

Susan J. Ellis

SOME THOUGHTS ON HARD-TO-KEEP VOLUNTEER RECORDS

- ** Leaders of volunteer programs agree that documenting the efforts of volunteers is important...but not always easy. Despite the difficulty in "capturing" a record of volunteer activity, every attempt should be made to try. On the other hand, not knowing how to document something should never stop an organization from doing something!
- ** As volunteering becomes more and more creative, recordkeeping becomes less and less simple. Timesheets, for example, are a good idea when volunteers work in a facility and on a regular schedule, but the complications begin when volunteers work out in the field and as needed.
- ** Some hard-to-keep record examples:
 - the work board members do in-between meetings...the work any committee members do in-between meetings*
 - the contribution of "on call," standby volunteers*
 - time spent by regularly-scheduled volunteers in preparing for their assignments*
 - effort by groups already organized independently but giving special service to another organization/agency*
 - credit for the role played by a director of volunteers in "networking" community groups to be more helpful to one another*
 - the impact of volunteers in one-to-one support roles (beyond the time spent with the recipient of service)*
 - other efforts by volunteers working off-site*
- ** Hours served is the most common, yet least meaningful type of recordkeeping on volunteer achievements. Consider keeping records on units of service instead: number of speeches given; number of telephone calls attempted/completed; number of flyers distributed; etc.
- ** How about benchmarks reached?: *tutees moving onto next reading level; patient able to dress self; parolee going six months without violating rules; etc.*
- ** Don't be afraid to use educated estimates on which to base documentation of time spent. After all, if auto mechanics can use Chilton's Rate Books to estimate how much you will spend on car repairs, why can't directors of volunteers also refer to accepted standards of time necessary to accomplish a task?
- ** Consider keeping extremely detailed records—no matter how hard this is to do—for one or two months, then extrapolate those findings to what can legitimately be expected for other months.
- ** Ask volunteers in the field to log their activities, but then arrange a system in which they are called by telephone to report their data.
- ** Look for relevant examples in the salaried work world that can be applied to volunteer recordkeeping (such as estimating time, etc.). Refer to Neil Karn's articles in THE JOURNAL OF VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION (Winter 1982-83, Spring 1983, and Fall 1984) on "Money Talks: A Guide to Establishing the True Dollar Value of Volunteer Time."