

McHugh Publishing Reprint

Nine Tips for Working with Volunteers in a Publishing Program

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Item: A scientific society, recognizing a niche with commercial potential, proposed the launch of a new journal. The society's board of directors, wishing to reward a past president with a distinguished position, appointed him as the journal's editor - despite his lack of qualifications for the position.

The editor refused to sign a contract or take any payment for his services. He also refused to cooperate with the society's publishing staff, who were accountable for the new journal, and did not meet the mutually agreed-upon schedule for delivery of articles. Not surprisingly, the new journal missed its launch date by one year, and five years went by before it was published on schedule.

Item: The board of directors at an allied health association, which publishes a monthly magazine, appointed a new chairman of the publication's editorial review board. The new chairman, who happened to be the brother-in-law of the volunteer president, took an average of 19 months to assign articles to reviewers and report back to the staff editor: his predecessor had averaged four months per article. Editorial

submissions plummeted. When queried by the magazine's editor about the slow turn-around time, the editorial board chairman angrily replied, "What the hell do you expect for the pay?"

While these are blatant examples of it, political maneuvering is not uncommon in associations. When you work in association publishing, volunteers come with the territory. Moreover, the volunteer leadership is constantly changing, creating the potential for conflicts between staff and volunteers.

Here are nine steps you can take to ensure that politics, nepotism, and favoritism have difficulty entering your publishing program:

1. Find out why the members volunteered.

Most volunteers serve because they want to make a difference in their trade or professions. Many also serve because they care about a particular cause. Sometimes it's the exposure or networking that they want. When determining a volunteer's motivation, you may even hear a candid reply such as, "It looks good on my resume."

You'll need to employ your listening skills, personal observations, and your intuition to figure out a volunteer's "hidden agenda" - any unarticulated wants and needs. Once you've identified what motivates a volunteer, you'll be in a better position to make the relationship work to your mutual advantage.

2. Discover what volunteers want of their relationship with the publishing program and with you.

Ask questions such as these: "What do you want to accomplish during your tenure? How can we, as staff, serve you? How do you want to work together?" Again, if you uncover what's important to a volunteer, chances are you can win his or her commitment to work with you in making the program successful.

3. Remember who works for whom. All staff work for the chief staff executive, through the "chain of command" and the organizational structure. Volunteers work for volunteers.

That means volunteers should never be able to hire or fire staff (with the exception of the executive director, who works for the board of directors). To allow otherwise would create a chaotic situation. Nor should volunteers drop unbudgeted projects into the laps of staff. While volunteer-inspired projects may be worthwhile, provisions for both staff and financial resources need to be made, typically through the

strategic plan or annual plan of work.

4. Understand your association's power structure.

Power is the ability to influence people, behavior and events. And it often has nothing to do with position, title or formal authority. As Hedrick Smith observes in *The Power Game*, "Information and knowledge are power. Visibility is power. Personal energy is power; so is self-confidence. Showmanship is power. Likability is power. Access to the inner sanctum is power. Obstruction and delay are power. Winning is power. Sometimes, the illusion of power is power."

Remember those intangible ingredients of power when interacting with volunteers. To emphasize your own position, always approach volunteers in a confident and positive manner.

5. Develop job descriptions for volunteer positions.

The relationship between staff and volunteers is strengthened if each party knows exactly what is expected of the other. As a staff member, you undoubtedly have a job description. In contrast many volunteers don't have a clue as to what their job entails.

Spelling out the responsibilities in a job description is not only helpful to the incumbent volunteer but also allows for a smooth transition during and after the inevitable turnover in a position.

6. Educate volunteers about publishing. With the volunteer's job description in hand, have a heart-to-heart discussion that establishes your professional credentials and outlines the needs of the program. Emphasize the importance of everyone meeting deadlines; volunteers generally underestimate the time needed to accomplish publishing tasks.

If you work with a volunteer journal editor, walk through the requirements for getting each issue to the managing editor or the printer on schedule; discuss the recommended number of articles that should always be in development to maintain the journal's publishing schedule. For volunteers working with a book program, talk about the expected turn around time for manuscript reviews and type of information that reviewers should provide.

7. Formalize arrangements with volunteers.

Written agreements emphasize that a volunteer writer or editor is entering into a business relationship with your association. They also legalize the relationship: Such agreements usually require volunteers to provide legal warranties that they have not infringed on copyrighted material, violated someone's privacy, or written libelous material.

When working with volunteer journal editors. be sure the

publishing agreement quantifies what they are expected to deliver (articles, reviews, editorials, and so forth), and when. The contract should also require periodic reports from volunteers so the publications staff can monitor the flow of editorial material.

8. Review the documents governing your association's publishing program.

While not exactly fun to read, organizational documents can prove useful if you find yourself embroiled in a political disagreement. Knowledge is power and those who know the titles have an advantage when politics intensify.

Your association's bylaws, for instance, may address who the publisher is; the selection process for and duties of editors, referees, and committee chairs; and the volunteer editor's scope of authority, tenure, and compensation.

Also determine whether the bylaws contain a conflict-of-interest provision for volunteers. If a volunteer might have access to proprietary information that he or she could use to compete against the association, consult with your chief staff officer. A volunteer conflict-of-interest issue is not the business of staff; it must be handled peer to peer by the executive committee or the elected president.

9. For each publication or periodical, develop a mission statement, financial objectives, editorial policies and procedures, and a structure for editorial decision-making.

The policies established by the publishing committee should support the staff editor's independence - to select the content of a magazine or journal, decide which books to publish, determine the production schedule of a publication, and so forth. The policies should also emphasize that the volunteer's role in these areas is advisory.

Taking these steps will ensure that all volunteers are dealt with on a fair, consistent, and businesslike basis. They'll also reduce the likelihood that you'll end up pulling an article from your magazine's lineup or publishing a book on an arcane topic simply because of a volunteer's stature, micromanagerial style or personal interest in a project.

Publishing in a nonprofit organization is a special field. So it's not surprising that many nonprofit executives have little publishing experience. Therefore,

many need expert and objective guidance when it comes to either starting a new publishing program or evaluating current operations. Consider, also, the fact that nonprofit publishers operate in a unique environment, one that can be sometimes both frustrating and challenging.

As a publishing executive experienced in both the nonprofit and commercial sectors, I saw a void in the availability of practical management information for the nonprofit publishing executive. I decided to remedy that situation by writing and publishing *Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, Foundations and Societies*, 1997, 162 pp.

Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations is unique as it presents a broad overview on how to succeed as a nonprofit publishing manager. Read *Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations* to pick up practical advice from an expert consultant who has "sat in the publisher's chair at a large professional society. For information call 414-351-3056. E-mail j.b.mchugh@worldnet.att.net

About John B. McHugh

John B. McHugh is a publishing management consultant and industry commentator. He has held management positions at Houghton Mifflin, Richard D. Irwin, and Wadsworth, Inc. At the American Society for Quality, McHugh served as Publisher and Director of Programs.

McHugh's articles have appeared in *Association Publishing*, *Association Trends*, *The Book Marketing Update*, the *COSMEP Newsletter*, *Independent Publishing*, the *PMA Newsletter* and *Small Press*. McHugh also conducts on-site training workshops for publishers.

Other McHugh Publications of Interest:

Managing Publishing Rights: Acquiring, Protecting and Selling, 158 pp., 1998. \$90.00. Item M-16

Permissions Management for Requestors and Grantors: Dealing with Copyright and Fair Use, 62 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-14

Publishing Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Principles for Associations, Foundations and Societies, 162 pp., 1997. \$85.00. Item M-15

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Electronic Rights for Publishers: Protecting Your Interests, 31 pp., 1996. \$22.00. Item MP-7

Book Publishing Contracts: An Introduction, 68 pp., 1996. \$70.00. Item M-13

Managing Book Acquisitions: An Introduction, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-12

College Publishing Market, Third Edition, 100 pp., 1995. \$65.00. Item M-11