

## CAVORT 2016

### Nuts-&-Bolts Volunteer Roundtables Session Saturday, March 19, 2016, The Galt House Hotel

Compiled by Meg Matheny, Session Organizer & Host, from notes submitted by table recorders

## REALIZE

### Roundtable 1: Starting & Managing a Volunteer Program

Facilitator: Terry Delavan, Syracuse Stage

Recorder: Linda VanVark, Old Globe Theatre

- Start small with a brand-new volunteer group. Have a staff member lead the group as it gets going.
- Make benefits of volunteering clear; emphasize that their work saves the theatre time and money.
- Keep staff and volunteers connected.
- Give new volunteers a tour of the theatre and background on available volunteer opportunities.
- Create a mentoring program to pair new volunteers with seasoned volunteers.
- Give volunteers specific tasks. Always work from a list of things that need to be done.
- Give back to the volunteers by organizing activities such as Friend-Raisers and new member coffees.
- Keep track of volunteer hours for theatre audits and grants.
- Communicate with volunteers in a variety of ways: email, phone, text, etc.

### Roundtable 2: Organization of Volunteer Operations

Facilitator: Caroline Martinson, Actors Theatre of Louisville

Recorder: Anne McMahon, Actors Theatre of Louisville

- Have a liaison from theatre administration come to the volunteer group meetings.
- Organize according to need: regular play ushers, student matinee/children's theatre ushers, meals for actors, "Intern Angels" (each of these volunteers adopts an intern), airport transportation, etc.
- Give volunteers active roles in promoting the plays, such as a costume parade showing what the costume department can do.
- Advertise the volunteer organization in the theatre program (such as a flyer on the back of each program).
- Give volunteers a free ticket to an annual theatre event (such as St. Louis Rep's spring Extravaganza).

### Roundtable 4: Marketing Volunteer Opportunities & Projects

Facilitator: Ann Bronsing, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

Recorder: Linda Vandivort, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

- Develop an e-newsletter for volunteers and internal theatre staff. Include volunteers' birthdays.
- Publicize volunteer events in the play programs, perhaps on a page dedicated to the volunteer group. Include web address to volunteer website and social media pages.
- Create a Facebook page.
- Invite theatre staff, board members, and guests to an annual volunteers' luncheon and talk up activities.
- One theatre published an 8-page brochure targeted to people nearing retirement to tell them about volunteer opportunities.
- Use the EventBrite website to attract younger volunteers – they can purchase tickets to events and link to the theatre's website and social media page from here.
- Hold an MFA luncheon for students and faculty from local graduate schools.
- Link the volunteer website with the theatre's website.
- Theatre could offer complimentary tickets as incentive for recruiting subscribers and volunteers.

- Promote the fun, social aspect of theatre volunteering with other groups – “cross-pollinating” of organizations.
- Advertise in church bulletins and programs of other events around town.
- Hold an annual volunteer recognition activity such as a brunch. Volunteers could create centerpieces with previous shows as themes, and people could guess which play is represented as a contest.
- Have something autographed by the actors as a door prize to encourage participation.
- Send email blasts to advertise events and ask for help.
- Hold monthly luncheons to get to know volunteers and pass on information.
- Select captains to coordinate volunteers on site.
- Theatre’s marketing department could send out email blasts and press releases about big volunteer fundraising events.
- Ask the House Manager to thank volunteers before each show.
- Give the theatre a “check” (one of those big, fake, cardboard ones) showing the dollar equivalent of volunteer hours contributed each season.

### **Roundtable 5: Funding for Volunteer Services**

Facilitator: Bonnie Gibbs, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

Recorder: Sue Barley, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

- Different ways to handle dues: 1) annually, \$20 active membership = 10 hours of service during season; 2) \$30 no commitment but receive bi-monthly newsletter; this offsets the cost of monthly luncheons; 3) \$50 no commitment but receive perks such as newsletters, tours, meet-and-greets, invitations to luncheons, treated royally by the theatre; 4) list a suggested amount for dues but offer a way to pay more.
- Use a portion of the money from fundraisers for operating expenses.
- Speaker Series – charge public \$15 a ticket and designate these funds for leadership development, such as CAVORT participation.
- Hold an auction at volunteer meetings.
- Recycle!
- Theatre tours and lunch – if already available, add a bit extra for fundraising.
- “Showcase House” – volunteers get cash equivalent for the time they’ve given.
- Fundraising projects – special “Grinch” or “Dracula” photo, \$5.00 each; December Nights event using subjects’ devices; sell popcorn; 50/50 drawing; gift shop; special events at each monthly meeting.
- Endowment fund.

### **Roundtable 7: Theatre Services Provided by Volunteers**

Facilitator: Nancy Ashcraft, Pasadena Playhouse

Recorder: Carolyn Seiffert, Actors Theatre of Louisville

- Ushering – hours tracked by both theatre and volunteers.
- Feeding cast and crew – tech suppers, meals between shows, etc.
- Meet and greet on opening night buffet – theme-oriented.
- Tea for new members.
- Transportation – airport pickup/drop-off, grocery shopping, etc.
- Housing – spruce up apartments during the summer, provide welcome baskets.
- Interaction – new season picnic for interns, interns help with fundraisers, holiday baskets.
- Tours of theatre facilities.
- Production – no help from volunteers.

- Committees – various.
- Newsletter – online; some pay higher dues for printed version.
- Historian.
- Assist small theatre companies with ushering and connections

### **Roundtable 9: Challenges in Working with Volunteers**

Facilitators/Recorders: Suzanne Mercer, Atlanta Shakespeare Company

Terry Conway, Actors Theatre of Louisville

- Working a large theatre vs. a smaller one – large theatres may require multiple levels of assistance, while smaller theatres could use captains as a go-between for volunteers and the House Manager.
- Coordinating volunteer schedules – larger groups could use SignUpGenius.com, while smaller groups could use VolunteerSpot.com (both sites are free).
- Communication is key! Assign a liaison between volunteers and the Board; have the president of the volunteers speak at a Board meeting; use social media such as Facebook for volunteer communication; good relationship with theatre staff is critical.
- Background checks – generally not needed.
- Troublesome volunteers – It's extremely rare to have to get rid of a volunteer, but a process should be in place. Could talk with the volunteer to remind them they represent the theatre, then follow up with a letter.
- Working with college students as volunteers – emphasize that the volunteer group operates like a business. The students could usher along with bussing tables and cleaning up for meals, while the more established volunteers bring food.
- Money management – keep separate bank accounts for operations and reimbursements.
- Personality conflicts – make sure roles are clear up front, don't correct other volunteers, focus on the positive and don't complain or argue in front of patrons.
- Maintaining interest – some volunteers just want to put the activity on their resumes. Engage them in frequent activities such as a monthly luncheon, etc.
- New volunteers – listen to their ideas; have a liaison for new volunteers who can explain if some of their ideas won't work.
- Older volunteers – give them tasks they can do comfortably, such as sitting down to direct patrons if needed.