



## Hosting a VolunTourist Lessons Learned

### Volunteer Management:

- Volunteers need direction. Create a clear and concise orientation for the volunteers for when they arrive, and put into place simple systems that give direction for the easiest of tasks (i.e., washing dishes, finding toilet paper), so they can integrate into the community more easily. Orientation should also include background information for your community and your organization, project specifics, daily schedule, rules to the program, and general facility directions.
- Take feedback from the volunteers seriously and be open to suggested improvements, but do not get into the habit of trying to meet every need. Provide an exit survey for all volunteers to receive feedback.
- If you have volunteers who want to stay for a longer period of time, set up a program that sets guidelines for length of stay and beware of the creation of a subculture that may alienate newcomers. (NOTE: Three months of living in a bunkhouse environment seems to be the limit of one's sanity.) Also create a program to keep long-term volunteers focused. This can include Team Lead requirements as well as professional development and service learning opportunities.
- Word of mouth is the best way to expand your volunteer base, and the best way to encourage volunteers to spread the word is to create that feeling of belonging to your organization. Newsletters and alumni programs can help with this, but the best way is to make sure that they leave your program with the feelings of accomplishment, empowerment, satisfaction, and a desire to return.
- Empower volunteers with a sufficient orientation and training for the project, so they are able to effectively complete tasks, but also learn a new skill and be able to process and reflect on their service.
- Make sure volunteers have a point person and a team leader on site, so they know where to go for direction and feel connected with the bigger goals of the project.
- Give volunteers enough information about the long term plans for the projects they are working on and how they fit into the big picture so they know how important their work is, even if it seems tedious.

### Housing Volunteers:

- Community meetings are a great way to communicate information, decompress, celebrate success, reflect on the experience, and to create a community feeling that makes people take pride in the organization and its mission.
- Cleanliness is essential in communal living space. Make it a priority or suffer the consequences of sickness and volunteer disapproval. Encourage all volunteers to participate in the daily activities of the housing site including signing up for chores.
- Keep the community environment open and accepting. Many people volunteer to get the feeling that they belong to something greater than themselves. At HONO many volunteers have stated that they loved how everyone is welcomed and valued no matter what skills they have, religion they are, race, sexual orientation, or class they come from. Try to make the volunteers feel welcomed and valued.
- Finding a good kitchen manager is key to a successful volunteer housing program if that is part of the program. Food costs can make or break the financial viability of a housing program.
- Coed housing can work in a large bunkhouse style environment but you must make it clear what the rules are when it comes to fraternizing in the community space . . . as in there is NONE!

- Create an environment that empowers volunteers to solve problems amongst themselves. You can be overwhelmed with inter-volunteer issues, so do not try to be the mediator in all situations. This is especially important if there are long-term volunteers.
- Set clear rules for the community that also includes guidelines and a system in place for when someone has broken the rules and you need to ask them to leave. It will happen no matter how well you screen people or how clear your rules are. Leave the clause that your organization has the right to ask any volunteer to leave at any time, but just make sure to clearly communicate the reason for the early departure before rumors start.
- Community environments are breeding grounds for rumors and gossip. Keep a good ear to the ground so you know what the mindset of the volunteers is at any given time so that you can "nip it in the bud."
- The cost of housing volunteers is great, but it can also be turned into a good revenue generating program. If you can afford to make it as cheap as possible when beginning you will have greater turn out of volunteers. If you are successful at creating the "community" or "family" feel, you will get volunteers to buy into the program. If you can get them to feel like they belong taking ownership then you can raise the price as time goes on and the dedicated will be willing to pay.

### **Projects:**

- Determine a focus area, either geographic or programmatic, and clearly explain it to volunteers during orientation, during project assignments, and on site.
- Continually remind volunteers of the impact of their work.
- Partnering with organizations is great, but make sure to clarify an MOU with all project partners from the beginning of each project so everyone's roles and responsibilities are clear. Clarify branding, messaging, and run of show details so that everyone feels comfortable with how they are represented and to ensure that everyone gets the credit they deserve.
- Accurately estimating the scope of work for a project is extremely important. If the work can keep all of the volunteers engaged for the duration of the project, and if they can complete the project by the end, it will make for a great volunteer experience.
- Large groups of volunteers seem to always slow down after lunch. It is a good idea to design a day of service to have a smaller scope of work in the later part of the day.

### **AmeriCorps\*NCCC:**

- If you are working with NCCC teams, try to allow them as much responsibility as possible. They can be huge assets in the running of your program if properly utilized. They are young, eager to learn, and want to feel useful.
- Plan assignments in advance, and structure them so they are quickly learned and well-documented, so they can be passed on to others after the team leaves.
- Keep clear communication with the Team Leader of an NCCC team. Allow them to sit in on meetings so that they can stay informed and maintain their status among their team.
- Anytime your organization is working with AmeriCorps, especially NCCC, make sure that you know and establish the policies surrounding fraternization. Make these policies as clear and simple from the start and communicate them prior to the team arriving or starting a program.