Don’t Wait: Create Dismissal Policy Today

By Yvette Boysen

Dismissing a volunteer may not be a common occurrence, but when the time comes, you want to be prepared. “Dismissal policies are integral for volunteer managers to have in place, regardless of the size of the organization or the volunteer program,” explains Sammy Feilchenfeld, training coordinator at Volunteer Toronto (Toronto, Ontario, Canada). “The policy allows the manager to lay out the plan and process if they ever need to dismiss a volunteer.”

According to Feilchenfeld, the following components are key:

Policy statement:
“The policy statement should state that dismissal is fair, equitable and reasonable and related to the expectations and consequences for volunteers,” he says.

Responsibilities:
It’s a volunteer’s responsibility to understand that dismissal is a consequence based on specific actions. Additionally, a nonprofit’s staff is responsible for ensuring the policy is followed.

Procedures:
• What are grounds for immediate dismissal? An example is an altercation with police.
• If applicable, provide details about dismissal during probation.
• Explain the step-by-step process that could result in dismissal. For instance, failure to meet the requirements of the volunteer role or misrepresenting the organization’s mission is followed by warnings, an opportunity to improve and dismissal.
• How will the dismissal itself take place? It may include a formal letter and meeting.
• Is there an appeals policy? If so, how is it handled?

Feilchenfeld says the volunteer manager may write the dismissal policy, but staff who manage volunteers, as well as volunteers themselves, should have input as well.

Once your policy is in place, be sure it is shared with all volunteers at the start of their involvement. Feilchenfeld recommends discussing it during orientation and making it available in its entirety in the volunteer manual. He also suggests some sort of acknowledgment, such as a signature, proving that the volunteer has read and understands the policy.

“Organizations can go a long time before they ever have to dismiss a volunteer, but the biggest mistake is to make the policy while they’re in the process of dismissing a volunteer, or even after the fact,” Feilchenfeld says. “Having the policy ahead of time means the process will be transparent and all volunteers will know they are subject to it.”

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Learn to Remember Names
Do you have difficulty remembering names of new acquaintances? Here’s how you can improve your memory skills:
• When being introduced to someone, repeat the individual’s name: “Susan, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”
• Exchange business cards.
• Use the person’s complete name in conversation within a few minutes after being introduced: “I just had an opportunity to meet Susan Stewart.”
• Make a mental connection with the individual’s name: “Stewart ... like the Stewarts of Scotland.”

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