

Getting volunteers started, the right way

A new volunteer shows up, full of energy and enthusiasm, ready to go to work. That's great, right? Absolutely...as long as you take the time to make sure the volunteer's work will be done as safely – for them and for the organization – as possible.

Orientation – What kind of orientation program do you have for volunteers? (By the way, it's never too late to “orient” volunteers who have been with you for years.) What follows is a short checklist of the basics. You might consider incorporating these items into a packet to give to all volunteers, so everyone understands what you expect and require.

- Registration form – This can include not only the volunteer's contact information, hours of availability, etc., but also areas of interest, special skills, allergies or other medical conditions that might affect volunteer assignments, and other such information.
- Description of available volunteer assignments.
- Chain of command – Who does the volunteer report to? Who do they see in the organization when they need something, or have a complaint or problem?
- Safety rules and other rules.
- Time sheets
- List of tax-deductible expenses and/or reimbursement forms.
- Photo/video release forms, for your newsletter or other publicity.
- The VIS® brochure. (Download and print as needed, at www.cimaworld.com/files/brochure.pdf.)

Screening and training – Conduct criminal background checks on volunteers who would be in contact with vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. Depending on the physical demands of certain volunteer tasks, make sure the volunteer is physically capable of performing the work. (This not only reduces the risk of injury, it also reduces the risk that a volunteer might contend that a preexisting injury occurred during his or her volunteer work.) Make sure volunteers have the necessary training for each assignment. Have them *show you* – not just tell you – they know how to do the work.

Accountability – Just because volunteers are unpaid, that doesn't mean they are unaccountable. Require them to follow your rules, just as though they were paid employees.

Here are some additional resources on training, screening, and other aspects of volunteer management:

- www.nonprofitrisk.org -- The Nonprofit Risk Management Center
- www.nonprofit-info.org -- The Internet Nonprofit Center
- www.energizeinc.com -- Energize, Inc.
- www.nonprofitissues.com -- *Nonprofit Issues*, a publication devoted to legal matters.
- www.choicepoint.com -- One of many providers of criminal background investigations and credit reports.