

Orientation and Training

The phrase ‘Orientation and Training’ may sound like duplication, or two ways of saying the same thing. And, while ‘Orientation’ and ‘Training’ are related, they are in fact two different components that are essential for creating a positive and productive environment for volunteers.

Orientation is the process of informing a volunteer about the organization’s mission, its core values, operating structure, history, future plans, and any other important aspect of the organization’s ‘DNA’. Even with occasional volunteers, it is important to answer the critical questions about your organization – who are we, what do we do, and why do we do it? And, while occasional volunteers may not require the same depth of orientation and training that a longer term volunteer may warrant, remember that your one-time or occasional volunteers are an important link in your volunteer marketing network as they may refer someone who is suited to serve on a more frequent basis.

A thorough orientation process also lets volunteers know that your organization is committed to professionalism, and respects not only the intelligence of the volunteers but also the time and energy they have committed.

Training is the process of equipping volunteers with the information and skills required to effectively carry out the tasks they have agreed to perform for the organization.

Depending on the nature of your organization, the task(s) being assigned to the volunteer, and the number of volunteers you are dealing with, training may need to take place in a more formal ‘classroom’ setting, or it may be best handled one-on-one or through job shadowing.

Whichever format is most appropriate given your circumstances and the tasks being assigned to the volunteers, the training process should include topics such as:

- Skills, attitudes and knowledge required to perform the assigned tasks;
- Degree of decision-making authority to be assigned to the volunteer;
- Boundaries regarding what the volunteer can and cannot do, as well as rationale;
- How to handle emergencies, with specific details on any likely emergency situations;
- Who the volunteer directly reports to and goes to with any questions or concerns;
- How the volunteer’s role fits into the larger operation and mission of the organization.

Orientation and Training enable the organization and the volunteer to establish a clear understanding of what is expected from each party. In that way, Orientation and Training is a

vital link in the overall Volunteer Management process as it helps to define the starting point (Mile Zero) for supervision, evaluation, recognition and, if necessary, discipline or dismissal.

Additional Tips:

Continuously evaluate and improve your Orientation and Training material to keep it relevant and engaging. During Orientation and Training sessions, pay close attention to which portions have the participants engaged and which segments are less engaging.

Remember to allow ample time for questions during any Orientation or Training session. Not only does this allow participants to be more engaged and informed, but their questions may also suggest what information needs to be added to your Orientation and Training process.

At the conclusion of Orientation and Training, make sure that participants have a 'point person' they can go to with any questions that may arise once the formal session is over. Volunteers may have additional questions a few days, weeks or months later – by assigning a specific person for them to take their questions to, your organization is doing its part to establish good communications and demonstrating that you value the questions of your volunteers.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- If YOU were a new volunteer with an organization, what are some of the main things that you want to know about that organization and which could be included in orientation? Who is the most suitable person to lead such an orientation?
- Think about one or two volunteer positions within your organization – what type of training might a volunteer require? Draft a list of the key items to be included in training.

ServiceLink is proud to offer the following *Volunteer Engagement* workshops:

1. Identifying and Designing Volunteer Positions
2. Recruitment and Marketing
3. Screening and Interviewing Volunteer Applicants
4. Orientation and Training
5. Supervision and Evaluation
6. Discipline and Dismissal
7. Motivation and Recognition

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