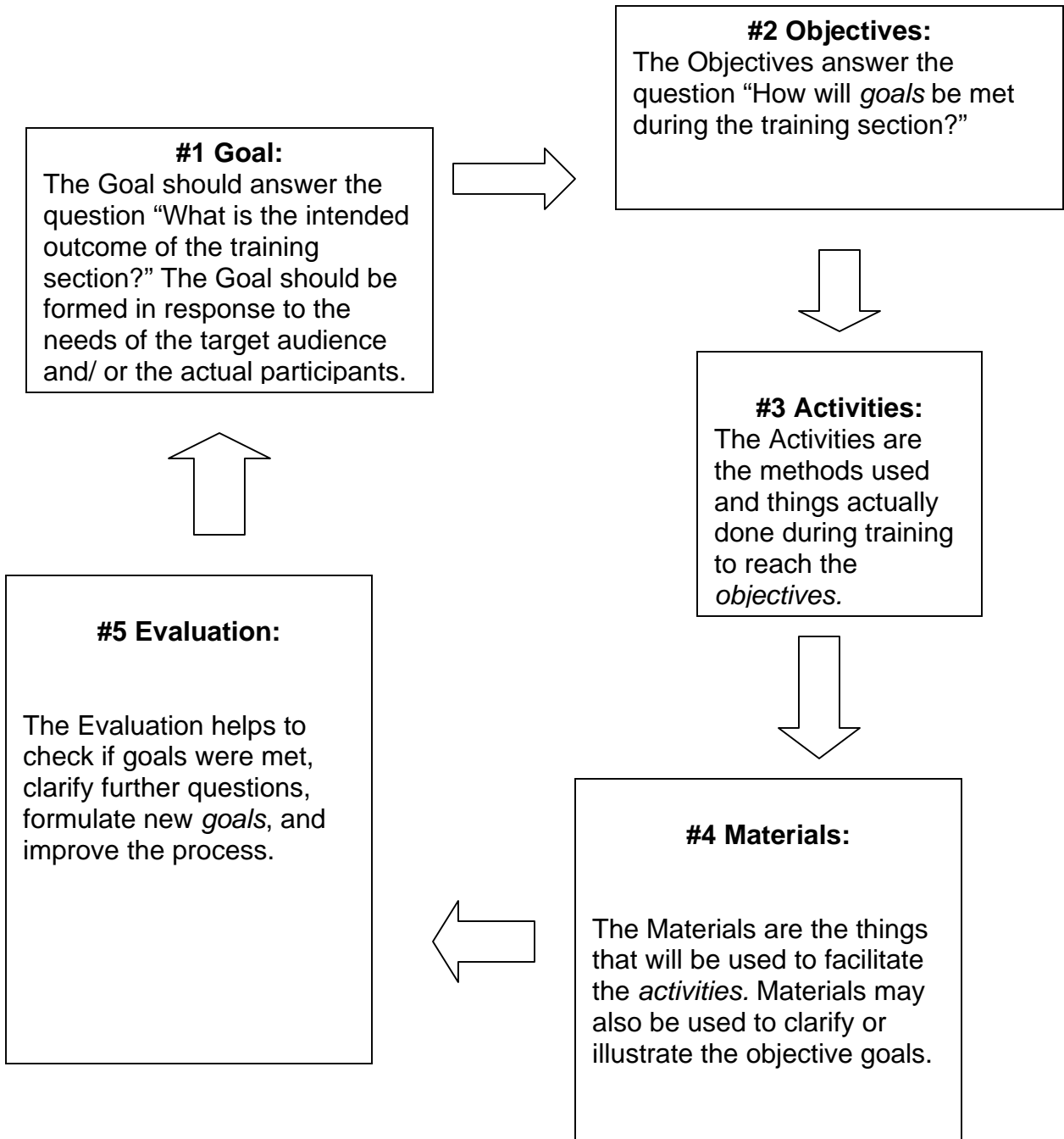
❖ **Evaluation**

- Design and/or use an evaluation to receive feedback about the training.
- Emphasize importance of constructive feedback—Interest in quality.
- Evaluate.
 - Content
 - Presenter knowledge
 - Resources and material
 - Logistics—space/time (optional)

Framework for Developing Effective Training Content

NOTE: The following framework focuses on content. It does not address the logistics of organizing a training session. It is assumed that individual trainers will choose a particular presentation style suited to the material, the trainer's needs and the needs of participants.

Effective training includes the following elements. The elements may be included formally or informally, as the situation requires.



Sample Get-to-Know-You Activities

Try these simple activities to get started with your training or meeting.

Also, try putting “Ice Breakers” into your search engine in the Internet

- ❖ **Simple:** Have people say their name and something they like or do, or something else about themselves. It could be any random piece of information, something fun, or something that has to do with the training, like a teacher that they remember well and why, or something fun they have done in the last month.
- ❖ **I’m bringing:** Have folks in a circle and each person should say their name and what they are bringing to a particular (pretend) event (like to Field Day, to math class, or a trip to the moon) For instance...”My name is Angie and I’m bringing art supplies, ” or “My name is Chris and I’m bringing charm.”
 - For an added challenge, have someone start again with the same thing they are bringing. Then have the next person repeat the first person’s name and what they are bringing, and then name their own. The third person starts with the first person, then the second person, their own, and so on, each person trying to remember the people who came before them. It’s a good memory game that will help people remember each other’s names. It can take some time, however.
- ❖ **Pair Introductions:** Pair people up with someone they do not know or do not know well. List 3-5 introduction questions, like name, where they are from, what they like to do with their free time, etc. The pairs share that information with each other. Then gather the large group and have the participants introduce the other person.
- ❖ **Who Did That?** Before the training, make a list of 10-20 experiences or knowledge that people in your group are likely to have. For instance...been to a foreign country, has a child at this school, wears red suspenders, anything, really. Or relate the items directly to the content of the training, for instance-knows the name of the school secretary or who has been to an All-City Tutor Training. The group should find someone who has that knowledge or experience, introduce themselves and have the person initial their paper. Consider offering a simple prize for the person who finishes first.
- ❖ **Who am I?** Have sticky notes, or paper or index cards with some tape. Ahead of time, write the names of famous people on the paper and, without them seeing, place the notes on their backs. People need to ask other people yes and no questions to try to identify themselves. They can only ask each person one question until they have talked with everyone, introducing themselves to people they don’t know. Each time they ask a question, they can take a guess at their identity.

Workshop Evaluation

(Sample)



Workshop Title _____

Workshop Date _____

Presenter _____

Please rate the following:	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not Helpful		
Information offered	5	4	3	2	1
Presenter knowledge/skills	5	4	3	2	1
Handouts/materials	5	4	3	2	1
Meeting location	5	4	3	2	1
Overall workshop	5	4	3	2	1

My most valuable or notable learning was:

I still have questions about:

The best part of the workshop was:

Any other suggestions/comments?