

17. Study on Measures to Enhance Training for Volunteers at Kominkan (Citizens' Public Halls)

Leader: Eiji Hattori (Director, Practical Social Education Research Center)

1. Purpose and background of the study

The February 2008 report by the Central Council for Education, entitled, "Measures to Promote Lifelong Learning to Lead the New Era – Aiming to Create an Intellectual Recycling-Oriented Society," emphasizes the significance of enhancing the educational function of local communities by encouraging individuals to give back to society using what they have learned, thereby aiming to create an intellectual recycling-oriented society. The report also values volunteer activities as opportunities where individuals can learn and make use of their acquired knowledge. It requests social education facilities, such as citizens' public halls, libraries, and museums, to further positively accept volunteers in the future.

However, the Social Education Survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in FY2008 revealed that the percentage of citizens' public halls that have a volunteer registration system, 16.6%, is quite low compared with that of libraries (66.7%) and museums (37.0%).

Therefore, in order to ascertain the current status of volunteer activities at citizens' public halls and training therefor, we conducted a survey targeting municipal central citizens' public halls nationwide and considered desirable forms of such activities and training for the future.

2. Outline of the study

(1) Acceptance of volunteers

Out of 1,041 central citizens' public halls nationwide, 418 halls or 40.2% have been accepting volunteers. According to the survey, it was found that citizens' public halls with a larger number of working staff, full-time staff, and staff members with a social education director's license are more apt to accept volunteers.

(2) Reasons for accepting volunteers

The most common reason for accepting volunteers was "to provide local residents with opportunities for lifelong learning through volunteer activities" (59.6%), followed by "to strengthen the connection between the facility and local communities" (57.4%), and "to provide local residents with a place to make use of the knowledge and abilities that they have acquired so far" (48.8%).

(3) Training for volunteers

Out of citizens' public halls that accept volunteers, 20.8% provide training for volunteers. The percentage was 23.0% for city or ward public halls, 19.4% for town public halls, and 8.7% for village public halls, showing a decline in this order.

(4) Voluntary training by volunteer groups

The percentage of volunteer groups that have conducted voluntary training was 38.5%. The most common reason for not conducting training was "there were no requests from volunteers" (43.2%). Nevertheless, considering the fact that nearly 40% have conducted training voluntarily, its necessity must have been demonstrated by the volunteers.

3. Measures to enhance volunteer activities at citizens' public halls and training therefor

We clarified and analyzed the current status of volunteer activities at citizens' public halls and training therefor and were able to obtain the following suggestions regarding measures to be taken in the future to enhance such activities and training.

- (1) Citizens' public hall staff may have different ideas for volunteers depending on whether they consider their facility as an educational facility for local residents or as a base for creating a better community; whether their facility is operated mainly by the public administration or by the local community; and whether they consider their facility as a place where local residents learn as students or as a place where local residents exercise their respective abilities. Volunteer activities at citizens' public halls are diversified. They cannot be seen from a single point of view, nor can they necessarily be treated in the same manner as those at libraries and museums. When considering volunteer activities at citizens' public halls, these points need be clarified.
- (2) As is shown in the results of the survey on reasons for accepting volunteers, volunteers are accepted not for the purpose of reducing the number of working staff or cutting expenses, but with the aim of providing local residents with opportunities for lifelong learning and places to make the most of their acquired knowledge. The existence of volunteers will consequently enrich the operation of each facility. Therefore, how volunteer support programs are implemented can be an indicator that shows how fruitful each facility's programs are.
- (3) When carrying out training for volunteers, it is necessary to get volunteers involved from the first stage of planning the training programs and to match volunteers' needs with the learning content that citizens' public halls consider necessary throughout the process.
- (4) Volunteers are accepted not for the purpose of making up for staff shortages at facilities but for the further development of facilities in the future. In order to achieve that purpose, training for volunteers is very important, and this is also clear from the results

of the survey on voluntary training by volunteer groups.

- (5) This survey was conducted targeting facilities, but a survey of volunteers is also needed. Through such a survey, we should be able to ascertain the activities and training content required by volunteers and share the survey results with citizens' public halls, thereby enhancing volunteer activities and training therefor, and further revitalizing the overall operation of these facilities.

4. Connection with the mid-term goals

In light of "ideal cooperation among schools, families, and communities" being cited as a priority issue for achieving the mid-term goals, we were able to clarify the current status of volunteer training at citizens' public halls, which form the base for regional social education. We expect that this study will contribute to revitalizing the operation of citizens' public halls and enhancing volunteer activities in local communities in the future.

5. Dissemination of research results

The report on this research study will be delivered to prefectural boards of education and the whole text will be available on the website of the Practical Social Education Research Center, National Institute for Educational Policy Research.

6. Future plans

We finished this study in FY2009. We will make further efforts to disseminate the results widely to citizens' public halls. At the same time, the knowledge obtained will be fully utilized in special courses for citizens' public hall staff and volunteer activity promotion research seminars, etc. to be held at the Practical Social Education Research Center, National Institute for Educational Policy Research.

7. Reports on this study

"Report on the Study on Measures to Enhance Training for Volunteers at Citizens' Public Halls"

Practical Social Education Research Center, National Institute for Educational Policy Research
(March 2010)

"Report on the Survey on Training for Citizens' Public Hall Staff"

Practical Social Education Research Center, National Institute for Educational Policy Research
(March 2010)

<http://www.nier.go.jp/jissen/chosa/houkokusyo0-0.htm>