

Chapter Two: Program Planning



“I have an almost complete disregard of precedent, and a faith in the possibility of something better. It irritates me to be told how things have always been done. I defy the tyranny of precedent. I go for anything new that might improve the past.”

- Clara Barton

2. Volunteer Services Program Planning

Planning is required to deliver an effective Volunteer Services Program. Initial impressions are lasting ones. Having an organized program increases the chances of your program running smoothly and frees you to concentrate on the needs of your volunteers and their supervisors.

2.1 Program Planning Elements

Whether you just want to tweak a program that is running smoothly or you're starting from scratch, some of the elements you'll need to look at include:

- **Target audiences and marketing strategies.** *What types of volunteers do we need and how can I reach them? What do we have to offer volunteers in terms of personal or professional growth or the satisfaction of giving?*
- **The “right mix” of volunteer opportunities.** *Do we have volunteer positions for people with limited skills as well as for professionals? Do we have short term projects? Do we offer volunteer opportunities for families? Do we have projects that can be done during the traditional work day as well as during the evening and weekends?*
- **Needs analysis.** *Have we assessed our population and agency needs? When do we need volunteer assistance? Do we need front desk coverage at lunch time? Do we need help when many of our commands are getting ready for deployment? Do we supplement our financial programs during tax time or prior to the holidays? Do we use volunteers during a crisis? Do we use them to extend service delivery hours or locations?*
- **Position descriptions.** *Have we analyzed tasks and created realistic job descriptions for positions in which we routinely use volunteers? Is there a process in place to create position descriptions for arising needs? Do we have interesting and challenging positions?*



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- ***Effectiveness of services delivered. Do we have a method of training volunteers and assessing their effectiveness? Do we get feedback from volunteer supervisors and customers about the Volunteer Services Program?***
- ***Satisfaction level of volunteers. Do we have a system in place for assessing our volunteers' satisfaction with their experience at our agency? Do we use the feedback from volunteers to improve the Volunteer Services Program?***
- ***Resource allocation. How much funding do we have to support our program? Is there funding to reimburse expenses? To purchase token appreciation gifts? To host a recognition event? To send volunteers to training? Is there a system in place to allow volunteers to use agency computers, office equipment and supplies?***

These decisions are made through effective planning, often called Strategic Planning. The essential elements of effective program planning are:

- ***Needs assessment and data analysis.***
- ***Resource identification.***
- ***Action plan development.***
- ***Evaluation. (Covered in Chapter Eight: Program Evaluation.)***

2.2 Needs Assessment and Data Analysis

The decisions you make are only as good as the data you base them upon. The two primary types of decision making data are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data, such as surveys and needs assessments, gather data from a large group of people. Quantitative data is great for noting trends, but can be frustrating as it is difficult to completely understand multiple choice responses.

Qualitative data such as focus groups and interviews gather data from a very small group of people. The data provides in-depth information, but for only a small number of respondents. It's not wise to make major program decisions based solely on qualitative data. Both types of data are valuable. It's often especially beneficial to get results from a large survey and then do follow-on focus groups or interviews to clarify responses or concerns generated by the quantitative tool.



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When doing a needs assessment for your Volunteer Services Program getting input from current volunteers, staff volunteer supervisors, installation personnel and agency management to determine their needs, perceptions, expectations, etc. will enable you to establish or maintain a strong program.

Each DOD Family Support Program is required to do some type of needs assessment to evaluate, revise, develop and improve programs and service delivery methods. A needs assessment:

- Develops a demographic profile of your client population and its needs.
- Analyzes service delivery trends.
- Documents emerging needs.
- Notes other service providers utilized by clients.
- Identifies gaps in services.
- Indicates program awareness levels.
- Identifies any misperceptions potential clients have about family support services.

2.2.1 Client Needs and Demographics

It's important to target your Volunteer Services Program to the unique needs of the personnel who make up your installation. Learn the mission of your installation and the mix of service personnel that is required to carry out the mission. Some installations are highly technical, or the location of headquarters personnel. Oftentimes, a higher percentage of senior military personnel staff such installations. They, and their spouses, are more likely to be college educated, and may, therefore, be looking for information about professional volunteer opportunities such as teaching workshops or providing individual education sessions.

Perhaps the mission of your installation is training. There may be a mix of junior and senior personnel who are only attached to your installation for a short time period. They, or their spouses, may be looking for short term or temporary volunteer experiences such a managing a project. A few of examples of short-term projects that have been managed by volunteers are:

- Coordinating a Military Spouse Appreciation event.
- Managing a “fun run” in recognition of the Month of the Military Child.



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- Hosting a Senior Military Spouse Conference.
- Providing in-service training.
- Implementing a marketing campaign.
- Doing customer satisfaction surveys and tabulating the results.

Since the military is primarily comprised of younger adults, it is very likely that you will have individuals who want to volunteer, but who have minimal education and experience. Their immediate needs may very well be to gain skills to assist them in developing a resume in support of future paid employment.

Many middle and high schools now require students to perform a minimum number of community service hours, so you may have teens at your installation looking for opportunities to volunteer. Boy and Girl Scouts may also be working on a community service badge and look to your agency for an opportunity to volunteer.

College students in human service and counseling programs are often looking for practicum and internship opportunities within a military family support program.

As installations realign, missions may expand or change. Stay tuned to any changes on the installation or within the local community that may have an impact on opportunities for your clients. When employment opportunities are limited on the installation and the surrounding community it is helpful to have a robust volunteer program so military family members don't become frustrated about potential career stagnation.

Based on what you know about personnel assigned to your installation, what services volunteers currently perform and have performed in the past, and your professional experience, you'll be prepared to address the volunteer needs of your clients.

2.2.2 Command Needs

We often focus our Volunteer Services Program on military family members, but service members at commands make excellent volunteers. They may do shift work and are available during traditional hours or they may need to volunteer during non-traditional business hours.

Junior command personnel may want to volunteer because they want to fill free time. More senior personnel may want to volunteer because they feel strongly



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about an area such as financial education or sexual assault. They may also want to volunteer to “try out” a potential second career upon retirement.

Whatever the reasons, the more active duty military personnel who are familiar with your family support program the better, as they will be able to educate personnel at their commands about programs and services available.

2.2.3 Local Community Needs

You may not always be able to place a volunteer at your agency, or even on your installation, so it’s important to be aware of community needs. For example, if you interview a young service member who wants to work with animals you most likely will not be able to place him or her within your agency, but you’re able to serve your client and increase your credibility if you’re able to give a name and a phone number to a contact person at an agency in the local community such as a local animal rescue group, shelter, or pet therapy organization to the individual seeking volunteer opportunities.

By referring potential volunteers from the military community to the local civilian community you increase good will and acceptance of the military installation. At many military installations, military families don’t live on the installation, but live in the local community using civilian schools, businesses and services. Volunteers improve the quality of life of everyone in the community, not just military personnel and their families.

2.3 Data Sources

Information regarding the use of volunteers and the types of volunteer opportunities desired by DOD family members comes from a variety of sources. Well being surveys, installation quality of life boards, local family surveys and evaluations, focus groups, internet polls, interviews, and individual requests are some sources of data. Oftentimes, excellent data is obtained. It is imperative to disseminate information fundamental to program planning to the staff that plan and deliver direct services.

2.3.1 Surveys

Surveys are a convenient method for gathering data from large, multifaceted target audience groups. Survey forms can be prepared for completion by the individual surveyed, or can be completed by an interviewer as they solicit responses from survey participants. Although the examples below pertain to surveys of potential volunteers and volunteer supervisors, general subjects to be covered by any survey include:



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- Demographic information (age, rate/rank, gender, years in military, number in family, employment status, number and frequency of relocations, etc.)
- Current knowledge about volunteer opportunities on and off the installation.
- Current knowledge and usage of your local family support programs.
- Preferred sources of information (word of mouth, radio, TV, media, etc.)
- Factors influencing use of family support programs (recent relocations, access and timing of services, etc.)

Surveys should be conducted at random, in numbers sufficient to gain a strong sense of the overall target audience and its subsets.

Large surveys require a great deal of expertise and resources to conduct in order to produce useful results. You can conduct surveys on a smaller scale by following a few simple steps:

- Get approval to do your survey.
- Determine who you want to survey and what you hope to learn by doing so.
- Design a short, clear survey that will be easy to tabulate.
- Have at least three people review the survey questions. Make sure at least one of them knows nothing about your program to ensure question clarity.
- Use self-addressed envelopes to return hardcopy surveys, do e-mail surveys, or conduct surveys in person in the lobby of your facility, the commissary, clinic, or base housing.
- Tabulate results as responses come in if possible. Recruit volunteers to tabulate.
- Share the information gathered with other family support staff.

You may find you've generated additional questions as a result of your survey and may want to meet with your target population in small groups or with individuals to clarify information gathered in your survey.



2.3.2 Focus Groups

A focus group is a small group formed for the purpose of sharing information about a common interest. It is the most widely used form of qualitative research. Many times the term “focus group” is improperly used when what actually occurs is a group discussion or even a briefing. The desired outcome of the focus group interview is a clarification of needs and concerns of participants.

A focus group:

- Seeks in-depth, open-ended responses about a topic.
- Interviews groups of 8-12 people in an informal setting.
- Uses a series of 6-8 preplanned open-ended questions to facilitate group interaction and stimulate thinking.
- Typically lasts approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.
- Should have two facilitators. One facilitator documents responses and the other asks questions. It is important for the questioner to be unbiased.

Consider the following in organizing a focus group to gather data about your Volunteer Services Program:

- The group should be representative. Try to include not only those who are enthusiastic supporters, but also those who have been less than satisfied, or know nothing about your program.
- Prescreen participants. It would not be beneficial to do a focus group about volunteer satisfaction with your Volunteer Services Program with participants who have only been a volunteer for a short time.
- It is important to get all participants involved. Do “round robins” in response to the questions if you find that you have one or two extremely dominant participants.
- You might want to do focus groups with differing target audiences. For example, you might ask almost the same eight questions of spouses, retirees and teens, but in separate groups. Generally it is best to have at least two separate focus groups with the same target audience to validate results. It may be necessary to do three or more if responses are ambiguous.



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- Ask for permission to audio or video tape your session. If even one person seems hesitant, do not record the session. It is more important to get good information than to have a recording of the group.

The format for a focus group is the facilitator:

- Welcomes participants as they arrive.
- Offers refreshments as participants arrive.
- Begins group by introducing him/her self and the recorder.
- Asks participants to introduce themselves.
- Explains what a focus group is, the purpose for this group, approximately how long it will last and asks for permission to tape or video if planned.
- Asks the questions. Probes where necessary.
- Lets participants know when the group is almost over and asks if there are any comments that participants would like to make that weren't covered in the questions asked.
- Lets participants know how he/she will use the results of the focus group.
- Thanks participants.

Use the “funnel” approach for questions. Start off with a broad question and “funnel” to the more specific questions. For example to determine satisfaction levels of existing volunteers you might ask:

- What types of volunteer work have you done prior to volunteering here?
- What has been the most satisfying experience and why?
- What attracted you to volunteer at our family support program?
- What types of volunteer work are you currently most enjoying doing at our agency?
- What are you finding to be most frustrating about volunteering with our agency?
- Comment on your experiences working with staff and your supervisor?
- Comment about the adequacy of training you've received to do your job.



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- If you could change one thing about volunteering here, what would it be?
- What other comments do you have about the Volunteer Services Program?

At the end of the focus group you could distribute a small goodie bag, coffee mug or other giveaway with an agency newsletter, information about upcoming training opportunities, etc.

It's nice, but not a requirement, to follow up with a thank you note to those who participated in your group. Tabulate your results by question or by topic area and share with your chain of command.

2.3.3 Interviews

Another way to get information is to ask people for it. Interviews are time consuming, but often yield in-depth, useful information. Interviewing current volunteers and current or previous staff members who have supervised volunteers may be very valuable towards making improvements in your program. There are three types of qualitative research interviews:

- Structured - usually with a structured questionnaire.
- Semi-structured - open ended questions.
- In-depth - one or two issues covered in great detail. Questions are based on what the interviewee says.

The semi-structured interview with open-ended questions is the most used format.

Questions for qualitative interviews are generally focused on learning the interviewee's:

- Behavior or experience.
- Opinion or belief about a subject.
- Feelings.
- Knowledge.
- Background or demographic data.

Since interviews are time consuming for both you as the interviewer as well as your interviewees, it's important to be prepared. Know what you want to find



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out, and ask the right questions to get the information you need. Prepare your questions in advance. Do a practice interview with a family member or friend to ensure your questions are clear.

When scheduling your interview, arrange meeting time, location, and provide a brief summary of your goal for the interview. At the interview, you're in control. The following agenda will help you stay in control and gather meaningful data:

- Briefly describe the purpose of the interview.
- If you want to record the interview, ask for permission.
- Begin by asking simple questions. For someone who has supervised volunteers in the past you might ask about the types and how many volunteers they've supervised.
- Ask more in-depth questions as the interview progresses. For example, you might ask what has been their greatest challenge in supervising volunteers and how they've dealt with it.
- End with a question such as "Is there anything else I need to know about your experience with the Volunteer Services Program?"
- Offer to provide information about the results of your survey if your interviewee is interested.
- Thank the interviewee.
- Follow up with a thank you card.

Upon completion of your interviews, document the key information you learned and forward it to others to whom the information would be useful.

Try to avoid some common pitfalls of the interview process. To ensure that the interview goes smoothly:

- Limit interruptions such as the telephone. Certainly, turn YOUR cell phone off.
- Eliminate competing distractions such as a lively conversation across the hallway.
- Start with simple questions to avoid possible "stage fright" for both you and your interviewee.



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- Avoid asking interviewee embarrassing or awkward questions.
- Avoid jumping from one subject to another. Try to ask questions about a similar topic in sequence.
- Interview then inform or teach. Try to provide information about your program after you've asked your interview questions.
- Present a neutral perspective to avoid biasing the interview.

2.4 Resource Identification and Assessment

It's important to know what tools you have available to support your Volunteer Services Program since funding is generally not specifically dedicated to the Volunteer Services Program. Assess current and anticipated fiscal and material resources. All staff should be aware of budget and fiscal restraints. Every family support program has limited financial and staff resources. Program planning must take into consideration the availability of resources to the entire family support program.

2.4.1 Agency Resources

If you have just a handful of volunteers within your organization you may be able to provide general supervision to all of them. However, you may need to recruit staff members who are willing to provide position specific job training and supervision for your volunteers too. Supervising anyone requires time and can be hard work depending on the individual volunteer. Staff supervisors often get frustrated as they spend a great deal of time and energy training a volunteer, and then the volunteer gets a paid position or transfers, the recruitment and the training process begins again. Also, staff members who supervise volunteers often don't receive recognition for their efforts. We'll talk more about this issue in Chapter Seven: Recognition.

Working closely with staff to develop realistic expectations of volunteers, a specific job description, step - by- step training plans, and strategies for motivating and maintaining volunteers can help to alleviate some frustrations. However, it's a reality of the paid and volunteer work force as well that people leave positions.

Many sites heavily rely on long-term, trained volunteers to provide and expand the availability of agency services. If you're fortunate to have a concentration of retired military personnel, who have also retired from their civilian careers, utilize their vast experience. At remote or overseas locations many talented individuals may not be able to find full-time employment in their field and make excellent volunteers.



Always have some short-term volunteer projects available for individuals who are new to the area and want to volunteer while they do their job search. Updating job vacancy announcements, designing and posting professional looking displays, managing projects, and assisting other clients with computer software and the Internet are some possible short term volunteer assignments that require limited supervision and training.

2.4.2 Community Resources

Partner with other organizations on and off your installation to expand resources. Network to learn about opportunities for volunteer placement and training.

Most military family support programs can provide an excellent undergraduate or graduate level internship for college students in education, human resources, and counseling programs at local universities. Contact local universities and offer placement and supervision. Ensure your student volunteers have a rich experience by involving them in all functions of your agency and you'll have interns contacting you year after year for placement opportunities. In turn, you may become more aware of training opportunities available at the college or university.

College and VA work-study participants are placed in some family support programs. Depending on their skill level they should at a minimum, able to greet clients, compile packets of information and do other routine administrative work.

Don't forget to utilize the active duty personnel at your installation. We often call upon them when we need logistical support. Many times there are also individuals who cannot deploy or mobilize with their unit and could be a valuable, albeit, short term asset to your program. Perhaps you could arrange for a Career Counselor/Planner/Advisor to be available on site one day a week to talk with both active duty service members and their spouses about military career opportunities. A person trained as a Command Financial Specialist could do budgets or workshops. A Uniformed Victim Advocate or Sexual Assault Victim Advocate could supplement your volunteer watch bill.

And finally, although we often don't think of guest speakers as volunteers, who would be better than the installation's General or Admiral being invited to your agency to do a brief about the installation's mission and strategic plan as a staff in-service training? Be sure to invite your volunteers to this training!



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2.4.3 Fiscal and Material Resources

Resource needs of your Volunteer Services Program are relatively minimal. You need:

- Administrative tools such as hard copy or electronic forms to manage your program.
- Office equipment such as copy machines, telephones and computers.
- Thank you cards, certificates of appreciations or token gifts.
- Donations or financial support for recognition events you choose to host.
- Professional development resources such as journals, conferences and Internet sites.
- Time to recruit, train, supervise and recognize volunteers and the staff who supervise them.

Even though resource needs are minimal, you should develop and maintain a prioritized list of justified resource needs and submit these requests to your chain of command. It's important to differentiate "must have" items from "nice to have" items. A "wish list" that includes order forms and sources should always be on file should funding become available. Maintain a copy of the list and providers as all items on the list may not be purchased during a single order. Items not purchased from the wish list can be resubmitted as additional funding becomes available.

2.5 Program Planning

Every year or two it's important to pause and not only look at where your program is currently, but in what direction you want it to go. Most organizations do strategic planning which is "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (*Creating and Implementing your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, John M. Bryson and Farnum K. Alston, Jossey-Bass, 1995). Strategic planning looks at an organization's mission, goals, objectives, and internal and external factors impacting on it. Strategic planning allows one to act rather than react. Most businesses and organizations, including military family support programs do strategic planning.

You can do strategic planning for your Volunteer Services Program. Key questions asked during strategic planning process include:



- Why does the Volunteer Services Program exist?
- How does the Volunteer Program interface with other family support programs?
- How does our Volunteer Program interface with community programs?
- Who are our volunteers?
- What are their needs?
- What are the needs of the staff who supervise them?
- Are there emerging issues we haven't identified or addressed?
- What direction should we be moving in our Volunteer Program?

2.5.1 Program Planning Benefits

The benefits of program planning include:

- Minimizing the element of surprise.
- Maximizing your ability to create your own future and manage change effectively.
- Helping ensure that all functional areas in your organization work efficiently toward achieving stated organizational goals.
- Identifying potential internal problems on paper so corrective actions can be taken before negative impacts are experienced.
- Allowing for a change in management approach from reactive to proactive.
- Continually measuring performance against established standards.
- Giving managers and staff a sense of ownership in organizational outcomes, and providing everyone with a tracking document that clearly records accomplishments.

2.5.2 Program Planning Process

Many books and articles describe how best to do strategic planning. The fundamental steps that are taken in the strategic planning process follow.



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Step One: Get Ready

If the head of your organization has not already implemented a planning event for your entire family support program, decide to make time to plan your Volunteer Services Program. An organization usually involves all staff and many volunteers in some aspect of strategic planning. The entire staff may not participate in the actual planning session per se, since it might require suspending services while all staff met.

The focus of your strategic plan could be solely on the Volunteer Services. You could invite volunteers, staff who supervise them, supervisors from functional areas, and other agency management to meet to discuss your program and develop a plan.

If getting people together isn't possible, after gathering data from surveys, volunteers, supervisors, etc. you could develop a draft plan and ask for feedback on its workability.

If your family support program is located in a region where other branches of the service are also located, contact a sister service and talk with them about the strengths and challenges of their Volunteer Services Program.

It's important to gather input from all of staff who are involved with the Volunteer Services Program as well as those who are not so that everyone is aware of the goals for the program. This input could be obtained through a written survey or an interview prior to the planning meeting.

As part of getting ready, it's important to have current data to use in the decision making process. There is some significant pre-planning work that needs to be done and made available to all of those involved in the planning process. Data gathered through needs assessments, interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc, is analyzed and sent, either prior to the in-person planning session for participants to read in advance, or is presented at the planning session.

Step Two: Articulate Mission and Vision

Your mission statement communicates the essence of your organization. Mission statements typically describe an organization in terms of:

- Purpose - Why the organization exists, and what it seeks to accomplish.
- Business - The main method or activity through which the organization tries to fulfill the identified purpose.



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- Values - The principles or beliefs that guide an organization's members as they pursue the organization's purpose.

Whereas the mission statement summarizes the what, how, and why of an organization's work, a vision statement presents an image of what success will look like. A vision statement should be realistic, easily understood, ambitious, and responsive to change. It should orient your group's energies and serve as a guide to action. It should be consistent with the organization's values. In short, a vision should challenge and inspire the group to achieve its mission.

For example, Microsoft Corporation's vision statement is, "To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential."

Their mission statement is, "Empowering people through great software – any time, any place and on any device."

If you're only looking at your Volunteer Services Program, you look at the same three areas in defining the mission for your program:

- Purpose - Why do we have a Volunteer Services Program?
- Business – How do we currently go about our business of recruiting, screening, placing, supervising and recognizing volunteers? Could we do any of these better or more efficiently?
- Values – What are our beliefs about this program? Does our agency cherish volunteers or see them as a "necessary evil"?

Step Three: Assess the Situation

Once your organization has committed to why it exists and what it does, it must take a clear-eyed look at its current situation. Part of strategic planning is an awareness of resources and an eye to the future, so that your organization can successfully respond to change. Situation assessment, therefore, means reviewing current information about your organization's (or program's) strengths, weaknesses, and performance - information that will highlight the critical issues that your organization faces and that its strategic plan must address. These could include a variety of primary concerns, such as funding issues, new program opportunities, changing regulations, or changing needs in the client population. Choose the most important issues to address.

Assessing the situation also involves analyzing risks associated with the use of volunteers and establishing procedures to reduce risks. Possible risks associat-



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ed with using volunteers include:

- Working with fragile clients.
- Use of equipment.
- Access to confidential material.
- Physical requirements of a job.
 - Results of failure to follow agency procedures.

Step Four: Develop Strategies, Goals, and Objectives

Once critical issues are identified, it is time to figure out what to do about them: the general and specific results to be sought (the goals and objectives). Goals and objectives may come from individual inspiration, group discussion, formal decision-making techniques, and so on - but the bottom line is that, in the end, the leadership agrees on how to address the critical issues.

This can take considerable time and flexibility. Discussions at this stage frequently will require additional information or a reevaluation of conclusions reached during the situation assessment. It is even possible that new insights will emerge which change the thrust of the mission statement. It is important that planners are not afraid to go back to an earlier step in the process and take advantage of available information to create the best possible plan.

Step Five: Complete the Written Plan

The mission has been articulated, the critical issues identified, and the goals and strategies agreed upon. This step essentially involves putting all that down on paper. Usually a member of management or even a planning consultant will draft a final planning document and submit it for review to all key decision makers if your Volunteer Services Program planning is part of the agency's plan. If not, you will need to capture your plan on paper or electronically. The product of Step Five is a strategic plan!

The final step in getting ready is to select a facilitator and prepare an agenda.



2.5.3 Program Planning Agenda

A sample agenda follows.

Sample Strategic Planning Session Agenda

Welcome, Purpose, and Overview of the session: _____

Icebreaker Activity: _____

Mission Statement Review/Update (if applicable)/Vision: _____

Success Reports: _____

Data Reports: _____

Brainstorm Goals: _____

Prioritize Brainstormed Goals: _____

Select 3-5 Goals to Operationalize: _____

Formulate a Written Plan of Action and Milestones for Each Goal:

Assign Responsibilities: _____

Summarize and Close: _____



2.5.3.1 Strategic Planning Agenda Tips

- **Icebreaker Activity:** *It's important that the ice breaker activity be fun to stimulate creativity. It also needs to be focused on the topic of planning. An example of an activity would be to ask each person to use crayons, markers and a large sheet of paper to draw, and then describe, their drawing of the "ideal volunteer program."*
- **Success Reports:** *After reviewing the mission statement, have each participant report one or two job related-successes from the previous year that supported the family support program mission and vision. If the group is large, ask a representative from each functional area to report successes.*
- **Data Reports:** *Keep the meeting flowing at a pretty fast pace so that participants' energy levels stay high. It's especially important to provide only an oral synopsis of the highlights of the needs assessment data collected. Focus on service delivery gaps, or areas that clients indicate an opportunity for improvement exists within your organization.*
- **Brainstorming:** *If you're strategic planning session is an all day event, try to do the brainstorming session right before lunch. Brainstorming energizes people and continues with lunchtime discussions.*
- **Pare Down:** *All kinds of wonderful and exciting, and often unrealistic, ideas are generated through brainstorming. The next step is to use some type of nominal process to pare down the list of goals into 3-5 areas that staff and volunteers are excited enough about to want to work on for the next year or more.*
- **Operationalizing Goals:** *Once the brainstormed goals are selected that will be operationalized, ask participants to choose which one they are most interested in more fully developing. It's important that a basic plan for each idea be developed during the strategic planning session otherwise participants will leave the session without a clear plan. It's equally important for someone to be responsible for following up with the plan throughout the year. This responsibility often falls to management, but a staff member or volunteer who is excited about, and committed to a goal, may be the best champion for the goal. A sample Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M) form follows.*



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It might be helpful to remind participants, goals and objectives should:

- Relate to the agency's mission.
- Provide a clear focus.
- Address short-term and long-term needs.

Goals are developed as general statements and objectives are specific actions related to each goal. Objectives should be:

- Related to mission and goals.
- Realistic.
- Measurable.
- Prioritized.
- ***Close: Finally, bring closure to your strategic planning session. Summarize decisions made, put plans for follow up in writing, and ensure responsibilities have been assigned.***

The strategic planning process can produce a roadmap to guide the activities and accomplishments of the family support program, and the Volunteer Services Program for the near future.

2.6 Program Design

Each agency's Volunteer Services Program is comprised of similar functions:

- Recruiting.
- Screening.
- Placing or referring.
- Orienting and training.
- Supervising.
- Recognizing.



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The way these functions are done may be very different. Recruiting or marketing strategies may be different depending on an installation's unique characteristics. The number and types of volunteers may be different. The need for volunteers may be greater at some installations than at others. The type of volunteer opportunities varies from one installation to another. And finally, the way volunteers are recognized is often installation or agency specific.

Whether you're fully dedicated to managing your Volunteer Services Program or it's a collateral duty, there is an art and a science to designing and implementing your volunteer program. This guide will provide you with some of the "science" of managing your program. The "art" is the flair in which you manage your program and the mark you leave on the volunteers and staff with whom you work.

"The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight,
but has no vision."

- *Helen Keller*

