

SKILL-BASED VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMING



In A Nutshell

What is Skill-Based?

HandsOn Network defines skill-based volunteer programming as:

- An innovative approach that utilizes the skills, experiences, and talents of volunteers matching them to nonprofit's needs.
- Goes beyond traditional consulting services.

Skilled volunteers include:

Professionals-- the construction manager who helps to design the community playground.

Trained, Experienced Hobbyists--the master gardener who plans the layout for their community garden,

Students-- graphic arts students who work as a team to design an organization's logo and display boards.

Why Skill-based?

The time is right—

Early retirement, unemployment, under-employment, baby boomers and empty nesters, implementation of community service graduation requirements at both secondary and college levels, the current political and media focus on volunteerism and community engagement all contribute to an increase in the number of individuals and groups seeking volunteer opportunities.

Meanwhile--

Nonprofits are experiencing increased demand and decreasing resources.

Changing Expectations

The baby boomers, millennials, and those younger are looking for volunteer opportunities that allow them to use their skills. Many are looking for opportunities to build resumes and to network with other professionals. The skilled volunteer wants to feel that they're a part of the organization. They are looking for opportunities to assume leadership for projects that positively impact their community.

These individuals are busy. Skilled volunteers want volunteer opportunities that are time specific, flexible and collaborative. Most are accustomed to using technology as a workplace tool. Thus, the skilled volunteers are most likely to apply for those opportunities that are episodic or project based. Virtual opportunities will allow skilled volunteers flexibility in terms of time and location. Retention of these volunteers will require that organizations utilize a more collaborative method of supervision and evaluation. Skilled volunteers will be able to make valuable suggestions regarding the work plan. They will also be able to provide valuable feedback regarding progress and suggestions for change.

A publication from Volunteer Centers of Michigan www.mivolunteers.org

START WITH THE QUESTION

What could your organization do with more time and skills?

SURVEY
DESIGN

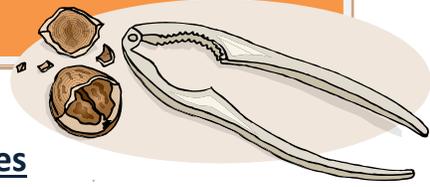
WRITING
—blogs,
articles,

EVENT
PLANNING

ADVOCACY

RESEARCH

GETTING STARTED



Seek Quick Successes

Start by working with staff and volunteers who (1) are experienced and demonstrate skills in volunteer supervision (2) demonstrate enthusiasm and the desire to engage skilled volunteers.

Look for projects that will show the greatest impact over a relatively short period of time. Use these projects to establish and pilot policies and procedures. Successful projects then serve as models and selling points for future projects.

Next Steps:

1. Form a focus group made up of interested staff and current volunteers
2. Develop and implement a needs assessment process
3. Set program goals
4. Educate board, staff, and volunteers.
5. Utilize the results of the needs assessment to choose a limited number of projects/volunteer positions.
6. Develop and/or revise volunteer policies and procedures.
7. Implement the program
8. Review and revise

Consider:

- Who are the major employers in your community? What skills are represented within those staffs?
- What other institutions are a part of your community—school systems, community service groups, etc.
- Who are your current volunteers? What skills do they possess?
- Ask potential volunteers what skills they possess and what would they like to contribute to your organization.

Policies & Procedures

Changing expectations require changes in policies and procedures. Most volunteer programs and policies use a top-down, “management” approach. In this approach the supervisor is “the boss”. Communication tends to be “one-way”—supervisor to volunteer. To recruit and retain skilled volunteers organizations must move from management to engaging.

Engaging means the following:

- **A lateral, parallel approach** in which volunteers are viewed integral parts of the organization
- **Support and collaboration** between staff and the volunteer.
- **Equal partnerships.** Volunteers are encouraged to assume leadership and to provide input.
- Flexibility in scheduling.

Tools

Organizations that have well developed, up-to-date volunteer applications, orientations, and handbooks will need to make few changes. Volunteer applications and interviews should ask volunteers about skills and interests. Major areas requiring review will be the supervision and evaluation process. As volunteers assume more responsibility organizations will need to develop policies and tools that facilitate accountability. Volunteer work plans, evaluation and feedback reporting forms are commonly used by skill-based volunteer programs. In addition, it is important that the volunteer evaluation process be interactive and collaborative with the supervisor acting as listener as well as speaker.

The following provide information including tutorials and toolkits:

Volunteer Centers of Michigan
<http://www.mivolunteers.org/programresources.aspx>

HandsOn Network
<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/tools/handsonuniversityonline>

Corporation for National and Community Services,
<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/sbv>

