Tips for Cities on How to Start or Strengthen a Volunteer Program
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1. Assess needs and interest in developing a volunteer program. Identify where volunteers are already involved and what they need. Gather together key leaders to identify what the city hopes to accomplish through volunteer involvement. Develop a case statement for the volunteer program.

2. Talk with other cities of similar sizes that engage volunteers to learn about what the volunteers do and how the volunteer program is structured.

3. Obtain support from the key decision maker or governing body (Mayor, City Administrator, City Council, etc.) for starting or expanding a volunteer program. Be prepared to talk about the positive benefits and impact of a volunteer program such as:
   - Save taxpayer money.
   - Expand what the city can offer.
   - Bring valuable expertise.
   - Can often work weekends, evenings and holidays when extra help is needed.
   - Enhance the connection of the city with residents and the engagement of residents with the city.
   - Increase employability of residents who volunteer for resume building experience.
   - Contribute to important outcomes for the city such as beautification, youth support and improved schools.

4. Determine who will be responsible for the volunteer program. Seek training in volunteer management for that person(s). (See resources below).

5. Network internally in the city to build relationships with key individuals and departments for the volunteer program. Learn who has expertise and resources that would be important for the volunteer program. Find out who is the most interested.

6. Set up an advisory committee for the volunteer program. Include key staff who are interested in volunteers, staff from departments that have potential for engaging volunteers, current lead volunteers, etc.

7. Design the volunteer program structure.
   - Involve key leaders to brainstorm volunteer positions and develop position descriptions.
   - Assess any risk, liability and legal concerns and develop a risk management plan.
   - Determine if there are any potential union concerns and how to avoid them.
   - Develop ideas for recognizing volunteers.
   - Plan the volunteer data that you want to keep and explore databases for record keeping.
   - Develop volunteer policies and a volunteer handbook (asking other cities for examples).
   - Create ideas for volunteer recruitment and how you will let the community know about the volunteer opportunities.

8. Identify key external partnerships for the volunteer program such as civic clubs to partner for volunteer recruitment, potential partners for events and other organizations that could help get the community involved or bring key expertise you need.

9. Develop a strategic plan for starting or expanding the volunteer program. Detail what will be done by when, who is responsible, who needs to be involved and other accountabilities. Be prepared to address items such as:
   - The skill set of the volunteers needed. For example, are your tasks simple/difficult?
   - The interests of the volunteers and the cities' needs. Be specific. Do you have a community center, a library or parks that would like volunteer involvement?
   - The season(s) volunteers will be involved.
   - The cost of training a volunteer and of the volunteer program.
   - Policies that need to be developed such as the age youth can volunteer for different positions, what positions require a driver's license and how much supervision volunteers will be given.

10. Recruit volunteers through word of mouth, posting volunteer openings on the city website, posting positions at local volunteer center (if available) or volunteermatch.com and ask city partners to assist in recruiting volunteers.

11. Evaluate the volunteer program and decide the next steps. Keep up with the trends on who is volunteering to continually update the volunteer program.

Resources for Starting or Enhancing a Volunteer Program

MAVA Training - See available at: http://www.mavanetwork.org/events.

Articles
- 14 Steps for a Top Notch Volunteer Program," www.fieldstonealliance.org/.../02-19-09_start_volunteer_program.cfm
- "Cities Using Volunteers," League of Minnesota Cities study, http://www.lmnc.org/media/document/1/sotc13_volunteers.pdf?inline=true
- "Managing Volunteers to Minimize Risk," *Minnesota Cities,* November – December 2011, www.lmnc.org/media/document/1/managingvolunteersminimizerisk.pdf
- "Risk Management Information: Covering the Cities Volunteers," http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/coveringthecitysvolunteers.pdf?inline=true
- "Tapping Volunteers for Results," *Minnesota Cities,* November – December 2011, www.lmnc.org/media/document/1/tappingvolunteers.pdf

Other

General volunteer management resources at: http://www.mavanetwork.org/volmgmt and http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html.

Join MAVA for workshop discounts and access to additional resources at: http://www.mavanetwork.org/join.