Module 13: Volunteers and Helpers

Step One: Creating Your Inclusiveness Committee

Step Two: Training and Consultants

Step Three: Definitions and Case Statement

Step Four: Gathering and Analyzing Information

Step Five: Creating Your Inclusiveness Blueprint

Step Six: Implementation
Overview of Content

In this module you will:

• Learn about some of the cultural factors that influence volunteering and helping in the nonprofit sector.

• Consider the benefits to your organization of having a diverse base of volunteers and helpers.

• Explore the benefits that people of color may experience when they volunteer for your organization and the barriers that might prevent them from wanting to volunteer for your organization.

• Analyze the data from the information-gathering process around volunteers and helpers.

• Review a series of concrete suggestions for developing a more diverse and inclusiveness base of volunteers.

• Establish goals and objectives for developing a more diverse and inclusive base of volunteers and helpers that will be integrated into the inclusiveness blueprint.

This module should be completed by any organization that has decided to look at the composition and practices pertaining to volunteers and helpers. If you haven’t prioritized this area as a part of your inclusiveness initiative, then skip to Module 14: Programs and Constituents.

Who to Involve

The work in this module will be completed by the Inclusiveness Committee as a whole or a subset of the committee that would include members who have particular expertise about or responsibility for volunteers and helpers.

Exercises to Complete

• Exercise 13-A: Benefits of Having a Diverse Base of Volunteers and Helpers

• Exercise 13-B: Benefits and Barriers to Volunteering and Helping

• Exercise 13-C: Analyzing Data from Information Gathering

• Exercise 13-D: Developing an Action Plan for Volunteers and Helpers

• End-of-Module Checklist
Volunteering in the Nonprofit Sector

Many nonprofit organizations find they have trouble recruiting volunteers of color for their agencies. Yet research shows that members of communities of color give significant time to causes that are important to them. Often, however, the causes to which they are devoted are not traditional 501(c)(3) organizations. Volunteerism and helping is often done informally in the context of the community, the neighborhood, churches, and/or the family.

Cultural differences can affect the way nonprofit organizations and communities of color communicate with each other when it comes to volunteering and helping. Here are two examples of the many rich traditions held by communities of color related to helping the neighborhood, community, and family.

Churches and other houses of worship are a major center of volunteer activities for many communities of color, especially African American communities. The Black Church plays an extremely important role as a center of communal activity. (Note that while the term “the Black Church” is commonly used, there are many individual churches in African American communities with different religious traditions, beliefs, and practices and it is important to become aware of some of these differences if you hope to build alliances with individual churches.) Church is also a place where many people donate a great deal of time and money. In fact, according to some studies, half of all African Americans donate time to their churches and many perceive their contributions as important to lifting up the entire community.

Giving gifts of time and money within the community is common among Native Americans and is rooted in core values of sharing and reciprocity. However, until recently, traditional 501(c)(3) organizations were not a part of the tribal landscape and are, therefore, unfamiliar to some Native Americans.

Cultural differences can affect the way nonprofit organizations and communities of color communicate with each other when it comes to giving and volunteering: there is some evidence that some people of color do not find the specific term “volunteering” to be especially inviting. According to the Cambridge Volunteer Center, the term may have negative connotations, particularly in lower-income communities. Instead of “volunteering,” you can use other terms such as “helping out,” “giving back,” “neighboring,” or “community involvement.” This workbook uses the combined terminology “volunteering and helping” because each term
is known to resonate differently with different groups. With an awareness of potential sensitivity to these terms, it may be worthwhile for your organization to explore the cultural relevance and terminology that is most appropriate for your particular community.

**Benefits of Having a Diverse Base of Volunteers**

Any organization that has successfully developed a diverse base of volunteers and helpers can attest to the innumerable ways that such a base can help an organization. Some of the benefits are similar to the benefits of creating a diverse board of directors and staff. (Refer to Module 10: Board of Directors and Module 11: Personnel, for more on benefits.)

**For example,** if an organization has a small staff and a diverse client base, then volunteers can help bridge cultural gaps between clients and staff.

Furthermore, volunteers and helpers can bring cultural awareness and expertise that can help reach untapped communities.

**For example,** if an arts organization has been unsuccessful in attracting the attention of diverse communities, then volunteers may be able to provide valuable insight into the reasons that the organization is not successfully reaching communities of color.

In addition, when someone in a household volunteers, financial contributions from the household generally increase by more than 100 percent, so attracting new volunteers from any background can result in increased contributions for your organization.5

Of course, most organizations want to diversify their volunteer base because this expands the number of volunteers they have involved in their work. In 2000, 84 million Americans engaged in some kind of volunteer work. The average volunteer gave 3.6 hours per week and the total value of contributions by volunteers was over $15 billion.6 By opening up possibilities to work with volunteers of color, you’re sure to increase the total pool of available volunteers and helpers to accomplish your mission.

**Complete Exercise 13-A: Benefits of Having a Diverse Base of Volunteers and Helpers.**

**Motivations and Barriers to Volunteering and Helping**

Many of the reasons that people volunteer and help can be universally applied to volunteers of any background. It’s important to remember the basic human motivations for volunteering and helping when you’re thinking of retooling your volunteer program because you will want to make sure
that you respond to the needs of all of your volunteers and helpers.

Some of the basic reasons for volunteering and helping include:
- Helping others.
- Having an interest in the work or activity.
- Wanting to learn and gain experience.
- Having free time available.
- Being devoted to the cause.
- Knowing someone else who was involved.

Of course, in addition to these basic motivations, people who volunteer find other benefits, including the following:
- Acquisition of new skills.
- Higher self-esteem.
- New contacts and networks.
- Possibility for a new job.7

While the motivations for volunteering and helping don’t vary significantly among racial and ethnic groups, the barriers do. In the late 1990s, the United Way of Santa Clara, California, surveyed people of color to determine whether there were barriers to volunteerism. The following barriers were mentioned:
- Not being asked.
- Fear of being used as a token.
- Not feeling connected to the mainstream community.
- Lack of personal time.
- Cultural emphasis on family involvement over community involvement.
- Lack of identification with agencies serving communities of color.
- Lack of knowledge about volunteer opportunities.
- Belief that input from communities of color is not taken seriously.
- Uncertainty about the benefits of involvement.
- Economic hardship.8

Clearly some of these potential barriers are easier to overcome than others. But just understanding them can give you a better sense of how to communicate with communities of color and how to design programs that are culturally relevant to volunteers and helpers of color.
Note for Organizations Interested in Addressing Other Diverse Communities

A number of factors will influence how volunteers from different backgrounds experience your organization. For example, persons with physical disabilities will have a more positive experience volunteering if you have an accessible facility. Or, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people may have a negative experience if they find that their families are not welcome in the facility due to homophobic attitudes. As you think about the benefits and the barriers to volunteering that might prevent diverse communities from giving their time and energy to your organization, be sure to give some serious thought to these issues and pay close attention to the feedback that you get from current volunteers and helpers about these subjects.

Complete Exercises 13-B: Benefits and Barriers to Volunteering and Helping and 13-C: Analyzing Information.

Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Base of Volunteers and Helpers

By now it shouldn’t come as a surprise that the best way to build a diverse base of volunteers is to make a sustained commitment to doing so. A key element to your success will be to create an inclusive organizational culture and develop relationships with community members who feel good about supporting your organization. There is no quick fix to developing a more diverse base of volunteers, but as with all elements of creating a more inclusive organization, the more you focus on developing inclusive practices regarding volunteers and helpers, the more your whole organization will benefit.

Targeted Outreach

Focus your outreach within a certain geographic or other area. Depending upon the mission of your organization, it might be worthwhile to target your outreach to the communities most likely to benefit from your work.

For example, if you work on educational issues and there is a community with large percentages of people of color that your work particularly impacts, then consider targeting your volunteer outreach efforts there.
Develop Long-Term Relationships

Organizations that successfully develop relationships with communities of color understand that they must establish trust between themselves and community members. Unfortunately, in some communities, there may be a level of fatigue as a result of organizations from the outside coming in to do things with the best of intentions but without a long-term commitment. When this happens, people in the community can get excited about the potential for change and offer their time to an organization, only to discover that the organization doesn’t have a long-term plan for working within the community. Fatigue or even cynicism can result, which will have negative effects for other organizations that may want to work with volunteers from that community in the future. For this reason and many others, it is best to make a sustained commitment to any community from which you hope to recruit volunteers and helpers.

Community Leaders

If you decide to do outreach in a particular community, you will frequently find that there are formal and informal leaders who play an important role in the community. Community leaders often have influence as a result of their involvement in the community, or are affiliated with particular organizations or institutions such as the following:

- Churches or other houses of worship.
- Elected offices.
- Civic and cultural organizations.
- Neighborhood associations.
- Community centers.
- Fraternal organizations such as African-American sororities and fraternities.
- Small business owners.
- Media such as neighborhood newspapers and radio stations.

Community leaders can be helpful in recruiting volunteers and helpers of color because they usually have two important resources: information and access.

- They can tell you how to work within a community and give you advice on things such as community events to attend and social and cultural centers where people congregate.
- They can make introductions between your organization and other organizations and groups of potential volunteers and helpers.
Remember, though, that most community leaders take on those positions because they have a history of looking out for the people in their communities. Thus, they will be much more likely to serve as a bridge between your organization and members of the community if they believe that you have a long-term commitment to becoming more inclusive in every aspect of your work. Consider asking people in your organization – including staff, board members, current volunteers, and clients – if they know community leaders and if they would be able to make an introduction between your organization and community leaders they know.

Create Recruitment Opportunities

Informally visiting people, companies, and organizations face to face can prove to be quite meaningful, especially if you do so more than once. It also can be valuable to do a presentation to a group, such as a political or civic group predominantly comprised of people of color. Of course, getting an invitation to visit these groups isn’t always easy unless you have already established relationships with community leaders who can open doors for you. If you haven’t been successful on that front yet, consider asking members of your staff, board of directors, current volunteers, and clients about groups with whom they already have affiliations.

When you visit people or organizations, whether through a formal invitation or by just dropping in, you should always have information about your organization available to leave with people. Make sure that your materials include a visible call for volunteers and helpers. Be prepared to describe your organization and give specific examples of the work your organization does and where volunteer and helping opportunities are available.

Here are some of the types of places to consider visiting and leaving materials with:

• Immigrant aid groups.
• Nonprofit organizations predominantly serving communities of color
• Volunteer centers.
• Churches, temples, mosques.
• Youth groups.
• Sports groups.
• Schools.
• Professional employee groups.
• Arts and cultural groups and cultural events.
• Language classes.
• Small businesses that are owned by and/or primarily serve people of color.9
Communicate with Potential Volunteers

It is very important that you communicate with prospective volunteers in culturally appropriate ways. As you develop materials to give to prospects, be sure that the materials reflect your commitment to inclusiveness through the use of language and images. Also, try to avoid jargon.

For example, avoid statements such as, “Facilitate interviews between executives of the organization and community members who are interested in acquiring knowledge about volunteer opportunities with the organization.” Instead, say, “We’re happy to set up a time to talk with you about what we do and how we can work together to do this important work.” Avoid being patronizing; rather, keep in mind that you’re selling your organization to someone who doesn’t know it very well and who will be making choices about how to use his or her time. Volunteer prospects will be more likely to have an interest in volunteering or helping if your organization appears accessible and if they think they will have a positive experience working with you.

If you’re not sure how your materials are perceived by communities of color, then find people who can give you some insight into this important matter. Consider asking another nonprofit organization with more experience in inclusiveness issues to give you their perspective, or ask current volunteers or clients of color. Usually people generously provide feedback if they know that you are committed to following through on changes that need to be made.

Utilizing culturally relevant media channels to communicate with communities of color can be very beneficial to your outreach efforts as well.

For example, consider pitching stories to ethnic newspapers in your targeted community, especially if you can propose a story to highlight your organization’s direct relevance to their readership. If you can get articles placed, be sure to emphasize that you are looking for volunteers, and give people information on how to contact the organization.

Remember to give significant consideration to translation issues as you develop materials. Some organizations are anxious to produce materials in languages other than English. However, if an organization has no way of communicating with non-English speakers, then it may not be ready to recruit non-English speaking volunteers. Be sure that you have the organizational capacity to meet the needs of these volunteers before reaching out to non-English speakers.
Policies

Managing volunteers in many nonprofit organizations often falls to staff people who do not have enough time to recruit and oversee volunteers effectively or who are not evaluated based on their ability to work with volunteers. Thus, volunteer management is sometimes done haphazardly. Though developing or updating policies isn’t a silver bullet for effectively managing volunteers, policies can provide some consistency to the process and to the experience that volunteers have.

Consider the following changes or updates to policies:

• **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Policy:** Consult your legal counsel as to whether your EEO policy should apply to volunteers and helpers just as it does to staff.

• **Non-Rejection Policy:** Develop a policy that ensures that your organization gives volunteers and helpers multiple opportunities to serve. If they do not have the right skills or characteristics for a particular job, have a system in place that will ensure that they get placed in another volunteer position within a reasonable amount of time.

• **Screening Policy:** Develop a system that allows for continuity and coordination in the ways that volunteers and helpers get screened. You want to be sure that if one department in your organization needs volunteers who have a Ph.D. in biology and another department needs volunteers who can sell hot dogs at the county fair, that the recruitment process is coordinated in such a way that volunteers’ skills and experiences are appropriately matched with your organization’s needs.

• **Staff’s Ability to Work with Volunteers:** Establishing a policy that requires certain staff to be evaluated based on their ability to recruit and work with diverse volunteers and helpers will send a strong message to the organization about the value it places on this function. It also will ensure that staff will prioritize effective volunteer management practices and will lead to regular opportunities for staff and their supervisors to talk about working with volunteers and helpers who are people of color.

• **Good Overall Volunteer Policies:** If your organization is having a hard time recruiting volunteers and helpers from diverse backgrounds, the last thing you want to do is lose good volunteers due to poor execution of basic volunteer management procedures. Consider your policies related to thanking and recognizing volunteers, communicating with volunteers, and performing background checks on potential volunteers.

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.
For example, be sure to have an efficient system for reimbursing expenses. For a list of good volunteer practices, you can contact your local volunteer center through the website to access resources and training, and/or scan the Internet.

Once you have decided what to establish as formal policy, be sure to train your staff on the policies related to volunteers and helpers.

Benefits

If you hope to attract a diverse base of volunteers and helpers to your organization, it may be worthwhile to consider providing some very tangible benefits to complement the soft benefits that all volunteers and helpers enjoy, such as a sense of accomplishment around doing something that improves the community. Especially if your mission is focused on serving low-income groups, you may have more success recruiting volunteers and helpers from communities of color if you provide benefits, especially when these benefits make it easier for people to take time away from their families and communities.

Consider establishing the following benefits:

• Child care while a parent volunteers.
• Child care vouchers that can be used at specific times not necessarily related to volunteering.
• Tickets to events and child care during events.
• Meals while volunteering.
• Reimbursed bus fare or parking expenses.
• Transportation.
• Job training opportunities.
• Welfare-to-work credits.
• Credits that accrue to the children of volunteers and helpers, e.g., for youth programs, tutoring, etc.

Your organization may be able to provide other tangible benefits that relate to your mission or your community.

Track your progress in completing Module 13 on the End-of-Module Checklist, located after the exercises.

2 Ibid, pg. 39.
6 Ibid.
CHC Inclusiveness Committee members convene the clinic staff to develop a plan for recruiting a more inclusive group of volunteers.

Marcie and Luisa sat down with their team, which included four nurses and three office assistants. They had all reviewed the material from the workbook and were starting to answer the questions about the benefits and barriers for people of color in volunteering.

“I think people of color might like to volunteer here because our clients are so much like their own kids,” said Olivia Jackson, one of the nurses. “I’ve seen that with the two grannies who’ve come over from Christian Deliverance Church. They just love to talk to the children.”

“That’s a good one, Olivia. Another benefit might be that they get to learn about the medical field,” said Luisa. “And we’re not as stuffy as a hospital!”

“If a volunteer was a parent or grandparent of a child who received health care from us, they could be somehow repaying what was given to their family,” said Andrea Solis, a part-time office assistant who lived in the neighborhood. The group named four additional benefits.

“That’s a good one, Olivia. Another benefit might be that they get to learn about the medical field,” said Luisa. “And we’re not as stuffy as a hospital!”

“If a volunteer was a parent or grandparent of a child who received health care from us, they could be somehow repaying what was given to their family,” said Andrea Solis, a part-time office assistant who lived in the neighborhood. The group named four additional benefits.

“Now how about barriers?” asked Marcie. “I’ll get us started. How about feeling like they aren’t part of a team of volunteers?”

“That’s true!” said Olivia. “Most of the volunteers come in, do their work, then leave. They don’t really have a sense of who else is working with us.”

“I’d say that would be especially hard for people of color,” said Luisa.

Andrea thought of another reason, but seemed hesitant to share it. After Marcie encouraged her, she said, “Another barrier might be the perception that we mainly have white folks as volunteers, and that they’re not from around here. They see the Mercedes and Lexuses in the volunteer spaces in the parking lot and they think they wouldn’t fit in.”

“Wow,” said Marcie. “I hadn’t ever thought of that. That’s a tough perception. Especially since those cars usual belong to Eleanor’s fundraising volunteers.”

“Well, maybe we should look at that group, too,” said Luisa. “If they were more connected to the clinic volunteers, they might feel even more committed to the organization.”

“That’s a good idea, Luisa,” said Marcie. “I’ll talk to Eleanor about that.”

The group discussed the information that the Inclusiveness Committee had gathered about volunteers. They were especially excited about the possibility for implementing some programs that other community clinics had put into place regarding volunteers who spoke Spanish.

“We’ll have to expand that to Vietnamese,” said Tonya, another nurse. “I had six Vietnamese clients last month who hardly spoke any English.”

“So,” Marcie said, “shall we develop some goals about recruiting volunteers who speak Spanish and Vietnamese? That would be right in line with our clients’ needs.”
“Yes,” said Luisa. “But we don’t just need clinic volunteers who can speak those languages. It would also be good to have some of our volunteer clinicians speak them, too. The patients especially wanted to receive care from a doctor or physician’s assistant who speaks their own language.”

“Good,” said Marcie. “We’ll add that. Now that we’ve talked about bringing people in, we need to think about creating an inclusiveness environment to keep them here.”

Luisa nodded, “Let’s make sure that when people come here, they feel welcome. Some of our policies are pretty off-putting. They seem like they’re written by lawyers.”

“Well they were!” said Marcie. “Let’s take a look at those.” The group decided to set goals of recruiting ten new clinic volunteers and two new clinicians in the next year, all with the language skills they were seeking, and of reviewing their policies and welcome manual to make sure they were inclusive. They brainstormed the kinds of places they might find potential volunteers and decided to start with the families of their patients.

“Excellent work, everyone,” said Marcie. “We have the beginnings of a good plan. I’ll put this all down on paper so that it can become part of the CHC inclusiveness blueprint. And I’ll talk to Eleanor about adding a goal regarding our fundraising volunteers.”

Later, Marcie brought the topic up to Eleanor, who was very receptive. “This is great, Marcie, because it fits right in with my thinking on the fundraising side. If I put some of the suggested changes into place, I’ll need to have a cadre of volunteers to help who are from the communities we’re targeting. Let’s see what we can come up with.”

Together, they drafted a plan that would reach out through a number of different avenues to potential fundraising volunteers from communities of color and would help those volunteers feel successful and welcomed once they were on board. Eleanor planned to include a cross-reference to this effort in her section on fundraising. “I’m still concerned about what you said about the volunteers’ cars,” she told Marcie. “I can’t have them hide in the back. That wouldn’t be right either.”

“No, I see what you mean,” Marcie replied. “But maybe we could reserve half of the spaces for our clinic volunteers and half for fundraising.”

“That'll be a start! Be sure to include that in our plan,” said Eleanor.

“I will,” said Marcie. “Now I can’t wait to see what you folks come up with for the fundraising side.”
EXERCISE 13-A

Benefits of Having a Diverse Base of Volunteers and Helpers

Instructions:
Write down all of the benefits that you can think of for having a more diverse base of volunteers.

• Before you begin, revisit Module 4: Making the Case for Inclusiveness, Exercise 4-B: Visualizing Greater Inclusiveness for a reminder of some of your initial reflections on this matter.
• In addition to the points discussed in the module, think about benefits that might be specific to your particular organization.

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Date Exercise Completed __________
### Benefits and Barriers to Volunteering and Helping

**Instructions:**
Discuss the benefits that people of color might experience if they volunteer with your organization and the potential barriers that might discourage people of color from volunteering or helping your organization. Write down the results of your discussion below.

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**Date Exercise Completed __________**
Instructions:
Refer to Module 7: Information Gathering, Part 3: Compiling Results
- Exercise 7-C: Available Facts: Compiling Other Information
- Exercise 7-G: Stakeholder Perspectives: Compiling Likert Scale Responses
- Exercise 7-H: Stakeholder Perspectives: Compiling Narrative Responses

Select and review the information that pertains to mission and organizational values.

Answer the questions below.

Available Facts

In what ways is your organization’s base of volunteers and helpers more or less diverse than your community?

In what ways is your base of volunteers or helpers more or less diverse than other organizations in your field?
What best practices from the field regarding volunteers and helpers are applicable to your organization?

What trends can you identify about the composition of your volunteers and helpers that are relevant to your inclusiveness initiative?

Did you notice anything else regarding your base of volunteers and helpers from the results of the existing data scan?
Stakeholder Perspectives

What salient themes regarding your organization’s volunteers and helpers were identified by a majority of your stakeholders?

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________________________________________________________________________

In what ways is the culture of the organization perceived to be welcoming, or unwelcoming, of volunteers and helpers of color?

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Do stakeholders believe that the organization currently has a system for identifying and recruiting prospective volunteers and helpers of color? If so, is it effective?

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EXERCISE 13-C: Analyzing Information  continued

What stories or **strongly held beliefs** regarding your organization’s base of volunteers and helpers were identified by stakeholders?

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Are there any significant **inconsistencies** in perspectives among groups of stakeholders regarding your organization’s volunteers and helpers?

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What **trends** can you identify regarding your organization’s base of volunteers and helpers based on the perspectives of your stakeholders?

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continued
EXERCISE 13-C: Analyzing Information  continued

Did you notice anything else regarding the stakeholder perspectives in relation to volunteers and helpers?

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Is there any additional information related to volunteers and helpers that currently isn't available that you would like to collect in the future?

_____ yes   _____ no

If YES, what information would be helpful?

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Date Exercise Completed ___________
EXERCISE 13-D

**Developing an Action Plan for Volunteers and Helpers**

*Instructions:*
Using the following template, record the problem statement, goals, etc., as well as the steps that you will take to accomplish your goals. Remember that every organization usually has its own way of defining goals and objectives. The outline below can be tailored to match your organization’s usual planning process.

(1) What is the primary problem you want to address in regards to your base of volunteers and helpers?

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(2) What is/are your desired goal(s)?

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continued
EXERCISE 13-D: Developing an Action for Volunteers and Helpers  continued

(3) For each goal, what is/are your desired outcome(s)?

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(4) For each goal, what are the primary objectives you hope to accomplish?

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(5) For each objective, what tasks will you complete to accomplish the objective?

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(6) Who will be responsible for completing each task?

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(7) When will the objectives and tasks be completed?

(8) What resources, financial and otherwise, are necessary for achieving each goal?

Date Exercise Completed __________
## Module 13

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<td>Analyze the information gathered about volunteers and helpers.</td>
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<td>Develop an action plan to accomplish goals and objectives.</td>
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<td>Recognize your progress to date and communicate it to appropriate stakeholders.</td>
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