Communication is key to a successful program

As a volunteer coordinator, communication skills are one of the most important tools you will have. If your communication skills are lacking, you are at risk of having volunteers who will not understand your program’s priorities, goals, objectives and strategies. Each volunteer is motivated by something other than a paycheck and if an organization’s volunteers are “marching to their own drummers” the integrity of the program is at risk. Learning how to communicate the volunteer program’s goals and mission is key, being able to supervise, management conflict, and above all, to listen to volunteers is ultimately what will determine the success of the mission.

**Things you can do/learn to be a good communicator with volunteers**

- Become an active listener provide feedback, don’t interrupt, keep eye contact
- Own your message — use “I” and “my” messages and learn to convey your feelings
- Trust that the volunteers are there to support the organization’s mission and that they want to do a good job
- If feedback is needed, learn to be descriptive and focus on the behavior, not the individual

To be a good supervisor of volunteers, in addition to being a good communicator, make sure the environment is safe and secure, support each volunteer in achieving good results and then recognize them. If you are supervising volunteers at a distance, being in communication is crucial. Get in touch often and ask open-ended questions “how’s it going?” be informal and available. See if you can establish a support system with other volunteers nearby.

**Alaskan Concerns:**

- Change is very threatening to the “veteran” volunteers, how do I introduce and initiate change?
- Veteran volunteers are resisting new ideas and new volunteers how do I introduce new ideas and get support?
- These volunteers are neighbors and don’t get along here or at home, what can I do?
- How do I encourage a volunteer to move on?
- How do I “fire” a volunteer?

Learn more about these topics at **Everyone Ready**

**VNG-Volunteerism for the Next Generation:**

- Sustainability of Volunteer Efforts: “Supervising” “Communication Skills” “Distance Supervision”

**Everyone Ready:**

- Managing Change (and Dealing with Resistance to It!)