

Supervision

Supervising this generation of volunteers is distinctly different than supervising the traditional envelope-stuffer volunteer. These new volunteers may be more self-directed and use more initiative; as a result, they may require ready access to senior staff. The relationship should be based on mutual respect.

BASIC SUPERVISORY PRINCIPLES

The basic principles of supervising staff also apply in volunteer relationships.

- Offer ongoing communication, periodic performance assessments, and assignment status meetings to help volunteers complete their projects thoroughly and in a timely manner.
- Be sure that your volunteer has the staff and other resources needed to complete his/her project.
- Use a clearly defined position description and/or volunteer agreement letter to establish expectations, time commitments, and to evaluate the performance of your volunteer periodically.
- Be sure that the person assigned to supervise a volunteer does indeed have the time and resources to do so. A volunteer left without consistent staff contact may feel unappreciated and without guidance and support and may soon leave the organization. Interact regularly with the volunteer and ask questions about the position, the working conditions and challenges.
- If problems arise, deliver your feedback without blaming the volunteer. Use "I" statements to communicate your concern. For instance, if a volunteer does not show up regularly, you might say, "I fear something bad may have happened when I do not hear from you. I want to be sure that you are okay if you are unable to come to the office. What can we do to make sure you let me know next time?"
- Document all conversations with volunteers to support decisions to terminate.
- A volunteer should be dismissed only as a last resort and with all the sensitivity and tact you would use in terminating an employee: choose a quiet, private setting; identify the expected behavior and the specific problems you have observed; allow the volunteer to speak; document the meeting in writing.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPERVISING OLDER VOLUNTEERS

There are a few special considerations to keep in mind when managing volunteers in their 40s, 50s, 60s and older.

- Newly retired volunteers often seek flexible schedules and a sense of purpose in their experience.
- They expect to be treated as an "employee" even if they are not paid.
- They want to feel that their work is contributing to the mission of the organization, so make an effort to explain to your volunteer how his or her work is furthering your agency's overall goals and strategic plans.
- Be aware that some older volunteers may have physical or other limitations that need to be accommodated. Create a comfortable, open relationship with your volunteers so that they can be candid about special needs they may have, and be ready to adapt volunteer assignments as needed.
- Older volunteers with considerable work experience and high-level skills to offer may not require supervision per se, but rather may simply need a staff liaison to consult as he or she completes a specific

assignment. A volunteer developing a disaster recovery plan may simply need assistance with community contacts in seeking an alternative worksite, for instance, or a health insurance consultant may need access to the agency executive director or finance committee to gather past practices information before researching health insurance options for the agency.

These kinds of senior level volunteers require a team approach to supervision. They may have a level of expertise in a particular area not held by anyone else on staff, and hence bring incredibly valuable knowledge and experience to the benefit of the organization.

- Older adults with a lifetime of work experience may be more comfortable in asking for what they need, whether that is flexible scheduling, additional training, or access to senior staff. In that sense, supervision can be easier.
- An evaluation form can be useful in providing the volunteer with the opportunity to tell you about his or her experience with your organization. It is important that if you use such a form, that you have a way to acknowledge their feedback and make changes as appropriate.

See Appendix for More Resources:

Sample Position Description	A-2
Volunteer Feedback Form.....	A-26