



**Do Better Together: Addressing Racial Bias  
MAVA Event on July 9, 2019  
Notes and Takeaways**

Host: Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration

Presenter: Hope Lockett, Volunteer Senior Manager, Cookie Cart

**Notes from Small Group Discussions:**

Discussion Question #1: How do volunteer managers address racial bias with current volunteers as we work to engage a more racially diverse volunteer base?

Challenges/Opportunities

- One organization brought in trainer on implicit bias for staff and then offered to volunteers, but volunteers were not registering for training. Need to learn how to talk about why the topic is so important.
- With outside speakers, how to staff training so that volunteers have the context for materials being presented?
- Staff may see these efforts as doing “something extra” as opposed to a priority.
- We also may have biases toward people who express bias – i.e. labeling them as ignorant or uneducated.
- How do we have good relationships and conversations with those who don’t share our views?
- Being the only one talking about these issues at an organization can be isolating – how to address this with volunteers when we don’t have the trainings/awareness at the staff or organizational level?
- How do we develop skills to address bias?

Tips/Suggestions/Ideas

- Make orientation mandatory and cover topics of racial bias there.
- Use orientation as a way to weed out volunteers who may not be a good fit.
- Reinforce racial bias topics several times throughout orientation and training so volunteers learn it in different ways.
- Find out what volunteers want to explore in more depth and give them resources to learn on their own.
- Ideas for motivating people to learn more or address difficult issues: Make it convenient, have fun conversation, food, market it.
- Do trial runs of trainings for your “expert” or long-term volunteers.
- Get buy-in by sharing possible ideas for training and have volunteers help to prioritize.



- Make training short and convenient to get people excited about coming back for more.
- Approach it as ongoing support instead of trying to get it all done in one training or at the orientation.
- Record trainings so volunteers can come back to revisit topics they want to learn or re-learn more about.
- Start with staff – use of IDI or other tool – have team profiles so that issues can be addressed at this level.
- Get beyond “diversity is good” to why it’s needed.
- Be empathetic and curious – get beyond fears of saying the wrong thing or offending others
- Use “TRC” as a tool – transparency, reciprocity, curiosity. To start off, share something about yourself when asking questions.
- Be aware of the experience of volunteers who are not fitting the dominant community of most volunteers – they may not raise the issue with their supervisor.
- Ask “what do you think we’re missing?” “Who is underrepresented?” “Whose experience isn’t being reflected?”

Discussion Question #2: How do organizations address volunteer orientation when volunteers are starting at very different places with their understanding and lived experiences around racial bias?

#### Challenges/Opportunities

- Do volunteers actually read handbooks? This might not be the best way to get info to volunteers.
- One-time groups are a challenge – you don’t know who they’re bringing and it’s difficult to thoroughly onboard.
- How are the staff treating each other? Have seen staff reinforce negative behavior.
- Often an organization’s DEI efforts are focused on staff (which is needed!) but not extended to volunteers, who are the primary people interacting with service recipients.
- Boards and staff often say they don’t need racial bias training/orientation, especially those not working directly with clients.
- Some organizations include optional training on DEI – varied responses in terms of how many volunteers attend.
- It takes time – need opportunities to practice what you learn in a training.

#### Tips/Suggestions/Ideas

- Focus on changing the culture one person at a time – this is what impacts the organization.
- Coaching, constantly giving tools, asking questions. “Help me to understand why you don’t need this training.” One-on-one mentoring. If it’s a barrier to require the training, maybe they shouldn’t be there.
- Make orientation or other racial bias trainings mandatory.



- Possible to have leaders for groups who can challenge racism in the group.
- One organization presented all day training on white privilege and other equity topics. Some people found it valuable and others still didn't see relevance. Over time, it helped.
- Another organization started with bias because everyone was at different places. Needed to address white privilege, so added intersectionality. Good response - people wanted more time to talk about it. It was a required training that was part of a 5-part series.
- Be explicit about what you are and what you are not. One org is very clear "we are not saviors."
- Develop a resource list so volunteers can do their own homework to follow up after training.
- If staff orientation covers racial bias or organizational values around racial diversity, is there opportunity to borrow this for volunteer orientation?

Discussion Question #3: How do we have conversations with volunteers about inappropriate or culturally insensitive actions?

#### Challenges/Opportunities

- Stepping in and steering a conversation in a new direction is a skill – not always something we automatically know how to do well. Also is very difficult when you feel personally attacked.
- Organizations tend to be more reactive vs. proactive.
- Wide range of volunteers of many different ages – how do you address behavior without making assumptions?
- Change is slow.
- These conversations are uncomfortable, and not many of us are good at sitting in our discomfort (but we need to get better!)
- Even if you know how to approach these conversations with peers, other power dynamics can complicate things – i.e. donors, board members, etc.

#### Tips/Suggestions/Ideas

- Important to "walk the walk" – share your own learnings from experience and be candid about mistakes you've made.
- Having strong relationship with volunteers makes it much easier to have these types of conversations. The main work is getting to know people, and it will not be comfortable.
- Shift focus from intent to impact. Good intent doesn't matter if there was negative impact.
- Treat these instances as opportunities for development within the team – bring in experts, conduct workshops, etc. BUT you must be sure to show why this is important.
- Come from place of curiosity and ask for more details, i.e. "What do you mean by that?" to help them see potential problems with their statement/actions.
- Ask volunteers to bring in articles about diversity or racial bias; have focused discussion, lunch and learns, or book club type activities.



- If you can't or don't say something immediately, it's okay to follow up later and address it with the person privately.
- It is helpful if everyone is working from the same framework of understanding; i.e. everyone has had some level of training and has a common understanding of certain terms, concepts and expectations.
- Start with staff – they should be on board first, particularly leadership.
- Find a volunteer who can help advocate for change with other volunteers.
- Address the problem, not the person.
- Mirror vs. Window – reflect on what action/statement is doing to you when addressing it with person.
- Nexus Community Partners has some great resources and classes.

*Hope Lockett, Senior Volunteer Manager from Cookie Cart, shared the following additional ideas to keep volunteer engagement leaders thinking about addressing racial bias with volunteers:*

**Volunteer Appreciation gift cards from community partners:**

For us that is East Side Thai, Caydence Coffee, Brunsons. That way they are more likely to come to community outside of their volunteer hours. We even ask that they come during a time they wouldn't.

**Have volunteers drive into work different ways:**

Creating almost like a landmark scavenger hunt. So that they casually get more familiar with the community.

**Partnering with other Community Partners on Events:**

Have volunteers stand on the planning committees on behalf of your org. or with another staff. We are working on Affordable Housing with ABC Realty and East Side Freedom Library.

**Van tours or walking tours of the community**

Show volunteers the landmarks that the community values and from the community's narrative.

**K-12 events for volunteers to go to (ones where they won't be intruding but adding to)**

School Fairs, Performances, Science Fairs, History Days Presentations, Senior Projects etc.

**Volunteers being ambassadors: training them to have courageous conversations**

We have one volunteer who has read the three popular books on courageous conversations. She is starting a book club with her neighborhood block club. The first book...White Fragility!

**And here is the video she shows in her volunteer orientation:**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/rita\\_pierson\\_every\\_kid\\_needs\\_a\\_champion](https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion)