

Cultivating Leadership

One of the reasons to recruit and train volunteers is to build your organization's core team. When you encourage leadership development within your organization, you make the organization more sustainable. If one leader encounters problems (or one of them is burnt out), work can still continue. Training staff and volunteers to develop strong leadership skills will create new opportunities for growth for your organization. Encouraging leadership is good for an organization's sustainability and for ensuring a consistent quality of work.

A system for leadership development should build upon your volunteer management system and include these steps: identifying leaders, giving them leadership training, sharing power, preparing them to represent the organization, and evaluating their performance.

Make sure that the way you select leaders is transparent and accessible. Anyone with the qualifications who makes the necessary effort should be eligible. Be sure that leaders of the organization understand that they need to include everyone in their work and report back. Encourage more experienced volunteers to mentor new volunteers, and strongly discourage group social events that do not include everyone.

Identifying Leaders

In your day-to-day work, you can identify potential leaders by analyzing volunteers' skills in terms of leadership qualities. Once you know what these are, you can strengthen these skills and address any weaknesses in order to help the individual develop and flourish within the organization. In

order to increase the likelihood of successful leadership, try to provide guidance to bring out individual leadership styles.

If you find leadership skills in one of your volunteers, the next step is to sit down in a one-on-one meeting to see how she envisions herself growing within your organization. Encourage the individual by pointing out the qualities you see in her and discussing ways she can take on new responsibilities or help the organization to grow. Once you have agreed on the new responsibilities, write up a short job description and invite her to discuss it with you or make any edits to it so that you are both clear about what is expected.

Leadership Preparation

When a volunteer begins to take on these new responsibilities, help her to prepare for new challenges. For example, before a volunteer speaks publicly on behalf of the organization, you can go over some of the items to highlight in the talk together and discuss what to expect from the event.

Not every hard-working person is a leader. If a person spends a lot of time volunteering in your organization, she might think of herself as one of its leaders. If this person possesses some but not all of the qualities necessary for leadership, then it is not appropriate to put her in a leadership position. You can encourage her to overcome her weaknesses or you can guide this person through her responsibilities, but do not waste time on somebody who is not ready to be a leader.

a new leader in your organization is planning an event in which several groups will work together, it is a good idea to have a one-on-one meeting with each leader, a meeting with all the leaders together, and then a larger group meeting with all people involved in the event, to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Reflection and Evaluation

After a volunteer has taken on a new leadership role and you have had the opportunity to see her use her skills, have a one-on-one meeting with her to discuss her performance, point out things that she did well, and give feedback on any areas where there is room for improvement.

Always start with positive input before anything negative. As the volunteer begins to gain more confidence in the new role, you can consider letting her work more independently, with less direction from you.