Commissioned for: Nat. Forum on A Commission on Volunteerism
Blacksburg, VA 1980

MAPPING VOLUNTEERISM:

WHAT SHOULD WE PUT ON THE MAP?

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To attempt rational policy planning and action in any realm of human activity without adequate and relevant information to guide these processes is at best foolhardy and at worst harmful. Such information may be thought of as a kind of map, a simplified perspective on reality. Maps simplify reality in various ways, always reducing the amount of available information and usually highlighting certain features of reality while ignoring others. Volunteerism has yet to be mapped adequately. In this paper I will raise some questions that must precede such a mapping process. Different kinds of maps are needed for different purposes, and the use to which a map is to be put should determine the kinds of features included and excluded. If we are to understand volunteerism, what are the key elements or features for inclusion to produce an adequate map? One could discuss this question endlessly. Many do. Based on existing research as well as practical considerations, I think there are four main categories of crucial features of volunteerism: volunteers, individual volunteerism resources, volunteer groups, and collective volunteerism resources.

(1) Volunteers. Most people take some vague and amorphous definition of the term "volunteer" for granted, convinced that they know one when they see one. But when one tries to be precise, defining what a volunteer is becomes unexpectedly difficult. Is someone who enlists in our U.S. "Volunteer" Army really a volunteer, or just someone freely choosing a paying job? Is a VISTA or stipended (partially or meagerly paid) volunteer really a volunteer, or more accurately a "quasi-volunteer," a person working for low pay and expense reimbursement but with some significant commitment to a goal in the public interest? Does the provision of expense reimbursements to a volunteer make that person any less a volunteer than a person wealthy enough not to need such reimbursements? Perhaps the hardest kind of questions here involve the overlap of paid work and volunteer activities. Is there not

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a volunteer component in many paid occupations, for instance a lawyer teaching full time rather than pursuing a more lucrative private practice, or a top corporation executive who accepts a poorly paid government or nonprofit organization job?

A volunteer is best defined as someone who is currently doing volunteer work. Volunteer work is best defined as non-coerced, non-obligatory, societally useful activities performed for intended beneficiaries other than kin and motivated primarily by the expectation of psychic or interpersonal satisfactions rather than the expectation of direct, high probability, appropriate remuneration for services performed. Using this definition, U.S. Army "volunteers" are actually paid workers, except when off-duty and possibly engaged in volunteer work, as defined here. Stipended volunteers and people who take lower paying jobs or careers because of commitment to the public interest are "quasi-volunteers." Expense-reimbursed volunteers are as much volunteers as the non-reimbursed, assuming they qualify as true volunteers as defined above.

Several other distinctions among volunteers can be useful. Too often informal volunteering is overlooked. Formal volunteers are affiliated with some program, organization, or agency that coordinates their work. Informal volunteers do volunteer work either on their own (as in helping a neighbor in need) or as part of informal groups of friends. Because they are ubiquitous, informal volunteers may be overlooked, but full-time volunteers are usually overlooked because they are so rare. Yet full-time volunteers, performing 30 or more hours a week of volunteer work, are the central mobilizing forces of perhaps tens of thousands of volunteer groups and programs in this country. Part-time volunteers---the active, regular volunteers who put in their few hours each week---are the norm. Their far greater numbers make their total contribution to volunteerism very large indeed. Nominal volunteers officially belong to some voluntary group without doing any volunteer work, even though they may be contributors of money or goods to volunteerism.

Adequate mapping of volunteers should also identify volunteers by levels of responsibility (policy volunteers such as board members; management volunteers' operative volunteers such as campaign workers or therapeutic companions), by programmatic type of activity, by the type of voluntary group affiliation if any, by the social and physical work setting, by the clients or targets of activity (group members themselves; clients; the general welfare), by domestic vs. transnational orientation, and by degree of societal change orientation (from status quo to radical change-oriented), and possibly by several other characteristics (such as training/education, skill level/competence, prior volunteer experiences, and range of a person's current volunteer involvements).

(2) Individual Volunteerism Resources. To understand and map volunteerism adequately, one must be able to identify the principal

types of resources provided by volunteers and others involved in volunteerism as individuals. Some important elements here are amounts of volunteer time, of paid staff time, of contributed funds, property, or facilities, of lent funds, property, or facilities, and of total expenditures by individuals on volunteer groups or endeavors (including subscription fees, for example).

(3) Volunteer Groups. As with defining volunteers, it is impossible to define volunteer groups in a way that all will accept. For instance, is a group a volunteer group if it has any paid staff? What if the paid staff in a nonprofit organization outnumber the volunteers? What if the only volunteers in a nonprofit organization are its board of directors or equivalent? What if the volunteers are working for a government agency (as with the I.R.S. volunteers) or even constitute a government agency (as with the Environmental Commission of a small town government)---are they a governmental group or a volunteer group?

I have found it useful to deal with such questions by defining a volunteer group as a group (organization, agency, association, etc.) the majority of whose active, service-producing (more than nominal) members and staff are volunteers. Volunteer groups can certainly have some paid staff, but they will be a minority in relation to the bombined staff plus membership. When paid staff outnumber volunteers in a nonprofit organization, it is often useful to refer to the organization (providing it is not a government agency) as a "paid-staff nonprofit organization" (abbreviated as "PSNPO"). The term "voluntary group" can be used to refer to the whole range of nonprofit groups, both volunteer groups and PSNPOs. A PSNPO will almost always have a volunteer board of directors (sometimes expense-reimbursed), and sometimes will have other volunteers associated with it. The latter volunteers may be termed the volunteer component or "volunteer program" of the PSNPO. The volunteer program of some PSNPO, such as a hospital, however, is itself a volunteer group when considered as analytically separate from the larger PSNPO. Most voluntary associations or volunteer membership organizations are thus volunteer groups, as are the volunteer programs affiliated with many PSNPOs or with government agencies. In smaller towns and cities, planning boards, school boards, and the like can be local government units and volunteer groups simultaneously.

There are many important differences among volunteer groups worthy of mapping, only a few of which can be touched on here.* One can disdistinguish volunteer groups as being informal or formal, informal volunteer groups being groups of friends, co-workers, neighbors and the

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*For more extensive discussion of these differences, see "Dimensions and Categories of Voluntary Organizations/NGOs," by myself and two colleagues, in the Journal of Voluntary Action Research, 2 (2), 1973: 116-120.

like who lack a unique group name, clear group membership boundaries, and a clear leadership structure; while formal volunteer groups have at least the latter three characteristics. Like informal volunteers, informal volunteer groups are widely ignored but widespread and important. Another key distinction among volunteer groups is whether or not they are formally related to some other, usually larger, group or organization. There are two different types of relationship here, called vertical and horizontal integration. A vertically integrated volunteer group is part of some larger organization that covers more territory (as a Girl Scout troop is part of the Girl Scouts of America). A horizontally integrated volunteer group is part of some larger organization at the same territorial level (as a hospital volunteer program is part of the hospital in a given town). Independent volunteer groups stand alone, with neither type of relationship. Such groups are usually the smallest, least known, shortest lived, and poorest, but also the most innovative and need-responsive volunteer groups.

The most common way of distinguishing among volunteer groups is in terms of their goals and purposes, especially their primary purposes. There are many different schemes for classifying volunteer groups into what may be called "programmatic types." After many years of empirical research in which different classification schemes were used, I have found the following one to be the most analytically useful:

community service/community action groups
other-helping health groups
other-helping educational groups
personal growth/self-development/self-improvement groups
communication/information dissemination groups
scientific/technical/engineering/learned groups
other-helping social welfare groups
self-help disadvantaged/minority groups
political action groups
environmental/ecological welfare groups
consumer welfare groups
international/transnational welfare groups
occupation-related groups (business-trade-professional associations; farmers' and ranchers' associations; labor unions and employee associations)
expressive leisure groups (sports and recreational groups; hobbies and games groups; entertainment and spectatorship groups; cultural and artistic groups; sociability and fellowship groups)
religious/ideological-ethical groups
deviant/criminal groups
fund-raising/fund-distribution groups
multipurpose/general groups*

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*For more detail and examples, see my article, with two colleagues, entitled "The Nonprofit Sector" in the Nonprofit Organization Handbook (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1978), edited by Tracy Connors.

Many other important distinctions among volunteer groups also come to mind, of course, particularly size, wealth, power, age, public familiarity, geographic scope, societal change orientation, etc. Each of these can be important in one context or another, but for general purposes the prior distinctions seem more important to grasp and take into account.

(4) Collective Volunteerism Resources. There are collective or group resources for volunteerism that are crucial to a mapping of volunteerism. There are at least three main types of these support groups: cooperation facilitation, leadership development, and operating-resources provision groups. In fact, these three types may be thought of most accurately as functions, with some support groups engaged in only a single function and others involved in two or even all three.

Cooperation facilitation groups are alliances, coalitions, confederations, councils, and similar bodies that bring together two or more volunteer groups in a temporary or permanent attempt to bring about collaboration, cooperation, and sometimes coordination or even merger between these groups. A good example would be the Alliance for Volunteerism that is convening the forthcoming National Forum, but a few other examples are the National Assembly, Independent Sector, AFL-CIO, the National Council of Churches, and the National Council of Organizations for Children and Youth. These groups are very important for understanding volunteerism because they constitute the formal networks and the superstructure. Two questions about such groups immediately arise, when they are viewed in this light: (1) How much breadth of coverage is there for volunteer groups in general by one or another of these cooperation facilitation groups? That is, what types of volunteerism have no such groups, and which such groups include only a small proportion of the total set of relevant potential members? (2) Could there be some kind of useful cooperation facilitation group for volunteerism as a whole to link together the many existing specialized groups that facilitate cooperation in one or another area of the field?

Leadership development groups are organizations of and for different kinds of leaders, paid and volunteer, of voluntary groups. A good example would be the American Society of Association Executives, one of the Co-Sponsors of the National Forum. But again there are many other possible examples. The aim of such groups is to develop the skills, competence, and personal qualities of leaders of voluntary groups through meetings, training, publications, and the like. A question worth pondering is whether all areas of volunteerism are adequately served at present by some kind of leadership development group. If not, what are the gap areas and how could they be filled?

Operating-resources provision groups are organizations that try to provide such operating resources as recruitment of volunteers, training, evaluation, research, fund raising, funding, technical consultation, and/or other services to outside volunteer groups (that is, not

merely to local or other lower territorial level units or chapters of their own organization) of one kind or all kinds for some defined geographical territory. Such a group would be Volunteer: The National Center for Citizen Involvement, as a general national operating-resources provision group, or the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars, as a national group specializing in research on volunteerism ---both groups being Co-Sponsors of the National Forum. Private foundations are good examples of local or national specialists in fund-raising training and consultation. Volunteer Bureaus around the nation are examples of local specialists in volunteer recruitment and sometimes technical consultations and training. Again the question arises regarding how well do the existing operational-resources provision groups meet the very real needs of America's volunteer groups. Where are the gaps---by type of operational-resource, by area of the country, and by type of volunteer group---and how can these gaps be filled? How can volunteer groups be helped to more readily find the kind of support group and help that they need?

Conclusion

There are good maps and bad maps. In volunteerism, we have few good ones, with some notable exceptions (some national directories of national organizations). At the local and state levels, maps of volunteerism are almost uniformly inadequate; yet this is where most of volunteering takes place. We may now be able to develop some consensus on what should be put on our maps of volunteerism, but how can the data be gathered and updated regularly, who should do so for what territorial levels and types of volunteerism, and how should the information, the resulting maps, be disseminated in order to be of maximum benefit to volunteerism?