GETTING VOLUNTEERS STARTED, THE RIGHT WAY

A new volunteer shows up, full of energy and enthusiasm, ready to go to work. That's great, right? Absolutely - as long as you take the time to make sure the volunteer's work will be done as safely, for them and for the organization, as possible.

Orientation – What kind of orientation program do you have for volunteers? (By the way, it's never too late to "orient" volunteers who have been with you for years.) What follows is a short checklist of the basics. You might consider incorporating these items into a packet to give to all volunteers, so everyone understands what you expect and require.

- Registration form – This can include not only the volunteer's contact information, hours of availability, etc., but also areas of interest, special skills, allergies or other medical conditions that might affect volunteer assignments, and other such information.

- Description of available volunteer assignments.

- Chain of command – Who does the volunteer report to? Who do they see in the organization when they need something, or have a complaint or problem?

- Safety rules and other rules.

- Time sheets

- List of tax-deductible expenses and/or reimbursement forms.

- Photo/video release forms, for your newsletter, Website, etc.

Screening and training – Conduct background checks on volunteers who would be in contact with vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly, and who would have access to the organization's financial information. Make sure volunteers demonstrate that they are physically able to perform the tasks you expect to assign them. This not only reduces the risk of injury, it also reduces the risk that a volunteer with a preexisting injury might claim that the injury actually occurred while he or she was volunteering for your organization. Have veteran volunteers help train new ones.

Accountability – Just because volunteers are unpaid, that doesn't mean they are unaccountable. Require them to follow your rules, just as though they were paid employees. Discipline volunteers, and even terminate them, if they do not follow your rules.

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