

Chapter 4.2

Working with volunteers

Benefits of this chapter

Volunteers are as important as your sport

There is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteers, but it is certain that, their contributions and involvement in aquatics is a significant part of growing our sport. This is not to say that the contributions from your staff and members are less important, however, you should always remember that volunteers donate their time. Therefore, learning to manage them and keeping them happy can be both useful and necessary for your national aquatics federation.

This chapter will discuss various ways of recruiting, managing and keeping volunteers.

Introduction

Why volunteering matters?

As aquatics is a sport which relies heavily on volunteers to carry out most of our activities such as running competitions, administration, etc. it is important to understand why volunteers matter and how their contribution can benefit your aquatics federation.

According to a recent study from John Hopkins University statistics show that the contributions from volunteers can account for an estimated 5% of a country's Gross Domestic Product. Imagine the effect that volunteers can have on your aquatics federation!

Volunteers are usually at the forefront of our sport, they are the ones doing the hands on activities at swim meets, diving competitions, etc. They are the ones thinking of new systems and developing innovative ways of thinking from an organisational point of view. Their contributions help create close partnerships with the community and they are the faces of your federation. Recognising their hard work, facilitating and supporting their contributions and above all keeping them happy is important to the growth of your national aquatics federation. It is critical to ensure that the methods your implement to recruit, train and support these volunteers reflects your federation as being well organised and caring.

Recruiting for Success

Before you begin to recruit volunteers for the various duties within your aquatics federation, make sure to consider the following points:

- What specific tasks need to be done within your federation?
- Which tasks should be done and can be done by volunteers?
- When, where and how do you recruit volunteers?
- Who recruits volunteers in your federation?
- Who can train the volunteers?

Recruiting volunteers can be a time consuming process. Unfortunately, it often becomes a case of looking for a “warm body”, somebody, anybody, to get the job done. Keeping these questions in mind when deciding when and where to recruit volunteers can help your federation gain time and keep the support it needs to be successful.

Why recruit a volunteer?

- To help spread the work within your federation among volunteers
- To support your federation
- To gain fresh and new ideas
- To get the work done within your federation

Recruiting on any level within your federation is about getting the right person with the right skills at the right time in the right job. Whether your present volunteers can fit the job, or if you have to recruit others, it is important to match the right person to the right job.

It is important to keep in mind that securing volunteers should be done through a total recruitment process rather than by taking the first individual who comes along. The recruitment of volunteers in your National Federation, whether it is to get someone to organise the annual budget meeting or to run for president, should not be handled any differently from the recruitment of your paid staff.

Define the Job

The first step in recruiting volunteers is to define the jobs which need to be done. Whether it is officials at swim meets, towel girls/boys on deck, etc. each job should be defined in order to help ensure your federation gets the right person to fill the right position.

Determine Job Qualifications

Once the volunteer job is defined, determine what qualifications are required to do the job. A job description is a useful tool. It lists all the qualifications needed to do the job. This step clarifies for all those involved, including your aquatics federation, the expectations and requirements of the volunteer position. It also gives volunteers an idea of the part they play in the total picture of your federation.

A volunteer job description should include:

- Title – This is the volunteer's identification. Remember to give this as much prestige as possible.
- Purpose – This is a general statement identifying what the job is and why it is necessary.
- Responsibilities – List each duty and responsibility of the job. Be as specific as possible.
- Qualifications – Outline the skills, knowledge and attitudes you seek.
- Relationships – Clarify who the volunteer is accountable to.
- Time commitment – Estimate time demands of the job. Be specific, i.e: define how work should be done weekly, monthly, long-term basis or flexible, self-determined.
- Benefits – What is in it for the volunteer? What is to be gained personally by doing the job?

Examples:

- The "people" person might be good at social committee work, canvassing or public relations.
- The "prestige" person might enjoy being master of ceremonies or media spokesman.
- The "achievement" person might like program planning, chairing a committee, working on a new activity or being on the executive. Any "type" of person could do a very good job at any volunteer position, but both the organization and the volunteer benefit from a perfect match.

Motivate

Keeping volunteers motivated is very important, especially since they are not reliant on your federation or the event for income. If they become unmotivated they have the choice of walking away from an event or federation, and this can become problematic especially if an event that you are running depends highly on volunteers. However, as experience has shown, volunteers are often motivated by simple things like the uniforms they are given, the meals they are provided, free access to the competition after their shift, positive working environment etc.

Some easy ways of motivating volunteers at your aquatics events include:

1/ Positive feedback

Positive feedback is essential to great coaching. Just as coaches use it on the pool deck, you should use it in your federation to keep your volunteers motivated. Giving positive feedback can go a long way.

2/ Give regular rewards and recognition

An effective way to stimulate inner motivation of your volunteers is through rewards and recognition. Whether it is recognising a job well done vocally or through a reward both are incentives which can motivate your volunteers to keep working hard.

3/ Provide on-the-job training

Developing a standard process within your federation for training your volunteers, similar to how you would train a full time staff member, can go a long way in motivating your new members. Training allows them to see what your federation is about and helps them build a connection and develop passion for aquatics and your federation.

4/ Be available

Be easily accessible to volunteers will help enormously with their morale and motivation. At times it can be frustrating within your federation to be interrupted with questions from volunteers but spending time with volunteers will help them feel part of your winning team.

5/ Provide free food

Offering snacks, drinks and depending on the setting meals can go a long way in motivating and encouraging volunteers.

6/ Have fun

Fun is a great motivator. Volunteer work can be stressful, and fun is one of the most effective ways to get everyone on track and relieve stress. It is important to work hard, but also to play hard.