Volunteer Leader Training: Training Volunteers to Lead Nonprofit Organizations to Increase Positive Social Change

Abstract

Volunteer leaders are an often underutilized resource in nonprofit organizations. However, as volunteer administrators are stretched to their capacity, others in the organization must provide leadership to volunteers. One way for nonprofit organizations to increase their capacity is to develop the leadership skills and ability of identified volunteers. This workshop describes a Delphi study conducted with volunteer administrators to identify the necessary leadership competencies for volunteer leaders. A workshop was developed and delivered, in addition to an evaluation instrument to assess volunteer leaders on the identified competencies. This session will present the content of the volunteer leader workshop and challenge participants to develop their own teaching activities to incorporate in a similar workshop.

Introduction

Administrators in volunteer-based nonprofit organizations wear multiple hats. Often times, leading volunteers is not the sole, nor even the primary responsibility of a volunteer administrator in these organizations (Fisher & Cole, 1993). Fisher and Cole (1993) suggest that one developmental opportunity for volunteers is education and training that prepares them to accept leadership responsibility within the organization. However, research indicates that volunteer leadership remains underutilized in nonprofit organizations (Cooperation, 2007b).

[Organization] is an organization that provides professional development and educational support to local nonprofit organizations. During the fall, 2015 semester, a Delphi study was conducted to determine the competencies that should be included in a workshop for potential volunteer leaders. Through the Delphi study, experts in volunteer administration reached consensus on 42 competencies. These competencies were incorporated into a workshop delivered to potential volunteer leaders during the spring, 2016. A corresponding volunteer leader assessment was developed to evaluate the development of workshop participants on the taught leadership competencies.

The purpose of this workshop will be to share the methodology used to identify the 42 competencies, the structure and content of the resulting workshop, and the corresponding volunteer leader assessment. Participants will engage in examples of the teaching activities implemented in the workshop. Finally, workshop participants will be asked to develop their own ideas for teaching and learning activities for a volunteer leader workshop.

Learning objectives include:

1. Examine the volunteer leader competencies identified by volunteer administrators.

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2. Evaluate the volunteer leader workshop developed to teach the identified competencies.
3. Generate teaching activities to incorporate in a volunteer leader development workshop.

Literature Review

Nonprofit volunteers and for-profit employees differ in their reasoning and motivation for engaging in their respective jobs (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2014; Cnaan & Cascio, 1999; Pearce, 1993). For this reason, leadership styles directed at for-profit organizations are not appropriate for nonprofit organizations (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Moreover, the traditional single leader model is becoming less effective as the demands of nonprofit organizations increase. Small (2007) suggests

> "Traditionally, leadership theories have focused on vertical leadership, in which a person who has been appointed to a position of authority exerts downward influence on subordinates. However, appointed leaders are not the only ones who can demonstrate leadership behavior. In team situations, team members can exert influence on each other and share the leadership process." (p. 5)

The transition toward team work structures, particularly in capacity-limited nonprofit organizations, can present a challenge in providing the leadership necessary to achieve organizational success. Volunteer-based organizations must identify ways to provide the requisite leadership for their volunteers to accomplish personal and organizational goals. One way to do this is to develop leaders within the volunteer ranks.

> "Volunteer leadership remains a vast untapped resource for nonprofits not only to expand capacity for service and volunteering but also to provide a strategy for addressing the retention challenge facing volunteer managers…In addition, these leadership roles, if properly supported, cultivate the consciousness, capabilities, and commitment in volunteers, and create lifelong advocates for causes and the change that citizens seek to make in their communities." (Cooperation, 2007b, p. 15).

Building volunteer leaders provides benefits beyond increased capacity for the nonprofit organization and relief for the volunteer administrator. Programs led by volunteers have a greater impact on communities (Texas AgriLife, n.d.). Nonprofit organizations provide opportunities for individuals to give back to their community. However, retaining those volunteers is a challenge faced by nonprofit organizations across the globe. At times the volunteer can be less invested in the mission of organization than the paid staff, causing the volunteer to leave rather than return to work towards a common goal (Cooperation, 2007b). According to the Cooperation of National and Community Service (2007a) "one out of three volunteers who volunteer in one year do not volunteer the next year" (p. 1). Moreover, 65.4 million individuals volunteered in 2005, with only 44.5 returning in 2006 (Cooperation, 2007a). However, Fisher and Cole (1993) indicate that providing

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volunteers with a means to "advance" in the organization provides an incentive to continue their service.

Northouse (2013) describes leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). Boyd (2003) revealed numerous competencies and skills leaders of nonprofit organizations should possess to effectively facilitate the operation of the organization. Some of these competencies include: organizational leadership, systems leadership, organizational culture, personal skills, and management skills (Boyd, 2003). However, this study focused on paid nonprofit administrators and directors as the leaders of the nonprofit organization.

Volunteer leaders differ from the paid nonprofit administrators or directors in that a volunteer leader is a non-paid individual with a formally defined role within the organization. A volunteer leader takes charge and ownership in coordinating projects and programs that build community assets, meet community needs, and provide volunteers with a positive experience so that they continue their journey of service while helping to carry out the mission of the non-profit organization (Jamey Bachman, personal communication, February 9, 2016).

As demands on nonprofit organizations continue to increase, volunteer leaders will have to step-up and assume more responsibility to ease the workload of the paid directors and administrators. In an effort to assist local nonprofit organizations, the researchers/workshop presenters worked with [organization] to produce professional develop efforts to help the nonprofit organizations build their leadership capacity within their volunteer ranks. A Delphi study was conducted to identify competencies to include in a workshop for volunteer leaders. 42 competencies were identified, a workshop was developed and administered. Additionally, a skills assessment was developed to evaluate workshop participants on the identified competencies.

Lesson Plan Description

Title: Volunteer Leader Training: Training Volunteers to Lead Nonprofit Organizations to Increase Positive Social Change

Time: 90 minutes

Purpose: To describe a role volunteer leaders can play in a nonprofit organization and provide the background and foundation of a volunteer leader training workshop. Participants will leave the educator workshop with the resources to develop a volunteer leader workshop for their organization or community.

Objectives:

1. Describe the importance of volunteer leadership in nonprofit organizations
2. Explain Delphi Study and findings
3. Describe the development and facilitation of volunteer leader training

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4. Discuss the assessment and evaluation methods nonprofit directors can use to evaluate the leadership ability of volunteer leaders in the organization

Teaching methods:

I. Introduction – 5 min
   a. Introduce ourselves, Mississippi State University and, Volunteer Starkville
   b. State the objectives of the educator workshop

II. Describe the importance of volunteer leadership in nonprofit organizations – 5 min
   a. Utilize the PowerPoint to review relevant literature regarding nonprofit leadership and utilizing volunteer leaders in nonprofit volunteer groups.

III. Explain Delphi Study and findings – 10 min
   a. Utilize the PowerPoint to explain Delphi study and identified volunteer leadership competencies and skills.

IV. Describe the development and facilitation of volunteer leader training – 40 min
   a. Describe the facilitators and participants who attended the training.
   b. Introduce key components and delivery of the training.
      i. Competency and skills families
      ii. Four types of volunteers
   c. Participants work in small groups to complete sample activities included in training.
      i. Activity 1: Participants work in small groups to define volunteer leader.
      ii. Activity 2: In small groups, participants are assigned a competency or skill from the first family of competencies or skills. Groups discuss why their assigned competency is important when interacting with each of the four volunteer types. Facilitators provide example of how volunteer leaders can effectively recruit, mentor, and identify strengths of volunteers who call in each of the four types. Small groups share their answers to the larger group.
   d. In small groups, participants are assigned competency and skills families B through F. Each group works to develop an activity to teach the competencies and skills included in the family they were assigned. Small groups share their activity idea with the larger group.

V. Discuss the assessment and evaluation methods nonprofit directors can use to evaluate the leadership ability of volunteer leaders in the organization – 5 min.
   a. Utilize the PowerPoint to discuss assessment and evaluation methods identified by the Delphi study.

VI. Conclusion – 5 min
   a. Facilitator contact information
   b. Question and answer period

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PowerPoint slides and activity sheet are included in the Appendix.

Discussion of Outcomes/Results

The Delphi technique coupled with a review of literature was used to define specific competencies and skills desired in a volunteer leader by a nonprofit administrator. The Delphi method builds consensus among the opinions of experts in the discipline through multiple rounds of survey instrumentation (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). This methodology allows individual experts to compare and refine their responses with other experts participating in the study (Adler & Ziglio, 1996). Additionally, the Delphi method was selected for this study due to the geographical dispersion of experts. Since a Delphi can be administered electronically, geographical location of respondents is not a barrier.

A snowball sample of nonprofit administrators was used for this study. The first round began with a list of 20 nonprofit administrators provided by [volunteer resource organization]. At the conclusion of the first round, the initial participants were asked to provide a list of additional nonprofit administrators to participate in the second and third rounds of the Delphi (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Ludwig, 1994). Sixteen participants completed the second round and twenty completed the third round. Each round was comprised of repeat and new participants from [state] representatives of national and international volunteer organizations.

Participants' contributions were compiled over three rounds of iteration using surveys with open ended and rank order questions developed using Qualtrics, online survey software. The first round survey included the following open-ended questions:

1. In a volunteer organization, what are the most important leadership competencies a volunteer leader should possess?
2. In a volunteer organization, how should volunteer leaders be assessed on these leadership competencies?

In addition to the two open-ended questions above, participants were asked to provide their name, organization, and job titles. Finally, respondents were asked to provide the name and email address for additional nonprofit administrators from other volunteer organizations, as they were able.

Participants were given one week to respond to the first round instruments. An email reminder was sent out one week after the initial distribution of surveys to increase participation (Dillman, 2011). Results from the first round survey were analyzed three weeks after first contact was made. A list of leadership competencies and skills was gathered from the participant's responses, with similar terminology combined into a single term (Schmidt, 1997).

Second round instrumentation was developed from the responses on the first round and distributed to the initial respondents plus the contacts provided on the first survey.

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Competencies and skills were listed in descending order with the most common terms listed first and the least common listed last. Participants were asked to indicate the importance of each leadership competency and assessment technique on a 5 point Likert-type scale from very unimportant to very important. Following the Likert-type section, participants were also asked to list any additional competencies or skills as open-ended question. Again, participants were asked to provide their name, organization, and job titles, in addition to, the names and email addresses for additional nonprofit administrators from other volunteer organizations, as they were able.

Similar to the first round, second round participants were given one week to respond to the questionnaire. A reminder email was sent one week after distribution and data were analyzed three weeks after contact. For this round, consensus on a competency was defined as at least 70% of all participants rating 3 or higher on a 5-point scale, with a median value of 3.25 or higher (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The same procedure and data analysis methods were used for round three of the Delphi study to develop a final list of competencies and skills.

At the conclusion of three rounds of iteration, respondents reached consensus on 42 competencies and skills volunteer leaders should possess. The 42 competencies were then grouped into five overarching families. Table 1 displays the competencies as they are grouped into their respective families.

Table 1

Nonprofit volunteer leaders competencies and skills

Family	Competency	*n*	% rated 3 or greater	*Mdn*
Family A	Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers	20	90	4.5
	Recruit and Mentor other Volunteers	20	90	4
	Leadership	20	90	4
	Ability to Network with Others	20	90	4
	Delegate and Support Team Activities to Achieve Organizational Goals	20	90	4
Family B	Ability to Teach	20	90	4
	Ability to Motivate	19	87.4	4
	Ability to Encourage	20	90	4
	Lead by Example	20	95	5
	Service-oriented Attitude	20	90	4.5
	Willingness to Serve	20	90	4.5
	Willingness to Give Oneself	20	90	4
	Facilitate Participation by Local Internal and External Stakeholders	20	85	4
Family C	Dependable	20	90	5
	Punctual	20	90	5

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	Dedication	20	90	4
	Possess Integrity	20	90	4
	Organized	20	90	4
	Resiliency	20	90	4
	Scheduling and Related Documents	20	85	4
	Willingness to go Above and Beyond	19	87.4	4

Nonprofit volunteer leaders competencies and skills (continued)

Family	Competency	*n*	% rated 3 or greater	*Mdn*
Family C	Driven	20	90	4
	Commitment	20	90	5
	Must have Back-up Plans and Incentives for Those who Volunteer	20	90	4
Family D	Respect to Others	20	90	5
	Good Listener	20	90	5
	Communication	20	90	5
	Conflict Resolution	20	90	4.5
	Consideration	20	90	4.5
	Kindness	20	90	4
	Compassion	20	90	4
	Patience	19	87.4	4
	Personality	20	90	4
	Positive Attitude	19	87.4	5
	Enthusiastic	19	87.4	4
	Confident	19	89.4	4
Family E	Able to Work With Minimal Guidance and Supervision	20	90	5
	Resourceful	20	95	4
	Initiative	20	90	4
Family F	Critical Thinking	20	90	4
	Assessment and Evaluation	19	89.4	4

Families A through D include the majority of the competencies and skills identified by the panel of experts. Competencies and skills grouped in Family A include skills volunteer leaders should have to build and increase capacity within the nonprofit organization. These competencies include demonstrating leadership; networking; recruiting, identifying strengths, and mentoring volunteers; and delegating and supporting volunteer teams to achieve organizational goals. Family B includes the ability to teach, motivate, and encourage volunteers, as well as the ability to facilitate participation by local internal and external stakeholders. Dependability, punctuality, dedication, integrity, resiliency, and drive are among the competencies and skills included in family C. While Family D includes respect to others, listening skills, patience, and positive attitude to name a few. The final two families are made up by the ability to work with minimal

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guidance and supervision, resourcefulness, initiative (family E); and critical thinking skills and assessment and evaluation knowledge (family F).

The panel of experts reached consensus, in the third round of iteration on 10 assessment criteria for evaluating the leadership competencies and skills of nonprofit volunteer leaders. The assessment criteria can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Assessment criteria for evaluating volunteer leadership competencies and skills

Assessment Criteria	*n*	% rated 3 or greater	*Mdn*
How well they communicate with general volunteer population	20	90	5
Confidence in skills taught	20	95	4
Interaction with other volunteers	20	90	4
Follow-through	20	90	5
Feedback from general volunteer population	20	90	4
Responsiveness of general volunteer population to react to leader's call to action	20	90	4
Ability to obtain quality volunteers	20	90	5
Observations	20	90	4
Return rate of volunteers	20	90	4
Feedback from the general volunteer population	20	95	4

Workshop Implications

This workshop will benefit educators and program directors interested in training volunteer leaders within their organizations. Participants will discuss volunteer leadership competencies and skills identifies by a panel of experts in the field utilizing Delphi methodology. In addition, participants will discuss the components of a volunteer leader training workshop.

Participants will work in groups to define volunteer leader and the roles volunteer leaders play in organizations to better understand their value. Presenters will describe the components of a volunteer leader training and specific aspects to consider when developing and facilitating a training on your own. Participants will work together to complete an example activity developed by the facilitators to teach volunteer leaders the competencies and skills included in family A. Participants will then work in small groups to develop activities for the remaining five competency and skill families, and share their activities with the group. Furthermore, participants will be encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussion about similar programs or ideas in their respective areas.

Participants will be provided with reference material from the existing volunteer leader training. These materials will provide a starting point for participants who wish to develop a volunteer leader training to meet the needs of their volunteers.

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Appendix

Competencies & Skills Nonprofit Administrators desire Volunteer Leaders to Possess

*For the purpose of this training, we have grouped these competencies into families.

Family A ~ Competencies & Skills
Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers • Recruit & Mentor Other Volunteers
Leadership • Ability to Network with Others
Delegate & Support Team Activities to Achieve Organizational Goals

Family B ~ Competencies & Skills
Ability to Teach • Ability to Motivate • Ability to Encourage • Lead by Example
Service Oriented Attitude • Willingness to Serve • Willingness to Give of Oneself
Facilitate Participation by Local Internal & External Stakeholders

Family C ~ Competencies & Skills
Dependable • Punctual • Dedication • Possess Integrity • Organized • Resiliency
Scheduling & Related Documents • Willingness to go Above & Beyond
Driven • Commitment • Must Have Backup Plans

Family D ~ Competencies & Skills
Respect to Others • Good Listener • Communication • Conflict Resolution
Consideration • Kindness • Compassion • Patience • Personality
Positive Attitudes • Enthusiastic • Confident

Family E ~ Competencies & Skills
Able to work with Minimal Guidance & Supervision • Resourceful • Initiative

Family F ~ Competencies & Skills
Critical Thinking • Assessment & Evaluation

4 Volunteer Types

Ideal Ian – Skilled and motivated to work within the guidelines and structure of the organization

Trainable Tina – Motivated and willing to work within the guidelines and structure of the organization, but lacks skills

Disruptive Dan – Has skills but not willing to work within the guidelines and structure of the organization

Freeloading Freddy – Disinterested and does not have skills

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Volunteer Leader Training

Why are Volunteer Leaders Important?

"Volunteer leadership remains a vast untapped resource for nonprofits not only to expand capacity for service and volunteering but also to provide a strategy for addressing the retention challenge facing volunteer managers...In addition, these leadership roles, if properly supported, cultivate the consciousness, capabilities, and commitment in volunteers, and create lifelong advocates for causes and the change that citizens seek to make in their communities."
(Cooperation, 2007b, p. 15).

Development of a Volunteer Leader Training

- Four hour training
- 10 volunteer leaders identified by volunteer director invited
- Eight volunteers leaders attended the workshop
- Lunch was provided

Training Objectives

- Describe the importance of volunteer leadership in nonprofit organizations
- Explain Delphi Study and findings
- Describe the development and facilitation of volunteer leader training
- Discuss the assessment and evaluation methods nonprofit directors can use to evaluate the leadership ability of volunteer leaders in the organization

Why are Volunteer Leaders Important?

As demands on nonprofit organizations continue to increase, volunteer leaders will have to step-up and assume more responsibility to ease the workload of the paid directors and administrators. In an effort to assist local nonprofit organizations, the researchers/workshop presenters worked with [organization] to produce professional develop efforts to help the nonprofit organizations build their leadership capacity within their volunteer ranks.

Desired Competencies & Skills of Volunteer Leaders

Family A ~ Competencies & Skills

Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers
Recruit & Mentor Other Volunteers • Leadership
Ability to Network with Others
Delegate & Support Team Activities to Achieve Organizational Goals

Why are Volunteer Leaders Important?

The traditional single leader model is becoming less effective as the demands of nonprofit organizations increase. Small (2007) suggests

"Traditionally, leadership theories have focused on vertical leadership, in which a person who has been appointed to a position of authority exerts downward influence on subordinates. However, appointed leaders are not the only ones who can demonstrate leadership behavior. In team situations, team members can exert influence on each other and share the leadership process." (p. 5)

Identifying Volunteer Leader Competencies and Skills

- Delphi Study
- 42 Competencies and skills were identified
- Volunteer Leader Training was developed based on identified competencies and skills

Desired Competencies & Skills of Volunteer Leaders

Family B ~ Competencies & Skills

Ability to Teach • Ability to Motivate • Ability to Encourage
Lead by Example • Service Oriented Attitude
Willingness to Serve • Willingness to Give of Oneself
Facilitate Participation by Local Internal & External Stakeholders

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Desired Competencies & Skills of Volunteer Leaders

Family C ~ Competencies & Skills

Dependable • Punctual • Dedication • Possess Integrity
Organized • Resiliency • Scheduling & Related Documents
Willingness to go Above & Beyond • Driven • Commitment
Must Have Backup Plans

Four Volunteer Types

Ideal Ian – Skilled and motivated to work within guidelines

Trainable Tina – Motivated and willing to work within the guidelines but lacks skills

Disruptive Dan – Has skills but not willing to work within the guidelines

Freeloading Freddy – Disinterested and does not have skills

Importance of a Volunteer Leader

- Volunteer Leaders are important to Nonprofit Administrators because they...

Help to carry out the mission and achieve goals of a nonprofit organization by:

- Taking charge of a project by coordinating it and taking accountability for its successful completion
- Communicates the details of the project with other volunteers and serves as a resource for them throughout the project
- Organizes, leads and inspires a group of volunteers before, during and after the project
- Oftentimes initiates new projects in order to achieve organizational goals
- Represents the nonprofit to other volunteers and to the community

Desired Competencies & Skills of Volunteer Leaders

Family D ~ Competencies & Skills

Respect to Others • Good Listener • Communication
Conflict Resolution • Consideration • Kindness
Compassion • Patience • Personality • Positive Attitudes
Enthusiastic • Confident

Defining a Volunteer Leader

- Working in Small Groups, formulate a list of words that represent what you think describes a Volunteer Leader
- Now, develop a working definition of what a Volunteer Leader is based on your group's word list.

Family A ~ Competencies & Skills

Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers
Recruit & Mentor Other Volunteers • Leadership
Ability to Network with Others
Delegate & Support Team Activities to Achieve Organizational Goals

Family E ~ Competencies & Skills

Able to work with Minimal Guidance & Supervision
Resourceful • Initiative

Family F ~ Competencies & Skills

Critical Thinking • Assessment & Evaluation

Importance of a Volunteer Leader

- Working in Small Groups, formulate a list of reasons why you think:
  - Volunteer Leaders are important to Nonprofit Organizations and
  - Ways they can be utilized to make the organization more effective.

Recruiting, Mentoring & Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers

Easily identifies Ian's strengths and recognizes his willingness to work. Find most suitable long-term role.

Builds her trust through coaching/mentoring; helps her learn new skills and where she can be the most effective.

Maintains a leadership role to eliminate potential problems; Identifies Dan's strengths and areas he can contribute, if any.

Recognizes his lack of desire and inability to complete anything beyond simple tasks. Finds most suitable short-term role.

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Recruiting, Mentoring & Identify Strengths of Other Volunteers Activity

Recruiting the right people for the right program requires a commitment of time, energy, and creativity, as well as a well-considered plan.

1. **Decide on the characteristics you want your volunteers to have.**
   - Think about the goals of your organization, the strengths and needs of the population it will be serving, and the activities the volunteers will be engaged in. Also consider the physical and time demands of your volunteer program.
2. **Identify the barriers that may deter people from volunteering.**
   - For example: Lack of confidence in their ability to contribute -- inability to translate their life experiences and skills to a particular program's needs, fear about safety, or difficulties with transportation.

Family C ~ Competencies & Skills

Dependable • Punctual • Dedication • Possess Integrity
Organized • Resiliency • Scheduling & Related Documents
Willingness to go Above & Beyond • Driven • Commitment
Must Have Backup Plans

Family F ~ Competencies & Skills

Critical Thinking • Assessment & Evaluation

Group Activity

1. You have been given a family of competencies and skills.
2. Work in your small group to develop an activity to teach the volunteer leadership competencies and skills.
3. Share your activity with the larger group.

Family D ~ Competencies & Skills

Respect to Others • Good Listener • Communication
Conflict Resolution • Consideration • Kindness
Compassion • Patience • Personality
Positive Attitudes
Enthusiastic • Confident

How do we assess our Volunteer Leaders?

Assessment criteria for evaluating volunteer leadership competencies and skills

Assessment Criteria	n	% rated 3 or greater	Mdn
How well they communicate with general volunteer population	20	90	5
Confidence in skills taught	20	95	4
Interaction with other volunteers	20	90	4
Follow-through	20	90	5
Feedback from general volunteer population	20	90	4
Responsiveness of general volunteer population to react to leader's call to action	20	90	4
Ability to obtain quality volunteers	20	90	5
Observations	20	90	4
Return rate of volunteers	20	90	4
Feedback from the general volunteer population	20	95	4

Family B ~ Competencies & Skills

Ability to Teach • Ability to Motivate
Ability to Encourage
Lead by Example • Service Oriented Attitude
Willingness to Serve • Willingness to Give of Oneself
Facilitate Participation by Local Internal & External Stakeholders

Family E ~ Competencies & Skills

Able to work with Minimal Guidance & Supervision
Resourceful • Initiative

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