



Tips From the Field

Engaging Boomers as Volunteers

Suggestions and ideas shared by leaders of volunteers at symposiums held in St. Paul, MN on 10/27/2008 and in St. Cloud, MN on 1/27/2009.

Motivation to have Impact

- Make sure the volunteers understand the part their particular role plays in the mission of the agency, why are they being asked to do this and how they are part of the bigger picture.
- Offer the volunteer opportunities for feedback as a means for them to have an impact – their opinions are important.

Interviews

- Ask: How do you hope to make an impact?
- Importance of first contact –assume they've done some research
- Flip recruitment – develop the job for the skill set of the volunteer
- Offer variety of tasks and give them choices – direct and non-direct client contact
- Go out for coffee with the prospective volunteer. Show your interest in getting to know who they really are.

Positions Design

- To develop a wider range of positions, ask department heads and other staff for an idea they want to see happen, but do not have the time to do it. Say if they will give you the idea, you will take it and work to spin it into a project for a volunteer.
- For volunteers who want flexibility, bring in two people – share position and increase flexibility. Put volunteers in teams, so that they can cover for each other when gone.

Skills-based volunteers

- As you interview volunteers, keep a list of the types of skills you are seeing volunteers bringing. Set up a time with staff to ask them to brainstorm ways those skills could be used in their departments.
- Send an e-mail to staff about a skill that a volunteer has to offer. Say who gets back to you first will get the volunteer. Create a friendly sense of competition.
- Frame the volunteer position to demonstrate the importance you place on it: with business cards, cell phone, office space etc.

Recruitment

- Make the recruiting message crisp, exciting and positive.
- When a new volunteer comes in, we ask how they heard about volunteering. If it is from a current volunteer, we put the volunteer's name in a monthly drawing for a prize. This gives a fun incentive for volunteers to recruit other volunteers.

Support

- Give flexibility to Boomers with opportunities to move from position to position.
- Re-adjust your work schedule for evening hours one time a week for volunteers.
- Boomers from the business world expect quick action. Try to meet expectations when you can, and when you cannot, make clear the constraints we are operating under.
- Look for Indicators the volunteer is ready to take on higher level responsibility: the volunteer shows consistent commitment and follow through, indicates an interest in doing more and/or the staff see the volunteer has capability to do more

Recognition

- Demonstrating impact is the new “thank you” note. Share statistics.
- Offer training. Offer a promotion

Organizational Buy-In

- Start with small changes where you have staff that "get it" and then promote the success.
- Set up a taskforce to guide the change. Include top management, front line staff, lead volunteers and the people in the organization who are natural “change agents.”