Managing the Risk of Volunteer Misconduct

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What is volunteer misconduct?

- Intentional:
  - Disregard of the nonprofit’s rules, policies, requirements
  - Taking action to harm fellow volunteers/employees, clients, or the nonprofit

- Accidental:
  - Errors in judgment, mistakes

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Your Experience with Volunteer Misconduct

- Question #1:
  - What is your biggest concern or fear about volunteer misbehavior?
Your Experience with Volunteer Misconduct

• Question #2:
  ▪ What are your experiences with volunteer misconduct?
  ▪ INTENTIONAL
  ▪ ACCIDENTAL

Understanding Volunteer “Risk”

The way we “perceive” risk depends on a variety of influences, including:
  ▪ Availability of alternatives and perceived necessity
  ▪ Immediacy, dread and rare yet catastrophic
  ▪ Knowledge and familiarity – is it a familiar exposure? Have we weathered this storm before?
  ▪ Trust
  ▪ Complexity

When are we at greatest risk (but may not know it)?

• When we emphasize external threats…
• Critical internal threats include:
  ➢ Poorly trained volunteers
  ➢ Volunteers who have “signed off” without “signing on”
  ➢ Building internal pressure (e.g., to relax standards and requirements) perhaps caused by poor outcomes
  ➢ Increasing error rate
What is Risk Management?

• A planning discipline
  ➢ 80% - planning for performance
  ➢ 20% - planning for trouble

• A discipline for dealing with uncertainty

Risk Management Process

Experience as a Risk Management Tool

“Our experience is the only thing about which we may be completely sure. Everything else we think we know is merely inference.”

• Rene Decartes

“Once we have an experience, we are thereafter unable to see the world as we did before.”

• Daniel Gilbert – “Stumbling on Happiness”
Increase Communication to Reduce Risk

- Are unhappy volunteers who feel that the nonprofit has been fair and respectful in the process less likely to stir up trouble?

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It’s not only what you say, it’s how you say it that matters

- Compassion, fairness, kindness: your values count

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Multi-Step Process
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- Step 1
  - Establish reasonable performance requirements for volunteers
    - What tasks are suited for volunteer staff?
    - Create a position description for each ongoing volunteer role in your nonprofit
    - Design an orientation program that reinforces your performance requirements and expectations

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Multi-Step Process
Managing the Risk of Volunteer Misconduct

• Step 2
  ➢ Review your expectations with volunteers seeking appointments at your nonprofit
  ➢ Reinforce the idea that volunteer service is valued
  ➢ Emphasize each volunteer’s associated responsibilities

Multi-Step Process
Managing the Risk of Volunteer Misconduct

• Step 3
  ➢ Provide plentiful opportunities for feedback and questions
    • The fallacy of the “open door” policy
  ➢ Encourage complaints!

“A Complaint is a Gift”
Multi-Step Process
Managing the Risk of Volunteer Misconduct

• Step 4
  ➢ Address concerns as they arise; look for warning signs and act without delay
    • Are your rules being followed with precision?
    • Do events suggest a mis-match between volunteer and volunteer role?

Your Scenarios...

• Let’s discuss the specific instances where volunteer misbehavior has sidetracked your nonprofit, or put your mission in jeopardy.
• What went wrong? What can you do to prevent a recurrence?

Pre-Termination Counseling

• Let the volunteer know how his performance is not consistent expectations
• Guide the volunteer through the process of understanding specifically what needs to be done to conform to expectations.
• Consider additional training, pairing him with a more experienced volunteer, or counseling regarding behavioral issues.
• Give the volunteer an opportunity to correct his performance and act in accordance with expectations.
• Inform the volunteer of the necessity of acting in conformance with expectations and that the failure may result in terminating use of the volunteer’s services.
Volunteer Termination

- If the volunteer’s performance continues not to meet expectations, thank and excuse the volunteer from future service.
- Explain the reasons for the termination.
- In some cases (e.g., when the conduct is egregious) immediate termination of services is warranted.

Resources

- Next Month’s Webinar
  - Conducting a Youth Protection Risk Assessment
  - December 2, 2009 – 2:00 pm Eastern

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