Volunteer Best Practices

Top Ten Ways to Sustain Volunteers:

1. Know how to promote the organization
2. Have volunteer programs
3. Be flexible in volunteer programs based on interests of the volunteers
4. Advertise clear job description and expectations
5. Evaluate the volunteer
6. Recognize a volunteer’s work
7. Train your volunteers properly
8. Be aware of risks in the programs
9. Don’t waste the volunteer’s time
10. Have a clear plan and organized direction for the volunteers and programs

Application

The purpose of this assignment was to gain real world experience in what working in a nonprofit is like, and understanding the challenges that come with the job.

Background

Girls Inc. NH in Rochester, New Hampshire is a unique nonprofit because it is one of four centers in New Hampshire that make up the name “Girls Inc. NH”. It is also the newest and smallest center. Girls Inc. NH tries to keep all of the centers on the same level. It expects that eventually all of the locations will have the same programs, the same fundraisers, etc. . . . I was surprised to learn that the Girls Inc. in Rochester does not have an established volunteer program.

The Volunteer Handbook for interested individuals is a universal handbook for all of the centers. In the end, however, the booklet applies more to the Manchester, Concord, and Nashua centers than to the Rochester one. Rochester advertises the same programs, but does not actually have them. This is due a lot to the early stage the organization is in and how well it is known in the Rochester community.

Tasks

Task #1: Spreading the Word

My first task was to assess the community and the resources available in Rochester and then propose ways to spread the word about the organization. Girls Inc. is not well known in the community. There were no signs and no advertisements in the local media. I learned how to create a communication plan and proposal for my supervisor to use in the Rochester and Durham communities. This included sample and template news releases, PSAs, letters, and presentations. It also included fundraising ideas, websites to advertise on, and community resources, such as the local high school, to use.

By having this, my supervisor had a guide to turn to in order to recruit volunteers. I was surprised that this had not been done earlier.

A volunteer manager should know early on how the resources available in the community and how to advertise effectively to bring in volunteers.

How can you get the help you need if you don’t ask for it?

Task #2: Program Planning

My second task was to plan the activities available to the girls at the center for April Vacation week, and to research science projects for a staff member to use on Science and Technology days at the center. I planned a “Multi-cultural Week” where, each day, a different continent is explored. In order to do this, I had to outline how to get from Point A to Point B. I could not just say that there will be Australian-themed coloring pages—I had to find the coloring pages! These details are important to have because without them, programs dissolve. As a volunteer manager, it is important to have detailed plans in order to create programs volunteers can work in.

Never waste a volunteer’s time.

A volunteer whose time is not used wisely will not come back. In a starting nonprofit, this can be disastrous because not only will that volunteer choose not to return, but by word of mouth, others will be reluctant to volunteer.

Conclusion

My volunteer experience at Girls Inc. taught me what it means to work in a nonprofit and be a volunteer manager. Organizing volunteers is as important as supervising them, if not more. Proper planning behind the scenes of a nonprofit is what can make or break the organization. Volunteers are an important piece to accomplishing a mission and without them, a nonprofit cannot succeed.