

The Changing Nature of Volunteers @ your library. “In the broadest sense, library volunteerism is one way of fostering the democratic ideal of community participation... In the narrowest sense, volunteerism is one part of the total dialog between the community and the library.” —Preston Driggers & Eileen Dumas, *Managing Library Volunteers: A Practical Toolkit* (2002)

Volunteers and public libraries have gone hand-in-hand for decades; however, the roles that volunteers play in the library and the type of people looking to volunteer at your library has changed and is still changing. This issue of Across the Board is

dedicated to helping public library trustees understand and prepare for these changes and make the most of the dedicated people in your community who would like to help your library.

ACROSS THE

BOARD

The Role of Today's Library Volunteer

Many U.S. public libraries would not exist today if it were not for volunteers banding together to form local reading rooms and lending libraries. Over the years volunteers have done everything from running the library to working the circulation desk and even shoveling the sidewalk in winter.

Times have certainly changed area libraries over the years, greatly so in the past decade. For example, technology has changed the complexity of workflow in the library and many volunteers who used to help check out books have moved from behind the circulation desk to other roles within the organization. Another shift has been the increased number of paid staff people now working in our libraries, many of whom started out as volunteers!

EXTERNAL CHANGES

NEW VOLUNTEERS There are external changes coming that will have an impact on the type of volunteers knocking on your door. The *Chronicle of Philanthropy*

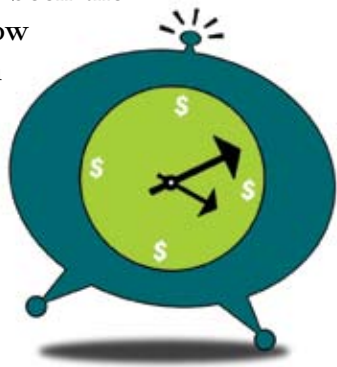
recently reported on the inability of many nonprofit organizations to take advantage of the imminent surge of retiring Baby Boomers as a volunteer source. Constance Todd, executive director of the National Institute of Senior Centers,

says that the baby boomer volunteers within her organization want their volunteer work “to have value and an impact” and that they like social interaction. How can you meet their needs in your library?

- Create volunteer opportunities that are more than just busy work.
- Allow for flexibility to make the most of a retired professionals' skills.
- Be prepared to explain the relative simplicity of your library compared to a large corporation or organization where a retiree may have worked, and help them understand the scale of your operations and how they can help the most.

PERSONNEL COSTS Personnel costs account for a significant portion of your library's budget. In MHLS libraries personnel disbursements account for an average of 64 percent of total budgets.

- Strategize as a board about using your volunteer program to maximize paid staff's time. This will help you demonstrate to the community that they are getting the highest value on the dollar from your library.
- Use volunteers to help get special projects, identified through your long-range planning process, off the ground.
- Volunteers can enhance a patron's experience at your library.
 - Shelf reading, sometimes called an Adopt-a-Shelf Program, can become a primary volunteer activity. This project ensures that the books are in the right order on the shelves so people can find what



Did you know that in 2004 the estimated dollar value of volunteer time was \$17.55 per hour?

(Independent Sector, 2004)

they need while also making your library look neater (and freeing up paid staff to spend more time with patrons).

- Volunteers can serve as greeters at the door, help orient new residents to library services, and serve as hosts during library programs to enhance the welcoming atmosphere at your library.
- Volunteers can coordinate book donations. Train them to assess and categorize book donations:
 - what could be used on the library's shelves,
 - what could be sold at your book sale or online, and
 - which items need to be tossed.

Here are some other suggested volunteer activities:

- Summer Reading Program Support
- Book Menders
- Senior Read-Aloud Program Volunteer: This is a great way to facilitate outreach to senior citizens housed in assisted living homes or care centers without sending your staff outside of the library.

LEGAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Some library volunteer programs simply consist of praying for great volunteers to walk through the door. Libraries must plan for success by:

- Actively recruiting volunteers with needed skills;
- Providing training for volunteers;
- Annually evaluating volunteers to make sure all is going smoothly; and
- Holding a formal recognition event for volunteers.

Either approach requires that the board of trustees sanction the use of volunteers within the library and consider the legal and risk management issues associated with the use of volunteer labor.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE A “VOLUNTEER”? Do you have age limitations? Here's one definition of a volunteer:

“A *volunteer* shall be considered as any individual, 16 years or older, who assists with work done at the Louisville Public Library, without remuneration. Exceptions to the age requirement may be made by the Library Director.

A *student intern* shall be considered as any middle school, high school or college student who performs volunteer work, without remuneration, as part of an authorized school program to earn academic credit. Individual Boy Scouts working on advanced awards are also classified as student interns.” (source: Louisville Public Library, Colorado)

DISABLED VOLUNTEERS If disabled volunteers come into the library as customers, they fall under the “public accommodation” section of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, if they work in your library as volunteers they are exempt from the act. Your willingness to make “reasonable accommodations” in the workplace demonstrates a good faith effort on the part of the library to use the talents of disabled individuals. (For more information about the ADA, visit the MHLS web site at <http://midhudson.org/admin/main.htm>.)

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS Involving teens brings them into the library when they might not otherwise participate in your organization. However, be aware of the management and legal issues surrounding youth volunteers:

- Will you require a parent permission slip?
- How many hours a week will you allow them to work?

Set a minimum age limit for youth volunteers. Some younger teenagers do not have the maturity to work independently and require close supervision. Consider creating parent-child or family volunteer opportunities.

COURT-ORDERED WORKERS ▶ You'll need a policy stating your requirements for court-ordered workers.

- Will you accept court-ordered workers in your library?
- Will municipality or court insurance cover workers while at the library?
- What types of offenses will you accept?

VOLUNTEERS & DRIVING ▶ Are you thinking about soliciting volunteers to do home delivery of library items using a personal vehicle? Be sure that you have a policy requiring your director to review both a current motor vehicle record and proof of auto insurance; make copies to keep on file at the library.

TRAINING ▶ Along with training in the specific tasks a volunteer will be asked to do, volunteers should receive basic safety training.

- Have a written policy that addresses emergencies concerning volunteers so that your staff knows what to do if a volunteer is injured while working at the library. Mishandling this type of situation could have serious financial implications.

- Volunteers should be aware of all chemicals used in the library and their proper usage and storage. State this in a policy written by the board.

CONFIDENTIALITY ▶ One of the most important training components for volunteers is to convey a clear message regarding patron confidentiality and privacy. Volunteers must understand the importance of safeguarding a patron's personal information and reading habits—and that it is not only inappropriate to share this information with family members or friends, but it is against New York State Law. (For more information about the Confidentiality of Patron Records, visit the MHLS web site at <http://midhudson.org/admin/main.htm>.)

ACCOUNTABILITY ▶ Have volunteers "sign-off" on your policies to prove that they've received and read them. This can help protect the library should a volunteer be accused of any wrong-doing that is covered under library policies.

INSURANCE ▶ One of the biggest concerns of many trustees when it comes to volunteers is insurance. The Federal Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 grants immunity from personal liability to volunteers who are acting in good faith within the scope of their duties (a good reason to have *job descriptions* for volunteers!). You can purchase additional insurance, but depending on the extent of your volunteer program this may or may not be worthwhile. Talk to your insurance broker before buying into this.

Samples of volunteer policies and the others mentioned above are available on the MHLS web site under **Trustee Resources** → **Library Policies** or access them directly at http://midhudson.org/department/member_information/library_policies.htm.

RECRUITMENT

Traditionally, your library director will supervise the recruitment, supervision, training, evaluation, and recognition of volunteers or appoint a paid staff member to oversee the volunteer program. Good practices such as training and evaluation can help your library make the most of the time and energy of your volunteers just as it can for paid staff.

RECRUITMENT TIPS

- Include information about volunteer opportunities in your library's brochure, newsletter and on your web site.
- Be sure library staff is aware of what to do if someone walks into the library asking how they can help out.
- Contact local agencies such as the high school or senior center and let them know what type of volunteer opportunities are available. Hospital waiting rooms, church bulletin boards, the Chamber of Commerce and the Post Office are other places where you can drop off information about volunteering at your library.
- Do some targeted recruitment. If you know that you need tutors to help kids with homework in the library, find a teachers organization, RSVP or Senior Center and pitch your volunteer needs to them.
- Be clear about what is expected of a volunteer in the library: what tasks are involved in the job, how many hours will be expected of them, who they will report to, etc.
- Ensure that the paid staff of the library know that volunteers are being recruited in support of their work, not to replace them. This will help to create a welcoming environment for new volunteers.

For more resources related to volunteer management, visit the MHLS web site at <http://midhudson.org/funding/fundraising/volunteers.htm>.

RECOGNITION

As a trustee it is important to insist upon recognition of the volunteer work done in your library. These are the people, like you, who give their time freely because they believe in what your library does. There will be no greater advocate for your library than a trained and happy volunteer. Word of mouth is probably the best publicity mechanism for libraries, and volunteers play a large role in getting the word out to the community about the great stuff going on at your library. Don't miss this opportunity to make the most of your budget and your library's good name.



FALL 2005 TRUSTEE EDUCATION SERIES

Trustee Essentials: Essential sessions are designed to educate public library trustees in *Background and Structure of Libraries in New York*; *Roles and Responsibilities of a Board*; and *Running Effective Meetings*.

2005 ESSENTIALS DATES & LOCATIONS

Thursday, October 6 from 6–8 p.m., Kent Public Library
 Saturday, October 8 from 10 a.m.–12 p.m., Hudson Area Association Library
 Monday, October 24 from 6–8 p.m., NorthEast–Millerton Library

ADVANCED TRUSTEE EDUCATION

This year's topic will be *Your Library's Message: Creating Effective Communication Strategies for Your Library*.

2005 ADVANCED DATES & LOCATIONS

Saturday, November 5 from 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., Millbrook Free Library
 Monday, November 14 from 6–8 p.m., Kinderhook Memorial Library

MHLS 46TH ANNUAL MEETING

Friday, October 14, 2005, Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y.
 Keynote Speaker: Walter M. Mayes (The Giant Storyteller) will speak about the importance of programming in our libraries. **Registration information in the mail by September 2005.**

CONSTRUCTION WORKSHOP

Tuesday, September 27, 2005, MHLS Auditorium, Poughkeepsie
 "Blueprints for Success: Guidelines for Relationships between Library Administrators and Design Professionals from Selection through Construction"
 Speaker: Paul K. Mays of Butler Rowland Mays Architects, LLP, Mechanicville, N.Y.

FRIENDS GROUP RECOGNITION EVENT

Thursday, October 20, 2005, MHLS Auditorium, Poughkeepsie
 Keynote Speaker: Douglas N. Roesemann, 2005 President, Friends of Libraries USA (FOLUSA)

Register online for MHLS events at:
<http://midhudson.org/evanced/lib/eventcalendar.asp>



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