

Power Booster

DuPage Association of Volunteer Administration - www.dava-il.org

Supervising Volunteers - techniques we've found helpful

As we learned in the Betty Stallings' Training, the goal of effective supervision is to get work done AND to empower the volunteer to be successful. Often though there are special circumstances that require more management than the straightforward situation of one supervisor overseeing volunteers. Sometimes due to work schedules there may be multiple staff supervising or the volunteers need special considerations.

At DuPage Children's Museum the volunteer program is mainly decentralized but there are exceptions. As the Volunteer Coordinator I am responsible for program planning, interviewing, screening, placing, recognition, record keeping, etc. Other staff usually supervise their own volunteers such as the Facilities Manager who supervises his facilities volunteers. Each week Jessica and I do directly supervise 20 administrative volunteers as well as help with the supervision of special event volunteers, corporate groups and volunteers with special needs. As an added complication, Jessica and I or other staff may supervise each other's usual volunteers depending upon work schedules. These are some management techniques we've found to be helpful.

Encourage staff buy-in

- Some staff are better than others at supervision so we try to be proactive and utilize them. We build relationships with those staff, thank them in person and tell their supervisor how well they supervised the volunteers.
- We regularly send emails to all staff describing volunteers' projects and how staff X worked with them and how the work positively impacted the Museum. Public recognition can be very powerful.
- We try to get photos of staff and volunteers working together and post them, helping to set the expectation in everyone's mind that this is how supervision should be done. We try to ensure that staff know the volunteers ahead of time (their names and a bit of information about them). We try to build that important relationship by bringing them together and finding commonalities (perhaps they are both grandmothers or gardeners).
- We follow up with staff afterwards; it is an expectation that staff will give us feedback. We ask not only how the project got done but also how the volunteers felt and what they enjoyed. We ask staff for their suggestions for making the next time better for the project and for the volunteers and we give them credit for their suggestions.

Give staff the tools for successful supervision

- Clear communication is critical for success. We use both personal and email communication to outline the project and its impact, the tasks and the materials needed. We usually email a couple of weeks ahead as a heads up and then email and advise in person just prior to the project. We also inform the managers, the receptionist and the visitor service staff about the project and who is the supervisor.
- We try to anticipate what could possibly go wrong and create a Plan B that we communicate to the staff. We try to look ahead and plan for contingencies so staff feel more confident and know that we are thinking of them and trying to make their day go smoother.
- We usually lay out all the materials needed for the project, a completed sample and a list of written instructions. If there are multiple projects or multiple steps we find it helpful to set up acrylic holders with numbered written instructions. In that way everything is prepared for the staff and their job is much easier and almost any staff person can supervise in a pinch.

Train volunteers to be self-sufficient

- Each of our administrative volunteers are trained to log in to the computer and access their personal folders or Volgistics where they have regular reports to run. They each have hanging file folders containing projects and instructions. They can start work even if Jessica or I aren't there.
- We have trained the job coaches and our students with disabilities to be self-starters too. Work is laid out for them or they look in a drawer in which we have materials and picture cards of the tasks.
- We have developed leaders in our groups of volunteers who can supervise. It then makes it easier for us to communicate and delegate through the leader.

For more information see the attached excerpt from Volunteer Management by Steve McCurley & Rick Lynch