Demystifying Working with Volunteers

Samantha Barr & Erin Spink
Learning Outcomes:

• understand your role as a staff partner to volunteers

• learn tactics for handling common challenges with volunteers

• develop tools to ensure success on both sides of the volunteer/staff relationship
Introductions – Who We Are

Samantha Barr
Manager, Alumni Relations & Advancement Campaigns
University of Toronto

Erin Spink, MA (Leadership)
Senior Manager, Volunteer Engagement
Canadian Cancer Society
2 Secrets to partnering with volunteers
SECRET 1

THE ONLY PROBLEM WITH VOLUNTEERS...

IS THAT THEY`RE PEOPLE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR ERIN SPINK
It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.

- Steve Jobs

“BASIC ASSUMPTION”
The Importance of Volunteers

• How many volunteers do you have vs. staff?
  • CCS ratio is 150:1

• Are your programs delivered by volunteers?

• Volunteer engagement and giving
  • Your network, ambassadors and more likely to be donors or have soft-credit

• Volunteers bring authenticity
  • Allow staff to dedicate their time and focus on what they do best, while bringing in talent who are adding real value & they can often be the longer-term relationship holders
  • They can bring relationships and representation to key stakeholder groups

• Basic volunteerism stats
  • Ave 13M Canadians volunteer annually (age 15+)
  • Est. 55% of charities & non-profits are run entirely by volunteers
Who’s Driving the Bus?
Common Challenges: Do any of these sound familiar?

• Managing expectations
  • Front end investment that needs to be made – e.g. training
  • Coming with enthusiasm, but not the context
• “Quicker to do it myself”
  • Don’t always have the time to bring volunteers up to speed
  • Preparing the work – parsing pieces of work to delegate takes time
• Working with a volunteer engagement partner
  • Maybe you don’t even have one!
  • Disconnect between the fundraiser and the VE partner
• Number of volunteers
  • Managing a team of people and having to manage those relationships
  • Volunteer committees
• Clarity on decision-making and roles and responsibilities
  • Who works for whom? Power structure
  • Volunteers may have a longer history than the fundraiser!
• The Badly-Behaved volunteer
  • You know (& whom) what we’re talking about!!!
Exercise #1

What challenges have you experienced?

Discuss around your table

Use one of the examples provided or share your own!
Solutions

• Moving from being the “doer” to the “facilitator”
• Role descriptions or a project brief
• Asking “What do you want out of this?”
• Expectation management
  • Providing context, timelines, respecting volunteers’ time by providing prepared work and materials for them
Partnership Basics - Staff/Volunteer Relations
Understanding Your Role

• Volunteering is changing
  • Volunteers are sophisticated – they have high expectations
  • What are you asking volunteers to do?

• Partnership, a relationship that has to be managed
  • Thinking of volunteers as “time donors”

• How do you work with your other donors?
  • Share vision, identify ways they can help create that vision
  • Outline details, expectations, resources and be available for support

• You might not always have something for a volunteer to do!
Exercise #2

• Do any of these solutions help with the challenges you identified earlier?
  • If not, brainstorm some solutions that would fit
Sharing!

- What challenges did you discuss and what solutions did you identify?
Closing Reflection

• What did we learn today?

• What were your “aha” moments?

• What new ideas and tools are you walking away with?