

Project Management 101a: Establishing a Framework for Volunteer Success posted June 2010

It is not always possible to enlist the perfect volunteer. Frequently, a well-meaning volunteer becomes overwhelmed by elements of the task and is unable to see the big picture. Previous volunteers, more often than not, leave no crumbs to follow or a very vague playbook (pardon the mixed metaphor). Some advance planning goes a long way when put in charge of a multi-phase, multi-faceted project, yet volunteers often resist actually doing the planning. In such cases, senior leaders and/or staff need to step in and help to set up a framework for volunteer success.

The project management of a quarterly newsletter is a good case in point. The volunteer content editor usually is expected to plan the contents, manage submission traffic, gather or suggest graphics, do preliminary editing, prepare and hand off the copy to production staff who will fine-point edit, layout and distribute the newsletter. All too frequently, the volunteer makes a general call for submissions (rather than identifying what is needed and contacting potential contributors) and then frantically tries to gather enough material for each issue. Much anxiety and stress, not to mention potential burn-out, can be avoided by establishing a framework that includes the following essential elements for volunteer success.

- An Understanding of Purpose and Goals
Why do we publish? What are we trying to accomplish?
- A Content Guide (more generally - materials, information, focus)
What do we want and need to include?
What should be standard in each issue of the publication and what should be variable to respond to current association needs?
How should that material be prepared for the production staff?
- Layout (more generally - format, blueprint, media type)
What should the publication look like so that it is consistent with the organization's brand?
In what order and format should the material be presented to fulfill its goals and purpose, and encourage readership?
- A Production Schedule
How often do we need to publish, and what are the deadlines we need to meet?
- Qualified Personnel
What needs to be done by whom? Who is responsible and what are their responsibilities?

The next "Matter of Association Management" will elaborate on developing production schedules/operations calendars that aid in managing all types of projects.