Setting Goals for Your Volunteer Program

How often does your organization consider its volunteers when setting new goals? For many organizations, volunteers represent a highly valuable asset. Wouldn't it make sense to consider such stakeholders when developing mission-critical decisions?
In this article, we'll offer tips for **engaging volunteers** throughout the goal development process.

Within an organization, a mission statement is written, and objectives are developed and later evaluated for the agency itself. Sometimes, though, volunteer programs are overlooked in this process. However, stepping back to take a panoramic look at your volunteer program regularly is important for several reasons.

First, it's good to compare your organization's mission to your volunteer activity — is the direction of your volunteer program still reflective of your organization's overall aim? After this is determined, your program must keep moving forward in the right direction by setting new, measurable objectives. In doing so, your volunteers will be steered with a sharper focus, and your volunteer program will have something to strive toward. And, through the related record keeping, you will also have data in place to substantiate your efforts, which is useful when approaching potential donors or seeking local funding.

A SMART Method for Setting Goals and Objectives
The way to identify results and success is to articulate goals and objectives. However, if sitting down to write this year's plans seems like a somewhat daunting task, keep reading. Following is basic information that may help demystify the goal-setting process. A *goal*, of course, is simply what you want to accomplish. Goals are defined in broad strokes and are often long-term. As a simple example, XYZ Organization's goal might be to expand its impact on individuals within the county.
How will the organization know if or when it has achieved its goal? This is where objectives come into play. An *objective* brings a specific aspect of the goal into sharp focus. In addition, an objective is concrete and short-term. All objectives should address the following components:
- Your target demographic – What group of individuals do you seek to help?
- Your agency's impact – What is the desired outcome of your efforts?
- A timeframe – What is the deadline to meet your objective?
- A "yardstick" for measuring success – In what quantifiable way(s) will you measure your efforts?

Using our earlier example, an objective for XYZ Organization may read as follows: *To develop a new service program for county residents, XYZ Organization will recruit 50 new volunteers within the next four months.*
Once there is a goal and an objective in place, specific actions, or *activities*, should be formulated that will help meet the objective. Continuing our example, XYZ Organization might decide on the following activities:

- Develop and distribute updated volunteer recruitment flyers
- Run volunteer recruitment ads on local TV and radio
- Increase focus on volunteer recruitment in social media avenues

As you can see, achieving just two or three objectives may require a significant amount of time and energy. In fact, to set yourself up for success, make sure your objectives are SMART. This commonly used acronym reminds us that objectives should be:

Specific – Your objective is tightly focused and concrete.
Measurable – You have defined a means to quantify your efforts.
Attainable – Your objective may be a stretch to achieve; however, at the same time, the bar has not been set unrealistically high.
Relevant – Your volunteer program's objectives mesh with the overall goals of your organization.
Time-oriented – Set a deadline for which to accomplish your objective (e.g., six or twelve months).

Although it does take effort to formally set goals, objectives, and activities, the process can be invigorating. It's an opportunity for staff and volunteers alike to re-evaluate, refocus, and recharge — with a specific task to accomplish in sight.