



Power Booster

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

Technology in your Volunteer Program

Blogs, wikis, social networking, Facebook, podcasts... Is your head spinning with the range of technology available? Do you feel that you should be incorporating new technology into your volunteer program? Before you start incorporating new technology I suggest you think about the expected outcomes. What do you want to accomplish? Think of technology as a tool... like a hammer. The hammer alone would not build a table for you. You would first need to make decisions about the expected table's size, color, style and then develop a plan and acquire the skills or someone with the skills.

What are your Expected Outcomes?

Are you seeking more rapid communication with volunteers/public, more rapid response time to inquiries, more timely distribution of information/training or enhanced data management? Your outcomes will determine the type of technology that best meets your needs.

Communication

- Rapid response
 - ◇ Today, people have a heightened expectation for rapid communication. If your organization cannot respond quickly enough when a volunteer inquires you may lose them to another organization who can.
 - ◇ Your current volunteers may also have high expectations for you in terms of getting back to them about schedule changes, service hours or questions. This may affect how satisfied they are with your volunteer program and ultimately affect retention.
 - ◇ You also need to consider the technological skill, needs and preferences of your volunteers. Are they willing or able to use the technology? What should it be? Ask your volunteers, especially youth and young adults how they want to receive information and training. Teens may need training materials online but retirees may want a hard copy training manual. Online trainings may be more effective and more cost efficient. However, one size may not fit all. Your goal is to maximize the effectiveness using technology. After all, a training manual is not effective if half of your volunteers don't read it.
- Information sharing
 - ◇ The public may have high expectations for your website as a place to find updated information quickly, in an entertaining, easy to follow format. You will be competing with other sites with possibly more resources and that will affect your success in recruitment.
 - ◇ Consider volunteer personal preferences and needs. Some volunteers may expect quicker information sharing like an e-news while others may still expect face-to-face interactions.
 - ◇ Your volunteers may expect to be able to advocate for your organization and share their experiences and photos through social networks.

Data Management

- You may need to ensure that your data is kept more secure and better organized for efficient retrieval. You may need to upgrade software to meet new guidelines, higher expectations and to allow you to compete better for grants and partnerships in your community.
- There is more emphasis now on reporting not only hours but the impact, quality and outcomes.
- An upgraded system may allow you to more quickly track and match your organization's demands to the supply of available volunteers.

Remember, technology is a great tool but only if it helps you get your job done.

