

Involving Stakeholders in Building Training Plans

What is on your short-list for program training needs? If free or reduced-fee training talent, marketing opportunities, or free space for meetings or recognition events is on your list, look no further! Stakeholders could be the answer to these needs.

The collaboration among stakeholder groups to develop and implement volunteer training is both an ongoing challenge and an excellent opportunity. With staff limitations and dwindling financial resources, effective partnerships that leverage resources, including good ideas, are absolutely key elements in effective training for volunteers working in independent living. Confident and well-trained volunteers are then able to provide high quality and cost-effective services for clients. So, what does it take to engage stakeholders?

Who are your stakeholders?

Make a list of current and potential persons, groups and/or institutions that have an interest in, and a need for, volunteer-based independent living services in your service area. These stakeholders can include primary stakeholders such as social services, Area Agency on Aging, caregiver support organizations, families, clients, etc. Secondary stakeholders can also be good contributors to the training planning processes. Secondary stakeholders could include faith-based organizations, large employers, teaching hospitals with geriatric specialties, adult day care centers, hospices, disabled veterans organizations, support groups for specific illnesses and disabilities, and many more.

How do you get stakeholder buy-in?

If you want stakeholders to participate in supporting volunteer training through the development of volunteer training plans, there must be an authentic invitation to participate in the full process. Stakeholders are most engaged when included early in the process and when their time and talent contributions are valued. Stakeholders may also need to be reminded of the immense and important community need that volunteers are trying to meet.

You may want to prepare a basic review that demonstrates the great need for this service (what the experts say). In the case of independent living support, be sure to include information about the effect this issue has in the workplace related to lost time for the ever-growing number of employed caregivers. There is a human need and an economic one. The comparison between the amount paid in Medicaid and through private pay for skilled facility care compared to community in-home services will be especially eye-opening for secondary stakeholders that are not involved in these issues on the level of primary stakeholders. Be sure to include real examples of how community-based independent living volunteer services have made a difference in the lives of local citizens.

What do you need from them?

Determine the type and level of involvement your training program needs from each stakeholder, but try not to limit your request. Some of your best untapped resources and ideas could emerge from stakeholders. Provide a specific list of ways that stakeholders can be influential and involved in the training process, yet make it known that your program is open to new involvement or future expansions of the stakeholder. Make sure the list includes opportunities for stakeholders to contribute training talent, supplies, meeting space, marketing, volunteer recruitment and recognition, and funding. Try to find a way to utilize as many stakeholders as possible in the training planning process. Some stakeholders will have much to offer while others may just be able to offer community goodwill.

When do you need assistance from stakeholders?

Identify and meet with stakeholders prior to setting your training priorities and schedule. This could be accomplished individually or in a group setting. This up-front investment in time has the potential to reap benefits for training and also during program implementation. You may need to have more than one group meeting at different locations or times to be able to accommodate most of the stakeholder's schedules. The input and resources shared by stakeholders will help flesh out many details of training, whether that is guest instructors, donated training supplies, or facilities.

Follow through and follow-up to keep stakeholders involved.

As you involve stakeholders in the training planning process, be sure to include a way for them to continue giving feedback and sharing their ideas. Once training begins, consider updating stakeholders on the results of any training assessments you do. (Hint: if you do assess trainings, plan in the beginning what kind of assessment tool will best fit your needs. Consider using surveys (online, print or telephone), personal interviews, or pre and post tests to assess trainees.)

Keep the lines of communications open both ways. Use a format of communication that is common to all stakeholders involved. Alone or in combination, you could use email, voicemail, Facebook, or another half-dozen new social-media technologies to keep them informed.

Keep your stakeholders involved and your volunteers will reap the benefits of your community's rich training expertise and assistance.

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