Designing Volunteer Roles for Results

presented by

Rick Lynch
The design of some volunteer jobs causes motivation problems and turnover. To create motivating jobs for volunteers, follow these tips:

1. Make sure the job is one the volunteer’s supervisor wants done. Ask that person these questions:
   A. What are some parts of your job that must be done but that you don’t like doing?
   B. What are some things you wish you could do but lack the time to get to?
   C. What are some things you would like to see done but that no one has the skills to do?

   Tasks the supervisor wants done are tasks that will be valued and appreciated.

2. Make sure the job is one the volunteer wants to do. Instead of trying to fit the volunteer to the job, build a job around the volunteer’s skills and interests.

3. Make sure the volunteer knows the purpose of the job. Volunteers find jobs most meaningful if they can see the connection of the job to the mission of the organization.

4. Make sure the volunteer has ownership, either by herself or with a team of volunteers. Volunteers should be able to feel that something is theirs, a neighborhood, a group of citizens, an individual seeking assistance, a parking lot, for example.

5. Volunteer jobs should define the results the volunteer is responsible for achieving, not simply list the tasks the volunteer performs.

6. Volunteers should have the ability to make some decisions regarding their work. They should be empowered to fulfill their responsibilities.

7. Volunteers should be able to tell if they are doing a good job. There should be some mechanism to give them feedback on how well they are achieving their results.
Job Design Worksheet

Give the volunteer ownership
What can the volunteer own? This might be a project, a group of residents, or a neighborhood association.

Define the assignment in terms of results.
What are the results expected of the volunteer? What are we trying to accomplish? What is the point of the assignment? (These are all the same question, expressed in different terms.)

Give the volunteer the authority to think.
What decisions can the volunteer make as he or she pursues each result? Are there actions that the volunteer needs to have approved in advance of taking action? Are there decisions that the volunteer has to wait for someone else to make? Does the volunteer have access to the information necessary to make those decisions?

Define measures of success.
What information will tell us if the volunteer/team is achieving the desired result? How will we collect it?
Below are fifteen statements taken from actual job descriptions. The title of the person doing the job is in parentheses. For each, determine if the statement holds the person responsible for achieving a result or for performing an activity. If your answer is that the item is an activity, see if you can state the desired result of performing the activity.

1. (Salesperson) Increase profits from sales by ten percent this year.

2. (Mental Health Counselor) Spend at least fourteen hours per week in direct counseling of clients.

3. (Fire Marshall) Inspect all commercial properties for fire hazards once per year.

4. (Receptionist) People coming to or calling the office will view us as a competent, professional organization.

5. (Trainer) Conduct fifteen training sessions per month.

6. (Police Officer) Citizens in patrol area will be safe from burglaries.

7. (Bank Officer) Increase the number of long-term deposits at our bank.

8. (Teacher) Meet with children’s parents once per quarter.

9. (Housekeeper in hotel) Customers will be satisfied with the cleanliness of their rooms.

10. (Hospital Cook) Patients will find their meals appetizing.

11. (Clerk) Increase office efficiency through improved office procedures.

12. (Purchasing Officer) Staff will be satisfied with the quality of their supplies.

13. (Community Relations Officer) Make presentations to citizen’s groups.

14. (Master Gardener) Callers will be able to solve their plant disease problems.

15. (Typist) Type all correspondence in a timely manner without typographical error.