

Volunteer Participation: A Universal Challenge for Chapters

Volunteer participation is an ongoing challenge for HFMA chapters, as many chapter leaders are concerned about leadership development and participation. HFMA chapter leaders are not alone on this one! Adrienne A. Bendel, section/assembly/society director for the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), published an article on volunteer participation in ASAE's Chapter Relations Communication newsletter. Based on her experience, Adrienne developed a "top 10 list:" of ways to motivated members to take on the added responsibilities of being a volunteer leader.

Here's the list!

- 1) Make sure the potential candidate understands what is expected and how the system works. Develop job descriptions outlining the duties of the office, the time commitments, travel requirements, and reimbursement policies. This way, nominees understand what is expected, and for members who require employer approval, the outline provides a written record. Provide a formal orientation for new officers. Don't assume that long-standing members understand the intricacies of your governance structure.
- 2) Show the member the value of serving as an officer. These benefits include professional development, prestige, and contribution to the community. If you provide ongoing training, emphasize to the candidates how this experience will carry over into their professional lives.
- 3) Communicate, communicate, communicate. Nothing frustrates volunteer leaders more than lack of communication. Provide the information needed to make informed decisions----including full financial and resource implications. Become proficient in, and encourage the use of Internet e-mail.
- 4) Provide recognition to officers, their employers, and their families. It is not enough to present a president with a plaque at the end of his or her term office. Issue press releases to local and industry publications at the beginning of the term of office and acknowledge the individuals company or employer in the copy. Include the spouse and family in activities whenever appropriate. Send a letter of appreciation to the individual's employer.
- 5) Recognize that leaders contribute in different ways. Tailor the positions to the available talent. Not everyone wants to president. Perhaps a member cannot commit to the responsibility of being an officer or committee chair but could serve as a committee member. Another member's expertise may be writing rather than public speaking. Ask him or her to contribute articles to the newsletter.
- 6) Always respond to members' offers. When members indicate an interest in being active, find jobs for them. Ask them to write a newsletter article or participate on the newsletter committee.
- 7) Examine your governance structure for entry barriers. If potential officers decline nominations because it requires a five-year commitment, ask your board to consider changing the term to three years. Add members-at-large who serve shorter terms. Look at officers' responsibilities. Working with your board, redesign the existing structure and assign selected duties to new positions. This involves more members and reduces the time requirements for all individuals.

- 8) Use volunteer time effectively. Don't waste board meetings on superficial issues. Volunteer leaders want to feel that their time is well spent.
- 9) Promote the nomination process. Make sure members thoroughly understand the nomination process. Members are quickly disillusioned if they miss the deadline to nominate a candidate. Include nomination information with your new-member orientation materials, and publish it often in other media.
- 10) Give new officers a support system, Assign an experienced member to act as a mentor to new volunteers. This creates a comfort zone that permits the new officers to ask questions without feeling embarrassed about their inexperience. Let new leaders know you're always available for advice and to lead an impartial ear for sounding out ideas.

Adrienne A. Bendel, section/assembly/society services director, Medical Group Management Association, Englewood, Colorado, is a member of the Chapter Relations and Association Management Company section of the American Society of Association Executives.

This article is excerpted and reprinted with permission of the American Society of Association Executives, 1575 NW, Washington, DC 20005-1468; 19997-97, ASAE, (202) 626-2723; www.asaenet.org.

