

Engaging and Involving Volunteers of Fire Service Boards



Arizona Fire District
Association
June Conference, 2002



The Board from Hell



Think back in your experience to a time long, long ago when you worked with "The District Board from Hell." This group couldn't agree on anything. Members showed up for the meetings late and left early. They didn't review their agenda or Board packets prior to walking in the door. They would spend hours arguing about the smallest detail and never get to a decision, or worse, they would make big decisions without even a 5 minute discussion.

- What were the characteristics of those Board members?
- Why did they behave the way they did?

Select someone from the group to report your findings.

Themes to remember...

- Engaging community members in governance is difficult.
- Good, effective and hard-working volunteers are hard to find and even harder to retain.
- Once residents have had a taste of engagement, it's hard to go back

Themes to remember...

There are two pieces to volunteer engagement:

- A long-term plan to attract, retain and replace
- An annual work program to make volunteer contributions worthwhile

Themes to remember...

- Improve the experience by establishing clear expectations
- Treat volunteers as you would other scarce and valuable resources

What do you get when you engage and involve volunteers?

- Access to intellectual assets and data
- A reservoir of human resources
- A better understanding by the public of complex issues
- Improved communication and increased support for the District

What will it cost you?

- Time, inconvenience and aggravation
- Increased “meddling” in the District’s business
- Perceived loss of control
- Rethinking the business operations model
- Increased training and support

What do you want from a volunteer?

- Dependability
- Thoughtful deliberation
- High-quality, well-considered recommendations
- Loyalty
- Upstanding character
- Team player

What must you do to get a great volunteer?

Solicit	Train	Support
Assess		Evaluate
Appoint		Applaud

The Engagement Model...

SAA - T - SEA

Solicit	Train	Support
Assess		Evaluate
Appoint		Applaud

Elements of Volunteer Engagement

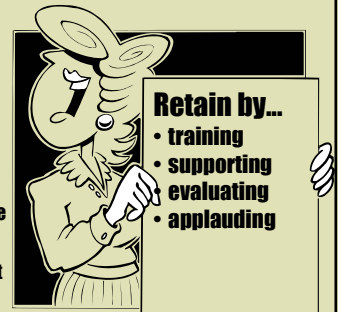
- Create selection policy
- Announce to a broad audience
- Solicit selected targets
- Create audition opportunities
- Assess performance
- Consider alternate appointments



Elements of Volunteer Engagement

Provide:

- Basic training
- Technical training
- Information updates
- Individual & group support
- Review, evaluate and report on performance
- Acknowledge good performance... correct poor performance



Elements of Volunteer Engagement

- Develop a clear contract
- Create a plan that sets goals and objectives
- Develop annual work program
- Set performance measures & standards
- Evaluate performance



Elements of Volunteer Engagement

- Create a support system and contract
- Negotiate work program
- Provide training opportunities
- Search for successors



Elements of Volunteer Engagement

- Demand completed staff work
- Select the brightest and best as staff liaisons
- Allow for alternative work schedules to compensate for evening and Saturday meetings
- Provide backup and cross-training for liaisons



Locating and Attracting

Where are the best places to find good Board members and policy volunteers?

Places to Locate and Attract

1. Voter Registrations / Party Rosters
2. PTA / PTO
3. School Board Members and Candidates
4. Civic Clubs and Organizations

Places to Locate and Attract

5. Schools Teachers and Students
6. Church Leaders
7. Chamber of Commerce
8. Neighborhood / Homeowner's Associations



Places to Locate and Attract

9. College Faculty
10. Word-of-Mouth / Referrals
11. Local “hangouts”
12. New community members



Ways to Audition and Assess

1. Written applications for appointment
2. Personal interviews and surveys
3. Group assessment centers
4. Ad hoc committee assignments
5. Personal endorsements / testimonials



Ways to Audition and Assess

6. Pre-appointment training sessions
7. Local government awareness courses
8. Proxy or substitute assignments
9. Trial periods with fixed, non-renewable terms
10. Shadowing assignments



Ways to Train

1. Independent training contractors
2. District-delivered training programs
3. Formal mentoring programs
4. Informal mentoring...under-the-wing with group leaders



Ways to Train

5. On the job... shadowing with full-time staff
6. On the job... shadowing with another more experienced volunteer
7. “Here’s your desk, figure it out!”



Ways to Evaluate

1. Periodic, formal written individual evaluations by leadership
2. Group performance reviews
3. Self assessments
4. Goals & objectives assessment / work program evaluations
5. 180 degree peer-to-peer assessments

Ways to Applaud and Acknowledge

1. Annual volunteer picnic or supper
2. Movie tickets for a job well done
3. Peer recognition and award
4. Formal award given by mayor at a council meeting
5. Brief mention in the water-bill newsletter

Ways to Applaud and Acknowledge

6. Special parking or seating at events
7. Opportunity for special training
8. Tuition waivers at schools and colleges
9. Radio / TV or newspaper articles
10. Plaques and physical trophies

How to Lose a Loser!

1. Don't re-appoint!
2. Leader has heart-to-heart talk
3. Request for sponsor or mentor intervention
4. Substitute assignment
5. Prepare a "thank you for your hard work and dedication" letter

Ways to Increase Success

1. Make the process of contributing easy, attractive and supported
2. Give volunteers progressively more challenging assignments as they mature
3. Assign sponsors and mentors to all volunteers for the duration of their careers
4. Once interest is established, strike while the iron is hot... develop and implement an citizen engagement plan

Ways to Increase Success

5. Provide volunteers with important and interesting work
6. Give volunteers access to the policy makers
7. Provide clear goals, objectives, direction, boundaries, and guidelines
8. Match talents and interests with the volunteer's desire to serve

Ways to Increase Success

9. Develop a fool-proof volunteer information system
10. Acknowledge contributions

For More Information
Contact...



OVER MY *Dead* BODY!



CREATING
COMMUNITY
HARMONY
OUT OF
CHAOS

*The Basic Training Guide
for Managing Community
Involvement*

By Lance Decker

