

CHAPTER 4:

Defining Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities

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Introduction

In most literacy programs, the volunteer manager wears many hats. Volunteer management may fall to the program coordinator or another staff member, but it is likely that multiple staff members will be involved with volunteer efforts. To ensure that volunteers are used efficiently and effectively, it's crucial to define their roles and responsibilities. Staff, current volunteers and potential volunteers will all appreciate having a clear understanding of expectations from the beginning of the experience.

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Volunteers most likely will provide support to your program in one of two areas: instructional support, which includes assisting certified teachers and interacting with students, and administrative support, which can run the gamut from clerical help to recruiting other volunteers to planning

fundraising activities. In deciding what roles volunteers should play in your program, it's important to consider the program's needs. At the same time, to successfully retain volunteers and maximize their potential, it's crucial to match their interests to the assignments you give them. Keep in mind that volunteers want to participate in your program for a reason—find out what that reason is, and be sure that the work you ask of them reflects that reason. Also, consider the skills a particular role requires, and either match volunteers to those roles based on their existing skills, or provide training so that they can acquire those skills. No one likes to take on a job he is not prepared to do!

The following story illustrates the importance of defining volunteer roles and responsibilities.



Program Description

A family literacy program in a small rural town was providing many services for families, but it had limited staff and was challenged by the number of families in the community who were in need of services. The program coordinator and staff decided to invite volunteers to join their team in an effort to increase the number of families the program could serve.

Volunteer recruitment flyers were placed in strategic areas of the community and announcements were made through the local newspaper. Soon, the program was overwhelmed by phone calls inquiring about volunteer opportunities. Staff scrambled to schedule an orientation meeting, and volunteers were quickly placed into classrooms to help support the paid instructional staff. The program was delighted with the response they received from interested volunteers and thought

that with this additional help they would be able to provide services to many more families.

Unfortunately, with little time to plan, it didn't take long for difficulties to arise. Volunteers began voicing their dissatisfaction with the duties they were asked to perform and didn't feel they had enough training to make a real difference in the program. Staff began to resent what they felt was a "take over" attitude from the volunteers.

The program coordinator decided to confront the situation by "bringing all parties to the table" to develop guidelines and definitions of volunteer roles and responsibilities. Among the solutions discussed was the creation of a volunteer handbook, which both staff and volunteers would help develop and which would outline the different opportunities available for volunteers. Looking back, all parties involved agreed that more preparation for the incorporation of volunteers into the family literacy team would have been beneficial. The program was able to overcome this rough start and is now able to welcome new volunteers in a more professional manner.

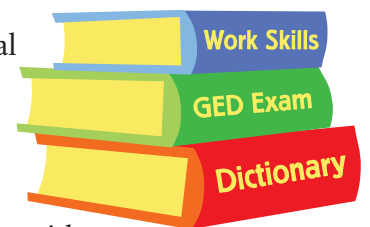
Roles for Volunteers to Support Instruction

There are many ways volunteers can assist educators. Volunteers bring with them both expertise (often from their current or previous profession) and experience. At the same time, it's important to remember that volunteers usually are not certified teachers, and will need lots of guidance and support from staff to be able to contribute effectively in the classroom. Also, be sure to consider what kinds of training a volunteer might need in order to be prepared to work with the families in your program, many of whom may be from a different culture or socio-economic background than your volunteers, and who likely have less formal education than your volunteers.

Volunteer roles in adult education

Adult learners who participate in literacy programs come from diverse educational backgrounds, and may include English language learners, adults with learning disabilities, GED students, and those transitioning to work or post-secondary education. What they have in common is a desire to improve their lives and their families' lives through literacy.

One way volunteers in the adult education classroom can support instruction is by balancing the needs of students at different levels. Many programs serve adult learners who are at varied levels of reading and math. A volunteer can work one-on-one or in small groups with students who are at a lower level, allowing the instructor to cover more material with students at a higher level. Or, conversely, a



volunteer might work with students at a higher level while the instructor helps students who are struggling with a particular concept or activity.

Other ways volunteers can contribute to the adult education component include:

- *Assisting Teachers*—Volunteers may be able to help facilitate small group activities, tutor adult students one-on-one, review homework assignments, or help a teacher prepare materials for class. Some volunteers also may be able to provide translation for English language learners.
- *Home Visiting*—Volunteers can accompany teachers on home visits to provide adults with news about upcoming events at the program, share educational materials, and work with parents to reevaluate their educational goals.

See *Sample D* for a job description from Pima County (Arizona) Adult Education Family Literacy program for a volunteer to work with English Speakers of Other Languages.



Volunteer roles in children's education

The children's education component in family literacy programs focuses on the development of language and literacy skills. One reason for volunteer interest in your program may be the opportunity to work with children as well as adults—the chance to help children establish the skills they'll need to succeed in school and in life. For some volunteers, this intergenerational exchange of knowledge is extremely rewarding. Bear in mind, however, that volunteers working with children are subject to certain licensing regulations within your state and likely will be required to have a criminal record check. Be sure to let volunteers know up front what personal information they'll need to provide.

Often, the value of having a volunteer in a children's classroom is simply having an extra set of eyes, ears and hands. Some roles a volunteer might play include:

- *Storytelling or Reading Aloud*—Volunteers can help foster children's love for language and reading by sharing stories and books with them. They may read to children in a group setting or one-on-one. When a volunteer reads aloud to the entire group, this also gives the teacher extra time to prepare for the next activity.
- *Facilitating Learning Activities*—Volunteers can help children access materials, oversee the use of those materials, and encourage children to think and play creatively.

- *Homework Club*—School-age children may benefit from some extra attention through tutoring or afterschool sessions. If the club is held in a library or computer lab, volunteers can help students select books and learn how to access the various resources available.

Volunteer roles in parent education

Parent education, sometimes called Parent Time, provides training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher of their child. While the focus of Parent Time is on helping parents understand how their children learn and ways to support that learning, this component also is an opportunity for parents to discuss other life issues with their peers. Volunteers in parent education can share their own life experiences as they help parents address some of the difficult or challenging issues they face.

Volunteers in parent education can offer support in a number of ways, including:

- *Accessing Community Resources*—Parents may be unfamiliar with the services available to them in their community. Volunteers can help parents develop a list of resources and discuss how they can be contacted. Parents may be looking for assistance in areas such as free or low-cost medical services, legal aid, food programs, housing, or domestic or substance abuse programs, among others. Volunteers also can help parents identify free community events that are appropriate for families to participate in together, such as international festivals or library celebrations.
- *Preparing for Work*—Some parents may be getting ready to enter the workforce and may be unfamiliar with the steps necessary for finding and applying for a job. Volunteers can help parents research careers in their community, develop a résumé, and practice a job interview. Volunteers also can share their own work experiences, describing the skills that helped them succeed in the workplace.

Volunteer roles in PACT Time

PACT Time, or interactive literacy activities for parents and children, is a unique component in family literacy. PACT Time provides strategies for parents to support their child's literacy development while giving parents the opportunity to practice those strategies in a safe and structured environment. In the classroom, teachers and volunteers model learning techniques and offer suggestions and support as parents work with their children.

Volunteers often enjoy working with parents and children together, encouraging the learning bond as it develops between each parent and child. Roles volunteers might play during PACT Time include:



- *Facilitating Circle Time*—As part of PACT Time, sessions often begin or end with a group activity called Circle Time. Volunteers can read a book aloud to the group, demonstrating good read-aloud skills. A volunteer might teach the group a new song or fingerplay, and can help prepare handouts for parents so they can practice the song or fingerplay with their children at home. If a volunteer speaks a language other than English, he or she can translate activities for English language learning families or help to develop activities in the families' home language.
- *Arranging Field Trips*—Sometimes PACT Time might include a trip to the library, the local zoo or a museum. Volunteers can help to make arrangements, including transportation or meals, and also can help chaperone on the trip itself.

While volunteers can support instruction, it's important to remember that volunteers usually are not certified teachers (although some may have teaching experience). Again, it's very important to define the roles volunteers will play in the classroom, and be sure that both staff and volunteers have a clear understanding of those definitions.

Roles for Volunteers to Support Administration

Volunteers come from all walks of life and bring with them many skills. Perhaps their most endearing asset is a desire to help. Some volunteers may be more comfortable providing “backstage” support, while others simply want to put their best skills to good use. A good place to start matching volunteer skills to program needs is during the orientation process. Ask volunteers about their work experience, skills, hobbies and interests, and find out why they want to volunteer in your program. Have choices available about the different kinds of roles they might fulfill—both in and out of the classroom.

There are many opportunities for volunteers to participate in the administrative functions of a program. What follows is just a sampling of the roles volunteers can play in a program's day-to-day and long-term operations.

Board membership

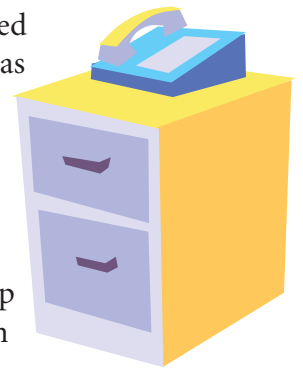
Advisory Boards and Boards of Directors usually concern themselves with community outreach, fundraising, policy and procedures, and fiscal management. As members of your community, volunteers can provide valuable connections to local businesses and agencies that can support your program. Volunteers often bring with them specialized skills, such as accounting, media relations, or human resources. Board members must have a clear understanding of your organization's mission and how your program meets the needs of your community. Armed with this knowledge, volunteers can advocate for your program to raise awareness and forge new, purposeful collaborations.

Volunteer management

Volunteers need consistent feedback and recognition. While staff are ultimately responsible for ensuring satisfactory and satisfied volunteer participation, seasoned volunteers can support the ongoing volunteer efforts of your program. For example, an experienced volunteer can act as a liaison between other volunteers and staff, representing volunteer concerns at monthly planning meetings. Current volunteers can coach new volunteers, helping them learn about the program and making sure they understand policies and procedures. Volunteers also can help organize volunteer appreciation events, perhaps in conjunction with other program celebrations.

Clerical support

As any teacher or program coordinator knows, there's a lot of paperwork involved in education! Many volunteers will have experience with office equipment such as copiers and fax machines, and also may have extremely useful organizational skills. Among the duties volunteers can fulfill are copying handouts and other learning materials, gathering materials from the library or researching information on the Internet, filing, and making phone calls to parents whose attendance has dropped. Volunteers also may be able to assist in record keeping, such as attendance, permission slips for field trips, or donations. Of course, keep in mind that volunteers may want a variety of experiences, and clerical work can become mundane. Be sure that volunteers have opportunities to explore other areas of interest as well, and that all of their hard work is recognized frequently.



Recruitment

As active members in your community, volunteers can be very effective in recruiting both families and other volunteers. Volunteers can lend a helping hand at recruitment events, like county or school fairs, and also can help promote these events and your program by posting flyers in the community. Some volunteers also may participate with other organizations that serve a similar population and can refer families to your program. To recruit new volunteers, an experienced volunteer might speak to civic groups about his or her experiences in your program. And remember that word of mouth is one of your best recruitment tools. Satisfied volunteers will speak positively about your program to just about everyone they meet!

Fundraising

Most literacy programs rely on a variety of funding sources, both public and private. Fundraising can be a time-consuming and arduous process. At the same time, there are many creative ways to approach fundraising. Volunteers can research available opportunities, looking for foundations and businesses that routinely provide support (both financial and in-kind) to educational and social organizations. Some volunteers even may have grant-writing experience or editing skills. Volunteers also can assist in organizing fundraising events in your

community, from bake sales and raffles to more formal presentations for civic organizations. To make the best use of a volunteer's support of your fundraising efforts, it's essential that the volunteer has a clear understanding of your program's mission, goals and activities. And again, word of mouth is a powerful tool. Volunteers who are enthusiastic about your program can advocate for the services you provide to families when speaking with their colleagues and business associates.

Marketing and public relations

Many of the roles described above involve some level of marketing and public relations. From designing brochures and putting up posters to participating in events and speaking to civic groups, volunteers can help you create a real presence in your community. Volunteers can write press releases (see *Sample E*), offer to be interviewed by the local newspaper or radio talk show, plan special events or site visits (see *Sample F*), represent your program at a family reading night at the library, or plan a public celebration for National Family Literacy Day (see *Sample G*). Volunteers experience firsthand the great work your program does and can speak with authority and "credibility" about the services your program provides to families.

Putting It All Together



The roles volunteers can perform are vast and varied. Taking the time to "get to know" potential and existing volunteers will be worth the investment of your time and effort. By matching volunteers' skills to the needs of your program, their services can enhance and expand the services you're able to offer to families.

Volunteers also provide a vital link to the community, which can support recruitment efforts, fundraising and community outreach. Setting guidelines and defining roles doesn't have to be restrictive, but rather can lay the foundation that allows volunteers to contribute in meaningful and creative ways.

Pima County Community College District

**Job Description for Volunteer Tutor for English
for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

Reports to: Supervising instructor and Coordinator of Volunteer Services

Hours: An initial commitment of 3-4 hours a week for three months is required

Definition and Basic Responsibilities

The volunteer ESOL tutor will work under the direct supervision of a Pima County adult education instructor but may work one-on-one or in small groups with students in the classroom on basic language skills, including word definitions, grammar, pronunciation, English descriptions of real-life scenarios, idioms and formation of complete sentences. The tutor also may work outside of the classroom with one or more individuals who are speaking significantly below the average classroom level.

Basic Qualifications:

- High School diploma or GED
- Strong desire to be placed into a multi-cultural learning environment
- Excellent oral communications skills and command of the English language. Previous experience as a tutor is desirable but not required

Related Duties May Include:

- Helping to facilitate classroom activities
- Supporting a subject area in various ESOL activities
- Working with instructor to develop resources or appropriate lesson plans

Additional Information:

Potential volunteers may be asked to observe one or more classes at one or more locations before being given a steady assignment. This is to insure that the volunteer is familiar with the variety of Pima County adult education classes. Volunteers also will be asked to attend a 90 minute orientation before or within 3 weeks of initial placement.

Pima County Adult Education (PCAE) serves more than 10,000 students annually at a variety of locations throughout Pima County and employs 170 full and part-time employees, many of whom began their tenure as PCAE volunteers. In 1992 and 1999 PCAE was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of the top 10 Adult Education and Literacy Programs in the country.