

## Volunteer Engagement Lifecycle?

**Speaker:** This is the volunteering engagement cycle. Volunteering stands at number 7 and it is one of the nine points that form the volunteer engagement cycle. Often the rest of the points are ignored and importance is given only to volunteering. Let us go through all the points. The first point – why do we need the volunteer is important. You need the answer for this question to find the right volunteer for your organization.

You can apply the need assessment method here and also identify the resources required to engage the volunteer. For example it is necessary for the CEO of your organization to meet the volunteer, not at induction but at a later stage to motivate him. This has to be planned well in advance and is also necessary for cost benefit analysis. You need to analyse if the cost involved in engaging the volunteer is cost-effective or not.

The volunteer's job description (JD) should have two things. The first one is the tasks expected and second is the deliverables. If a person volunteers for a stipulated duration of time, when will you know in the volunteer engagement cycle if he was successful? The next point is who are we looking for? What is our target group and what will appeal to them? In an employee motivation program it is said that every employee has different levels of motivation within the same department and organization, the same holds true for volunteers.

If you need a volunteer for fund-raising, you will have to find someone who has previous experience in fund-raising or in case you are trying to augment your staff even a fresher with interest in fund-raising will do. Now where will you source such volunteers from? Are there fund-raising online groups or online communities which have active discussions or agencies? Volunteers should not be used to engage new volunteers. All engagement should happen through the employees.

How to recruit volunteers? Selection and matching are the two important processes involved. Different volunteers will have different criteria for selection like skills, character and other parameters. During the process of selection these qualities should be assessed. The points of job description and selection of volunteers remain same for employees too. During the process of matching, the interests of the volunteers should also be taken into consideration.

A person who excels in fund-raising for livelihood projects may or may not be able to excel in fund-raising for children's projects. On his first day at any organization, a volunteer is bound to feel nervous and uneasy. Does your organization have a person assigned to introduce and interact with the volunteer on his first day? This clarity has to be adopted and practised by the organization. Induction and training are two different aspects.

While induction has to necessarily be given to each and every volunteer, training is specifically given but not necessarily to everyone. Next comes support to the volunteer, this support could be in terms of volunteer policies. It is essential for an organization to have volunteer policies or a manual, which should be given to the

volunteer right from the start. This will make it easier for him to know the kind of support he will receive from the organization for e.g. conveyance, food, etc. If he agrees and abides, then he is best suited for the role. In the case he does not agree, then maybe he is better suited for volunteering in some other organization and you can guide him there.

We now move on to supervision that includes monitoring and evaluation. It has been noted that volunteers who are not evaluated and told how they are performing have left organizations. Hence monitoring and evaluation has to be conducted on regular basis and is helpful to both, the volunteer and the employee. Retaining the volunteer is the biggest problem faced. It comes on the eight number of the volunteer engagement lifecycle.

The question we should ask is what is the work culture of our organization? Is it in alignment with the volunteer we are seeking? Criteria like acceptable dress code, code of conduct, etc should be identified in the matching process itself. Lastly exit – this is basically the removal from what you had assigned to the volunteer initially. This may or may not be a removal from the organization. The exit can mean the end of a particular project and should be concluded with an exit interview with the volunteer. Volunteers are a living, walking and talking advertisement of the organization they are associated with. Hence volunteer engagement should be on a mutually rewarding contentment basis.