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NCNB

STRATEGIC ISSUES SERIES

BOOKLET

The Board's Role in
**Effective
Volunteer
Involvement**



**NATIONAL CENTER
FOR NONPROFIT BOARDS**

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*A leader with vision and passion is the magnet
that pulls a volunteer to action.*

— Henry A. Rosso

While the vast majority of nonprofit organizations involve volunteers in direct service and support roles, the subject of volunteers is rarely raised in the board room. This lack of attention implies that there is nothing the board should be saying or doing about volunteers. In some organizations, volunteers are perceived as a day-to-day management issue and therefore the responsibility of the paid staff. In other cases, “having” volunteers is seen as an end unto itself—as long as a corps of voluntary workers is signed up, everyone assumes things are fine.

There is also the obvious fact that the board is itself composed of volunteers. Is there a connection between board volunteers and other volunteers in the organization? Should there be?

The purpose of this booklet is to examine and challenge assumptions about volunteers, and to provide some guidelines for the board member who wishes to exercise the same legal and fiduciary stewardship with volunteers as with other organization resources. Unless the board places volunteers on the agenda, even once in a while, it is not possible for it to exercise any leadership in this area.

Boards of directors vary, and it is hard to anticipate the situations of many different readers. If you are a board member of a large organization, you may have an organized and staffed volunteer services office. On the other hand, if your board governs a small grass-roots organization, the responsibility for involving volunteers may be shared by everyone.

Another variable is how central volunteers are to the service delivery of your organization. If your program is designed to be provided through the actions of many specifically recruited volunteers, the issues in this booklet are critical. If your organization is just starting to explore ways to incorporate community participants, your board can pave the way by articulating a forward-looking vision.

Finally, volunteers do many different jobs. While the considerations proposed in this booklet apply to volunteers in general, some questions are particularly relevant to direct service volunteers, others to volunteers engaged in advocacy or outreach, and still others to technical assistance expert volunteers. It is precisely this range of potential volunteer activities that makes it necessary to lay a strong foundation for their success.

The goal of this booklet is not to urge the board to micromanage—the ongoing activities of volunteers are the domain of organization staff. But the fundamental philosophy, purpose, and goals of volunteer involvement deserve board attention. Then the staff can implement policy about volunteers just as they implement other organization policies.

II. WHY BOARDS SHOULD CONSIDER VOLUNTEER ISSUES

Volunteers are a legitimate subject of concern to a board of directors because of the following basic principles:

- 1. Volunteers are a valuable resource for the organization and should be included in any discussion of development. If cash is obtained by “fund raising,” volunteers result from “people raising.”**

Volunteers do not “save” money, but involving them effectively can stretch the budget beyond what it might otherwise cover. Volunteers should therefore be considered as one of the options available to support your organization’s efforts. They are a valid part of any resource development strategy.

2. It is possible and desirable to take a proactive stance in planning for volunteer involvement.

The ways volunteers can help your organization are limited only by your vision for that involvement. The volunteer world is changing and evolving. The organization that can tap into emerging sources of community involvement will find support of many kinds, but it won't be "business as usual." Is your organization poised to take advantage of today's volunteer force? Have you articulated what you want to achieve through volunteers?

3. Volunteers are the unsalaried personnel department of the organization.

The board discusses policies that affect paid personnel, even though implementation is the role of the chief executive: new project areas that require funding, major personnel policies, affirmative action statements, and ethical considerations. In some organizations, volunteers far outnumber employees. Wouldn't the volunteer staff benefit from the same types of guidelines?

4. Volunteers are influential agents of the organization.

Volunteers have credibility in the community because they are perceived as supporting an organization without personal vested interest. They therefore have enormous potential in public relations, fund raising, public education, legislative advocacy, and other community outreach functions.

5. Because volunteers *are* agents of the organization, their work poses potential risk management questions and insurance needs.

Anyone acting on behalf of an organization can put others at risk or can be at risk. Volunteers are not inherently more or less likely to have accidents or make mistakes. However, the board should make sure that the organization has taken all the necessary steps to protect the client, the volunteer, and the paid staff.

6. Volunteers are a source of valuable information for planning and evaluation.

Volunteers are "insider/outside"—they are familiar with the organization but not fully integrated into its daily activities. They are

knowledgeable, but they have a unique perspective. They may also have access to consumer or client opinions in a different way than employees do.

III. HOW THE BOARD SHOULD BE INVOLVED

A. Being Informed

One of the first things to consider is, What does the board know about current volunteer involvement? Do you have concrete information that allows the board to provide oversight on the use of this human resource just as it monitors other organization work? Or are you out of the loop, uninformed about a subject with enormous potential and implications? Unless you understand the present picture of volunteerism in your organization, it will be hard to formulate policy for the future. You cannot develop a *vision* for volunteers until you see the current reality.

Basic data about volunteers should be reported to the board along with other organizational information. The point, again, is not to manage daily activities but to observe patterns. If the numbers or types of volunteers change significantly, and if the work of volunteers has a major impact on the organization (which is to be hoped), the board needs to be informed. Volunteers are part of the full picture, to be integrated into organizational decision making.

Data useful to the board over time would be:

- ◆ Where in our organization do volunteers work? Where do they not work?
- ◆ How many volunteers are active at any given period in each area of our organization? Are volunteers active seasonally as well as on an ongoing basis? Are there peak times for volunteer involvement? Are we experiencing difficulties recruiting the volunteers we need?
- ◆ What is the profile of our volunteer corps? How diverse is this group in terms of gender, race, age, education, geography, and

other factors? Was this profile actively sought or did it evolve on its own?

- ◆ What trends and issues affect volunteer involvement in our organization?
- ◆ What community groups collaborate with our organization through the volunteer office?
- ◆ How much staff time is devoted to volunteer management?
- ◆ How are volunteer accomplishments evaluated and what are the findings of this evaluation?

B. Asking Fundamental Questions

If your organization does not have a consciously designed volunteer participation component, you should consider the following issues first. These are board-level vision and policy concerns.

Organizations already committed to the involvement of volunteers should state their expectations clearly and periodically consider whether the organization is involving volunteers effectively. Ask the following questions at least every two years.

1. Why do we want to have volunteers in the first place?

Many nonprofit organizations automatically involve volunteers, as if it is self-evident that volunteers are appropriate for every setting. Worse, some organizations fall back on volunteers as a strategy for coping with insufficient funds. Volunteers are tolerated as long-term temporary workers until more money can be raised and employees hired.

Lack of funds is a poor reason to recruit volunteers. Instead, as a board, you need to articulate the reasons why volunteers are a meaningful, positively selected strategy for strengthening your service delivery. To keep staff morale high, the board should make it clear that it intends to maintain funding levels to hire or keep employees and that volunteers are a complementary way to expand available services.

Volunteers bring some unique characteristics to an organization—characteristics that would diminish or change if the person were to receive a salary. The issue is not caring, concern, or enthusiasm.

Commitment to quality service does not depend on the presence or absence of a paycheck, and most nonprofit employees are dedicated workers.

However, in general:

- ◆ Volunteers have perceived credibility with clients, donors, legislators, and others for the very reason that they do not receive a paycheck from the organization.
- ◆ It often makes a difference to the recipient of a service that the provider is there purely because he or she wants to be.
- ◆ Volunteers are often more free to criticize and speak their minds.
- ◆ Volunteers bring the “luxury of focus” to their work. While paid staff members must spread their time and efforts equitably among all clients, volunteers can be recruited to concentrate on selected individuals and projects.
- ◆ Volunteers, as private citizens, can sometimes cut through red tape and bureaucracies more directly than employees, who are limited by jurisdictional restrictions.
- ◆ Volunteers can be asked to work odd hours, in varying locations, and to fill special needs for which staff time cannot be justified yet which are important to individual clients.
- ◆ Volunteers can experiment with new ideas and approaches that are not yet ready to be funded.
- ◆ Volunteers bring the organization more hands, talents, and hours.

The board should approve a written statement concerning the purpose and role of volunteers in the organization. This will affirm both paid and unpaid staff. Here is an example:

Our organization encourages the teamwork of salaried staff and volunteers so that we can offer our consumers the best services possible. Volunteers contribute their unique talents, skills, and knowledge of our community to provide personalized attention to consumers, enable the salaried staff

to concentrate on the work for which they were trained, and educate the public about our organization and its cause.

— Susan J. Ellis

*in From the Top Down: The Executive Role
in Volunteer Program Success*

2. What is our vision of volunteer involvement for our organization?

Volunteers are as diverse as the general labor market. Stating that you want volunteers does not immediately give a clear picture of the *kind* of volunteers you want. Again, the board's role is not to focus on details, but to provide an outline for the staff to fill in. Your dreams set the direction for everyone to follow.

Many important trends and issues affect volunteerism. It is the job of the chief executive and the volunteer program staff to understand these trends and incorporate them into project implementation, but the board should also be aware of potential new sources of volunteer help. Here are a few examples:

- ◆ A growing number of school systems are having students perform community service as a requirement for graduation. This is happening at the university level, in high schools, and even in the lower grades. Is it appropriate for your organization to find meaningful ways to involve these young volunteers?
- ◆ National service is evolving and will undoubtedly change as each administration takes office. To receive an AmeriCorps placement, organizations must develop clear project goals and provide matching funds. Should your organization seek such involvement? What are the implications of such an effort for overall volunteer participation in the future?
- ◆ In some states, recipients of public assistance benefits, unemployment compensation, and other public funds are being asked to “give back” through community service (although in some locations such participation is forbidden). Again, what are the implications—and the ethical considerations—of tapping into these sources of help?

- ◆ Although much publicity has been given to large corporations that sponsor employee volunteer projects, these programs are relatively new. Do the large and mid-size businesses in your community have organized volunteer efforts? Are you working with them—perhaps even encouraging such programs? What might this mean if you are looking to the same companies for philanthropic dollars? And what about small, local businesses?

Even the vocabulary that describes volunteering is in flux, encompassing such terms as: “community service,” “service-learning,” “pro bono projects,” and “lay ministry.” What your organization now calls its “volunteer program” may better be envisioned as a “community resource office.” This brings us back to the role of the board in setting the organization’s sights as high as possible. If you want to go beyond past experience with volunteers and tap the new and exciting sources of help—express your wishes.

Here are just a few opening questions to assist in the board discussion:

- ◆ Do we want our volunteer corps to reflect or represent the community we serve? To reflect or represent the clients or consumers we serve? To expand or augment the skills of our employees?
- ◆ What are the pros and cons of adapting our volunteer involvement to the emerging new trends and issues in volunteerism? What criteria (political, ethical, financial) should we use to determine which trends to pursue?
- ◆ Do we want to develop collaborative arrangements with existing community groups? Is volunteer action one way to accomplish this?
- ◆ How large should the volunteer program be? At what point in this increase in size will we reconsider the volunteer program budget?

The organization’s staff will consider the management details of all of these questions, but the board sets the framework for volunteer involvement.

3. Have we made sure that planning for volunteers is integrated into other organizational planning issues?

Many boards engage in strategic planning. Are volunteers incorporated into long-range plans for the organization? Or do you plan for everything else and then assume that volunteers will support all of this in some way?

Recently, a major hospital produced an 80-page Five-Year Plan. The hefty document, the result of hours of staff and board discussion and the help of a consultant, did not contain the word "volunteer." Yet the facility already was the recipient of the donated time of 600 volunteers! What were the implications of neglecting volunteers in the strategic plan? Ironically, the hospital was struggling with the aging of its volunteer corps and faced the very real possibility that, without dramatic action, few of the current volunteers would be around at the end of the five-year period.

It is appropriate for the board to take an active position on volunteer involvement: State what you want and let the staff take the necessary steps to accomplish the goals. You don't have to be grateful for any volunteer who wanders in: if you want a high-powered, expert, diverse volunteer corps, plan for it.

When the chief executive presents a new initiative, the board should ask whether volunteers been considered in this plan. For example, decisions about a merger will affect both sets of volunteers as well as both sets of employees. The design for a new building should include the activity and space necessary to accommodate volunteer work.

The school board in a rapidly growing area mandated the recruitment of volunteers but neglected to consider the effect of putting more adults into crowded temporary buildings. The result was an adult bathroom crisis that could have been anticipated and mitigated. Such practical matters are solved only when volunteers are visible to decision makers.

4. Do we need or want self-led volunteer groups to support our work?

Until now, the focus has been on volunteers recruited to work within the organization, generally under the supervision of or in collaboration with paid staff. Another model for volunteer involvement is the independently organized, self-governing volunteer group.

Whether it is an auxiliary, a friends group, or a special event committee, this kind of volunteer group brings a whole new set of board considerations:

- ◆ Why do we want a self-led volunteer group? Are there reasons beyond hoping for increased fund raising? Is this the best approach to achieving our goals?
- ◆ Are these to be independently incorporated bodies or will they use our organization's tax-exempt number and therefore require the board's oversight?
- ◆ How will such groups interrelate with each other, with the in-house volunteer department, and with the board?
- ◆ Who is in charge? Since the self-led group is formed to support the organization, who "owns" the funds raised? Who approves name changes, project goals, and other public activities that affect the larger organization?
- ◆ Will organization staff have any direct responsibility for or authority over any aspect of the group's work? Conversely, does the volunteer group have the right to delegate work to employees of the organization?
- ◆ How will reporting and evaluation be handled?
- ◆ Should the presidents of such groups serve as *ex officio* members of our board? If so, will their responsibilities be the same as those of other board members? What is the rationale for giving this group of volunteers governance privileges when direct service volunteers (also contributors to our organization) may not have automatic representation on the board?

Beware of creating a false dichotomy between fund-raising volunteers and direct-service volunteers. Because our culture values money so highly, it is easy to fall into the trap of elevating those who support the organization by organizing special events and bringing in funds. Thus, auxiliary presidents serve on the board, a luncheon is planned for the friends group, etc., while frontline volunteers have lower status and fewer perks.

Most of the negotiations regarding these questions can be delegated to the staff in tandem with the volunteer group's officers; however, the board must determine the fundamental purpose of any all-volunteer group operating in the name of the organization. The board must maintain a balance between allowing supporters to be creative and active on behalf of the organization and exercising control over vital questions. If you already have an auxiliary or friends group, it is not too late to articulate the best working relationship. If you wish to explore the option of such a group, do so without dollar signs in your eyes. It takes time, effort, and nurturing to build a strong fund-raising corps. How willing is the board to listen to input as well as to accept checks?

A related issue is the creation of advisory bodies or representational groups such as alumni councils. Be careful not to imply that these volunteers have decision-making authority (one suggestion is to avoid calling the group an advisory "board"). Your board needs to clarify roles, lines of authority, and the conditions under which volunteers will be consulted.

5. What policies do we need to set for volunteer involvement?

The following are some areas in which the staff needs policy guidance from the board:

- ◆ Which organization policies for employees apply equally to volunteers (for example, confidentiality), which do not apply at all (sick leave), and which require adaptation (reimbursable training expenses)?
- ◆ What are the criteria for determining appropriate and inappropriate roles for volunteers? Note: If you have an employee union, this policy area takes on even more importance. It may also be necessary to formulate policy for when and how volunteer issues are to be included in contract negotiations with labor officials.
- ◆ What are the basic requirements for becoming a volunteer in terms of background checks, references, and other screening mechanisms (which might cost money)? Are we comfortable

with setting requirements, even if it means turning some people away?

- ◆ What is our policy on discrimination against volunteer applicants? Does the organizational affirmative action statement include volunteers?
- ◆ Under what circumstances can a volunteer be fired? What are the performance standards to which volunteers will be held accountable?
- ◆ What is our risk management plan for volunteer involvement? Will we provide insurance coverage for volunteers?
- ◆ What are the principles for handling a dispute between an employee and a volunteer, or between a client and a volunteer?
- ◆ Is it to be a stated expectation of every employee that successful teamwork with volunteers is a job requirement?
- ◆ Will we reimburse volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses? What criteria will we use to decide what other expenses we will pay on behalf of volunteers, such as conference registration fees?

As always, it is the role of the board to ensure that issues are being addressed and the role of the staff to implement policies.

6. Are we budgeting appropriately to support volunteers?

Volunteers are not free labor. The board can demonstrate its understanding of this fact by ensuring that funds are allocated for volunteer program needs. Some organizations use a full-time equivalency (FTE) formula to determine certain costs, such as the budget for volunteer program supplies. But comparing 100 volunteers working four hours a week (400 hours) to 10 full-time employees (also 400 hours) does not always work. For example, the volunteer office will have to maintain 100 applications, folders, and other records, and 100 people will need to be thanked at the end of the year.

The following are budget line items needed to support volunteers (other than staffing, which we'll discuss later):

- ◆ Reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses (often referred to as “enabling funds”).
- ◆ Printing costs for recruitment materials, applications and other recordkeeping forms, training manuals and handouts, recognition certificates, etc.
- ◆ Funds to cover orientation, training, and continuing education for volunteers.
- ◆ Excess liability insurance coverage for volunteers, possibly including additional auto insurance if volunteers are transporting clients on your behalf.
- ◆ Supplies and equipment to allow volunteers to do their work. (If you recruit volunteers to coach basketball, have you budgeted for basketballs?)
- ◆ Recognition costs. It is not obligatory to buy a lobster dinner for every volunteer, but any token of appreciation (food, gift, certificate) is likely to cost something.

It is up to the staff to propose the amounts, but the board should make sure that the expense categories are included in the annual budget or that a commitment is made to raise additional funds to cover volunteer-related expenses.

For those who would like to balance the expenses of volunteer involvement with a dollar amount in the revenue column, it is possible to establish a dollar value for volunteer participation. You can use annually-calculated median value figures published by such sources as INDEPENDENT SECTOR or the Points of Light Foundation, or a more accurate figure calculated specifically for your organization. Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) nonprofit accounting guidelines adopted in 1993 require nonprofits to report the value of some donated time, so it is legitimate to reflect the costs as well. For the board, seeing a “balance sheet” for volunteer involvement transforms an invisible resource into a tangible asset.

7. Have we provided adequate staffing for the volunteer program?

This question must be answered by the chief executive, but it is appropriate for the board to ask about how staffing for the volunteer program affects the organization's ability to achieve its vision and goals. If the executive proposes eliminating the director of volunteers position because of a budget crunch, the board might ask whether this is shortsighted in terms of the number of volunteers that will be needed in the future.

In fund-raising discussions, boards typically consider whether it is necessary to "spend money to make money." While the executive assesses the ability of the development staff to achieve fund-raising goals, the board discusses such related questions as the hiring of consultants or how active the board itself will be in assisting fund-raising efforts. At this level, the board should discuss whether present staffing will support the desired outcomes of volunteer involvement and, if not, how funds will be raised to support them.

8. Are we certain that volunteers are providing the best possible service to our clients and staff?

When was the last time anyone evaluated volunteer activity? Is it costing more to have a volunteer program than it's worth? Are questions about volunteer accomplishments included in overall organizational self-assessments?

Employee resistance to volunteers is sometimes based on the observation that unpaid workers are not held accountable for their activities. Ineffective or even counterproductive actions are tolerated in the belief that bad public relations would result from criticizing or firing volunteers. When volunteers are also financial donors or have influential community connections, it seems even harder for the paid staff to voice concerns. Will the board expect volunteers to maintain as high a standard of work as employees?

Always remember that volunteers want to do the most good. No one volunteers to waste time. Some agencies wrongly feel that volunteer program evaluation and individual performance assessment is "biting the hand that feeds you." On the contrary, it is a wonderful form of recognition to include volunteers in the organizational

evaluation process—and it is highly motivating to be assured that one's efforts are on the right track.

9. Are we gaining the most from the sphere of influence of volunteers and are we getting valuable input from volunteers?

Volunteers expand the organization's sphere of influence. Every volunteer is multiplied by dozens of relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and others who have a source of firsthand information about your organization. Are these community members hearing (and repeating) gossip? facts? testimonials? complaints? Volunteers influence potential consumers, donors, and voters. Your organization's goal is to make sure that influence is a good one.

Conversely, volunteers are a source of invaluable information because they offer the perspective of a community member not affected by a particular professional point of view. The volunteer's viewpoint is often substantively different from that of a paid staff member or a client. Make sure, therefore, that volunteers are routinely surveyed as a part of any organization evaluation and that their comments are reported and analyzed as a distinct factor. When applicable, consider the opinions of volunteers in reaching board decisions.

The direct-service volunteer corps can be a source of new board candidates, or certainly of people who can serve on board committees. Oddly, many organizations recruit board and committee members from a pool of strangers when it would make sense to invite those who are already informed about the organization and have demonstrated that they care about the organization's work. This reluctance to mix categories of volunteers may be based on a concern about confusing lines of authority. It may make sense to ask someone to take a leave of absence from a direct-service volunteer assignment when serving on the board.

If the board cannot identify any direct-service volunteers with leadership skills, perhaps the organization needs to reconsider its goals for volunteer recruitment. A well-managed volunteer program should attract a wide range of people, with a variety of talents and occupations. The board can express its interest in using the volunteer

program as a training ground for prospective board members and hold the organization staff accountable for attracting such people.

10. Do we recognize the interrelationship of volunteer development and other resource development?

The goal of resource development is to obtain the support necessary to fulfill the organization's mission. Such support does not have to be cash. Donated goods and in-kind services are alternative ways to achieve budget goals. For example, if a large corporation agrees to print the organization newsletter, cash can be diverted from the printing line item to other needs. In the same way, strategically recruited volunteers can extend the budget.

When a new project requiring new sources of funds is proposed, the board should ask the chief executive: How might we support this new initiative, in addition to cash?

This question does not pit volunteers against money, or volunteers against paid staff. Volunteers are never a substitute for adequate staffing. But one way to maximize the value of volunteers is to assign them "pioneer" roles—testing the feasibility of a new idea in a limited pilot project before going after full funding. Or a small corps of selected volunteers might assist one employee while the project gathers momentum. Volunteers who have professional expertise might be recruited for short-term technical assistance at the start of a project, to make sure it gets off the ground effectively. As proper trustees and governors, the board should ensure that every available resource has been considered *before* spending time and energy raising more money.

Recognize how this issue is connected to the organization's vision for volunteers. If volunteers are always seen as cheerful aides, icing on the cake, they will never be considered seriously as part of the resource mix. If the organization sets goals to recruit a highly qualified cadre of volunteers, the whole picture changes.

Just as one cannot guarantee the success of a proposal-writing effort or a charity golf tournament, no one can promise that a volunteer recruitment campaign will attract perfect people with ideal schedules. However, attempts are made to raise the needed money. Is your organization making the attempt to raise the needed volunteers?

Thousands of volunteers raise millions of dollars on behalf of nonprofits. Recent surveys indicate that people who volunteer their time are also likely to donate money to causes they support—and that volunteers tend to give a higher percentage of their income to charity than do non-volunteers. Whether through board-led fund raising or the efforts of the development staff, is your organization asking frontline volunteers to make a financial contribution as well? Is this a missed opportunity? (Make sure volunteers receive a completely different solicitation than non-involved potential donors.)

Donors who are given a chance to become more involved personally often raise their level of financial contribution. So another question to pose under the resource development agenda is, Have we offered our donors the chance to volunteer as well? You might need a policy clarifying the fact that just because someone is a donor, she or he will not automatically be accepted as a volunteer. All volunteer applicants must be qualified and meet standards before and during their commitment.

C. Supporting the Volunteer Program

This discussion so far has focused on the tangible demonstration of board support for volunteer participation. As with any activity, time spent on planning and evaluation is repaid by increased accomplishments. Neglected endeavors may thrive by accident, but *active* support of volunteer involvement dramatically increases its potential achievement level.

What else can the board of directors do to support the volunteer program?

1. Schedule time to discuss volunteers. Even if this discussion takes place only once a year for twenty minutes, the status of volunteers increases when they are a formal part of the board's agenda. The board could discuss:

- ◆ Trends and issues that affect volunteer involvement.
- ◆ Major goals for the coming year.
- ◆ Plans for recruitment, training, and recognition.

2. **Expect and discuss reports on volunteer involvement.** Data about the size and scope of volunteer work on behalf of the organization should be included with other statistical information; otherwise, the board will get an incomplete picture of the activities of the organization and of the resources available to it.
3. **Individual board members should be as alert to volunteer recruitment possibilities as to fund-raising potential.** Board members can:
 - ◆ Recommend candidates. (These candidates must, however, go through the regular application process just as any other prospective volunteer.)
 - ◆ Carry recruitment materials with you to distribute. If you do public speaking on behalf of the organization, be sure to leave information on volunteer opportunities.
 - ◆ Use your circle of contacts. If you are employed by or affiliated with a corporation, religious institution, or other type of formal organization, arrange for the volunteer office to have access to your circle of contacts through company newsletters, special events or meetings, or display booths. Be a visible advocate—explain why *you* chose to volunteer on the board. If possible, offer the volunteer office the expertise of your company's graphic arts, marketing or public relations staff to help design recruitment materials.
4. **Take part in volunteer recognition events.** First, you deserve a thank-you! Second, board member participation shows other volunteers that they are valued at the highest level. And, finally, this is a great opportunity to talk with organization supporters whose opinions may prove illuminating. Attend the recognition event, and contribute to its success by participating, not observing from a segregated table.
5. **Recognize that board members are also volunteers.** Board members of nonprofit organizations are volunteers themselves, yet in day-to-day organization life, this fact is obscured. Because board volunteers have

specific legal and fiduciary responsibilities and are at the top of the organizational chart, board members are perceived as very different from the frontline, direct-service volunteers, who all too often are at the bottom of the chart. This separation may interfere with some important connecting links among all the people who contribute their time to your organization. The following are some ideas for reconnecting:

- ◆ Examine how new volunteer orientation can complement new board member orientation. The volunteer office is continually welcoming new direct-service volunteers. Can board members join one of those sessions to learn about the organization, take the facility tour, and generally become acclimated? Board members will be required to know much more, but the basic orientation to the organization may not need to be duplicated.
- ◆ While the line between governance and management should remain clear, it is hard to understand how the board can govern without firsthand exposure to the work of the organization. As a part of ongoing board training, therefore, it is a good idea to ask every board member to take on a short-term (even if only a few hours) direct-service volunteer assignment once a year. Such “reality testing” may result in more appropriate governance decisions.

A board of directors may form a committee on volunteer issues; whether this is appropriate for your organization depends on your needs. In the absence of paid volunteer program staff, the board of a small organization may need a volunteer development committee to plan the outreach strategies necessary to recruit the best volunteers. If yours is a membership organization, questions of volunteer activities may need to be considered by several committees, including the nominating committee and the membership development committee. Or, the board may form a volunteer advisory committee to offer expertise, community contacts, and other resources to the volunteer program staff.

CONCLUSION

Although nonprofit organizations are founded by volunteers, governed by volunteers, and accept the services of millions of volunteers to support their work, the subject of volunteers is still largely neglected in the board room. It may be benign neglect, but it nevertheless translates into missed opportunities and wasted resources.

Volunteers are more than icing on the cake—they are one of the main ingredients for community support and service delivery. The attitudes and methods of the past may no longer ensure that your organization will attract volunteers. If you want volunteers to be an important part of your organization's future, articulate a positive vision of volunteer involvement for the organization to follow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan J. Ellis is president of Energize, Inc., an international training, consulting, and publishing firm that specializes in volunteerism. Since starting the company in 1977, Susan has helped clients across North America and Europe to start or expand citizen participation efforts in a wide variety of organizational settings. Susan has written or co-written nine books on volunteer management and was editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* for six years. She writes the column "On Volunteers" for *The NonProfit Times*, a national publication. She has served as a member of the national board of the Association for Volunteer Administration, as well as on the boards of numerous other professional associations and local organizations in the Philadelphia area.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

There is a growing body of literature about volunteers and volunteer program management. Many of the following resources, although written for those who have day-to-day responsibility for volunteer administration, can help any board member to understand how to create the best organizational climate for volunteer involvement.

Axelrod, Nancy R. *Creating and Renewing Advisory Boards: Strategies for Success*. Washington, DC: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1990, 22 pages.

Many nonprofit organizations use advisory boards, composed of volunteers, to assist the staff and board with fund-raising, friend-raising, and special programs. This booklet gives an overview of the purposes of advisory committees, suggests ways to use them successfully.

Ellis, Susan J. *From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*. Philadelphia: Energize, 1986.

Written for chief executives and senior staff, this book presents all the subjects essential to fostering and supporting volunteer effort in an organization, including policies about volunteers, budgeting and staffing, ensuring teamwork between employees and volunteers, calculating the dollar value of volunteer contributions, and legal and insurance issues.

Ellis, Susan J. *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*. Philadelphia: Energize, 1994.

Provides both the practical and philosophical basis of volunteer recruitment. The book emphasizes the need to design the best assignments for volunteers as a prerequisite to encouraging the most qualified people to volunteer. Covers current trends and issues that affect volunteerism and discusses such topics as diversity and membership development for all-volunteer groups.

Fisher, James C. and Kathleen M. Cole. *Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs: A Guide for Volunteer Administrators*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993.

An excellent introduction to the basics of volunteer management. Each chapter deals with a different functional area, such as organizational climate for volunteers, recruitment, training, and evaluation.

Graff, Linda L. *By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs*. Ontario, Canada: Volunteer Ontario, 1993.

This comprehensive manual looks at all aspects of policy formation regarding volunteers, offers specific sample policies, and gives a seven-step guide to developing individualized policies. Although written in Canada, the book is relevant to all nonprofit and government agencies.

Scheier, Ivan H. *Building Staff/Volunteer Relations*. Philadelphia: Energize, 1993.

Explores the reasons for conflict between volunteers and employees and offers many useful solutions. Gives several step-by-step processes for analyzing task and work preferences for both paid and unpaid staff. Shows organization administrators how to help the whole staff work together as a team.

Tremper, Charles, and Gwynne Kostin. *No Surprises: Controlling Risks in Volunteer Programs*. Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk Management Center, 1993.

Shows how proper planning and procedures can make a safer environment for clients and volunteers, while limiting the potential for problems. The book presents the tasks of volunteer management and explains how to limit the risks at each stage. It also covers board liability issues.

Tremper, Charles, and George Babcock. *The Nonprofit Board's Role in Risk Management: More than Buying Insurance*. Washington, DC: National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1990, 20 pages.

A review of the board's responsibilities, including a six-step process boards can use to effectively manage risk.

Have You Read These Publications of the National Center for Nonprofit Boards?

*Welcome to the Board: An Orientation Kit
for Trustees*

A Public Trust in Private Hands (Video)

The Board Member's Guide to Fund Raising
by Fisher Howe

The Legal Obligations of Nonprofit Boards
by Jacqueline C. Leifer and Michael B. Glomb

The Financial Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards
by Andrew S. Lang

*Nonprofit Board Committees: How to Make Them
Work* by Ellen Cochran Hirzy

The Audit Committee by Sandra Johnson

The Executive Committee by Robert Andringa

The Nominating Committee
by Ellen Cochran Hirzy

*How to Help Your Board Govern More and
Manage Less* by Richard P. Chait

Hiring the Chief Executive by Sheila Albert

*Beyond Strategic Planning: How to Involve
Nonprofit Boards in Growth and Change*
by Douglas C. Eadie

Fulfilling the Public Trust by Peter D. Bell

Redesigning the Nonprofit Organization
by Gwendolyn Calvert Baker

Self-Assessment for Nonprofit Governing Boards
by Larry H. Slesinger

Developing the Nonprofit Board
by Maureen K. Robinson

Governing Boards: Their Nature and Nurture
by Cyril O. Houle

*Six Keys to Recruiting, Orienting, and Involving
Nonprofit Board Members*
by Judith Grummon Nelson

Building an Effective Board (audiocassette)

*Board Members and Risk: A Primer
on Protection from Liability*

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*What Every Board Member Should Know
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*Stories from the Board Room, Vol. II: Living with
Complexity: The Lincoln Hill Experience*

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