

**A Review of Episodic Volunteering: Organizing and Managing
the Short-Term Volunteer Program by Nancy Macduff**

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Episodic Volunteering is an ever growing concept for community-based volunteer-led programs throughout the world. More common in North America and western countries, episodic volunteering will certainly continue to grow in popularity as more countries establish and maintain volunteer programs. As individuals continue to reduce their overall volunteer time commitment, managers of volunteers will increasingly look towards episodic volunteers to fill gaps and, in fact, they will soon become the norm for organizations. Macduff (2004) offers this timely publication in an effort to bring to light the important management, leadership, and administrative issues related to episodic volunteering.

Like many organizations today, the organization that I work for is undergoing a review of the volunteer administration functions that have long been in existence to support community-based educational programs. This book, easy to read and full of practical tools and resources, has proved to be very helpful as we begin to look at how we recruit, retain, support, evaluate, and recognize episodic volunteers. Particularly useful is the recognition by Macduff that many organizations, including ours, have policies and procedures that only support long-term volunteer commitments. Interestingly, our organization has many episodic volunteer opportunities available and has support mechanisms in place; however, after reading this publication I can see we are simply not recognizing these

facts and taking advantage of the opportunities.

Macduff opens the book with an important overview, including a listing of volunteer position taxonomy definitions. Following the definition section is a chapter that will be familiar to many of us as it outlines and discusses barriers to formal episodic volunteer programs. Readers will easily relate to the barriers as we have all heard them before, or for some of us, we have used them as reasons to not explore episodic volunteering. Not only are the barriers identified and discussed, Macduff also provides some simple solutions for leaders to implement in order to address and overcome commonly identified obstacles.

Perhaps the most important information for many readers will be contained in Chapter 3 of the book. Macduff does an excellent job of not only defining an episodic volunteer, but also providing categories, based upon time spent volunteering, including temporary, occasional, and interim positions. Like the other chapters, Chapter 3 ends with a very useful worksheet that allows the reader to categorize positions and brainstorm management ideas.

Assessing the need for episodic volunteers is an important step that all managers of volunteers must complete. Macduff provides a step-by-step process that will assist managers in this process, again using the three categories (temporary, occasional, and interim) described in the previous chapter. Additionally, and perhaps most useful, is the information related to the

development of a planning team. Key points are offered by the author related to organizing the team, membership, and individual/group responsibilities. This is an important component of the process for developing and implementing episodic volunteering in your program as it begins to build the always important, and sometimes forgotten, support network that helps bring about positive change in organizations.

For many managers of volunteers, it is sometimes difficult to see how they can incorporate strategies into existing organizational structures to engage and support episodic volunteers. Throughout the remaining chapters, Macduff offers specific management functions and then provides examples of ways that they may be modified for the administration of an episodic volunteer program. Included in the analysis are (1) position descriptions and discussion on how they apply to the three categories outlined in Chapter 3; (2) recruitment, focusing on the four "Ps"; (3) screening with a focus on interviewing and task listing; (4) sustaining and supporting efforts; and (5) supervision with emphasis on a supportive environment. Sometimes record keeping may seem overwhelming, but Macduff provides examples of how this can (and really must be) accomplished within the short-term volunteer program. Finally, recognizing volunteer efforts, regardless of their time commitment, is important. The author provides examples of both formal and informal recognition strategies, including a very valuable checklist that can be used in the planning process.

A very useful part of the book comes in the concluding chapter in which Macduff writes about conducting a "field test." An excellent idea, especially for large nonprofit organizations that are attempting to start a short-term volunteer

program while maintaining an established, long-term program. The discussion in this brief chapter provides excellent points to consider as administrators are seeking to implement the ideas and suggestions offered throughout the book. While I have indicated, on more than one occasion, that several components of the book may well be considered the most important, it is really the entire book that is important to the profession. Macduff has offered a publication that outlines important planning steps for administrators who are beginning the process of starting an episodic volunteer program or those that need to revisit and strengthen a current program. Reflecting on the book, I found it to be very helpful as our organization begins to look at the very concept of episodic volunteering. In fact, the following are key points that I took away from the publication: (1) know your current volunteer corps, including actual or potential responsibilities; (2) engage a planning team; (3) review potential tasks and categorize them within your organization; (4) develop realistic, yet easy to understand task lists; (5) develop intake strategies that are representative of the episodic volunteer responsibilities; and (6) start small and allow it to grow in the organization!

It should be noted and is a key component of this publication—that designing, implementing, and supporting an episodic volunteer program is not an easy endeavor. Additionally, the management practices that we commonly use in long-term volunteer programs are not necessarily going to work for the short-term program. Certainly, this publication will add depth of knowledge and practical tools for managers of volunteers working in this important area of volunteerism.

About the Author

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