Sharing the Wealth: Empowering Adult & Youth Volunteers

Lesson Author and Institutional Affliation:

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Abstract:

Empowerment is an important aspect of leadership in today's organizations, including Extension. By understanding the basics of empowerment and how to put them into practice, participants can encourage, motivate, and retain volunteers.

Objectives:

- Define empowerment
- Clarify the connection between power and empowerment
- Illustrate the importance of empowerment in recruiting and motivating volunteers
- Identify opportunities for empowering youth and adult volunteers within Extension

Advance Preparation:

- Review lesson outline and materials (generally two hours of preparation)

Materials Needed:

- Computer
- Projector
- Attached PowerPoint presentation
- One copy of the PowerPoint handout for each participant

Time Needed:

- 30 minutes for instruction per section (focusing on adult or youth); additional time for follow-up activities

BACKGROUND

A primary responsibility of County Advisory Councils is to provide guidance and leadership to Extension within their county. As such, feeling empowered within this process, as well as learning to empower others is important for successful results. But what exactly does empowerment mean and how do we apply this within our own unique situations?

Working effectively with volunteer leaders begins with developing a good relationship. One aspect of a good relationship between the extension educator and extension advisory leaders is the ability to motivate volunteers to buy into the process, and work hard towards an end goal. Other important aspects of a successful educator/leader relationship include: encouraging self-efficacy (I think I can!), developing the ability to accept delegated responsibilities, and ideally, assisting in providing and working towards the vision of the group. Empowerment plays an important role behind the scenes of the development of these aspects, and more.

Useful websites for more information:

http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/PACmaterial.htm

http://agexted.cas.psu.edu/cyfar/PDFs/yesbookweb.pdf?

http://www.startguide.org/guide/g2h.html#Empowerment

> ### Tips for Using this with your Council
>
> - Before presenting this lesson, brainstorm (with your council) the significant issues you have experienced in recruiting or retaining volunteers.

INTEREST APPROACH

Team Leader: Illustrating the definition of empowerment through personal and professional experiences (10 min.)

Purpose: To develop a paradigm of empowerment through specific characteristics and personal experiences.

Group Size: Can work with any size group. For the "think, pair, share" portion, individuals first need to individually reflect, then pair up with a neighbor and discuss, and finally share with the larger group.

Activity: Begin by brainstorming characteristics associated with an empowering leader (write these on the board).

Once the group has decided upon common elements of empowerment, choose one of the following questions (the one you feel fits your audience most appropraitely) and write it on the board/flip chart. Use the "Think, Pair, Share" process.
- What does empowerment mean to you?

- What experiences/interactions have left you feeling unempowered? How about interactions where you felt particularly empowered?
- How do you use empowerment at work? In your daily life?
- How do you apply this to your Extension Advisory Councils?

Allow for group discussion to go on for a few minutes. Then lead into the lesson with the following statement: "In order to effectively apply the principles of empowerment, first one must understand some basics about power and empowerment, and how this can be applied successfully with both youth and adult volunteer leaders."

LESSON

(The lesson below should be broken into two parts, depending upon the preferred audience. The presenter can choose to focus on adult volunteers or youth volunteers, and will work through the lesson, until they split and follow either the "adult" or "youth" section below.)

- Open the lesson/discussion with the reading of Ghandi's quote about empowerment through change and action. (slide 2)
- Review the objectives for the lesson. (slide 3)
- Have the participants begin the interest approach above by brainstorming empowerment definitions and characteristics (refer to interest approach above)
- Use "think, pair, share" to complete the 'What do you think…' questions. (slide 4)
- Finish the activity with a large group discussion about personal experiences with empowerment (using the same questions as listed above/on slide 4)
- Explain the history of power in empowerment (slide 5)
- Present the definition of empowerment that is provided. Once the audience has absorbed this definition, discuss the question at the bottom of the slide. (slide 6)
- Move into characterizing empowerment a little more thoroughly. These are different ways that empowerment can be explained or applied within various situations. At the "others?" bullet point, encourage audience to provide other characterizations of empowerment they can think of. (slide 7)
- Transition into talking about the importance of empowerment with the following statement: "Now we have discussed fundamentals of empowerment, we will talk about the importance of using empowerment within your advisory councils." Spend a little extra time discussing the advantages of 'using empowerment effectively', as these are fundamental reasons as to why empowerment is important. (slide 8)

Adult (PowerPoint slides 1-8; 12-15)

- The next two slides are more general empowerment strategies; aspects that can be used for any type (youth or adult) of volunteer. (slides 12-13)

- The last slide is a brief review of what has been covered over the last hour or so. Take some time to review what has been covered and ask for any remaining questions. (slide 14)

Youth (PowerPoint slides 1-11; 14-15)

- Next, we differentiate between youth and adult volunteers. Discuss the unique characteristics of youth volunteers, advantages to working with youth, and how to encourage them to become more involved. (slide 9)
- Continuing to focus on youth volunteers, the next two slides discuss specific youth empowerment strategies. Even though this is not indicated on the slides, this would be a great time to start an audience discussion about specific youth empowerment examples and strategies that apply to them. (slides 10-11)
- The last slide is a brief review of what has been covered over the last hour or so. Take some time to review what has been covered and ask for any remaining questions. (slide 14)

APPLICATION

Personal empowerment is important for individual development as well as in bringing about positive change. Activities such as sharing our thought processes, inspiring success stories or even frustrations empower us. Use any/all of the activities below to drive home the idea of using/feeling empowerment within a group of volunteers. Based on this lesson of empowerment, participants should have a better foundation for using empowerment within their group of advisory leaders, and youth or adult volunteers in general.

Reworking the Volunteer Position
The purpose of this exercise is to incorporate empowerment into a hands-on experience that participants can take home and use directly in their volunteer development efforts. Prior to the training, request that each participant bring with them a current volunteer position description used within their organization or group. Towards the end of the training, have individuals pull out these descriptions and give them time to rework them according to information obtained through today's training.

Some key points to bring up during the activity:
- Encourage participants to refer to slides from the PowerPoint (9-11 Youth; 12-13 Adult) to get specific ideas on how to incorporate empowerment into the volunteer descriptions they are working with
- If participants are having problems getting ideas, suggest they pair up and assist each other by brainstorming together

- After 15-20 minutes, bring the group back together and debrief – ask about problems, issues with the activity; encourage someone to give their successful example; etc.
- If you find everyone having problems, choose a specific example and work through it with the entire group – this may be a sign that in the future you should bring your own "case study" and have everyone work on reworking a position example that you provide

Tie everything up by asking for comments and questions.

Empowerment within a Volunteer Training Program
The purpose of this exercise is to directly apply empowerment ideas and techniques into applicable programming for the participant. This activity should be started as a group-wide activity, and then develop into a personal activity. The group begins by brainstorming (on a white board or flip chart) the aspects/activities/duties important within a volunteer training program that encourages empowerment for participants. There should be three lists – one for program trainer aspects/activities, one for volunteer participant aspects/activities, and one for guidelines to be included within the overall program. Once the brainstorming is finished (each list should take about 3 minutes) then encourage each individual to begin developing their own volunteer training program, using the brain-storming information.

Allow about 15-20 minutes for participants to work on their own training programs, then bring the group back together and determine progress. Ask for questions, deal with major roadblocks, and tie everything back to the lesson. If participants are not finished, encourage them to take home their activity and finish it (with the ultimate idea being to incorporate it into their own situation) and contact you if they have any problems.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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POWERPOINTS
- See SEAL 2009 PowerPoint "Empowerment"

EVALUATION
- See attached