Volunteer Risk Management Myths and Truths

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#1

Telling volunteers what to do may increase an organization’s exposure to liability.
Risk Tips:

- Set clear expectations
- Train volunteers
- Use volunteer position descriptions
- Provide regular feedback
- Never assume volunteers know what to do (or what to do according to your rules)

#2

1. It’s perfectly legal to pay volunteers a fair wage.
2. Never, ever pay your volunteers!
Risk Tips:

- **Best bet**: In most cases, volunteers serve without any expectation of pay.
- **Stipends**: economic realities & 20% rule – “if no more than 20%... It would appear permissible” – (See FLSA2005-51)
- **Same role or coercion**: don’t do it
- Payment or promise to pay could change status:
  - Volunteer Protection Act (immunity for simple negligence)
  - Protection under anti-discrimination statutes

#3

Your brother’s best friend comes to volunteer. He doesn’t need to be screened because you know him.
**Risk Tips:**

- Screen ALL volunteers, whether or not you THINK you know them.
- Your screening process will vary by position. It should be based on the RISKS of the role.
- A basic screening process may include:
  - An application
  - Verification of any required credentials or experience
  - Reference checking
  - Interviews
  - More, depending on the role: background check, home visit

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**#4**

**Asking your volunteers to use common sense is the best advice you can give.**
Risk Tips:

- There really is no such thing as common sense!
- Never make assumptions about what volunteers think or would do in situations that require good judgment
- Don’t give volunteers a pass on training because they have served elsewhere
- Be explicit about expectations
- Remember: ongoing training is always important; things change

#5

If you set the bar too high, no one will want to volunteer.
Risk Tips:
- **Self-screening**: a valuable tool
- Ask: how important is your mission?
- Conduct Exit Interviews to collect information to help strengthen your program in the future

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#6
Volunteers hate being told how to do their jobs.
Risk Tips:

- Put a premium on communication
- Many workplace complaints stem from a lack of clear communication!
- Volunteers want to know how they can help & what they need to do

Volunteers from different generations have completely different expectations.
Risk Tips:

- Shared expectations:
  - To work on challenging projects
  - To learn
  - To make a contribution
  - To be fairly treated
  - Work-life balance

SOURCE: Ben Rosen, PhD., from the Kenan Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Remember:

- Think broadly about the harm a volunteer could cause or suffer.
- Scrutinize assumptions about volunteers and the work they do...
- Strive for clarity, consistency and fairness: your three-point shield against discontent and liability claims
- Invite complaints!
- Communicate generously
- Reach out for help!
Risk Resources:

Employee or Volunteer: What's the difference?
www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/employee_or_volunteer.shtml

Fair Labor Standards Act: Volunteers
www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp

Department of Labor: “economic realities” – 20%

My Generation: Reaping the Rewards of an Intergenerational Workforce:
www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/My_Generation_Reaping_the_Rewards_of_a_Multigenerational_Workforce.shtml

Other Resources:

www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub_detail.asp?id=120

www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub_detail.asp?id=226
Affiliate Membership Benefits:

- Free Risk Webinars (live!)
- Access to the Webinar Vault (recorded!)
- Discounts on book & other products
- Special rates for our annual Risk Summit
- Risk HELP! - www.nonprofitrisk.org/affiliates/risk_help.asp

Questions?