Involving Volunteers: Essential for Community Technology Initiatives

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http://www.itrainonline.org/itrainonline/mmtk/

Why Are You Here?

The Presentation

- Part 1: Introduction & Why

- Part 2: Defining Volunteer Assignments

- Part 3: Keys to Success

- Part 4: The Volunteer Manager (handout)

- Part 5: Recruitment

- Part 6: Other resources (handout)

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Volunteers are essential

- The UN believes that volunteer involvement is an *essential* and *fundamental* element to the success of community technology initiatives.

- This philosophy lead UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to create the UNITeS initiative, to promote volunteer involvement in ICT4D efforts and to support volunteers who are engaged in such efforts.

Example: Volunteers are essential

Many successful CTCs attribute their achievements in communities not just to the technologies they make available, but to the *personal* assistance they provide in using those technologies. For many CTCs, there is only one sustainable way to provide substantial levels of personal assistance: involving volunteers.

What is a Volunteer?

Someone who:

- receives no wages from the organization (but may receive compensation from the org that has arranged the volunteer placement)

- commits a fixed number of hours to the org, for a fixed period (a day, a week, six months, a year...)

- is making his or her commitment of his or her own free will (although many count those who provide service as part of a class or court requirement as a volunteer)

Exercise #1

Why Involve Volunteers

Reasons to involve volunteers

1. Volunteers bring an attitude and spirit that is different (not necessarily better) than paid staff

2. They can free up time for paid staff to address other critical needs

3. They are motivated to get other family, friends and co-workers to volunteer and donate as well

4. They bring a luxury of focus; they can devote their time to just one topic or activity

-- more --

More Reasons to Involve Volunteers

5. They may have skills, experiences or expertise that current staff don't have

6. Because they are not financially dependent on the org, they may feel more free to criticize

7. Can be more objective/neutral if from outside the community

8. If from within the community, can bring first-hand knowledge to their contributions

§ *-- more --*

Even More Reasons
to Involve Volunteers

9. Some people (not everyone) served by ICT4D projects may be more inclined to work with volunteers than paid staff.

10. Volunteers can become advocates for your organization

11. Many funders rate volunteer involvement highly when choosing programs to support

Don't Volunteers Save Money?

▪Yes, but there are **dangers** if you emphasize this over the other benefits of involving volunteers, because the perception is:

- If you had more money, you would hire staff instead of involving volunteers.

- If you lay off your entire staff, you could save even more money.

Example of the "Danger"

- Imagine reporting to a donor that you had saved a certain amount of money by involving volunteers instead of paid staff for a particular function, and the donor saying, "Great! We're going to cut our funding for your organization, because you can save even more money by using volunteers instead of paid staff."

- Imagine a local workers union protesting your organization because you are involving volunteers instead of their members. Both are scenarios you want to avoid, and you will if you downplay the "volunteers save money" theme!

Part 2

Defining
volunteer assignments

Exercise #2

Brainstorming possible volunteer assignments

Volunteer assignments Ideas

- Supporting the organization's own ICT needs: networking computers, trouble-shooting equipment, upgrading computers, doing an inventory of equipment, etc.

- Outreaching to communities served by the organization, in particular certain types of users (educators, medical professionals, social workers, small entrepreneurs, senior citizens, youth, etc.)

- Teaching classes and/or creating class materials

-- more --

More volunteer assignment ideas

- Providing one-to-one assistance to people using the resources of a community technology initiative

- Building and maintaining a web site

- Building databases to manage information about an organization (activities, class attendants, volunteers, information gathered from those served by the initiative, etc.)

- Researching potential funding resources and writing funding proposals

-- more --

Even more volunteer assignment ideas

- Preparing an annual report or financial statement

- Offering professional expertise in human resources management, project management, legal issues, marketing, etc.

- Helping to schedule and manage other volunteers

The possibilities of what volunteers can do to support your organization are limited only by your imagination

Write out each volunteer assignment

• Include:

  o a title and narrative description of the assignment wit a statement of WHY it is important (don't just list what needs to be done)

  o the number of hours a day, a week or a month a volunteer is expected to contribute

  o length of commitment (a day? a month? six months?)

  o skills and experience needed ("the candidate must speak Spanish and English fluently, and must have experience in SQL programming")

  o how many will be accepted for the assignment, and if they will work as a team or independently

Why is writing out an assignment so important?

- volunteers will stay longer; there will be fewer misunderstandings about what a volunteer is supposed to do.

- tasks you have identified "in your head" may be too big or too many for any one volunteer to do.

- And it demonstrates to candidates how seriously you are about volunteer involvement, and will encourage them to take it just as seriously

If you cannot write out each and ever volunteer assignment, your organization is not ready to involve volunteers.

Part 3

Keys to Success in Involving Volunteers

Retaining Volunteers is Key

- Retaining volunteers -- keeping people involved past the first time they show up to help -- is one of the biggest problems faced by organizations trying to involve volunteers. No one wants to spend time recruiting volunteers who won't last beyond one or two days of service.

- What can you do to retain volunteers, and to make your involvement of volunteers successful and efficient?

Keys to Success

1. detailed assignment descriptions, in writing (as discussed previously).

2. Give every volunteer assignment an end date

3. Streamline the volunteer screening/orientation process (more on this later)

4. Start small and grow slowly

The Volunteer Candidate Orientation

- Hold the orientation at a regular time ever week, every month, every-other-month, etc. Every candidate should know when the next orientation is.

- Make the orientation no more than ONE hour.

- Provide complete information,in writing, about your organization, policies, systems, etc.

- Provide details on how to deal with common/particular issues

- Have the volunteer sign something that affirms agreement with policies and assignment details

- Direct candidates to next step.

Isn't This a LOT of Work?!?!

•This may seem like a lot to do but, over time, it will actually SAVE you time!

- o Screens out volunteers who would not make the commitment

- o Volunteers will stay longer;expectations are clear and your own commitment is obvious.

- o Volunteers will not need as much support during assignments.

- o You will not have to spend as much time tracking down "disappearing" volunteers, sorting out misunderstandings about assignments, etc.

Part 4

The Volunteer Manager

Volunteer Manager Description

- A volunteer manager can be someone already on your staff, who will have the additional responsibility of orienting all volunteers, tracking their progress, and serving as their advocate on staff.

- A volunteer manager can also be a VOLUNTEER, someone recruited specifically for this role.

The role of the Volunteer Manager

(Handout)

Results of having a volunteer manager

- Volunteers will be more committed to your organization, because they will feel supported, and see the organization as efficient and well-run.

- Data will be tracked and available for funders to show the effectiveness of your volunteer involvement, and this can lead to additional funding.

- Staff will become more excited about involving volunteers, because the effectiveness of the program will be presented to them regularly.

- Problems that may be preventing success in your volunteer-involvement program will be identified and addressed early, preventing further problems.

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Part 5

Recruitment

BEFORE Recruitment…

- Your recruitment activities will be for naught without the aforementioned.

- Recruitment is the LAST thing you do, not the first thing, in involving volunteers.

Consider Diversity

Reach out, if possible, to:

- youth

- elders/seniors

- women

- people with disabilities

- people from ethnic or religious groups that are traditionally under-represented at your organization

- other people who are often socially-excluded

Exercise #3

What motivates volunteers?

Volunteer Motivations

Because they:

- o want to support a particular cause, issue or community
- o want to learn about how NGOs work, or about issues faced by a particular NGO
- o want to learn more about a particular community, culture or issue
- o feel a personal obligation to "give back" to their community, or in support of a particular cause
- o want to counter a feeling of powerlessness about a particular issue or circumstance
- o want to exercise skills they are learning, or have learned.
- o want to take on roles and responsibilities their professional work may not provide.

Recruitment Options

o Local volunteers

o Non-Local Volunteers From Elsewhere in Your Country

o International Volunteers

o Online Volunteers

Local Volunteers

Local volunteers are people who live in the same geographic area as your organization. The advantage of involving local volunteers:

- they do not require any housing accommodations in order to provide service to your organization

- they can become local advocates for your organization, spreading your accomplishments through word-of-mouth, which is still be best form of marketing

- it shows your organization's commitment to local people, and that you are willing to invite the public into your organization to see first-hand what you are doing

Recruitment Options - Local

Recruit local volunteers via:

- o communities of faith (temples, mosques, churches, etc.)

- o businesses

- o schools

- o universities

- o associations (such as an association of Linux users)

- o unions

- o retired persons

Non-Local Volunteers From Elsewhere in Your Country

<u>Non-Local Volunteers From Elsewhere in Your Country</u> are people who do not live geographically-near your organization, and would need some kind of housing accommodation, and perhaps other support, in order to volunteer at your organization.

Accommodations may be secured through their sponsoring organization or through a donor.

Recruitment Options - Non-Local Volunteers From Elsewhere in Your Country

o communities of faith (temples, mosques, churches, etc.)

o schools

o universities

o large businesses or corporations

o associations (such as an association of Linux users)

o United Nations Volunteers (which does sometimes fund so-called "national" volunteers for placements of six months to two years)

International Volunteers

International volunteers are people who have a permanent address outside of the country where your organization is located, and would need some kind of housing accommodation, and perhaps other support, in order to volunteer at your organization.

Accommodations may be secured through their sponsoring organization or through a donor.

Recruitment Options - International Volunteers

o United Nations Volunteers, Peace Corps, GeekCorps, NetCorps Canada, VSO, or other volunteer sending agencies

o universities

o large businesses or corporations

Online Volunteers

Online volunteers may, or may not, live in the country where your organization is located. They may be down the street or around the world. Online volunteering means tasks completed, in whole or in part, by a person via the Internet from a remote computer, usually at home, at work or at a university. It's also called virtual volunteering, cyber service, telementoring, and various other names. Online volunteering is the same as telecommuting, but instead of employees, it involves volunteers.

Tasks for Online Volunteers

- Online volunteers can:
    - translate documents
    - research topics
    - create web pages
    - edit and prepare proposals & press releases
    - contribute to curricula
    - develop databases
    - design graphics
    - offer legal or business expertise
    - tutor students
    - mentor young people
    - moderate online discussion groups
    - manage other online volunteers
    - and more….

Recruitment Options - Online Volunteers

- www.onlinevolunteering.org

- www.idealist.org

- universities

- large businesses or corporations

- associations (such as an association of Linux users)

Part 6

Other Resources
(Handout)

Resources on:

- How volunteers applying ICT4D are contributing to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- More assignment ideas for ICT4D volunteers

- Resources for volunteers applying ICT4D

- Resources for better volunteer involvement, particularly regarding ICT4D volunteers

- More information about "online volunteering"

- Resources in Spanish

- Screening Volunteers to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Conclusion

This unit has given you a *lot* to think about and, initially, it can seem like it creates more work for your organization, not less. Please note, however, that the information provided in this unit is not based on theory; it is based on actual practice. These materials are focused on what WORKS in making a volunteer involvement scheme effective, and making volunteer involvement worth the effort.