

A Guide to Supervising Volunteers

This manual has been developed to serve as a guide to your role and responsibilities in our volunteer program. Thank you for supporting our volunteer services program.

Volunteer Services is here to support you and your volunteer. We strive to assist you in whatever way we can.

Why request a volunteer?

- Encourages community involvement as volunteers vote, write letters to the editor, attend town meetings, and have their own extensive networks
- Volunteers who feel valued, and understand the importance of the work they are doing can become a powerful positive constituency for your City and community
- There are many individual benefits to you, as well as benefits to the organization and community
- Volunteers can stimulate creativity and offer new ideas that give you a new perspective about your departmental needs
- Volunteers can lessen your workload, freeing you to do the things that you are specifically trained to do
- Qualified volunteers can handle aspects of your work that keep you from completing your higher level tasks

Myths about working with volunteers

- “It’s easier to do it myself, than to have a volunteer do it.” In truth training a volunteer to do a task is very similar to training someone who is being paid. Up front you have to expend training time, but in a short time, you will be freed from time consuming low level tasks, and have time to focus on your priority tasks.
- “Volunteers don’t understand the importance of confidentiality and data privacy.” In truth only volunteers who have prior work experience and knowledge of working with this kind of information will

be placed. They will receive the same background check and training as a paid staff.

- “Volunteers will replace paid staff.” In truth while volunteers are an excellent support to staff they cannot replace the expertise and dedication of paid staff.
- “Volunteers can’t be fired.” In truth volunteers can be let go for any valid. If a volunteer has dependability or performance issues, or just isn’t working out as you’d envisioned you can contact the Volunteer Coordinator (Diane Erickson at derickson@wspmn.gov or 651-208-4840) with your concerns, and she will take it from there. If the issue is a job fit, the volunteer will be reassigned, but if it is a more serious concern the volunteer’s time with the City will be terminated.

How Volunteers are placed

Volunteer placements are determined by the volunteer’s skills, interests and abilities, and the City’s needs. If these factors are not in alignment, the potential volunteer’s services may be declined or he/she maybe referred to another agency. Be assured that steps have been taken to ensure a successful volunteer placement, successful for the volunteer and for you the supervisor.

- There is a formal process to becoming a volunteer that begins with the potential volunteer completing a volunteer application.
- If the volunteer seems to be a match based on the application an interview is scheduled with the Volunteer Coordinator
- If the candidate appears promising at the time of the interview, he/she is invited to meet directly with a Department Supervisor
- After the volunteer is placed, but prior to the first day of service, he/she must undergo a criminal background check, and any other specific requirements of your department
- The volunteer is also giving a Volunteer Handbook to read prior to their training.

The Supervisors Role

As a volunteer's supervisor you play a vital role in the success of the volunteer program

- You are the expert for the area in which the volunteer has been placed
- You will be asked to provide your volunteer with information specific to your area and work group along with information and detail on how you want the project done
- You will be responsible for letting your volunteer know how important the work they are doing is, even if it seems tedious, and how it benefits the City
- You may invite your volunteer to attend in house training
- You will build a working relationship with your volunteer, and provide the volunteer feedback on his/her performance, along with recognition and thanks
- You will want to give corrective feedback as soon as possible, while the situation is fresh and relatively minor versus delaying and allowing situations to develop into something more major
- You will also be a primary giver of positive feedback, and delivering that feedback will make a big difference in the continuing service of the volunteer
- You will schedule the next time he/she will be coming, and discuss what they will be working on if it is different from the current task
- You will make sure they know who to call if they need to cancel a shift

Orienting and working with your Volunteer

- Block off some time to spend with him/her
- Take him/her on a tour of your work area and other parts of the building he/she may need to access
- Review relevant policies and procedures for your specific area
- Bring your volunteer to his/her work area and provide supplies appropriate for assigned tasks
- Have the volunteer's work assignment ready with enough work to fill the volunteer's shift

- Select activities that permit the volunteer to gradually learn your methods and procedures
- Break larger jobs into manageable pieces that can be accomplished within the volunteer's shift, provide sequential instruction
- Explain your instructions clearly and concisely and take time to discuss all aspects and the purpose/big picture of each assignment
- Be sure to allow time for questions and periodically check in with your volunteer. Remember to give reassurance as needed
- Ask specific questions to confirm that the volunteer truly understands the assignment and expectations
- Training requirements will vary with the demands of each specific assignment, but it should be ongoing
- Keep volunteers up to date on changes that have occurred since their last shift that impacts their work
- Develop a system or procedure for on-going communication, most performance problems are, in fact, communication problems
- Define the extents and limits of his/her authority
- Tell him/her where and how he/she can get more information or help
- Define the standards and the results that you expect, including timelines. Explain how you will monitor the project
- Coaching is part of any learning process and is both corrective and reinforcing. Assess actions and outcomes, not people and personalities

What a Volunteer wants in a supervisor

- Volunteers, like paid staff, prefer supervisors who are fair, supportive and available
- Gives clear instructions and feedback
- Communicates expectations upfront
- Is a good listener
- Has a pleasant and professional manner
- Recognizes the volunteer's efforts, and successes
- Always has "real" work prepared, or calls the volunteer in advance and reschedules
- Takes action early to correct performance or attendance issues
- Shows concern for the volunteer, and makes them feel valued