



# Managing Cultural Diversity in Volunteer Organizations

By Loretta Gutierrez Nestor

**A**s early as the year 2000, cross-cultural people will be the majority in 53 of America's 100 largest cities and will comprise 29 percent of the workforce. Now that's significant for all of us as we plan the future of volunteerism.

And that is only the beginning. Given today's immigration and birth rates, by the turn of the century, one of every three Americans will be Latino, African Ameri-

can, Asian/Pacific Islander or Middle Eastern.

In the more distant future, around 2030, people of color will make up more than half of the American population.

The task of coping with these changes will be one of the key issues for you in the 1990s. It will be far from complete as the new century dawns.

"White males, thought of only a genera-

tion ago as the mainstays of the economy, will comprise only 15 percent of the net additions to the labor force by 2000," says *Workforce 2000*, a report prepared by the Hudson Institute for the U.S. Department of Labor last year.

The rest will be American-born white females, immigrants and a rich multicultural mix that includes Afro-Americans and a wide variety of Hispanics, Asians,



Native Americans and Pacific Islanders.

### Paradigm Shift

Little by little, senior executives and volunteer leaders across America are recognizing that these vast demographic changes demand a paradigm shift, a new way of running things—an approach often called “managing diversity.” This means recognizing that diversity is already a fact of life, learning to understand “culturally different” paid and volunteer staff and creating an environment in which they will flourish.

### Diversity Within Diversity

Although race and gender issues are given top priority when managing diversity, the concept of valuing diversity applies equally to issues of religious and regional differences, class, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation and lifestyle. Many also occur across educational lines, leaders versus worker bees, or paid versus volunteer staff.

“Culture” is a word that can be applied to any group. There certainly are regional, professional, class and lifestyle cultures. Women are socialized differently from the way men are. Even disability has a culture with its dos and don’ts.

Many organizations lose good people because they fail to teach them the rules. But now the rules may be changing, as different players enter the game. With the growing diversity of the American workforce, organizations are beginning to reassess recruitment and management policies, and are designing approaches to accommodate cultural differences among paid and volunteer staff.

Many are steering clear of EEO and affirmative action language. Why? Because, as one EEO manager put it, “EEO is passé. It’s ho-hum. People don’t want to hear about it anymore.” Others fear that “EEO has a stigma. To many people, it’s the law, it’s forced quotas, it’s promoting incompetents, it’s reverse discrimination.”

### Managing Diversity

By contrast, managing diversity approaches paid and volunteer staff differences not from the legal or moral standpoint, but from a practical perspective (without losing sight of EEO requirements), because it makes good business sense.

Managing diversity is much more than EEO regulations. Rather, it is part of the corporate strategic plan. We must go beyond numbers crunching and begin to

value diversity. The shrinking volunteer pool means more competition for existing talent, and that in turn requires a greater commitment by managers and volunteer leaders to recruiting, developing and retaining paid and volunteer staff of all kinds.

Managing diversity can help cut costs and increase productivity by tapping and developing seriously underused human resources. Also, employee and volunteer turnover can be reduced by recruitment, hiring and promotion policy based on merit.

## Ten Steps to Making the Most of Diversity

*(Adapted from Lennie Copeland of Copeland Griggs Productions)*

Typically, managing diversity includes the following:

- 1. Recruitment:** to increase the number of people of color through improved college relations programs and diverse recruitment through cross-cultural community outreach.
- 2. Career development:** to expose people of color with high potential to the same key developmental jobs that traditionally have led to senior management and top volunteer positions for their white, male counterparts.
- 3. Diversity training for managers and leaders:** to address myths, stereotypes and real cultural differences as well as organizational barriers that interfere with the full contribution of all.
- 4. Diversity training for paid and volunteer staff:** to improve the understanding of corporate culture, success requirements and career choices that will affect their advancement.
- 5. Upward mobility:** to break the “glass ceiling” and increase the numbers of people of color in the higher salary groups or volunteer leadership positions through mentoring, executive appointment and other programs.
- 6. Diverse input and feedback:** to move from asking managers and volunteer leaders what they think people of color need, to asking the people of color what they need.
- 7. Self-help:** to encourage and enable multicultural networks and support groups.
- 8. Accountability:** to hold managers accountable for development of their diverse paid and volunteer work forces.
- 9. Systems accommodation:** to respect and support the diversity of cultures through the recognition of different cultural and religious holidays, diet restrictions, and the like.
- 10. Outreach:** to develop a reputation as a multicultural leader (and hence visibility as an organization attractive to people of color) through supporting multicultural organizations, vendors, programs and services.

Virtually all those working in managing diversity believe that whichever of the above steps they take, top management leadership is a must.

“Cultural inclusiveness means not only tolerating differences but also supporting and nurturing them,” says Gwen T. Jackson, national chairman of volunteers for the American Red Cross.

Changing the attitudes and assumptions that prevail at an organization is far from easy.

Many times we can only hope to change behaviors rather than deep-seated attitudes. We must continuously remind ourselves that what we are doing is new, and that it may be frightening for those who prefer the status quo, or who fear that they are not ready to face the difficult and sometimes threatening issues raised by diversity. But we know that such resistance is no excuse for avoiding change.

Nonprofit organizations that deliver essential health and human services have little hope of continued success unless they mirror the diversity of their community. The message is clear. Diversity can be a revitalizing force for carrying your organization into the twenty-first century. And you personally can be the catalyst to make that happen.

You must be the visionaries who take the first steps.



A reduction in short-run and long-run costs can be achieved when all company operations are efficient. When paid and volunteer staff are not judged solely and objectively on the basis of their qualifications, inefficiencies can result.

Inefficient allocation of human resources in the short-run may occur when individuals are not recruited, assigned or promoted to the position for which they are best qualified. In the long run, paid and volunteer staff may become convinced that they will not attain a desirable position, and lose hope of attaining the education or training necessary for advancement. As people quit their "dead-end" jobs, the organization and the individual both lose when human resources are underused.

### **For Help in Learning to Manage Diversity**

■ You can buy or rent a three-part film/video training series, "Valuing Diversity," produced by Copeland Griggs Productions. The series deals with the issues of race, gender and cultural differences in the workplace and is accompanied by a training manual for each part. Call (415) 668-4200.

■ The American Institute for Managing Diversity offers two-day seminars called "Managing the Diverse Work Force." For information and dates, call (404) 524-7316.

■ ODT, Inc. provides products, services and training systems in Diversity Awareness Training, Upward Influence and Appraisal Systems. ODT's resources on managing a multi-cultural workforce include "ODT's Complete Cultural Diversity Library"; a diversity assessment tool entitled "The Questions of Diversity"; and a tip sheet, "Working with People from Diverse Backgrounds." For a free brochure of Empowerment Resources and any other inquiries, contact ODT, Inc., P.O. Box 134, Amherst, MA 01044, (413) 549-1293.

■ "The Nonprofit Sector in the United States and Abroad: Cross Cultural Perspectives" is a new three-tape videocassette series produced by INDEPENDENT SECTOR (IS). The tapes, which can be obtained independently or as a package, feature IS's first research conference on worldwide nonprofit endeavor. The series includes (1) an overview video highlighting several major presentations from the forum and commentary from many of the international participants (25 minutes,

## **GETTING STARTED ON THE ROAD TO DIVERSITY**

The first step is broadcasting a policy statement which tells the view of the organization's top leadership.

For policy statements to be effective, they should serve the following functions:

1. Express the organization's commitment to the goal of cultural diversity.
2. Reflect realistic and measurable objectives.
3. Be communicated in a way that leaves no doubt at any level of corporate management about the organization's intentions.

\$35); (2) a general session involving a panel of representatives from Japan, Germany, the Soviet Union, Argentina and Australia (17 minutes, \$45); and (3) a conversation with selected participants who offer views from key forum presenters (40 minutes, \$40).

The complete set is \$95. Contact Sharon Fitzgerald at INDEPENDENT SECTOR, (202) 223-8100.

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Another difference that must be accounted for is the immigrant's country of origin. "Asians and Pacific Islanders" is a general category that really does not define a specific culture. A person in that category may be Japanese, Japanese-American, Chinese, Chinese-American, Vietnamese, and so on. Recruiters for a multicultural population must recognize that it includes people from different countries with different traditions.

### Maintaining the Commitment

As people of color become more aware of your unit, you can start asking for support through volunteering. Such an appeal is easier once the unit has become more connected with the community it serves. Volunteer appeals for people of color will be strengthened if your unit

1. states publicly that having a culturally diverse workforce is a top priority;
2. recruits more people of color, and places them in both paid and volunteer leadership positions;
3. ensures a welcoming spirit among current paid and volunteer staff for people of color. Special training can support this goal.

### Making the Message Real

To recruit and retain a culturally diverse workforce successfully, the organization needs to recognize three important points:

1. The "quality" of the volunteer's environment is critical to his or her success.
2. The success of volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds greatly affects the ability of the organization to attract more people from culturally diverse backgrounds.
3. Since white staff often control the quality of the environment for nonwhite volunteers, they should be sensitive to cultural differences.

An effective way to recruit people from culturally diverse backgrounds is to represent a broad mix of cultures in your volunteer recruitment materials. However, these materials should not convey any "tokenism" or pandering to any particular group. People from culturally diverse backgrounds need to know that the messages are not addressed exclusively to them. They need to see that other people besides themselves are concerned with building a culturally diverse organization. Furthermore, whites need to know that the institution values the contribution of people of color—that they do belong as part of the team.



☐ **Diversity is valuable to every paid and volunteer staff member of your organization.**

☐ **Such diversity supports other goals of the organization by exposing volunteers to new issues, ideas, information and cultures.**

☐ **Diversity creates opportunities for character development of paid and volunteer staff by teaching tolerance and respect for other people and by encouraging concern for racial and social equity.**

☐ **A culturally diverse organization that values and nurtures people from all backgrounds is worthy of active participation.**

