

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks
60-Minute Module Series

NEEDS ASSESSMENT Training Guide

**National Park Service
Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



HOW TO SUCCEED WITH VOLUNTEERS-IN-PARKS

60-Minute Module Series

Program Preparation
Program Planning
Motivation
Needs Assessment
Designing Jobs
Recruitment
Interviewing
Orientation
Training
Safety Management
Supervision
Delegation
Performance Reviews
Recognition

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INTRODUCTION

The needs assessment is the foundation on which to build the park volunteer program. A systematic approach to identifying park needs and priorities will help ensure success in writing volunteer job descriptions, as well as in recruiting, interviewing, hiring, supervising, evaluating, and recognizing volunteers.

In conducting a needs assessment, a comprehensive, park-wide approach is best. Make sure you have the support of the Superintendent and other key management staff and that you address their priority needs and objectives. Involve all divisions and districts. A thorough knowledge of what work needs to be done (that is not now being done and would be appropriate for volunteers to do) will help you take advantage of the flexibility allowed in designing volunteer jobs. A comprehensive approach will encourage park-wide support for the program as well as park-wide celebration of the results later on.

PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The **Purpose** of this module is to underline the importance of developing a solid foundation for a successful volunteer program, as well as to summarize specific techniques for conducting a needs assessment.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the participant will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of a needs assessment as the foundation for a successful volunteer program.
2. Conduct a comprehensive, park-wide needs assessment.
3. Identify (1) priority work that is not now being done and/or (2) work being done that is not making the best use of paid staff.
4. Identify work that is appropriate for volunteers to do.
5. Identify skills that volunteers will need to have in order to do the work.

GENERAL NOTES TO TRAINER

1. This workshop is in a suggested format. Feel free, however, to personalize it to meet your park needs.
2. This module is about building the foundation for a strong volunteer program. The more successful you are at stressing the importance of conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, the more successful the participants will be at laying the groundwork for excellence as they develop their volunteer programs.
3. It is particularly helpful to present this module in conjunction with the Designing Jobs and Recruitment modules since each is dependent on the other for success. Having the participants actually go through a needs assessment exercise, develop a written job description from the assessment, and design a recruitment plan for the job will reinforce how the three modules are tied together.
4. While the ideal time to conduct a needs assessment is when first developing a volunteer program, it is important to stress the value of conducting one as often as needed to make sure that paid staff and volunteer time is not wasted on work that is low priority or may be unnecessary.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Transparency Section Method of Presentation Time
Handout

T-1 H-1 T-2	Introduction Purpose of Workshop Introductory Comments Learning Objectives Key Concepts	Lecture	5 minutes
T-2 H-1	Concept 1 The needs assessment is the foundation for building a successful volunteer program	Presentation Discussion	10 minutes
T-2 H-1 T-3 H-2	Concept 2 Unfunded work backlog	Activity	15 minutes
T-2 H-1 T-3 H-2	Concept 3 Appropriate work for volunteers	Activity	15 minutes
T-2 H-1 T-3 H-2	Concept 4 Skills needed to do work	Activity	10 minutes
T-2 H-1	Summary/Wrap-Up/ Evaluation	Summary Remarks	5 minutes

TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes

TRAINER'S NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Time: 5 minutes

T-1: Learning Objectives

T-2: Key Concepts

H-1: Key Concepts

Read purpose of needs assessment (H-1) and summarize learning objectives (show T-1)

CONCEPT 1

Time: 10 minutes

The needs assessment lays the necessary foundation for developing meaningful volunteer jobs.

T-2: Key Concepts

H-1: Key Concepts

Information gathered during the needs assessment process can be used to design written job descriptions, to develop a recruitment plan, to conduct an interview, and to develop an orientation and training plan. Time spent in conducting a thorough needs assessment is time well spent.

[Show Transparency with all concepts on it. Indicate that during the workshop each concept will be examined, together with relevant material.]

Group Activity

Ask:

Have you ever hired a volunteer just because they seemed like a nice person and were willing to do “anything” to help? What happened after they started working? Were they doing priority work or just work to keep them busy? Try to get answers that show some volunteers ended up requiring a lot of paid staff time in finding work that didn’t really need doing, in keeping the volunteer busy, or in time trying to keep the volunteer happy.

Summarize key learning:

To fully utilize volunteers, it is necessary to find out what priority work needs to be done, what work would be most appropriate for them to do, and what skills they will need in order to do it.

Remember: If you don’t know your park’s needs, you might tend to respond only to the volunteer’s needs.

CONCEPT 2

Time: 15 minutes

The first step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify priority work that needs to be done, that is not now being done.

T-2: Key Concepts

H-1: Key Concepts

T-3: Needs Assessment Worksheet

H-2: Needs Assessment Worksheet

Group Activity

Ask each participant to use the first column of the needs assessment form to list priority work in his/her park that needs to be done but is not now being done because of budget or staff limitations. For this exercise, they might want to make their list specific to a division or district since the information they summarize will be used to develop a written job description later on.

Debrief of Activity

Ask for examples of work needed to be done. Note the variety in the size, difficulty and type of work and the importance of knowing that this was actual priority work needed in their parks. Once back in their parks, participants can conduct a much more comprehensive needs assessment using paid staff, volunteers, and various planning documents to make sure the listing is complete.

CONCEPT 3

Time: 15 minutes

The second step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify what portion of the priority work would be appropriate for VIPs.

T-2: Key Concepts

H-1: Key Concepts

**T-3: Needs
Assessment
Worksheet**

**H-2: Needs
Assessment
Worksheet**

Group Activity

Ask participants to use the second column of the needs assessment form to list priority work that would be appropriate for VIPs to do. Consider unfunded work that is not now being done, as well as work now being done by paid staff that could be done by a volunteer, thus freeing up time for paid staff to do other work.

Group Activity

Now ask participants to form small groups of about four persons each, discuss what they have each done so far, and choose one from the group to summarize their park's needs to the class. Ask each group representative to give a brief summary.

Note how the summaries show what additional work can be done, as well as changes that can make better use of paid staff time.

CONCEPT 4:

Time: 10 minutes

The third step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify the skills needed to do the volunteer work that is identified.

T-2: Key Concepts

H-1: Key Concepts

**T-3: Needs
Assessment
Worksheet**

**H-2: Needs
Assessment
Worksheet**

Group Activity

Ask each participant to use the third column of the needs assessment form to list the skills VIPs will need in order to accomplish the priority work identified.

Group Activity

Have the groups of four get back together to discuss what each participant has come up with, and choose someone new to discuss their park's skills needs.

Ask each representative to report the group's findings to the class.

SUMMARY/WRAP-UP/EVALUATION

Time: 5 minutes

T-2: Key Concepts

Time permitting, review the Key Concepts of the module.

H-1: Key Concepts

With the needs assessment now complete, the foundation has been laid to move on to the next stage of volunteer program management — designing jobs for volunteers.

END 60-MINUTE TRAINING

SUGGESIONS FOR EXPANDED ACTIVITIES

1. Conduct a park-wide needs assessment. Define priority tasks that would be appropriate for volunteers to do based on the superintendent's management objectives, on the park's general management plan, the comprehensive interpretive plan, resource management plan, etc. Involve management, line staff and volunteers. Define the skills that will be needed to accomplish the volunteer tasks. Use the information to develop written job descriptions for volunteers.
2. Conduct a needs assessment for one division or for one district. Follow the same process as described above to determine priority needs, identify skills needed, and develop written job descriptions.

RESOURCES

1. McDuff, Nancy. *Volunteer Recruiting and Retention: A Marketing Approach*, Walla Walla: McDuff/Bunt Associates, 1985.

TRANSPARENCIES

Guide to Transparencies

T-1: Learning Objectives

T-2: Key Concepts

T-3: Needs Assessment Worksheet

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of a needs assessment
- Conduct a park -wide needs assessment
- Identify priority work
- Identify appropriate work
- Identify skills needed

Key Concepts

Concept 1

The needs assessment lays the necessary foundation for developing meaningful volunteer jobs.

Concept 2

The first step is to identify priority work that needs to be done, that is not now being done.

Concept 3

The second step is to identify what portion of the priority work would be appropriate for VIPs.

Concept 4

The third step is to identify the skills needed to do the volunteer work that is identified.

Volunteers-In-Parks Program Needs Assessment Worksheet

Unfunded Work That Needs To Be Done	Appropriate Work For Volunteers To Do	Skills Needed To Do The Work

Park Name:

Date:

HANDOUTS

Guide to Handouts

H-1: Key Concepts of Needs Assessment

H-2: VIP Program Needs Assessment Worksheet

Key Concepts of Needs Assessment

The purpose of conducting a needs assessment is to identify priority work that is appropriate for volunteers to do, as well as the skills needed to do the work.

Concept 1

The needs assessment lays the necessary foundation for developing meaningful volunteer jobs.

With a solid understanding of the priority work that is appropriate for volunteers to do, you will have the key information required to help guarantee success for both your park and your volunteers.

Concept 2

The first step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify priority work that needs to be done, that is not now being done.

Begin by looking at the unfunded backlog of work throughout your park that is not now being done either by paid staff or by VIPs. Arrange the list of work in priority order, organized by division or district to keep it manageable. Make sure your list of unfunded needs is responsive to the priority needs of park management, your park's General Management Plan, and other key planning documents.

Concept 3

The second step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify what portion of the priority work would be appropriate for VIPs.

As you look at your prioritized backlog of work, consider the work now being done by your VIPs. How does it stack up in terms of park priorities? Is volunteer time being spent on work that is not high priority? If so, supervisory time may also be misdirected. Volunteers should always supplement, and not supplant, the work of paid staff. Remember that VIPs can also free up paid staff to make more effective use of their skills.

Concept 4

The third step in conducting a needs assessment is to identify the skills needed to do the volunteer work that is identified.

When you know the skills your volunteers will need to do your work, you will have your best chance for success in designing your volunteer jobs and in finding the very best VIPs to fill them.

Volunteers-In-Parks Program Needs Assessment Worksheet

Unfunded Work That Needs To Be Done	Appropriate Work For Volunteers To Do	Skills Needed To Do The Work

Park Name:

Date: