



# Power Booster

DuPage Association of Volunteer Administration

## Orientation and Training of Event Volunteers

By Betty Stallings & Donna McMillion - From *How to Produce Fabulous Fundraising Events*, pages 49-51

Orientation and training will be different for those who serve on the leadership task force or steering committee, and those who are providing a short-term skill or assistance during the event itself. When orienting and training the leaders of the event, we often make the assumption that the lead individuals know all about the organization and have the skills to plan and stage an event. In fact, no one comes with these precise skills unless they have previously led a similar event. Even then there is no guarantee that they had a good experience. So, these event volunteers who make up the steering committee need training and orientation to avoid trial-and-error efforts resulting in many wasted hours.

Since these lead volunteers will be important ambassadors for your organization, they need to know as much about its mission and services as possible. This information could be reviewed as a part of the **initial planning meeting** of the task force and **backed up with written materials**, particularly for those with limited background with your agency. Other training topics for this group may cover such things as meeting management, communication avenues, approaches for donations, design of activity pert charts and volunteer recruitment, interviewing, supervision and recognition.

If the event has been held before, the **prior year's reports** will be helpful. **Videotaping** an event provides a particularly helpful medium for orienting new folks. And for those who have participated in the event before, the video is fun to watch and gives them renewed energy for the event. If there are people who are new to the event, you may want to cover the essentials of good event planning by **providing summaries of good articles and books** on the topic or through training videos. My favorite is a videotape on Special Events by Kim Klein, available from The Headwaters Fund (see resources).

**A new method I recommend** to provide the steering committee with guidance is using an **event coach**. This person does not put on the event for the organization, but is an experienced event planner available to the steering committee for a certain number of hours to consult on planning and staging the event. This is an excellent way to train internal talent while keeping costs down. If people know they will have a coach available to them, they are more apt to agree to become volunteer leaders. Too often, event volunteers are not adequately supported by the organization and all are disappointed in the result.

Training for those who will be volunteering at the event can occur in several ways. If you are utilizing an existing group (such as Rotary or a specific corporate or social group) to assist, you may offer to **attend one of their meetings** or speak at a lunch-hour meeting at their corporation to give participants the information they will need to feel prepared and competent to do their jobs. For some events it is essential that the coordinator of volunteers do a **walk-through** of the event with its steering committee and any other key leaders so that they will be able to coach and direct volunteers who will be helping on the day of the event.

For the Dynamite Dinner featured in this book, the **orientation is always tailored to the position**. Some orientations can consist of a **detailed packet** mailed to the volunteers well ahead of time telling when to arrive, what the job will be, how to dress, whom to call in case of a last-minute emergency, etc. Volunteers have said they rarely felt so prepared for a short-term volunteer position. The **celebrity hosts get more extensive orientation**, consisting of a dinner at the facility site before the event. Camaraderie is built and people are thoroughly prepared for the event. Since **part of the job description originally agreed to includes the expectation of attending the training**, there are very few "no shows." One of the most important pieces of information given to the volunteers is where they should check in and whom they should contact if problems occur. In planning any orientation or training, one must consider the question, "**What would someone need to know to feel comfortable and competent in carrying out this position?**" The answer to that question should lead you to the design of your training program.

The **post-event evaluation** should tell you whether volunteer participants felt prepared to do their jobs. Orientation and training can be enhanced every year on the basis of that feedback.

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