Developing an Active Chapter and Membership

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Membership Needs Assessment

Overview

Know thy member. This is paramount to being able to represent the interests and meet the needs of your chapter's membership. Knowing your membership means having concrete data that chapter leaders can use to guide their action planning and decision making.

Ways to Assess Needs

There are several tactics chapter leaders can employ to collect membership needs data. This section details a few strategies.

- Listening for needs
- Asking for needs

Listening for Needs

One of the easiest ways to collect data about your members and professionals in your area is to listen to what they're talking about. Periodically, consider yourself an anthropologist working in the field and listen to your subjects. Use the following questions to help guide your listening:

- What are your colleagues talking about?
- What are they not talking about?
- What are their professional concerns?
- What are their frustrations?
- What are they doing to meet their professional challenges?
- What are they not doing to meet their professional challenges?

Document what you hear and share it with other chapter leaders. If they're listening too, you can compare observations. Use the data you collect to help guide your action planning and decision making.

Asking for Needs

Sometimes it is more effective to specifically ask members about their needs and interests. This can be done across the entire membership or with a subsection. Below are two ways to assess the needs of members.

- Focus Groups
- Surveys

Focus Groups

A focus group is an ad hoc representative sub-set of a larger group. Ideally the focus group is constructed to represent the diversity and differences of the larger group. Focus groups can help identify opinions, ideas and experiences about a particular issue. Focus groups should not be concerned with making decisions or setting policy. The goal is to collect data to help inform the work of the chapter leaders.

The list below details what types of data focus groups capture.[1]

What focus groups are good for:	**What focus groups are not good for:**
getting information on how groups of people think or feel about a particular issue.	getting valid information about individuals getting information that can be

providing insight into why certain opinions are held getting information to improve the planning of new programs getting information to evaluate existing programs	generally applied to other people getting valid information about how things have changed over time

In order to collect useful data from a focus group, the focus group should be facilitated by someone who has an understanding of moderating a discussion and asking questions that will solicit useful data. See the section *A Facilitator's Guide to Focus Groups* at the end of this chapter for more information. Another helpful resource is *Focus groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* by Richard A. Kreuger (1998).

Surveys

Surveys are very common and efficient ways of collecting data. They can be administered in hardcopy, electronically and orally.

The ACR Office of Chapter and Volunteer Development provides assistance to chapters wishing to distribute an electronic survey. The ACR will develop an electronic survey tool using the questions you provide and will then distribute it via email to the members of your choice. You will receive the collected data for analysis.

Making Sense of Collected Data

Below are some tips for culling out member needs from data collected from surveys, focus groups or other means.

- Make sure to take time to review data collected from your needs assessment activities.
- It can be helpful to create tables in which to sort and compare the data.
- Be careful to keep the data in perspective. For example, say 75% of respondents may think the chapter should do X. 75% is a significant amount. But is it significant when taken in context of the percentage of respondents to the total membership? What if only 5% of the members responded? Keep in mind the number of people reflected in the data and the total number of members.
- When looking at verbatim responses, look for themes. Rarely will people use the same words to express similar ideas. It can be helpful to look for themes and then to group the data accordingly.

Volunteer Development

Many ACR chapters rely 100% on the work of volunteers. Even chapters with paid staff, depend heavily on volunteerism. Waiting for volunteers to emerge and hoping they do the right work, could spell fate for your chapter. This section discusses a number of issues related to successfully identifying volunteer opportunities, finding volunteers, matching volunteers to these opportunities and recognizing the work of volunteers.

Identifying Opportunities for Volunteers

Use the list below to identify opportunities for volunteers.

- Make a list of all of the work that needs to be done for your chapter.
- Divide the work into categories by who should do it.
  - Chapter officers (organization management)
  - Standing committee (long-term or recurring projects)
  - Ad hoc committee (short-term projects)
  - Special task force (short-term projects)
  - Individual effort (for projects that don't require a committee)
  - Paid staff or external consultant (for projects that can't be done with available volunteer time or talents)
- Write job descriptions for the work that can be done by a standing committee, ad hoc committee, special task force or individual effort. (See below for details on to write an effective job description.)
- Based on the job descriptions, identify how many and what types of volunteers you need.

Creating Job Descriptions

It is imperative to have written descriptions of jobs to be done by volunteers. The process of writing a description will help clarify exactly what needs to done, the timeframe it is to be done in, the number of volunteers and the types of skill they need. The written job description will help recruit the right types of volunteers and will serve as a point of reference between volunteers and chapter leaders for the expectations of the work.

The successful job description should address the following:

- the desired outcome or goal of the job
- a statement on how the job fits into the overall mission of the chapter
- an outline of skills and talents needed to do the job
- an estimation for the time commitment needed to complete the job
- a listing of known meetings or events related to the job
- a description for how and when volunteers will be selected
- a clarification of who is overseeing the job and the volunteer's work

Recruiting Volunteers

There are three typical reasons people seek volunteer opportunities in professional associations:

1. personal and professional development opportunities
2. networking opportunities
3. opportunities to contribute to a higher cause

Volunteers want to get something from their experience. The work of recruiting volunteers lies in showing how the available work can meet the desires of the potential volunteer. Match the mission of the job with the motive of the volunteer.

Refer to the job descriptions you have for volunteers. Are there some jobs that lend themselves more toward personal or professional development, networking opportunities or contributing to a higher cause? Perhaps elements of each of these reasons for volunteering are present in the available jobs.

Suggested Methods for Recruiting Volunteers

- Publish you job descriptions and ask for volunteers.
- Using the job descriptions, create a questionnaire that surveys members on their interests in volunteering, their available time and their specific skills and talents.
- Think about the members you know. Would any of them be potential volunteers?
- Because time is a major limiting factor in people's availability to volunteer, consider members who may have more time than others: recent retirees.

Placing Self-Identified Volunteers

Sometimes volunteers emerge outside of recruiting efforts; a member sends an email and indicates a desire to volunteer. This is another scenario where having defined volunteer needs and job descriptions comes in handy. If you have this information, you can see if there is an immediate need for the self-identified volunteer. Sometimes it is not possible to immediately place an eager volunteer. Chapter leaders should develop a way to collect information about the potential volunteer (name, contact information, interests, skills and talents, etc.) in order to solicit the would-be volunteer as future opportunities arise.

Working with Volunteers

There are 5 key elements of working with volunteers.

1. Inquire – Learn more about the volunteer in order to best match the work to his or her needs, interests and availability. Ask what the volunteer is looking to get from his or her volunteer efforts. Ask what the volunteer would like to do. Ask what the volunteer is able to do.
2. Inform – Make sure the volunteer has all of the information he or she needs to agree to and then execute the work. Inform the volunteer of the goals of the job and the job description. Inform the volunteer of the job expectations. Inform the volunteer of the timeline in which the work is to be done. Inform the volunteer when changes occur.
3. Agree on commitments and expectations – People are more likely to honor commitments they have explicitly made to another person. This is a way of creating accountability. Jointly agree on the job description. Jointly agree on the job expectations. Jointly agree on the time frame in which the work is to be done. Jointly agree on how you will communicate during the work.
4. Check in – Volunteering in a vacuum often results in disaster. It is important to check in with the volunteer periodically to see how things are going. Use this opportunity to remind the volunteer of expectations or previously-made agreements. Also use this opportunity to make new agreements if changes are necessary.

5. Appreciate – Express you appreciation for the volunteer's efforts. Saying "thank you" is crucial. Volunteers want to know the work they do is valuable and appreciated. It helps make the experience meaningful and valuable for them.

Volunteer Recognition

All volunteers seek something in return for their efforts. Recognition of their contributions is an important return on volunteers' investments. This section will discuss some of the elements of volunteer recognition and various ways to provide recognition.

Elements of Recognition

Volunteer recognition…

- can be public or private.
- should be appropriate to the person and his or her contribution.
- should be honest.
- should demonstrate insight into what the volunteer did.

Ways to Recognize Volunteers

A key to finding the best ways to recognize your volunteers is to know them –

- know their motivations for volunteering
- know about the volunteer work they did
- know how they would like to be recognized

Ideas for volunteer recognition:

- Give a written or verbal *thank you* to the volunteer.
- Make a public acknowledgement of the volunteer's work at a chapter event or written publication.
- Give a chapter-issued certificate of appreciation.
- Give a written or verbal *thank you* to the volunteer's colleagues and family for supporting the volunteer in his or her efforts and copy the volunteer.
- Create a tangible award (i.e. trophy, statue, plate, plaque, pin, etc.) and pass it around to notable volunteers.
- Organize a volunteer-of-the-month program.

A Facilitator's Guide to Focus Groups

This goal of this guide is describe the roles and qualities of the people needed to lead a focus group and to provide a general outline for a typical focus group.

The Role of a Focus Group Facilitator

Fundamentally, the role of a focus group facilitator is to create an environment and to help the participants share their thoughts, opinions and ideas on pre-determined issues. Most of the work of the facilitator is subtle, and if done well, unnoticed by the participants.

Qualities of a Good Facilitator

A good focus group facilitator will:[2]

- use subtle, unobtrusive leadership
- have an adequate knowledge of the topic
- have the discipline for listening
- be familiar with questions that will solicit useful information
- create an environment where participants feel safe and encouraged to share their thoughts, opinions and ideas
- work to alleviate problems created by participants who are shy, rambling or domineering
- control verbal and physical reactions to what participants are saying
- use neutral language, refraining from saying things that could sway the responses of the group

It Takes Two – The Facilitator's Helper

The facilitator needs a helper to successfully collect the data shared by the focus group participants. The helper should be available to take notes and, if possible, to record the conversation. The helper and the facilitator should meet soon after the focus group session to compare and document observations.

Preparing the Focus Group Questionnaire

A 1-1.5 hour focus group can typically address 5-6 questions.

Tips for preparing questions:[3]

- Make sure questions are open-ended, not yes or no questions.
- Encourage participants to think in the past about things they have experienced (*Recollect at time when*…). Asking people to conjecture on the future will not get very accurate information.
- Focus on questions that begin with *What?* (What happened… What caused you…) *What* questions focus on attributes and influences, valuable pieces of data.
- Avoid questions that

Ground Rules for Focus Group Leaders and Participants

Ground rules are logistical agreements a group makes to improve the ability to work together. Ground rules should be reviewed with focus group participants early in the session. The facilitator should enforce the ground rules. Below is a sample list of ground rules. This is a general list. It should be amended to meet the particular needs of your research.

Ground rules:

- Participate to your fullest ability.
- Respect the rights of others to participate in the conversation.
- Respect the rights of others to have different opinions, thoughts and ideas.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Speak from your own experience (use "I" statements).
- We will finish at the specified time.

Basic Focus Group Outline

Below is a basic outline for a focus group session. It should be modified to best meet the needs of your research.[4]

1. Welcome – Introduce the facilitator and the helper
2. Our topic is…
3. The information collected today will be used…
4. You were selected because…
5. Review the ground rules
6. Work through the focus group questionnaire
7. Conclusion – Review the purpose of the session and ask if anything was missed. Thank the group and dismiss them.

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[1]Krueger, RA. 1988. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

[2]Krueger, RA. 1988. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

[3]Krueger, RA. 1988. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

[4]Krueger, RA. 1988. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.