



Bright Idea

Volunteering For Success

(Abridged)

No nonprofit organization, whether focused on social services or the arts, can be as successful without the tremendous support provided by dedicated volunteers. That is why effective volunteer management is so essential to ensuring good experiences, and returns, for volunteers.

Understanding Volunteering

In December 2003, the second annual volunteer service survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics said 63.8 million people (28.8%) did volunteer work last year. This survey shows that volunteers gave an average of 52 hours per year, and nearly a third of all women volunteer, whereas only a quarter of men do. Volunteers also most often worked with religious groups, followed by education or youth services and social or community service groups.

The Independent Sector determined that the cost of the value of volunteer time in 2003 was \$17.19 an hour. Using these statistics, the volunteer workforce, then, represents over 3.3 billion volunteer hours, the equivalent of over 1.5 million full-time employees whose combined efforts are worth an estimated \$57 billion.

Released in February 2004, the Urban Institute Volunteer Management Capacity Study reported:

- Three out of five charities (62%) reported having a paid staff person who worked on volunteer coordination, but of these, one in three had not received any training in volunteer management, and half spent less than 30% of their time on volunteer coordination.
- More than nine in ten organizations are ready to take on more volunteers at their present capacity, with a median of 20 new volunteers.

The study shows that the more time a volunteer coordinator dedicates to management of volunteers, the better a charity is prepared to take on additional volunteers, adopt best practices, and have an effective program in terms of the benefits reported—an investment worth the benefits.

Finding the Right Place to Start

A number of studies consistently conclude that a majority of people will volunteer if asked, the best way to recruit volunteers. Studies have revealed that people are less likely to volunteer for a second time if their first experience was not very satisfying. Other studies asked volunteers a series of questions about their reasons for volunteering. The findings confirm what is already well known: volunteering provides a variety of personal benefits and satisfaction to the volunteer, in addition to the benefits received by nonprofit organizations and society as a whole.

So, to help more effectively cultivate and ultimately manage volunteers, some recent trends give insights on how organizations must change as volunteering has changed over the past several decades. Volunteering is now not only central to health and social service delivery, but also to many other segments of communities, including the arts and sports. The face of volunteering today also includes all ages and backgrounds.

The following are seven trends on how volunteering has changed over time identified by the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network:

1. More businesses are engaged in volunteering;
2. Volunteer opportunities are more readily

- available;
3. Youth are more engaged as volunteers;
4. Volunteering has become a requirement in many communities;
5. More organizations are seeking volunteers and relying on volunteers more;
6. The Internet is a major resource for volunteering opportunities; and
7. More people are interested in short/episodic opportunities.

These trends point to the changing demographics of the population and volunteer labor pool, and, thus, to the fact that organizations have to change as well.

Planning a Volunteer Program

The Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network has developed a set of characteristics of highly effective volunteer organizations. The four key action principles are:

1. Lay the Foundation through Mission and Vision
2. Combine Inspiring Leadership with Effective Management
3. Build Understanding and Collaboration
4. Learn, Grow, and Change

To implement these principles, Volunteer Centers can help local organizations develop volunteer programs. Whether as an individual, a family, or employees, volunteers' efforts in most communities throughout the country are organized around issues central to the communities' needs. In most cases, Volunteer Centers are the local organizations responsible for these efforts. As a convener for the community, a catalyst for social action, and a key resource for volunteer involvement in a community, Volunteer Centers mobilize people and resources to deliver creative solutions to community problems.

By David Styers, Senior Director, Volunteer Center Development at the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network.

Read the complete article online at the Volunteer Centers Members Only Intranet at <http://volunteerctr.intranets.com>.