



# Strengthening Organizational Leadership with the GEMS Model of Volunteer Involvement

## Generating, Educating, Mobilizing and Sustaining

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### Introduction

Section II of the KELD series focuses on coordinating leadership development activities in individuals and organizations. An organized structure helps to effectively execute leadership development activities. Volunteer leadership development must be planned for; it cannot simply happen by chance.

Working with and involving volunteers, leaders and members is a long-standing tradition in community organizations. Through the use of volunteers, leaders and members, the outreach of community organizations and the programs they deliver is greatly extended to audiences which would otherwise not be served. To effectively and efficiently disseminate quality educational and service programs, community organizations need to engage many volunteers, members and leaders. This engagement becomes much easier and more effective when a foundation for civic engagement is laid. The GEMS Model provides this foundation.

### The GEMS Model

To organize and coordinate the efforts of many volunteers, a framework for volunteer engagement and leadership development is needed. In response to rapidly changing needs of volunteer coordinators, the GEMS Model of volunteer involvement was developed. The GEMS Model consists of eighteen steps which exist in four dis-

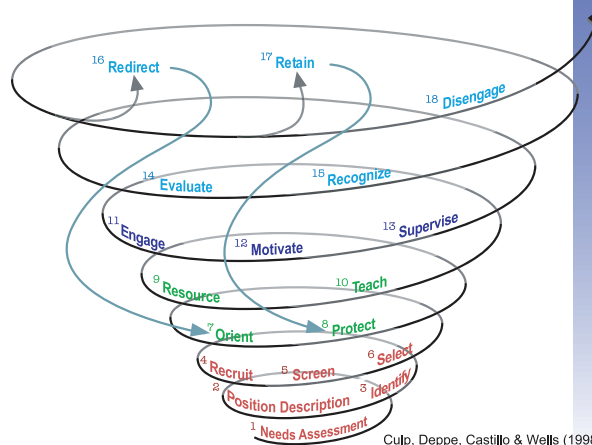
tinct categories. These categories include: Generating, Educating, Mobilizing and Sustaining. GEMS categories are displayed in a spiral, showing how volunteers move from step to step as they progress throughout their volunteer role.

The **Generating** category consists of needs assessment, developing position descriptions, identifying, recruiting, screening and selecting. The **Educating** category includes orienting, protecting, resourcing and teaching. The **Mobilizing** includes engaging, motivating and supervising. The **Sustaining** category contains evaluating, recognizing and redirecting, retaining or disengaging. Illustrated in a spiral, the GEMS Model indicates that volunteer program management is an ongoing process.

*Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain love for one another.*

—Erma Bombeck

**GEMS Model**  
A Spiral Profile of Volunteer Administration  
Generate Educate Mobilize Sustain



Culp, Deppe, Castillo & Wells (1998)



*Every problem that the country faces is being solved in some community by some group or some individual. The question is how to get connected so that the whole nation can solve problems.*

– George H. W. Bush

## Generating Volunteers

The Generating category involves six steps. Volunteer opportunities within the organization must be identified through a needs assessment, then defined in written position descriptions.

The most successful recruitment efforts are preceded by identifying potential volunteers. The volunteer identification process includes developing a list of qualified individuals and groups to be contacted. Targeted recruitment is based on the marketing premise that everyone is not a prospect for every product or service. Because organizations need to use their resources effectively, they should focus recruitment efforts by targeting the most likely candidates.

Volunteer needs, interests, knowledge, skills, backgrounds and attitudes can be surveyed through the screening process with selection based upon the volunteer's ability to perform the appropriate activity or task. In addition, the screening and selection steps also present the initial opportunity for the organization to practice risk management. Volunteer recruits presenting a risk liability could be screened out during this process, or they could be given additional attention during orientation.

Generating new members, volunteers and leaders is a fundamental step in organizational leadership. Organizations that fail to generate new members, volunteers and leaders find themselves on a path to self-destruction.

## Educating Volunteers

New volunteers generally have varying levels of knowledge about the organization. The Educating process includes orienting the volunteers to the organization as a whole and to their specific position responsibilities. Orientation can be beneficial in assuring that volunteers have accurate

information regarding the organization's purpose, programs, policies and expectations.

In today's service arena, volunteers should also be protected by being oriented about risk and liability management. Protecting volunteers includes teaching them specific strategies on how to deal with and avoid risk, as well as how to reduce liability. Informed volunteers will represent the organization positively, carry out their responsibilities effectively and possess a positive attitude toward the organization for which they are volunteering.

Additional teaching or in-service training related to specific skills and knowledge may be needed to help the volunteer successfully carry out his/her responsibilities. Education should be ongoing and may be conducted on an individual basis, through group meetings, workshops and classes.

Volunteers should be informed about the resources available to them to use in their volunteer role. Resources could include programs, materials and curriculum, or program, professional, administrative or financial support.

Education is important to the membership base, volunteer roster and leadership of all community organizations. Life-long learning practices should be incorporated into all organizations, both from the aspect of the target audience as well as its own membership, volunteer core and leadership. Practice the old proverb: "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man how to fish and he'll eat for the rest of his days."

## Mobilizing Volunteers

In the Mobilizing category, volunteers have the opportunity to engage in the task or activity they have been selected to perform. Individuals are motivated to participate in volunteer activities for a variety of

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reasons. By understanding these motives, administrators of volunteer programs can enhance the volunteer's experience.

The needs, skills and knowledge of the individual volunteer will depict how much and how often supervision is needed. Guidance, support and advice from the program administrator, middle manager or another volunteer can help lead to a positive and productive experience.

Mobilizing members, volunteers and leaders is the ultimate goal of all community organizations. Empowering people to serve identified community needs benefits everyone: the clientele, the individual providing the service and the organization as well as the community.

## **Sustaining Volunteers**

The first step in Sustaining a volunteer is evaluation. A volunteer performance evaluation will determine whether or not the goals of both the volunteer and the organization are being met. Documenting work to learn from past accomplishments and mistakes is important. Written documentation can provide a framework for decision making when considering new assignments, promotions and recognition, and when providing recommendations for the volunteer. Effective evaluation is ongoing throughout the four GEMS categories and should be conducted both formally and informally. Strengths, weaknesses, achievements and areas needing improvement as related to the volunteer position description should all be included in an effective evaluation.

To most effectively benefit both the organization and the volunteers who deliver its programs, volunteers should be recognized for their positive contributions to the organization and its clientele. Whether formal or informal, recognition helps volunteers

feel they are making a meaningful contribution to the organization, its programs and its clientele.

Retaining volunteers must be planned for; it contributes strength and continuity to the program. Plans for volunteer retention should begin at the point of entry and continue through the beginning of the next service engagement. The first-year experience usually will determine whether the volunteer will continue service to the program. Retention is best accomplished by meeting the needs of the volunteer, serving the volunteer's motives to continue service to the organization and providing a fulfilling relationship with the organization, its clientele, other volunteers and the organization's professional staff.

A volunteer may be retained in the same capacity or redirected to another role within the organization. In either case, as illustrated in the GEMS Model, a volunteer may continue back down through the spiral, re-entering the Educate category. If retained, the volunteer benefits by acquiring additional skills to carry out responsibilities. If redirected, the volunteer will reenter the GEMS spiral at the orientation step, receiving new position responsibilities, knowledge and skills necessary to perform effectively.

In some cases, even after redirection, a volunteer may disengage from the organization. If this is necessary, the process should be clearly defined and objective. At other times, a volunteer may choose to leave the organization for any of a multitude of reasons, many of which are positive and a natural evolution of volunteer development. Volunteer administrators should remember that disengagement is a natural component of volunteer development and should plan to make this phase as positive and smooth as possible.





Because a significant amount of time has been devoted to generating, educating and mobilizing members, volunteers and leaders, it is important to sustain those efforts to practice effective time management and capitalize on leadership development. Evaluating program effectiveness, recognizing and celebrating accomplishments and determining the subsequent level of involvement of members, volunteers and leaders will contribute to the stability and longevity of the organization.

## Conclusions and Implications

To be most effective, volunteer-based community organizations need a comprehensive administration model to provide a framework for volunteer leadership programs. The GEMS model addresses the emerging critical issues and necessities relevant to present day volunteer programs.

The GEMS Model contains eighteen steps, illustrated in a spiral, depicting the continuous process of involving volunteers in community programs and organizations. The GEMS Model is a tool that will help volunteer administrators and leaders achieve the goals of the organization and its clientele.

The GEMS model may be implemented at any step, based upon the current needs of the organization, its volunteers and volunteer administrator. GEMS allows the volunteer administrator and the volunteer leader to identify the phase their program is currently operating in and then proceed with managing the program by going to the next step in the model.

The GEMS Model may also be used as a framework for any member-based or non-profit organization. The concepts provide an effective structure for successful implementation of an organization's mission as well as internal leadership development.

## References

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