Engaging Volunteers as Partners: Lessons learned working with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, National Ski Patrol, and Community Recreation Volunteers

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SORP is the voice for advancing the outdoor recreation profession.
TODAY’S PRESENTERS

Nate Trauntvein, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Utah State University
Nate.trauntvein@usu.edu

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QUESTIONS?

Type your question in the QUESTION pane in the Control Panel.
Parks and Recreation
Volunteer, Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Research
Why we ♥ Volunteers

• Volunteers donate to charity at twice the rate of non-volunteers
• The rate of volunteering is on its way up
  • 2018 - 30.3%
  • 2016 – 24.9%
• Estimated value of $167 Billion
Volunteer Management Myths

- Our volunteers work for free
- Volunteers are only good for manual labor
- Youth don't make good volunteers
- Older adults are limited in the tasks they can perform
- Being a parent prepares you to coach soccer / Being a hiker makes you a good trail builder
Myth #1: Our Volunteers Work for Free

Much like employees, volunteers are an investment. If you don’t treat them well, they are going to leave.

Volunteers require training.

Volunteers need to be evaluated.

Volunteers need to be rewarded.
So what do we focus on in these trainings?

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Volunteers

Management Actions
- Matches Skills of Volunteer
- Introduces New Volunteers

Satisfaction
- Volunteer Efficacy
  \[ R^2 = .244^{***} \]

Participation
- Level of Involvement
  \[ R^2 = .295^{***} \]
- Group Integration
  \[ R^2 = .173^{***} \]
Myth #2: Volunteers are only good for manual labor

While it is true that they are great for park cleanups and coaching they can do more:

- Administrative work
- Park maintenance
- Fundraising
- Program instructors
Volunteer Strengths

- Of the 30,000 ski patrollers, a vast majority are volunteer (~23,000)
- Spend an average of 20 days
- Ski patrolers certify in (avalanche, mountain rescue, first response, teaching, etc.)
Myth #3: Youth Aren't Good Volunteers

Youth are not always the most mature volunteers but:

- They provide energy.
- They are the future (no matter how cliché).
- They understand technology.
- They often are required to volunteer:
  - Service learning in high school and college
  - Religious
  - Scouts
  - Community service?
Youth Volunteers

There is mutual benefits here

- Volunteers have a 27% higher likelihood of finding employment
- Volunteers without a HS Diploma 51%
- Volunteers in rural areas 55%
Myth #4: Older Adults are Physically Limited

- Years don't determine age
- Disposable time and income
- Expanded skill sets
- Matching the job to the volunteer
Tips for Working with Older Adults

- Know their physical abilities
- Watch for Fatigue if much older
- Mix older volunteers with younger volunteers when appropriate
- Don’t ignore a deteriorating situation
- Involve grown children when appropriate.
Myth #5: Being a parent makes you a good soccer player / Being a hiker makes you a good trail builder

Reproductive ability does not make you a great coach.

- Training is important
- Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate
- Opportunities for promotion
Maximizing your Volunteer Management Efforts
Recommendation #1: Communication

Make a concerted effort to track, recognize, and communicate regularly with agency volunteers.

- Contact information
- Preferred method of contact
- Emergency contact information
- Referral information
- Group affiliation
- Interests
- Have an agreement to participate (waiver)
Recommendation #2: Volunteer Handbook

The Handbook Should Include:

• Mission Statement, Goals, Objectives
• Volunteer Opportunities
• Role Definitions
• How to become a volunteer
• Working with Volunteers Info;
  • Accident procedures
  • PR and conduct
  • Volunteer recognition
  • Volunteer evaluation
  • Volunteer Release
Recommendation #3: Volunteer Group Integration

Provide opportunities for volunteer groups to interact

• Share Experiences
  • Success Stories
  • Failures
• Volunteer Meetings, Newsletters, Blogs, etc.
Recommendation #4: Know your Volunteers

• What motivates them?
  • Is it the location?
  • Is it the community?
  • Is it their role with the organization?
  • Is it getting to play on the fields on Sunday?

• How do you know?
  • Evaluations, surveys, etc.
Recommendation #5: Reach out to Underserved Populations

- Identify who is underserved
- Seek to understand the populations that are being served
  - Focus Groups with group leaders
  - Identify their needs
  - Identify their barriers
  - Identify the best way to communicate
THANK YOU!

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