

Volunteers in Public Service: A Canadian Model for the Support of Volunteerism in Government

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Volunteerism and government go well together. The government of Manitoba has proved this through the operation of the Volunteers in Public Service Program (VIPS). VIPS has played a significant role in the promotion of volunteerism and the development of a wide variety of volunteer programs in government settings.

The VIPS program has several aspects that make it unusual: its model for the effective support and development of structured volunteer programs, its training model for volunteer program managers, its focus on the provision of valid work experience for volunteers, and its flexible, cooperative working style. Jean-Bernard Robichaud of the Canadian Council on Social Development described VIPS this way:

This program is one of the most innovative we discovered during our visit to the provinces. In our view it is unique in Canada. It can become an extremely positive model for the development of volunteerism in the public sector.

BACKGROUND

The VIPS program, created by the Government of the Province of Manitoba, is part of the Employment Development and Youth Services Branch, Manitoba Employment Services and Economic Security. The program was developed in an effort to combine the promotion of volunteerism in the public sector with the need to offer people alternative ways of obtaining valid work experience and training. The departmental climate of concern for employment and training issues had a significant impact on the development of the VIPS program.

The goals of the VIPS program at its inception were to:

1. provide work experience opportunities for people outside the primary labour market (women, natives, youth, the disabled, etc.);
2. encourage greater public involvement in government services and activities through volunteer participation;
3. provide opportunities for government agencies to expand their ability to reach established agency objectives; and
4. promote the recognition of volunteer employment as a valued and self-fulfilling experience.

Departments in a large government organization tend to work in isolation from each other. A unique aspect of the VIPS program design was its mandate to work cooperatively with all other provincial government departments and agencies. Employment Services and Economic Security was involved with the provision of employment and training programs for youth and unemployed adults. Because it related to all other departments within government, this provided the VIPS program with the contacts and mandate to promote volunteerism throughout all sections of government.

Another unique aspect of VIPS was the involvement of a non-government/private agency, the Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg, as a resource to the program. The Volunteer Centre assisted VIPS staff in the selection of agencies to participate

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in the program, provided training for volunteer program managers and provided consultation on problems and concerns. This cooperation was invaluable for the program, and resulted in better coordination of services, promotion of volunteerism and access to appropriate training. In turn, VIPS increased the Volunteer Centre's involvement with the public sector.

The VIPS Program also developed and maintained a positive working relationship with the government employees' union management by keeping them regularly informed of volunteer programs and initiatives.

The program development model used by VIPS was very structured, ensuring success by requiring measurable program objectives and performance targets be set and evaluated. However, there was considerable flexibility in the way the model was applied. Each program reflected the personality and leadership style of its volunteer program manager. This flexibility allowed the incorporation of some affirmative action goals. A few volunteer programs were designed to involve volunteers from particular target groups, such as immigrants or youth. All Volunteer Program Managers were encouraged to develop volunteer activities and recruitment strategies that would enable the participation of special groups such as the disabled, seniors, and people returning to the work force. As well, the flexibility of VIPS has resulted in a shift in the program's methods of operation which is described in the next two sections, Phase I—Demonstration Projects and Phase II—Consultation and Coordination.

PHASE I—DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Program Model

To accomplish its goals, VIPS developed a six-component program model designed to demonstrate the effective use of structured volunteer programs. A Volunteer Program Manager (VPM) was an essential part of the program model.

Since VIPS had access to training and employment funds within its own depart-

ment, Phase I of VIPS was able to create training positions for volunteer program managers. VIPS provided the salaries required to hire trainees for periods ranging from three months to two years. The training period allowed time for the individuals to develop the skills required to function in volunteer program management positions and for the agencies to develop solid foundations for their volunteer programs. After the training period, agencies were expected to continue these volunteer programs by providing funds from their own budgets.

The VIPS staff at this time consisted of one Program Manager and several VPM trainees. The number of trainees involved per year varied from four to 21. The Manager of the VIPS Program was involved throughout all six components of the program model, acting as a consultant, ensuring the activities were carried out, and functioning as a mentor by providing assistance and the advice if problems occurred.

There were four participants in a demonstration project to develop a volunteer program: VIPS Program Manager, the Volunteer Centre, the agency selected and the Volunteer Program Manager trainee (from now on referred to as VPM trainee). Figure 1 shows the percentage of responsibility each participant had for each of the six components.

Activities undertaken in each component were as follows:

1. **Agency Selection**—VIPS and Volunteer Centre
 - publicize program within government
 - receive applications from departments/agencies or branches
 - review agency objectives, target population and services provided
 - identify service gaps with volunteer program potential
 - determine agency resources and facilities for a volunteer program
 - select agencies on the basis of potential for a variety of career related positions, agency commitment to supporting and continuing the con-

Shared Responsibility for Demonstration Project in an Agency

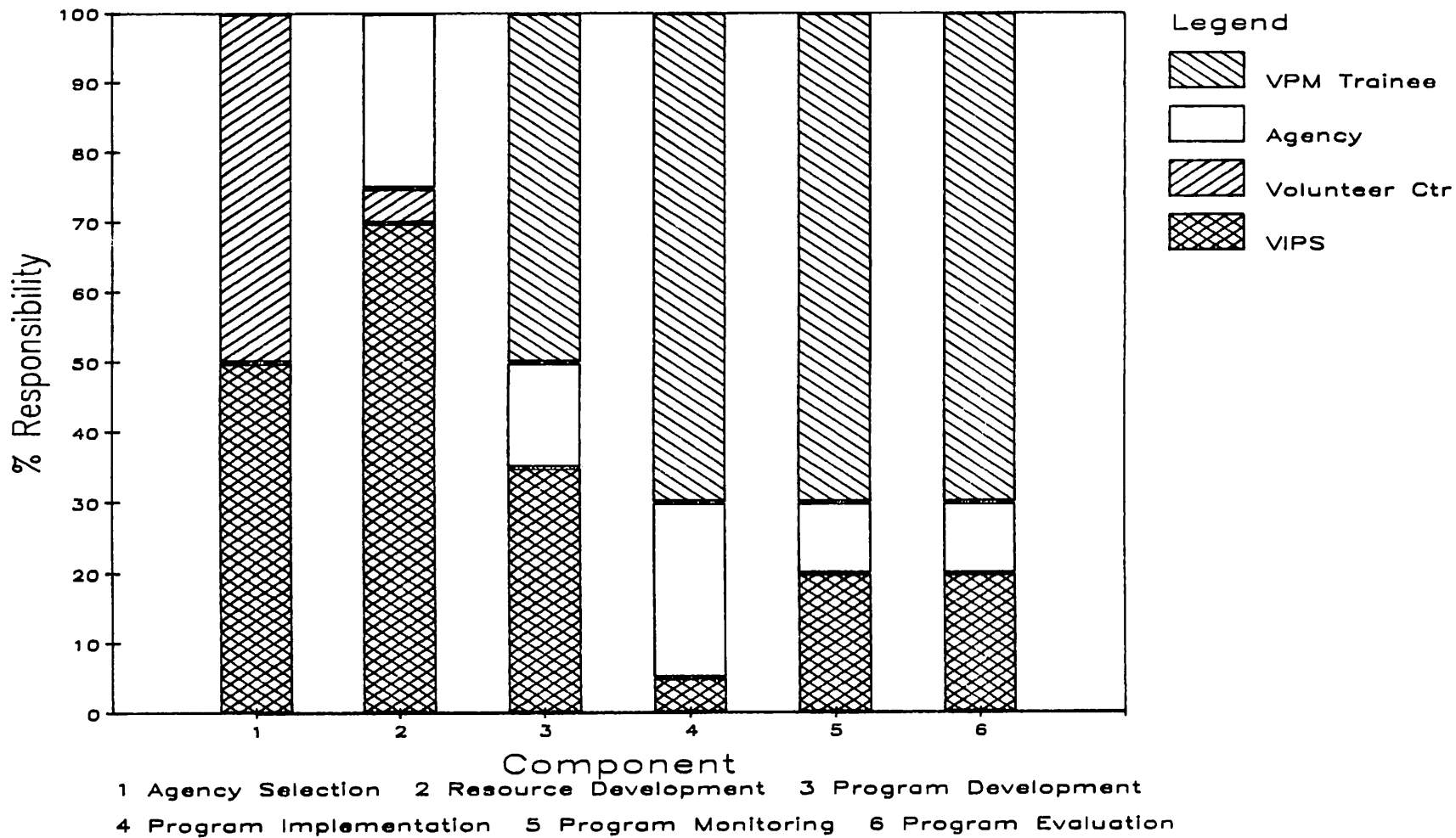


Figure 1

cept and a balance between human service and community service areas. (Depending on the department's current target group for employment, programs for specific groups such as youth or the elderly were also included.)

2. Resource Preparation—VIPS, Agency and Volunteer Centre

- interview applicants jointly for Volunteer Program Manager trainee
- select trainee (Agency decision based on recommendation of VIPS)
- allocate staff year and salary from VIPS budget
- arrange work location, facilities and program budget in the agency
- utilize the Volunteer Centre to train VPM in volunteer program development and management
- orient staff to volunteer program development
- orient VPM to agency operations
- plan for on-going training in leadership and management skills (i.e. planning, interviewing, reporting, evaluation, designing training)

3. Program Development—VPM Trainee and Agency and VIPS

- select program areas and activities
- develop program objectives and performance targets
- prepare job descriptions
- develop systems for recruitment, selection, placement, training, supervision, recognition and evaluation of volunteers
- develop program monitoring and evaluation systems
- prepare volunteer handbook and procedures manual
- clarify staff roles in relation to volunteers

4. Program Implementation—VPM Trainee and Agency and VIPS

- recruit, interview and place volunteers
- orient and train volunteers
- develop work plans
- recognize volunteers

5. Program Monitoring—VPM Trainee and Agency and VIPS

- supervise volunteers and assess progress
- identify needs, gaps and take corrective action
- prepare monthly reports on program status

6. Program Evaluation—VPM Trainee and VIPS

- assess extent to which objectives were met, impact on agency and benefits
- write final report

Programs

During the first two years of operation, the program model was tested and adjusted and an assessment was made of government's readiness for the concept of structured volunteer programs in the public sector. Initial placements were made on a three month basis and university students were hired as VPM trainees. As VIPS evolved, it was recognized that a longer developmental phase was required and the training period was continued for up to two years.

From 1978-85, 51 different agencies initiated volunteer programs with VIPS support. About two-thirds of these programs were located in provincial government services in Winnipeg, the provincial capital. The remaining third were located in other cities or rural areas of Manitoba. The ten provincial government departments/areas represented were Health, Employment Services, Education, Corrections, Natural Resources, Community Services, Culture, Recreation, Attorney General and Consumer Affairs. As well, pro-

grams were started in six recreation districts of the City of Winnipeg in the first year of VIPS operation.

Volunteers were used in a variety of ways—some traditional and some innovative. The following list indicates the wide range of activities and agencies represented:

Human Rights Commission

- producing a video on human rights concerns
- speaker's program for schools and groups

Red River Community College

- language enhancers for students learning English

Community Services

- friendly visitor, escort for elderly
- working with special needs children in day care
- collection of oral history from seniors
- helper for single parents

Recreation Branch

- board development for recreation, sports, and arts organizations

Provincial Archives Branch

- microfilming archives, filing records

Consumer Communications Branch

- developing consumer kit for seniors

Manitoba Police Commission

- coordinating "Officer Ollie Club" in schools

Eden Mental Health Centre

- organizing library
- assisting with group therapy
- planning recreational activities

Keewatin Community College

- planning committee for volunteer program

- tutoring low-literacy adults

Immigration and Settlement Branch

- writers and photographers for special newspaper
- translation of settlement material
- van drivers and child care for English language class

Youth Volunteers in Government

- individualized placements matched to specific career-related goals

Outcomes

Phase I of the VIPS program had a significant impact on the growth of volunteer involvement in the provincial government from 1978-85. Thirty-one of the 51 agencies participating in demonstration projects continued to operate their volunteer programs. Most of these agencies hired the VPM trainee.

The support and structure of the demonstration project allowed agencies to explore creative new ways of using volunteers while developing a solid foundation for volunteer involvement. Some very substantial, on-going programs, began as VIPS demonstration projects, for example, volunteer involvement in Winnipeg Parks and Recreation.

By making use of volunteer skills, abilities, interest and time, individual agencies were able to supplement existing services and accomplish special projects that would not have been possible with existing staff. On average almost 500 volunteers were involved per year for an average of almost 20,000 hours. In addition, the positive public relations effect of increased public involvement in government programs has been a benefit to both individual agencies and government as a whole.

The voluntary sector gained from the establishment of a pool of trained volunteer program managers who were potential employees for voluntary agencies. As well, the experimental volunteer program models, program documentation and expertise of VIPS became resources

to non-government agencies developing volunteer programs.

VPM trainees were provided with training in a variety of areas including planning methods, time management, interviewing, supervising, presentation skills, training design and marketing. The skills and abilities developed and demonstrated in the VIPS program enabled these individuals to advance to a variety of management positions in both government and non-government organizations.

Volunteers especially have benefited from participation in VIPS programs. In follow-up surveys, they indicated a wide range of benefits including training, work experience, the creative use of leisure time and exposure to government services. Both sexes were well represented in the volunteer profile which also included a wide range in age and employment status. Students, professionals, retirees, the employed, the unemployed, the disabled and immigrants were all involved. VIPS is aware of many volunteers who have found employment as a result of their participation in the program.

PHASE II—CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

During its first seven years, the VIPS program was concerned with promoting the concept of volunteerism and demonstrating the value of structured volunteer programs. In 1985-86 the program undertook a review and redefinition of its role which resulted in a new way of working to accomplish its goals. The VIPS program no longer supplies staff years, funds and training support to agencies. Instead, the new program model provides coordination, consultation and leadership in effective volunteer program development and management to staff within other provincial government departments. As well, it promotes and develops individual youth oriented volunteer placements for career-related experience.

The staff for this phase consists of the Program Manager and three consultants. Although a description of the new program model follows, comments on its operation are not possible since it is only now being implemented.

Program Model

Phase II of VIPS provides service in three broad categories: coordination, consultation and training, and placement. Activities undertaken in each category are:

1. Coordination:

- Supporting and encouraging networking among government personnel working directly with volunteers by taking a leadership role in the Committee on Volunteerism in Government.
- Facilitating the development of a policy for volunteer involvement in the public sector.
- Assisting with the development and implementation of government-wide promotion, information, documentation and recognition relating to volunteer programs in government.
- Networking with non-government organizations concerned with volunteerism and volunteer program management.
- Networking with government personnel using volunteer community committees and providing training and consultation to community based organizations.

2. Consultation and Training:

- Training and consulting on volunteer management for departments wishing to create a few volunteer positions, develop a new volunteer program or improve an existing volunteer program.
- Consulting on involving youth in government committees and projects.

3. Placement:

- Matching individuals seeking specific career-related volunteer experience with positions in appropriate government departments.

CONCLUSION

The VIPS Program has had considerable success in promoting and increasing effective volunteer participation in the provincial government of Manitoba. Its emphasis on flexibility, diversity, careful program planning and evaluation and cooperation with other agencies has contributed to this success.

Public sector volunteerism using the VIPS model has proven benefits for everyone involved—the government, the agency, the staff, the volunteer and the client served.

REFERENCES

Robichaud, Jean-Bernard. *Voluntary Action: Provincial Policies and Practices*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1985, p.23.