

Best Practices for Developing a Volunteer Program

Section 9: Measuring Volunteer Program Effectiveness

Agency and program leaders must make critical decisions regarding the distribution, use, and management of available resources. To help make these decisions, volunteer program managers need to document: (1) how financial, material, equipment, in-kind, and human resources have been, are being, and will be used by the agency to support agency efforts; and (2) what benefits these resources have brought to the clients and programs.

Evaluation should be tailored to your organization's capacity to evaluate. There are two basic types of evaluation. Formative program evaluation is used to monitor ongoing program effectiveness and to manage activity. It guides mid-year (or mid-project) adjustments and provides mid-year data for a year-end report. Summative program evaluation is a year-end (or project-end) report that includes results, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations, and future plans.

Data Collection

To measure program outcomes or attainment of program objectives, it is necessary to systematically collect and record baseline data in the early stages of planning. This data reveals how things were before the volunteer program went into effect. Once you have established the baseline, collect data that will show changes in behaviors, skills, or attitudes of the people affected by the volunteer program and the added value the program brings.

The manager may collect quantitative and qualitative data, such as the number of volunteers, the total time that volunteers commit to your organization, what duties volunteers perform, achievements of the volunteers, and the effectiveness of volunteers and paid staff working together. Data collection should draw on information already collected, and additional collection instruments should be developed based on the:

- Program goals and objectives
- Group targeted for evaluation
- Activities to be evaluated
- Resources available for implementing the evaluation

Evaluation Report

This data should be used to analyze how well the plan was implemented. The data collection method, or evaluation, should gather the best data the budget will allow and provide adequate time for gathering and analyzing the data. The evaluation report should be a succinct statement that summarizes the results or outcomes of the program activities.

When developing the report, consider the audience and how the information will be used. For example, ask yourself which of the following groups the data is intended to influence or inform:

- Board and officers of the agency

- Funding sources
- Agency managers and staff
- Agency volunteers
- General public

The goal of your evaluation report will also influence the report's content and appearance. Consider whether the goal of the report is to:

- Justify funding
- Gain additional support
- Demonstrate effectiveness
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the program
- Determine future planning
- Celebrate accomplishments

Key Questions To Ask

The number of questions you could ask to evaluate your volunteer program's effectiveness are almost endless. Limitations of time, money, and staff will focus the evaluation questions to the most essential ones to give you information to improve your program. Some possible questions:

- Is the program operating in conformity with its original design?
- Have adjustments been made as needed?
- Were the stated outcomes achieved?
- Is evaluation data being used for future planning?

Several resources are available to guide you in evaluating your program. See Section 10 for some suggestions. The material for this section was drawn from *A Practical Guide to Creating and Managing a Business/Education Partnership*, 1990, produced by the National Association of Partners in Education, in Alexandria, Virginia.

<http://www.gosv.state.md.us/pubs/bestprac/sec09.htm> - 05/03/2003.