



NAFCM Notes – Big Tuesday July 28

Volunteer Recruitment, Retention, and Support

Conversation with Whitney Trumble, Deputy Executive Director at Center for Conflict Resolution and Heather Fogg, Executive Director, Resolution Systems Institute

Tell us about your center or organization's successes in recruiting, retaining, and supporting volunteers who reflect their community. What challenges have you overcome, and what challenges remain?

Successful Strategies

- Emphasizing a sense of belonging by providing educational resources, including a volunteer book group.
- Offering ongoing volunteer learning opportunities and community-building events, which have contributed to higher engagement and volunteer retention. Centers also notice the benefits of community-building events where mediators have also formed friendships among themselves, and that seems to help create a sense of belonging and retain volunteers.

Hallmarks 1 & 2: Diversifying the Volunteer Base

Participants shared several approaches and asked questions about diversifying volunteer recruitment and strengthening volunteer engagement. Some recommendations included:

- Providing branded promotional items ("swag") to foster a sense of community.
- Evaluating the long-term effectiveness of these efforts, particularly in measuring volunteer retention. Did making the changes make a difference in diversity and retention? Did the volunteers stay?

Findings from CCR's experience

- The success of a particular candidate can be difficult to predict in general
- At CCR Chicago, the number of volunteer applicants has nearly doubled since implementing changes, and the number of applicants in some of the demographic groups sought have also increased.
 - Additional data will become available as more cohorts complete the program.

Ideas to diversify mediator pool and retain volunteers:

- Asynchronous and hybrid mediation training models to improve accessibility.
- Compensating trainers and providing a structured practicum that includes observation opportunities followed by co-mediation, which also helps volunteers know at the time whether they would like to continue volunteering.
- Hosting volunteer appreciation events, which help volunteers build relationships and strengthen their commitment to the organization.
- Offering mediation training on a sliding fee scale and providing scholarships to increase accessibility.

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When considering diversity goals for volunteer recruitment, participants discussed defining community needs by examining:

- The demographics of the current volunteer roster pool.
- The demographics of the broader community (e.g., Cook County).
- The demographics and needs of clients served.
- Specific language needs, such as increasing the number of Spanish-speaking mediators.

Questions Raised During the Discussion

- How can organizations encourage volunteers to participate in virtual mediations rather than in-person sessions?
 - One strategy shared was providing dedicated Zoom technical support.
 - Secure an intern to manage the technology during virtual mediations, allowing mediators to focus on the session without technical responsibilities.
- What was the timeline for the audit consultants and the subsequent implementation phases?
 - The initial research phase lasted approximately nine months to one year.
 - Implementation was described as an ongoing, long-term process rather than one with a defined end date.
 - The implementation timeline of the 3 phases described in the available report was also about 9 months to 1 year.
- What volunteer roles are available in addition to serving as a mediator?
 - Program administration needs
 - Training opportunities
 - Additional facilitation and circle keeping opportunities
- Did the RSI evaluation include an assessment of volunteers' sense of belonging?
 - Not directly; however, the survey responses from both participants and station monitors gave the sense that recognition of the skills component assessed pointed in a positive direction about the program overall, based on respondents' perception of the event. This might lead to further positive regard.
- With the matching events - you mentioned using a rating for how people would fill the diversity need — What definition were you looking at? Population of Cook County? The application pools of the past? What did you compare against?
 - Primarily the diversity of our current roster of mediators — those within our existing pool of volunteers. When we made our final selection of invitations, we looked at the folks who went through the matching event and had the highest rubric scores; then we looked at how those folks with the highest scores self-identified. So we started with matching the skills competency, then looked at self-identified demographics and lived experience.