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Let's All Resolve...

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

January

1998

Happy new year to you all! May 1998 be wonderful professionally and personally.

How are you doing with deciding on your new year's resolutions? To give you a break from the really hard ones like not over-eating, smoking, drinking, or whatever other vice-ing you may have, let me propose some professional commitments. If we all, individually and collectively, promise to take action on these small but vital things, the field of volunteerism will be strengthened over the next twelve months.

So, here are twelve proposed resolutions. If we each do one a month...just think! Let's resolve to:

- 1. Write letters to the editor** pointing out that some event they covered in the newspaper was really due to the efforts of volunteers. Examples: parades, historic re-enactments, county fairs.
- 2. Read a book on fundraising**--even if it sounds like an unpleasant subject. Schedule a lunch meeting with the organization's development staff and discuss ways the volunteer office and the development office might work together. If necessary, pay the tab.
- 3. Schedule similar lunches with any agency staffer** whose work intersects with volunteers. The agenda may vary from "thanks for all your support" to "why haven't we been working together?"
- 4. Visit at least two colleagues** who lead volunteer programs in completely different settings (maybe make this an exchange program). Set a goal of identifying, say, five ideas or program techniques that could also apply back home.
- 5. Contact any nearby college or university** offering "nonprofit management" or "public administration" courses to ask if they've considered the subject of volunteer management. How? Taught by whom? Check their library to see if any (current) volunteerism books are in the collection. If not, give the librarian copies of book catalogs in our field. Go to the public library and do the same thing.

6. Examine the data kept on volunteers and their work. Is it useful? Why these bits of information? Why not others? If computerized, run a completely new kind of report (such as the diversity of education/degrees of the volunteer corps) that might surprise others with what it reveals about volunteers.

7. Visit the Volunteer Center and see what it "feels" like. Check out the data on file about your volunteer program (and others like yours). If the Volunteer Center is underfunded, write a letter to its sponsor or funder and explain why a strong Volunteer Center is vital to the volunteer community.

8. Read at least two new volunteerism books this year. (For suggestions, see the [Online Bookstore](#).) Re-read (you can skim!) a book you used to think was useful. Is it still?

9. Once a month, pick a group of volunteers at random and hold a 30-minute coffee-klatch to ask for their input. Possible questions: What else could volunteers do around here? What parts of your orientation and training have you actually used? What do clients tell you that maybe they don't tell paid staff?

10. Engage in some sort of dialogue to share your opinions: speak up at a DOVIA meeting or conference workshop; write a letter to *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*; post to the Web (like respond here!--or to CyberVPM).

11. Attend a Chamber of Commerce meeting and see if it is helpful in making business community contacts. Look for representatives of mid-size, local businesses as well as the usual suspects of banks, phone companies, and other over-contacted companies.

12. Run for office or volunteer to do some of the necessary work to build the local [DOVIA](#), [state association](#), and [AVA](#) into the best and most worthwhile professional associations. Ask what you can give, not just what you can get. (Surprise! The giving ends up getting, too. And isn't that what volunteering is all about?)

O.K., so some of these aren't exactly quick and easy. But they certainly all would make a difference if a critical mass of us did even a few.

What other volunteerism resolutions would you like to propose?

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Submitted by Debbie Thompson, Volunteer Coordinator, Faith Lutheran Church

I challenged myself to do those things last year at this time. Thus far I am about 1/3 of the way finished with my master of science degree in public administration with an emphasis in volunteer administration. I started a volunteer services administration position at my local church (of which I am the volunteer coordinator) and joined the local Dovia. I have lunch with some of my volunteers at least two times a month and lunch with the senior pastor at least once a week. My

volunteer coordinator position is growing and I have now been asked to sit in as an advisor to the Council of Clergy as they begin to form an ecumenical-based volunteer action center. Next year's goal is to have this in place.

All this because I offered two mornings a week because I was new to the area and needed to meet friends and get myself acclimated to the midwest. My newsletter articles don't usually make it to the local paper, but the PR Board manages that department for us very well. I also encourage readers to ask the church for their volunteer coordinator or PR coordinator when they would like to solicit volunteers. Many times people need volunteers, but the information may sit on a pastor's desk for a very long time because the pastoral needs of the congregation will take precedence. This is especially true of churches with only one pastor in metropolitan areas that get many of these fliers weekly. Thanks for helping me not feel so alone in my quest.

Submitted by Jane B. Federer, Volunteer Administrators' Network, Columbus, OH

I shared your resolutions at our DOVIA annual meeting this morning. Of course I credited you and recommended your web-site! The resolutions were very well received. We particularly liked the letter to the editor resolution. Agencies in our area continue to eliminate volunteer administrator positions. Our DOVIA, the Volunteer Administrators' Network, should be writing letters to the editor expressing our concern when a position is eliminated and citing the value that a volunteer administrator brings to agency programs. We are fortunate that two universities in our area: the Ohio State University currently and Franklin University previously have for-credit volunteer administration courses. Thanks for the inspiration... keep up the good work!

Submitted by Karen Knaub, Director of Volunteer Services, Sedgwick County Zoo, Wichita, Kansas

I liked your list of resolutions, especially the idea of informal discussions with small groups of volunteers. This could apply to professional volunteer managers: mix and match individuals in small groups from within a larger organization, such as your local AVA or DOVIA. Networking is a prime benefit of belonging to such an organization and sometimes conversation flows easier in small groups producing more energy and excitement. Do this at a brown bag lunch at someones' office and you also familiarize the group with community resources.

Submitted by Doug Mackay, Program Director, Volunteer Service & Resource Project (RHD #2880), Pennsylvania

There can be no arguing with the ideas; as usual, they're concrete, do-able, and effective steps toward growth. I'd like to add one more: use all the resources for volunteers your community may have. Specifically, students, seniors, the disabled, the mentally ill, and the developmentally disabled. By whatever euphemism, those with the less obvious traits of a "good" volunteer can surprise you with their skills and attitudes. Need help? Find those agencies that promote the welfare of these folks and form a partnership. There's another resolution: form a partnership, either personal or professional; either single or organizational. Stretch your resources and expand your opportunities.

Submitted by Jackie Specken, Director of Volunteer Services, St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre, Alberta, Canada

I think this is a terrific challenge for all of us as professionals. I particularly like the fact that many of these resolutions are challenging us to stretch our boundaries and help to stretch those of others around us. Thanks for the ideas Susan. I hope you plan to revisit this next year and see how many actually take up your challenge.

Response from Susan Ellis

Thanks for the great suggestion, Jackie! I would love to "track" what colleagues may be doing this year on any of these subjects. Since we keep posting responses to past "hot topics" even after the month in which they were featured, maybe one way to do this would be to ask everyone to send in a response form outlining their activities and experiences. Then we would all see progress throughout the year.

But since so many of you have liked this "resolutions" idea, I promise to use each January's hot topic as a way to reflect or dream. Help me do so for us all!

Response from Sarah H. Elliston , Professional Development Associate at the Volunteer Resource Center in Cincinnati , Ohio

I agree with the other respondent that you've given us ALOT to do in one year, Susan. I wonder if it's possible? If I had lunch once a month with my volunteers to "see how things are going" and I serve on the Board of Volunteer Ohio (my statewide organization) and I offer to teach workshops in volunteer management at a local university, phew - that's alot for a year - you want a letter to the editor too? Every month? Slave driver - energizer - that's what you are. Well, I'll try to do some of these things - and you left out the CVA certification process, into which I was just accepted - now that will be my major commitment. Anyway- thanks for the ideas

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