

Benefits of Policies for Volunteer Programs

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Many organizations simply have not had the time to attend to defining the values and policies within which volunteering takes place. Given the current situation wherein everyone is trying to do more and more with less and less, this is understandable. Yet, this is an area that must be attended to. This is not to say that policies will resolve all problems and eliminate all hazards. However, policy development and implementation will go a long way to reduce the dangers and risks which currently exist in the field of volunteering.

There are many other good reasons to define policies for volunteer programs. Here are some examples:

- All organizations make policy decisions regularly. They just do not call them policies, and they often do not write them down. So, writing your policies can be a simple matter of formalizing decisions which have already been made.
- Writing decisions in the form of policies and distributing them to paid and volunteer staff can lend them greater import and perhaps better ensure compliance.
- Many policies are developed because of crises or problems. When something goes wrong, it becomes apparent that a position or policy is needed, either to decide what to do now, or to prevent the situation from recurring. So policies determine action and set boundaries beyond which one cannot go.
- Policies clarify responsibilities and define lines of communication and accountability.
- Policies provide a structure for sound management. Since they often identify the 'what' and sometimes even the 'how,' they can bring about program improvements and increase effectiveness.
- Policies ensure continuity over time and from staff to staff. In this sense, policies endure. They promote equity and standardization.
- Policies establish values, beliefs and directions for volunteer involvement. They connect the volunteer program to the larger organization and its mission.
- Policies can be a source of pride and satisfaction for managers of volunteers in a well-run program. They articulate the importance of volunteers and form an important, concrete, ongoing element of volunteer recognition. Policies thereby contribute to increased volunteer satisfaction and productiveness, and enhance volunteer retention.

Principles of sound and professional volunteer program management are equally important. In fact, policies and good management inform and support one another. Both are critical to successful, responsible, and safe voluntary action.

Types of Policies

In looking at the benefits of policies, and in considering the various definitions and descriptions of policies outlined above, four general purposes or types of policies emerge as central to our work in volunteer programs:

- policy as a statement of belief/position/value
- policy as a method of risk management
- policy as a rule
- policy as an aid to program effectiveness

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