CLD2-8

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Mobilizing Members, Volunteers and Leaders in Community Organizations

Calling the Group to Action

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Introduction

To effectively serve community needs, members, volunteers and leaders of community organizations must be mobilized to action. **Mobilizing** is the key component of a volunteer program and is the step in which service, leadership and action all begin. Those volunteers, members and leaders who first understand their duties, roles and responsibilities and have the background, knowledge and understanding to perform will not only serve the organization more effectively but also the clientele with whom they have contact. This understanding is developed through an effective program of generating and educating volunteers, members and leaders who are well-equipped to serve the organization.

Mobilizing is the all-important component of volunteer and community development that the program coordinator has been working toward. After devoting considerable time, energy and resources to generating and educating new recruits, they are actually mobilized to perform the role for which they have been selected. All too often, coordinators of community volunteer programs are in such a hurry to engage new recruits that insufficient time is spent generating and educating them. Engaging members, volunteers and leaders in the performance of tasks and roles which they have agreed to fulfill too quickly will generally result in frustration, poor performance and a poor retention rate.

Regardless of the number of individuals in an organization, little gets accomplished without a call to action. Simply belonging to an organization serves little purpose except to increase the membership roster. Organizational participants must be mobilized in order for anything to be accomplished. The Mobilizing category of the GEMS (Generating, Educating, Mobilizing and Sustaining) Model of Volunteer Administration consists of three steps: **engage**, **motivate** and **supervise**. Engaging involves calling them to action by appealing to individual interests. Motivating involves identifying and tapping personal interests, needs and stimuli. Supervising provides guidance for positive results and effective involvement.

Engage: Serving the Organization

The initial step in mobilizing a member, volunteer or leader is to engage individuals and create a personal interest in the organization or its programs. After newcomers have been generated and educated, they are given the opportunity to engage in the task or activity they have been selected to perform and are given the tools to do so. It is important to note that service to the organization and its programs cannot occur without the engagement of its volunteers and leadership. Not all members of an organization will choose to serve by being a volunteer or a leader. Likewise, most community organizations could benefit

Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes time. Vision with action can change the world.

– Joel Barker

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by involving a broader cadre of volunteers rather than simply limiting the volunteer pool to the organization's membership.

Recruiting members, volunteers and leaders will be much easier and more effective if the following question is considered: "What roles or activities will engage new people in this organization or program?"

Motivate: Understanding Why We Do What We Do

Individuals are motivated to participate in volunteer activities for a variety of reasons. Organizational leaders or administrators of volunteer programs should understand the motives that contribute to beginning, continuing and discontinuing volunteer service. Understanding what motivates individuals contributes to the success of recruitment initiatives. Understanding what keeps the people motivated helps the organizational leader and volunteer administrator enhance the experience of the individual and improves retention rates and longevity. Being aware of discontinuation motives allows the organizational leader or volunteer administrator to avoid them and contributes to retention. The relationship between volunteers and the organizations they serve is defined by two elements: individual motivation and the needs of the organization. The volunteer experience has the potential to satisfy the needs of the organization as well as the volunteer, leader and member and should account for the individual's motivation to serve.

Individuals serve an organization because they expect certain motivational needs to be met during the act of service. Clarifying the motives prompting involvement in an organization is one means of attempting to stimulate participation and involvement. Each service experience and engagement opportunity is accompanied by the individual's own expectations and is precipitated by unique personal motivators. Determining these unique personal motivators and expectations can contribute to providing volunteers, members and leaders with a satisfactory and rewarding experience. Organizations encountering difficult volunteers, leaders or members often have not taken the time to identify the individual's motivation to serve. The result is an inappropriate placement.

The three categories of human motivation include **achievement**, **affiliation** and **power**. Achievement motives are those which influence individuals to take pride in accomplishments and have a desire to achieve excellence. Affiliation motives influence people to be most concerned about their relationships with other people or groups. Power motives drive a desire for control and influence. Achievement, affiliation and power motives are important determinants of performance and success in work and volunteer service for community organizations.

To determine which category of factors (achievement, affiliation or power) motivates you, consider the answers to the following questions:

- "What type of service role do I prefer: Accomplishing a task, serving on a committee or being in charge of a group?"
- "What type of recognition do I most prefer: Being recognized for my contributions and accomplishments, being recognized for belonging to and participating in the group, or being recognized for my leadership qualities?"

Supervise: Helping Others to Be Their Best

The needs, skills and knowledge of the individual volunteer will demonstrate how much and how often supervision is needed. During the supervising phase, organizational leaders and volunteer administrators

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should determine how well the member, volunteer or leader is utilizing the available resources to perform their assigned task. On-going guidance, support and advice from the volunteer program administrator, supervisor or another volunteer can help lead to a positive and productive experience.

For some organizational leaders, volunteer administrators and program managers, working with people can be a daunting, difficult or challenging task. Involving volunteers is difficult for the new volunteer administrator, program manager or anyone who has difficulty delegating tasks. A good supervisor is an enabler of human resources. The supervision process needs both an individual who receives responsibility and a supervisor who must be willing to delegate responsibility to another. The supervisor delegates the task that she or he likes to do because this is the job that he or she would be best at supervising.

Not everyone can be an effective supervisor. Consider the following questions:

- "How do I like to be supervised?"
- "What supervision style is most effective with my personality?"
- "Can everyone be effectively supervised in the same manner?"
- "Can an individual be effectively supervised in the same manner all of the time?"

Conclusion

Mobilizing members, volunteers and leaders to engage in their role and serve the organization and its programs is beneficial not only to any community organization but also to its staff, clientele and the volunteers, leaders and members who serve it as well. Mobilizing adds the hands and feet to community organizations and enables and empowers its membership, leadership and volunteers to more effectively represent, lead and serve. The engagement of community-based organizations cannot happen without mobilizing volunteers, leaders and members to action. No matter what the membership roster of an organization shows, without engaged, mobilized members, volunteers and leaders, the benefit and outreach of the organization cannot be extended to audiences and communities.

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