

Working with volunteers.

Workshop with Mikael Morberg and Tal Lewinsky for the Multicultural center in Fittja.

Expectations - The "do's", the "dont's" and the "why not's".

What can a staff member do when the volunteer doesn't act as you should in the library environment or with the vision of the library?

The most important factor is that the volunteer has been introduced to what is expected of him/her as a volunteer and also what does it mean if you fail to meet the expectations. Does the library have the right to stop the person from volunteering again? Yes, of course.

In both Stockholm and Malmö, a volunteer is required to sign a document acknowledging the vision and the policy of the activities that the volunteer should be included in.

How should the tasks be decided on between the volunteers and the staff? What can the library do during the volunteer held events?

It's important that during the volunteer held events that the library isn't just a place to be in but that the volunteers have been informed about everything that the library and the librarians can supply to help, for example, the language cafés.

That's why it's important to get a dialogue going between the volunteers and the staff! If you, as a librarian know next weeks topic at the language café, perfect! Then you can plan on ordering books, show them on the shelves, in order to highlight them for the coming language cafés.

Or perhaps as a volunteer, that is what you are looking for? The perfect book to talk about with the participants of your activities?

That's why it's important to have a designated staff member that works closely with the activities that demand volunteers. So that the activities not only becomes something that the library "should" have but something that truly embodies that library's spirit.

How can you develop the different forms of how to work with volunteers?

The most important things are the evaluation and the meeting between the staff and the volunteers. Try at least once every half year to meet up, with a few points to talk about. During those meetings acknowledge the hardships and also the positive attributes that the volunteers are contributing to the library.

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What changed? (In the language café, was it new groups of people speaking other languages, in homework-help, has the amount of any subject dominated the help?). As every local community is dynamic it is important to take notice that the needs of the locals can change in a heartbeat. Here both the staff and the volunteers can help each other learning the needs of the locals.
- What is the volunteer's image of the library and the staff and otherwise?

- And how should the activity change next period?

With a designated staff member that works closely with volunteers, you can also exchange talks and tips during the year. That person can also be in charge of volunteer meeting where the staff member introduces the library, the vision of the library and the area to the volunteers.

Remember that a volunteer can be from the area, but can also have none of the local knowledge.

Recruitment of volunteers - To find the "good ones".

Can you advertise outside the regular channels? Can you use facebook or other social media?

Of course, you can advertise outside your regular channels. While I prefer to work with an organization that shares a vision with the public library for the community.

In our national library law it is said:

"Biblioteken i det allmänna biblioteksväsendet ska verka för det demokratiska samhällets utveckling genom att bidra till kunskapsförmedling och fri åsiktsbildning.

Biblioteken i det allmänna biblioteksväsendet ska främja litteraturens ställning och intresset för bildning, upplysning, utbildning och forskning samt kulturell verksamhet i övrigt. Biblioteksverksamhet ska finnas tillgänglig för alla."

That means that the organizations that agree to this value are easier collaborators and that you can relax more in your work.

It is important to note that if you advertise unorganized volunteers that you have to have them sign a document where certain requirements should be acknowledged.

Also, let the staff member that is in charge with working with the volunteer have time to show other language cafés or other activities to inspire the volunteers. Let them also meet the rest of the staff so that the volunteers get to know the place, the library where he or she will be heading an activity at.

Also, think about what type of volunteers you want to include in your organization. The way you're advertising can be really important, and social media can include younger volunteers while going traditional (through organizations) can exclude volunteers from a certain age.

Do you continue to have activities if there are few volunteers showing up?

As I look at several volunteers policies there are a few that say that if too few people show up, then the library staff is allowed to cancel the activity. That doesn't mean that you have to, but in my personal experience when there are too many people needing help and too few to help them, things get chaotic and that falls on the library.

If the organization which has volunteered fails to supply in a fair amount of people you should probably look for other organizations.

Keeping 'em - to stabilize your volunteer activities

How do you work to keep the volunteers from dropping out?

Get them involved!

Evaluate!

And finally, evolve.

As the community around the library is dynamic, it's important to have the knowledge of how the needs are changing. For example, what kind of groups are moving into the neighborhood, if there have been any recent new schools developments or other important questions, that changes the dynamic of the local's needs. It's important to share the knowledge, not just wait for the volunteers to pick it up when they finally meet the locals.

There's also a suggestion to organize for the volunteers some kind of education. For example in one of the policies, there's a suggestion bringing in a Swedish for immigrant-teachers speaking of their way of helping pupils. This can inspire the volunteers so that the person also feels he/she gets something out of it for all the time they put into volunteering.

How do you organize?

The more calm, and organized the workplace is, that's a better chance to organize a volunteer program. Have a key member that is responsible for collaboration. In some papers, they call it a volunteer manager. Give that person time to work with the volunteers and the groups.

If there isn't any time or financial solutions, to have a key person, that means in the best of time the library will act as just a place where the volunteer can use without getting any real value from. Then, I suspect it will be the same problems, that volunteers don't know anything about the library, or have any reason to care how you work.

And acknowledge the volunteers work - how, when?

The easiest way to acknowledge is to meet up. Take an interest in how they work.

In my last workplace, we have an informal dinner at the end of the semester to talk and to acknowledge that we appreciate the work the volunteers are doing.

This was important to us, because we know volunteers spend a lot of their time to assist, help and support our visitors.

Final exercise - Working with volunteers 2.0

How would you like to see your library work with volunteers?

Points to think about:

- How to organize? - If you could organize a collaboration, how would it look? Would you have a lot of meetings or is it better to let the staff work by themselves and the volunteers by themselves?
- Acknowledge? - How would you let the volunteer know who is doing a good job? Is it through informal meetings? A Swedish fika? Or should it be something more? Is there any possibility to organize a good model of educational learning for the volunteers with the help of inspirational lectures?
- Evaluate? Is it through a special document? Or during informal meetings?
- Organizations? Is there any downside to working with organizations? Do you prefer to work without organizations and why is that?

Sources:

Volunteer policies from Rosengårds library, Garaget Malmö, Stockholm stad.

IFLA - <http://library.ifla.org/1757/1/138-hoerning-en.pdf>

The Limits and Possibilities of Volunteering: A Framework for Explaining the Scope of Volunteer Involvement in Public and Nonprofit Organizations

https://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/New_Directions_for_Library_Volunteers.html