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United Way is Not the Way for Volunteer Centers

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

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At the risk of sounding like the Grinch, there is little to smile about this holiday season when it comes to the state of Volunteer Centers operated as internal programs of United Ways. This is a major issue in the United States because almost one-third of the Volunteer Centers on the Points of Light Foundation member list are a direct service of their local United Way. I have been simmering about this topic for a long time, but have just been pushed over the edge.

Two weeks ago I accidentally learned that the Volunteer Center in my own city of Philadelphia has disappeared. The Philadelphia Volunteer Center was one of the oldest in the country, but in the mid-1980s the local United Way denied them funding as an independent Center and merged them into the new "full-service" United Way. There the Volunteer Center was under-resourced, but did manage to provide some useful services. Now it's gone. Over the past year, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania quietly but deliberately erased the name "Volunteer Centers of Southeastern Pennsylvania" from all the places it used to appear. In its place are a number of referrals to a new Web site (which I guess the United Way thinks will run itself), [VolunteerWay.org](http://www.volunteerway.org) <http://www.volunteerway.org>, a collaborative online registry of volunteer opportunities in southern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. The key staff member who used to manage the Volunteer Center is now called "Community Impact Officer," with diverse duties including some volunteerism training, Gifts in Kind, and United Way staff work with funded agencies. There has been no official notice of any kind - no letter, press release, explanation in printed materials - to explain the decision to fold the Volunteer Center into other United Way activities.

I have always held the opinion that United Ways ought to help *fund* Volunteer Centers, but not *own* them. Why? Here are just a few reasons the connection is not as neat as it might look on the surface:

- Volunteering is so much broader in scope than the human service agencies within the umbrella of a United Way. While most Volunteer Centers within United Ways are allowed to capture

information on volunteering in all sorts of settings, their focus ultimately narrows over time to the types of organizations given funding by the United Way. So, for example, government agencies – a huge category of volunteer-involving settings – are under-served, as are cultural arts programs, environmentalism, and other political action causes, despite their obvious importance to community involvement.

- United Ways are eager to show that they are cost-effective fundraisers and are loathe to increase their administrative/overhead budget figures. To keep internal costs down, an in-house Volunteer Center is expected to stay small. This is money-based planning, not need-based planning. Independent Volunteer Centers can do additional fundraising (not that enough of them do this well) to grow; internal United Way Volunteer Centers are restricted from outside fundraising which would be direct competition to the United Way campaign.
- United Ways are about money first and foremost. Volunteering, though praised with lip service, is treated only with peripheral interest, except as an avenue to more fundraising. The proliferation of “Days of Caring” is a good example. The original motivation for the “Day of Caring” was to show corporate employees how their donation to the United Way is used by community agencies. While everyone is glad that the employees provide useful service during the Day, the real purpose is to generate more money later. In most communities, it is only United Way-funded agencies which are asked to develop a volunteer project (and who may feel they have little choice but to comply) and only companies with payroll-deduction plans which are recruited to send employees - an invitation-only circle. The irony, therefore, is that internal Volunteer Centers spend an inordinate amount of time planning and coordinating the logistical nightmare of a “Day of Caring” which looks as if it contributes to the work of a Volunteer Center, but may actually detract from it.
- As staff of the United Way, Volunteer Center workers can – and usually are – diverted and deployed to “priority work” when necessary. Think of how often you’ve heard Center staff beg off from a meeting or other event with the excuse: “Sorry, but that’s right in the middle of the Campaign.” The United Way fundraising campaign always comes first, leaving many communities without a fully-functioning Volunteer Center for one or two months a year.
- As an internal program, the Volunteer Center is governed by the United Way’s own board – and how much agenda time do you think this board spends on volunteer-related subjects? Most United Ways never consider that there might be a unique constituency for the Volunteer Center, with valid opinions and input. That’s one of the reasons the United Way here in Philadelphia felt completely free to dismantle our Volunteer Center without notice: they couldn’t fathom that it would matter to anyone.

I realize that United Ways are as diverse as the communities they serve, but I am tired of the incessant whispering about this problem. I also recognize that volunteer program managers have too often not come to the aid of Volunteer Centers in need of better funding and other support. (For example, I never saw one word about the changes in Philadelphia from my local DOVIA, neither as information nor as a cry to battle.)

On the other hand, every Volunteer Center in North America truly worth its salt is an independent, self-incorporated agency with a clear mission, a broad vision, and an understanding of the enormous scope of the field. Becoming an internal program of a United Way is the kiss of death to future growth.

It is time to bring this situation out into the open. While the behavior of local United Ways is the most egregious, the same principles apply wherever Volunteer Centers are subsumed under other organizations having many goals and agendas. So, if a Volunteer Center is part of municipal government, it is likely that local politics have an impact or that each new administration changes the services offered. If a Volunteer Center is part of the Red Cross, the Junior League, or any other organization, pressure (subtle or overt) is placed on giving priority to the causes and concerns of the sponsor. Only when independent can Volunteer Centers serve the full scope of the volunteer field.

So:

- Have you witnessed how a United Way or other sponsor has limited the effectiveness of a Volunteer Center? (Or, you are welcome to praise a good local relationship.)
- What are ways to support a local Volunteer Center so that it can be independent?
- What's the responsibility of volunteer program leaders in this issue (individually and collectively)?

Applaud or scream at this Hot Topic, but please take the risk to voice your opinions.

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Submitted on 4Dec02 by Valerie Helgren, Volunteer Services Coordinator, Holland, Michigan

While I admit that having the Volunteer Center as part of the United Way has its drawbacks, I really wonder how an organization like that would be funded otherwise, especially long term. Perhaps the partnership with volunteering and the United Way is better than nothing? My organization has received good services from our local Volunteer Center, but we are a United Way agency. I am interested to hear comments from non-United Way organizations to see how they are fairing.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Laurie D. Thomas, Volunteer Coordinator, St. John Medical Center, Tulsa, OK

Here, Here!!!! Having been employed by two Volunteer Centers during my career, I wholeheartedly agree that absorbing a center into the United Way turns the focus away from what a volunteer center should be - a full service community resource serving all not-for-profit agencies with the freedom to explore issues and legislation that effect volunteerism regionally and statewide. In my community - Tulsa, Oklahoma, we have a seriously understaffed but amazingly effective Volunteer Center. Tulsa's Volunteer Center is a program of our Community Service Council and serves more than 400 non-profits while our United Way funds about 75 agencies. Community Service Councils are probably better resting places for volunteer centers than United Ways - if a community cannot afford a free standing center. Any other Community Service Councils house a volunteer center?

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Fran Cook, Director of Volunteers/Calvary Church PA

I live in the Philadelphia area and was not aware that the United Way quietly dissolved the Volunteer Center. I used this center and it proved helpful for my non-profit organization. This was a great resource that people could turn to when they wanted to know where they could volunteer. The center had info on lots of non-profits that people could find out about. Now where do people go? The United Way has been realigning itself but it seems to have gone in a wrong direction. Bring back the Volunteer Center!

Submitted on 4Dec02 anonymously.

You sure know where to find the hot topics. I've just finished reading today's United Way/Volunteer Center hot topic and found we finally agree somewhere!

A sponsored Volunteer Center was my experience. When the parent company was in annual appeal mode or needed volunteers recruited, the "in house" VC was expected to drop their own clients and give priority to the new parent company challenge. The parent company rarely if ever inquired about the VC's own clientele.

VC clients were often expected to be pushed aside for sponsorship projects and employees and volunteer support staff were left confused and overwhelmed by additional work. Did we serve our own clients, would we appear indifferent to the sponsors needs? All further complicated by being an office of 2 with a support staff of 6 housed under the same roof as our parent company.

Management didn't want to address time management concerns often enough to impact this cycle from reoccurring. VC clients were disappointed, time lines on volunteer need would run out unfulfilled and staff was left to work on projects thrust at them.

Conflicts of interest would develop down the road as well. Once an individual volunteered for the parent company they were almost perceived as "their volunteer" from that point on. They were offered new, more detailed fundraising committees, board membership, and most certainly placed on the sponsors own mailing list.

It wasn't easy to have a concise proactive debate on how and why this hot topic is real and often the beginning and end all of a Volunteer Center's independence.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Laura J. Brown, Director of Volunteer Resources, American Red Cross Washtenaw County Chapter, Michigan

My local area has no volunteer center. We had one once, it was part of the United Way and it was downsized out of existence. The downsizing occurred in response to some problems our United Way had and they had to downsize to show the community that they were fiscally responsible. The Volunteer resources are always the first to go since they don't raise money. It is a huge lack in our community that many people are unaware of because it has been so long since there was a volunteer center.

My biggest trigger in your article was the Day of Caring. I also dislike the focus on large group volunteering. It is a great way to get to know an agency, but it is so expensive for small agencies to buy the materials and try to supervise a group that may be 3 times the size of it's existing staff. I have had fabulous Day of Caring experiences at my current agency (the American Red Cross) but I have also had some Day of Caring events that have felt like something other than a day caring!

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Sharron Regan, Community Resources Manager CHATS, Aurora Canada

This is interesting. We are trying to start a Volunteer Center and 211 information center in our area. The United Way is involved in the start up. Although I expect the Canadian United Ways are different, Susan's point about Volunteer Centers serving a larger group than what falls under the United Way's umbrella is interesting and food for thought as we go forward looking for a "home" for our volunteer Center.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Stephen J. Taylor, CFRE, Scout Executive & CEO - Palmetto Council, BSA, Spartanburg, SC

Having worked in the non-profit sector for the past 26 years in five different southern states I have personally seen all sorts of "volunteer center" arrangements from free-standing independent organizations to those funded by a local United Way to those being housed in a local United Way to those being part of a local United Way to none at all. To me the best arrangement is to have "none at all" with the onus on volunteer recruitment, training, placement, guidance, and direction being placed on the actual agency where the volunteer works. This arrangement places the responsibility directly in line with the benefit received. Should there be any struggle for dollars or control it then becomes all intra-agency and resolution to the concern becomes the local board's responsibility for action.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Linda Daino Ohlerking, Director, Volunteer Services, Albany County Dept. of Residential Health Care Facilities (NY) USA

I have wondered why the Volunteer Center of the Capital Region in Albany, New York suddenly closed its doors and disappeared from sight.. now I know why. Thanks for the enlightening article. I plan to show it to our County Executive.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Gail Orser, Prayer Department Manager, Guideposts, New York

You've made lots of good points. I have to say that I agree with you. I think the United Way does an excellent job in many communities, but if a Volunteer Center is a part of the United Way it will definitely be limited in scope. And volunteerism is certainly a lot broader than the United Way.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Aaron Spevacek, Executive Director, Alexandria Volunteer Bureau VA/USA

I think that my organization might be a good example of the ideal relationship between a volunteer center and local United Way. We are an independent center that was started by the United Way. The United Way's support was very important when we were just getting off the ground. But since that time (20+ years ago), we have grown well beyond our initial role as a volunteer clearinghouse. And now that the regional United Way has gotten its self into serious trouble, with many layoffs expected, we are out of the fray.

Incidentally, I believe very much in the role our United Way plays in facilitating workplace campaigns and in doing community needs assessments. I make a point of supporting their efforts in both regards.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Rebecca Quinn, Director of Community Involvement, Heart of Florida United Way, Orlando, FL

As a VC internal to a United Way, I have to disagree with most of the statements made, although I can see where many of them originate. Our VC merged with the United Way in 1995, and has been undervalued for much of the time since then. However, times are changing, and we are now receiving more internal attention than ever before. In the face of increased competition for donor dollars, our United Way is positioning the Volunteer Center as one of the things that makes us more than JUST a fund raiser. As the Volunteer Center, we serve any not-for-profit, including governmental, environmental, animal, arts, and other non-health and human service organizations. We have overcome the competition for campaign dollars by researching the other ways in which companies give--many of them have grant programs that go over and above their corporate gifts and United Way giving programs. We form better relationships with the donors (both individuals and companies as a whole) by serving them in another capacity--through volunteerism opportunities. Days of Caring has been an excellent vehicle to get companies involved throughout the rest of the year, because of their fantastic DOC experiences. We also have the advantage of other UW staff assisting the VC--communications and marketing, campaign connections to businesses, HR, etc. And even if the VC is being "used" by the United Way organization to increase campaign dollars, so what? It only benefits the VC in the end--through the exposure and the piece of the pie that we get, as well.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Rick Allen, Ph.D., President, United Way of Pierce County, Tacoma, WA

This was a very good analysis of how Volunteer Centers USED TO BE viewed by United Ways. Unfortunately, the article is about 5 years out of date.

Most United Ways in America are moving to a model with "community impact" as their core business. Money is a key strategy, but it's not the mission. Volunteering is a rapidly progressing key strategy as well, and many United Ways are paying MUCH MORE attention to this issue, not less attention.

Campaigns are moving to a "community conversations" model rather than a "thermometer" model...discussions are about human needs, and how people can help....including "here's how you can volunteer." Many thousands are now hearing this message. When leveraged this way, United Way may in fact be the BEST place to house a community Volunteer Opportunities Center.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Jackie Norris, Executive Director, Metro Volunteers, Denver, CO USA

In Denver, our United Way "spun off" the volunteer center over 8 years ago (during a difficult financial time for UW), and merged it with a technical assistance nonprofit, to form Metro Volunteers. They have been our largest funder ever since, and their CEO has been a board member of the volunteer center--and he really understand the value and impact an effective volunteer center can have.

We've been able to grow very differently than we would have if we were still internal...but we have the best of both worlds. We actually rent space in the United Way building, and they give us great support. We are in the process of building a closer programmatic relationship with them as they launch their 211 effort.

I join you in being outraged at the closing of the Philadelphia Center--and I wish folks in local communities would do more to support our type of organization, but the problem is often that we are a well kept secret and don't do an effective job of telling our story or showing our impact. We exist today because a group of local volunteer managers and other supporters didn't want the volunteer center to go away, and put some energy and effort into finding us a new home.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Kelly Nevins, Executive Director, Volunteer Center of RI, Providence, RI

I'm from an independent center which at one time was part of United Way, then spun off as the organization focused more on fundraising. The pluses are as Susan indicated, in that we are able to focus on helping many organizations find volunteers (rather than focusing only on UW agencies) and aren't impeded by the fundraising calendar from doing our duties. On the other hand, we have found ourselves in competition with UW as they handled Dare To Care (episodic volunteering) in house and turned it into a campaign long activity. Also, UW is well known and branded in our community, but a much smaller percentage recognizes the Volunteer Center exists. This, in turn, makes it difficult for us to raise the funds necessary to grow the Center and truly impact outcomes in our community.

UWA and many local UW's are embracing a new mission statement, which eerily echoes the mission of the Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network, and talks about mobilizing the caring capacity of people. UWA is also promoting Volunteer Solutions, which is an online volunteer matching tool. It seems to me that perhaps the pendulum is swinging the other way, and that UW is recognizing the need for supporting volunteerism locally. After all, several studies have shown that people who volunteer are much more likely to make donations, and significant ones at that!

An editorial aside, what really burns me up is the comment I hear from funders in general that say "Of course we see the value of volunteerism" and then continue to cut funds for just this issue!!!

Submitted on 4Dec02 by David Proctor, Strategic Planning Consultant, United Way of RI, Rhode Island, USA

A number of good points, however many United Ways are changing as have many Volunteer Centers in order to make more of a sustained impact within communities. If a United Way sees its mission as mobilizing the caring power of the community to improve the lives of people in need (as is United Way of RI's), it must work cooperatively with an independent Volunteer Center if it exists or have some capacity to identify, recruit, train, orient, support volunteers and volunteerism in order to have maximum impact. In our United Way of RI's transformation to even more intentionally mobilize RI's

community, our commitment is to work together with our Volunteer Center to help it be as strong and wide-present as possible. This is why we also are helping to fund its acquisition of new software to help it function the way it wants to which is more effective and more able to identify outcomes which will also help it attract more funding. This is a healthy partnership.

Excellent point to bring up for discussion because I have seen a number of United Ways which are not working well with Volunteer Centers, have incorporated & killed them, or ended up solely focusing on recruiting people for 1 shot events.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Donna Dolce, United Way of Essex and West Hudson Newark, New Jersey

I could not disagree with you more on your impression of the marriage between United Ways and Volunteer Centers. First, you're looking at an old UW model - UW today do not fund agencies but rather programs. We are now longer dependent on corporate campaigns, but most of our funding comes from grants, parts of which are retained by the UWVC to support the volunteer work needed to make the program successful.

Days of Caring - gone - large groups - corporate or others volunteer year round and we match them to the needs of the community at dates and times convenient to them and the agency. Lost identity - not a chance - the VC is known as the VC - perhaps because our UW has several different programs as part of its work - we look more independent. The major advantage - a preexisting stand alone VC just couldn't raise the dollars necessary to support itself. But by including the recruitment, training, recognition, of volunteers into a broader grant proposal e.g. a program focused on serving youth - we collaborate with a number of agencies and all share in the funding - including monies for the VC part of the project. Sure, a VC internal to the UW has a different focus - we don't create volunteer driven programs just to support the work of a VC - but provide a critical resource to a number of agencies that rely on volunteers - we offer training for boards and staff and offer a broader more enriched recognition program. Times they are a changing - and that includes UW's and VC who co-exist. Don't judge all UW's by history because there's a new model that works great with an internal VC as part of its heart and soul.

Submitted on 4Dec02 anonymously

The bigger issue is the partnering of 211 and United Way - The whole Gifts in Kind project has taken over time, attention, and staff. Our Volunteer Center was a wonderful resource in the late 90's - workshops were regularly scheduled, there was a single employee who was the "face and voice" of the VC. Now, the emphasis is on being the official channel for items that used to be given directly to various non-profits, and which now can only be obtained after paying a membership fee, and "handling" fee. The cover, of course, is that the restructuring is more cost efficient, serving a more diverse group of non-profits.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Diane L. Hennessy, Director of Volunteers, South Florida Science Museum, West Palm Beach, Florida - USA

I have no complaints about the United Way of Palm Beach County. We have excellent training for our Volunteer Coordinators and constant communication with the United Way. They are vital to our DOVS organization. Entering the field of Volunteering from the field of Education, I couldn't have pulled my successful Volunteer Department together without the help of the United Way. I owe them nothing but gratitude.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Jon Hall, Edmonton Alberta Canada

In Edmonton Alberta the Volunteer Centre closed on the eve of its 50th anniversary because the United Way withdrew funding after a number of years where the relationship was turbulent. The United Way immediately snapped up the annual Volunteer Centre Fund Raiser and started running it themselves "to ensure that it continued to serve the community." They then funded a limited recruitment and referral service with another human service agency.

The community has been struggling to find a new model for a volunteer centre and recently called the United Way (and other funders) to task for dragging its heels on moving the discussions forward. It may seem to some that the United Way didn't want to create a new entity. They have not yet offered to form a United Way Volunteer centre but I know the thought has crossed their minds.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Mary Kay Hood, Director of Volunteer Services, Hendricks Community Hospital, Indiana

I believe Susan has hit the nail on the head. The Indianapolis area had a Volunteer Center in the '90s and it, too, went by the wayside as United Way funding challenges came on the horizon. During the heyday of the center, there was some local television partnership providing on air spots about volunteering and volunteer opportunities. When the sponsorship/partnership dried up, the Volunteer Center dried up. Although the Volunteer Center is still part of the United Way, the activities are very limited with little and/or no publicity. And it seemed as though the United Way agencies had preferential treatment with regards to volunteer referrals than other organizations using volunteers.

Submitted on 4Dec02 by Bob Alden, Board member, Volunteer San Diego CA USA

In San Diego, the Volunteer Center became independent from the United way a few years ago. In January 2002 they merged with San Diego Cares (an affiliate of City Cares) to form Volunteer San Diego (www.volunteersandiego.org). In less than a year, we have become a dynamic, growing, proactive agency that has become the premier volunteer organization in the San Diego Area. We are still supported financially by the United Way, but are gradually being weaned off that. We have a great staff and board and lots of enthusiastic volunteers in our flexible program. We also maintain close ties with our national affiliates, Points of Light Foundation and City Cares. We feel we have a great thing going here and would encourage other Volunteer Centers to do the same, if possible.

Submitted on 5Dec02 by Mary Connolly, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships - Bergen County's United Way, Bergen County, New Jersey

The United Way and Volunteer Center in Bergen County formed a partnership in 1998 for the purpose of establishing a single volunteer program, while recognizing that we are separate organizations.

Days of Caring are joint projects that are open to any not-for-profit and volunteer group; the Volunteer Center handles placement of volunteers from the community and the workplace; the Volunteer Center maintains a searchable online database of volunteer opportunities to which we have a direct link from our web site; we have a joint annual fundraiser; and together formed the Northern New Jersey Business Volunteer Council which boasts 28 corporate members.

Through this partnership we have created a collaborative marketing model that not only promotes volunteerism, but has contributed to the fundraising and relationship building goals of both organizations.

A key to our success is both organizations commit themselves to co-branding so that the community sees a single response and the fact that we both realized there was no value in an adversarial relationship that frequently results in the United Way bringing their volunteer activities "in-house". Regardless of where volunteer activities are placed, what needs to be remembered is what is best for the community.

Submitted on 5Dec02 by Rob Buckel, Coordinator, Volunteer Central, A program of Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans, New Orleans, LA

While I agree that being housed within any organization has its challenges, I do not agree that "only when independent can Volunteer Centers serve the full scope of the volunteer field." What becomes important is educating the parent organization's directors and board. We spent the time needed to get the buy-in of our President/CEO. Of great importance is our ability to relate the purpose and goals of Volunteer Central, the name of our center, to the mission of Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans, our parent organization. That mission clearly states, "Volunteers of America...creates opportunities for people to experience the joy of serving others." It is no stretch to see how that relates to the work of Volunteer Central.

I guess we are lucky. We have a progressive, open-minded management team that fully supports Volunteer Central. Am I naive enough to think that this is not an on-going process? No, but I believe we have laid the groundwork to work successfully with our parent organization without compromising the purpose of Volunteer Central, which is to serve and engage our community, both individuals and organizations, and to champion meaningful volunteerism in Greater New Orleans. The key is we helped our management understand that the success of Volunteer Central, functioning as a traditional volunteer center, IS the success of our parent organization.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Ken Hall, ED, Hands on Memphis Hhhmmm, a debate about the relative merits of a Conestoga wagon vs. an Edsel. Volunteer Centers are quaint referral service agencies (mainly) and as such do a lot of talking about volunteer work but don't produce much in the way of sweat. And given their affiliation with the government -- CNS, POLF -- would you really expect more? United Ways are about as cutting edge as Volunteer Centers. Look at who or what agency in any given town is engaging citizens in active, hands on, flexible volunteering and build relationships there; leave the dinosaurs to the natural history museums.

Submitted on 6Dec02 anonymously

First and foremost--United Ways are in the business of raising money. And let's not be so naive as to say it's all about the community. The management staff at most UWs are paid VERY well. Meanwhile, they fudge accounting figures info about their actual administrative costs and continue to fund their sweetheart agencies. Some UWs have not taken on new agencies/programs for funding in ten years or more. The Volunteer Centers are a threat to the continued monopoly UW has enjoyed within the corporate sector conducting workplace campaigns. The more pro-active VCs become in partnering (or attempting to) with business and industry, the more aggressive UW will become in absorbing them. UW wants to be viewed as THE authority on issues and solutions in each community. To achieve this, they need to be able to have the VCs as a "feel good" image-builder so that the community sees them involved in more than just asking for \$ all the time--if they are gung-ho on volunteering, they can't be all about \$, right? I am almost amused by the excuse making of the UW professionals who have responded here. Come on, guys. Let's be honest. Sounds like you actually believe all the UW brainwashing about "community Impact" and the "We fund PROGRAMS not agencies." Please. We all know what the deal is. I'm glad Susan spoke up.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Maile Doyle, Director, Volunteer Center at United Way of Hancock County, Findlay, OH

Our Volunteer Center was begun with In-Kind support from our United Way in 1991 and funded by Corporate and Community Foundation gifts. It was formed from the beginning to serve all nonprofit and governmental organizations in our community. In 1995 after a wild 4-year ride from great success to down-sizing by the UW CEO, a new CEO asked the UW Board of Trustees to give the Volunteer Center a three year window to become successful again. That worked! The key to the survival of a Volunteer Center internal to another organization rests with the leadership of both the Volunteer Center and the parent organization.

This center has grown in service to the entire community, has created an annual fundraiser that is 44% of its budget and involves a segment of our community that did not traditionally give to United Way, the Home Builder Industry. This becomes a win-win situation for both UW and the Volunteer Center.

I have seen our Volunteer Center struggle with the issues of continued growth demanded by the community, yet inhibited by the parent organization. The solution has been to form a task force of all the community stakeholders to recommend to the United Way Board of Trustees a solution both for

program and for additional funding. The Task Force recommendations have been endorsed by the board.

Currently the Volunteer Center enjoys a great relationship with our parent organization, United Way of Hancock County. The Volunteer Center is considered the "Fundraising" Arm of United Way and provides the year-round visibility necessary to "Building A Caring Community"--our vision statement.

It would be extremely difficult for the Volunteer Center to raise the funds in our rural community as an independent organization. We need the United Way and it needs the Volunteer Center.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Melissa Mele, Volunteer Center Director, United Way of York County, York, PA

I could not disagree more. Our VC is internal to UW and that has been an incredible blessing. Has it always been easy, no. But with the right leadership, the VC can flourish. Our BOD and ED had enough insight to include fundraising, volunteerism, and community building into our mission. Its not just lipservice, but a reality. As the director I have the creative freedom to serve the community at large not just UW member agencies. All of our services are open to the agencies we serve. This VC has its own marketing, website, programming, membership. . . But at the same time has stable funding, the ability to use the good name of the UW when it suits, exist without competition, and the permission to be not just a resource but an area expert on volunteerism. We use the benefits of our parent organization just as they use our benefits. Its a win-win-win, for the UW, the VC, and the community. Its not about sticking the UW nose where it doesn't belong but where its needed in our community.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Mary Foley, Executive Director, The Voluntary Action Center, Manassas, VA

This is a very facinating conversation that is full of only partial truths. I must be confused because I thought addressing volunteer and community needs were best done at the local level. The make-up of this entity should be driven locally whether it is a separate or internal entity. I take offense to the notion that an internal UW volunteer center isn't as strong as an independent.

Volunteerism is a powerful, diverse business. Individual communities focus on volunteer programs that meet their community needs. The gentlemen from Memphis is addressing his community needs with only episodic volunteers to answer their call. I'm not sure Michele Nunn will agree with that narrow-minded approach but this is America and speech is free. Here in Prince William, Virginia, The Voluntary Action Center (an independent volunteer center) addresses our community volunteer needs with a strong partnership with our United Way, episodic programs for busy people, contracts with local government for Welfare to Work and court mandated community service, contracts with local schools for career building, hosting a federally funded RSVP program for seniors and a I&R program as our core value. These volunteer center programs are by no means dinosaurs. We are pro-active in addressing our local needs for both the volunteer perspective and community need. Let's continue to share our best-practices. Let's never think we all have to look alike. And please, no more generalizations.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Robin Albert, Director, United Way of the Greater Seacoast VAC, NH

Agreeing with Rick Allen, Ph.D., President, United Way of Pierce County, Tacoma, WA.- and disagreeing with most of Susan's points. Many consortiums and groups in our community had tried, unsuccessfully, to form a VC. The project wasn't successful until United Way volunteers recommended the formation of a VC in a 1999 UW Strategic Plan. They visioned it and it happened. I am the director of that VC - totally internal to our United Way, and like many others, serve all organizations equally. Our United Way funded 75 HHS agency programs last year. (We no longer have partner agencies.) Our VC is currently partnering with over 185 organizations and the number increases monthly. The VC program is fully supported by our Board. I love going out to employee campaign meetings, because I get to speak to people about volunteerism. It's a natural fit to us here. Volunteerism is not treated, as Susan put it - a "peripheral interest." We have an advisory council that includes UW Board members, corporate reps, community volunteers, and funded and non-funded agencies. I'll stop there. Sorry, Susan - but I think many of your comments stem from a time past. Click the "Volunteer" icon at www.uwgs.org

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Dorothy S. Grannell, Director of Volunteer Development, Maine

Each United Way is locally controlled and operated. Therefore, each internal volunteer center will have a different experience based on the values of its board and the community. Here in Portland, Maine our internal volunteer center is strongly supported, serves any non-profit, government agency or school or hospital that needs volunteers. We provide training for businesses and non-profits. We do not charge for any of our services and we make them available to everyone UW funded or not. This is just one way our United Way is able to assist all parts of the community whether or not they receive other funding. Susan's comments may hold true for some communities but not ours.

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Heidi Neuhaus, Volunteer Center, United Way of the Capital Region, Enola, Pennsylvania

I couldn't disagree more. It sounds to me as though Ms. Ellis should have done some research before making such generalizations, many of which are inaccurate. I am director of a Volunteer Center internal to a United Way. Since merging with our local UW in 1999, our services have increased and annual referrals almost tripled. (Incidentally, I should mention that the UW didn't "suck up" our Volunteer Center, but rather agreed to the merger in order to save the Center.)

Being internal to the UW has great advantages and very few disadvantages. I am not restricted to working only with UW-funded agencies and have the opportunity to work with any nonprofit agency that wants our help. In fact, only about 1/3 of the Day of Caring projects completed each year are at UW-funded agencies, and our projects include arts & cultural organizations, environmental groups, schools and community parks in addition to the traditional health & human service agencies. I do have limited campaign responsibilities, but I view the employee meetings as a great opportunity to promote volunteerism and talk about what I do. When I get a call from an agency who needs a board member with a special skill, or a client that desperately needs help with Christmas, or even help with some plumbing or computer problems, I have companies I can call on for help thanks to my affiliation with the UW. And most importantly, my co-workers -- both campaign and community building

colleagues -- are my strongest supporters and do a better job of promoting the Center than I do. So, if indeed the conditions described by Ms. Ellis really do exist for some Volunteer Centers, I'm sorry for them. But please, don't assume that all Centers internal to a UW no longer are able to do what we set out to do: make our communities a better place to live through volunteerism!

Submitted on 6Dec02 by Laura Lockwood, ManaTEEN CEO/AmeriCorps Promise Fellow with Volunteer Services of Manatee County, Inc., Florida

As the founder of The ManaTEEN Club, the nation's largest teen volunteer program...and a program of the Volunteer Center of Manatee County, Inc., I agree with you 100%!

I am asked to speak to VCs around the country about replicating our teen program and, without exception, only VCs that are independent have been successful in developing a program similar in nature to ours. Those VCs that are "internal" to United Ways or other parent organizations tend to simply be a "department" of the agency and the staff designated to manage the Volunteer component usually aren't given much lead way in terms of budget, direct service, etc.

Our independent VC has grown during the last 10 years from a \$40K annual budget to one of more than \$2million thanks to our innovative, creative ways to get people of all ages to volunteer. I encourage all internal VCs to "think outside the box" and take steps toward independence!

Submitted on 8Dec02 by Cher Siegel

I'm so glad to see you have the courage to speak out. I agree 100%.

Submitted on 8Dec02 by Penny Dendy, Executive Director, Volunteer Mobile, Alabama

I too am very concerned about the relationship between United Way and Volunteer Centers. As an independent volunteer center we were created by the United Way some 26 years ago and this year sustained a 63% cut in support from them. The chairman of the United Way of Southwest Alabama Board called me and said, "We just don't value your services." We will survive in spite of United Way, however, I think the recent decision to break the agreement with the Points of Light Foundation National Network of Volunteer Centers concerning technology is a clear indication that we are no longer in an environment with the United Way to collaborate or partner.

Submitted on 8Dec02 by Doris Davidson, Management Consultant, Florida

Way to go Susan. As a former director of a United Way Volunteer Center I have first hand knowledge of what you have described. Those who do not believe it will happen to them need to read "Generations" by Strauss and Howe. This book delves into the attitudes and beliefs of the past, present and future volunteers in this county. The current volunteer pool, the Baby Boomers, do not believe in collective solutions (for example, United Way) and will not support them in the traditional manner of handing over money to let United Way do what it pleases with it. They (the Boomers) demand more control and accountability. United way figured this out years ago, thus the Community Building/Community Impact phase. What really is going on is they are now going after the same

grants, providing the same services and thus have become the competition to the same agencies they profess to raise money to support.

As a Management Consultant, I work to educate agencies to realize they are capable of supporting themselves if they understand who they are, who their competition really is and how to survive in this volatile changing climate. They need to know they are a business that can earn their needed assets, not a chaity groveling for a hand out.

As far as the Volunteer Center I directed. It now is a 211 phone number or an online list of places to volunteer. I will admit there has not been an out cry from the community or is there a local group willing to support a Volunteer Center.

Submitted by 8Dec02 by Vanessa True, Youth Volunteer Centers Coordinator, Gwinnett Alliance With Youth, Gwinnett County, Georgia

I manage more than 20 Youth Volunteer Centers in my community and will grow to manage almost 30 by the end of this school year. I work within a local nonprofit agency and have a relationship with United Way. While our program has only been in existence for 5 years and is the first of its kind in our county, we have already supported an average of 60,000 youth service hours per year. Our local United Way gives us financial support and linkages to some community agencies. We are not a part of them and we will not become a part of them, because what we are doing now works. We motivate over 16,000 youth per year to get involved in their community through service; many of them are first time volunteers. Our success is owed to my training in the field of volunteerism, my growing relationships with local schools, agencies, and churches, and support from philanthropic agencies and businesses (including, but not limited to, the United Way). We're doing what works. You should all do what works. Every community is different and every United Way is different. (Thank goodness for that!) Stop the generalizations and the "we're the best" speeches. Susan, you make some excellent points applicable to many of your readers. United Way responders, you do the same. But none of the views apply to us all. As long as we continue to motivate volunteers towards community service and do so in a way that is ethical, inclusive, well-managed and effective, then we can all be successful. Enough said.

Submitted on 8Dec02 anonymously

I had to laugh when I read this. It was almost as if Susan has been sitting on my shoulder for the last six months. For the story she told...is our story. Trust me I rarely agree with what Susan has to say but every word of this is true.

We were an independent center almost 20 years ago and floundering...then UW came in swooped us up, saved us and helped us grow...sort of. The VC was allowed to do it's work about 50% of the time and the other 50% were pulled off to concentrate on UW projects. Fair enough, they funded us...kind of. We were an allocated program, our own mission, vision, Steering Committee. We reaped the benefits and pitfalls of being internal to a United Way...just as Susan says--growth was mostly in Day of Caring...the kickoff to the CAMPAIGN.

Take heed all of you out there internal VC's the winds of change are upon us. This new direction for United Ways of "impact" not just a fund raising pass through, will impact you. And Susan is right folks....United Way business is Fund Raising and if you are VC internal to a UW, if it's not your business now...it will be soon.

Peter Drucker in the Drucker process has you determine...who is your primary customer. Well, all of you UW's...that customer is the donor--the donor gives money. For VC's, the customer is the volunteer...who the UW wants to give MONEY

So...for us, under a new strategic plan---with "community impact" as the UW's goal, the VC has been realigned--mission changed...to match the UW's; the goals, corporate volunteers--get them to volunteer to...yes you can say it-- DONATE DOLLARS; the opportuntites, in the critical issues area; Day of Caring, focus on critical issues and member agencies--we're big folks, 230 agencies participate on DOC, 7000 volunteers. Want to know how many of the 230 are "member agencies"...less than 10%. Gonna change.

The pendulum swings...for those of you who vehemently disagreed with Susan and said, not true, not true, lucky you....for those like us...right on Susan.

Submitted on 11Dec02 by Ginger Murphy, President, Delaware Valley Association for Directors of Volunteer Programs (DVA/DVP), Philadelphia, PA

Thank you for a "Hot Topic" which inspires our community to take inventory and share experiences. As a fellow member of Susan's DOVIA, I would like to respond to her questions about our experience, role and responsibility regarding a Volunteer Center in the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley area. Conscious of the organizational changes underway at United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, our DOVIA invited UW representatives to attend or membership meeting in September 2000. We received a positive response from our affiliate, a member of their staff attended and our members had an opportunity to ask questions. Your observation that formal references to a Volunteer Center have disappeared prompt me to realize that follow-up invitation to our UW colleagues is now in order to understand how their organizational changes have an impact of volunteerism in our region. As the local DOVIA, our responsibility is to provide our membership with the opportunity to gather information and ask questions.

Our experiences with local United Way staff have been very positive. We count several local staff as members. One staff member who trains volunteer program mangers routinely donates her time to do workshops at our meetings and conferences. In the past, UW staff have served as our officers and offered their office facilities for our meetings and programs.

While acknowledging our appreciation for this support, your topic brings to our community's attention that as organizations and needs evolve, those of us entrusted volunteer program administration have a responsibility to constantly re-examine our own participation in this process.

Resources of all kinds will always be limited; let us ensure that our imagination and commitment are not.

Submitted on 11Dec02 by Tracey Mann, Manager, Volunteer Regina, United Way of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

I was disappointed Susan to read your article maligning those volunteer centres that exist within their local United Way's. Since merging in 1994 with the United Way here (after 17 years as an independent centre), Volunteer Regina has enjoyed enhanced status in the community, financial stability, and the luxury of being able to dedicate 100% of staff resources to the delivery of volunteer centre services. Those services are available to ANY community-based organization -- 95% of the organizations we work with are NOT United Way funded agencies -- and include sport, culture, recreation and health organizations.

Contrary to the opinions you have expressed, United Way board and staff are extremely supportive of Volunteer Regina, and in fact have recently increased centre staffing by 100%. Volunteer centre programs and services are as equally important as fundraising initiatives and never have centre staff been asked to set aside volunteer centre commitments in lieu of campaign (centre staff spent a grand total of 6 hours on campaign this year). Our reality is that United Way staff contribute far more time to support Volunteer Regina than the reverse.

In an environment where we have seen the number of community-based organizations exploding in recent years, our community has indicated its support for the volunteer centre being housed within the United Way, thereby reducing financial requirements to support another infrastructure and volunteer commitment for yet another board. It is erroneous to assume that all volunteer centres located within a United Way will suffer as a result -- as always it is ultimately the community, not the United Way, that will determine the value of a centre and how it is best supported.

Submitted on 11 Dec02 anonymously -- "I am active in the local DOVIA which this woman has fought for years. We literally struggle to bring events and support to volunteer managers."

Susan, you have impressed me again for being not only up-to-date but ahead of our time! My local community has struggled with this issue for years because of the Director of our local United Way. She is very controlling and doesn't welcome the community and volunteers as part of the United Way except those hand-picked friends of hers who serve on her board year after year. However, times may be changing because of the recession. She will no longer be able to have her loaned executives pressure folks into giving to something they don't see helping their community, because these folks are not working now. They are among the unemployed. We are all waiting for her retirement, but worry that HER board will replace her with the same kind.

Submitted on 12Dec02 by Kathey Graves, Executive Director, Texas, USA

The Texarkana Volunteer Center is an independent agency. For the past 25 years has been a United Way Agency. However, this year the local United Way has decided not to fund the VC for apparent reason. Needless to say, we are not inclined to think favorably of United Ways.

Submitted on 12Dec02 by Dorothy Grannell, Director Volunteer Development, United Way of Greater Portland, Portland, ME

I was pleased to read Ginger Murphy's response to Susan Ellis. It is very balanced. I would also refer Susan to the Greater Philadelphia listing on VolunteerSolution.org. More than 700 agencies advertise their volunteer opportunities there- and there are over 1000 opportunities listed. Those agencies that have United Way funding are clearly marked. Many, many organizations do not receive UW funding but have the same opportunity to list their offerings. Perhaps a bit more research before spouting off would have helped the Hot Topic.

Submitted on 12Dec02 by Molly Keeney, Executive Director, Volunteer Center of Greensboro NC/USA

As chair of the Volunteer Center National Network Council, I feel compelled to add my two cents to this discussion. I agree with some of Susan's comments but would not go so far as to say the only viable Volunteer Center is one that is independent. There are many good, strong and effective Volunteer Centers that are internal to United Way or some other organization and several folks from those centers have chimed in here.

At the same time, I have seen first hand how several internal Volunteer Centers have been shut down by United Ways in North and South Carolina. With the advent of 211 these United Ways have chosen to allocate their increasingly limited resources to this new initiative. It's happened even in larger cities like Raleigh and Columbia - both state capitals!

Some mistakenly think that 211 can take the place of Volunteer Centers - that's a laugh. It's true, 211 can give someone the contact information for an agency looking for volunteers, but 211 is surely not going to train volunteer managers, promote volunteerism, help someone select a volunteer opportunity that meets their skills and interests or organize a Corporate Volunteer Council. 211 is not and will never be a substitute for Volunteer Centers and I sincerely hope United Ways will recognize they are not serving the community when they think it can.

Submitted on 13Dec02 by Susan J. Ellis, President, Energize, Inc., writer of this hot topic

It is wonderful that so many different people have responded this month and with so many perspectives. Generally, I avoid jumping into the hot topic "discussion" since I feel I had "my say" in the original post of the Hot Topic. However, several people have questioned my knowledge of this topic and I feel a need to give some explanation of my research.

First, I am very aware of what is going on in Philadelphia. I have carefully reviewed VolunteerWay.org and I telephoned and spoke at length with several people in Philadelphia in a position to know what happened at our United Way and why.

Second, I am in the unique (and privileged) position of being able to travel throughout the U.S. to learn about "hot" trends. I assure everyone that I have personally discussed this month's subject with at

least two dozen people in the last year alone, in cities both large and small (Volunteer Centers are often my hosts, so I see this Hot Topic as trying to support, not hurt, them).

Finally, I have a long history on this subject with the United Way of America, having written their publication, *Volunteer Centers: Gearing Up for the 1990s*, which is out of print but which UWA allowed me to continue making available for free on line.

Having a difference of opinion does not make either party ignorant. It is possible to have the same facts and draw different conclusions.

Submitted on 16Dec02 by Ioana Muresan, Pro Vobis National Volunteer Center, Romania

(This goes both to Susan and to all who posted on this and other hot topics). What a great Hot Topic even for us, so far away from your reality and your challenges. As a national volunteer center manager, working to support the development of existing and new volunteer centers in my country, I find this discussion truly inspiring. We have both self-incorporated volunteer centers and internal ones (not to UWs - because we don't have this organization, but to various social service agencies.) All your comments have provided such useful food for thought.

As usual, your work and your experiences are our main inspiration, given that volunteerism has not got much of a tradition in Romania. So congratulations for being so communicative- thus allowing the rest of us to avoid reinventing the wheel! And thank you.

Submitted on 16Dec02 by Pam Kettering, Executive Director / United Way & Volunteer Services of Greater Yankton, Yankton, SD USA

Our United Way and Volunteer and Information Center merged into one organization in 1992. The Executive Director's position is to recruit, place, refer, recognize volunteers throughout community non-profit organizations and at the same time fund-raising for selected agencies/programs. Our community is small (16,000); therefore, we can efficiently and effectively work with both programs. The Board of Directors govern the complete operation of the office. Our Advisory Board is the sounding board for community issues. I believe we have a win-win situation and encourage other small communities to try it on for size. Larger communities may not find it works as well.

Submitted on 17Dec02 by Suellen Carlson, Director of Volunteers, Lutheran Social Services, Jamestown, NY

What a fascinating hot topic! United Way agencies take in a great deal of money, with very little public accountability. Their access to employees with payroll deductions is brilliant. Any not-for-profit could have sold itself in this way. I am always concerned that United Ways are able to drive programs in local agencies because of the strings attached to the funds. I would hope that not-for-profits would become smarter about raising their own funding, diversifying their funding streams and weaning off the Unity Way dole. That way they could attract their own volunteers and not rely on the winds of change.

Submitted on 17Dec02 by Judith A. M. Smith, Executive Director, Volunteer Jacksonville, Florida, USA

In my opinion, contingency theory is alive and well and living in this topic! In other words, "it depends." I've lived through most of a six-year reduction of United Way funding from 66% to 20% of budget. It was certainly not much fun, and we were darn lucky that the agency had cash reserves to continue programs and services to the community. That said, I have also lived under new leadership, for the past three years, that respects our capacity as an independent agency, is our major funder at about 25% of budget, and with whom we have a terrific reciprocating partnership based on mutual respect. It all depends upon the leadership and motivation of the local organization. If their agenda is truly community building, they can be the finest partner a volunteer center has. If their agenda is based narrowly upon their own organizational success, this can spell trouble for a volunteer center, particularly one that's on shaky financial ground and has become dependent on a single funding source. I believe the contingency concept likely carries over to internal centers also--it depends on the motivation of the leadership whether the partnership works or not. I do, however, agree that the primary customer of a volunteer center is the volunteer and the primary customer of a United Way is the donor. This is tough to reconcile, and therefore I believe the more effective structural model is the independent organization.

Submitted on 17Dec02 by Michael D. Call, President and CEO, United Way of Rock River Valley IL

It's obvious that every community is unique. I've read through the opinions expressed, and the full range of responses is present. Here's mine. First, each United Way is independent. While I acknowledge that some United Ways exist primarily to raise money, others, including ours, exist to improve the community. Raising and allocating funds is only ONE way we do this.

Second, most Volunteer Centers have a mission that is in step with their local United Way. Here in Rockford, Illinois, our Volunteer Center is internal to our United Way. We view the Volunteer Center as an integral part of our mission. On the campaign side of the business, we recruit financial resources and distribute them. On the Volunteer Center side of the business, we recruit human resources and "distribute" them.

Third, simply because of the name recognition, United Ways are often the source for community and volunteer information. Volunteer Centers generally don't enjoy a high level of community awareness. When the Volunteer Center is internal to United Way, we (meaning United Way AND the Volunteer Center) are able to provide better customer service.

Fourth, most United Ways bring a high level of corporate and media support, which we have found greatly benefits our internal Volunteer Center.

In the end, each community has determined--and will continue to determine--what works best when it comes to not only referring volunteers, but also promoting volunteering, making volunteering more effective, and building strategic community coalitions to solve the most pressing problems.

For us, having a Volunteer Center which is internal to United Way works best.

Submitted on 17Dec02 by Betty Sue Cliff, Director, Volunteer Center of Bi-County United Way, Inc., Missouri, USA

Re: United Way limits Volunteer Center effectiveness and operations.

Rather than the United Way limiting a Volunteer Center's effectiveness, there are frequent examples of assistance given by United Ways to Volunteer Centers, such as computer updating, training, etc. Praise for Volunteer Center functioning within the community is part and parcel of the good relationship between United ways and their Volunteer Centers. In addition, United Way opens the door to a source of corporate volunteering that is not easily available to independent entities, thus removing the need to reinvent the wheel.

Re: Volunteer Center staff being required to give priority to United Way internal work.

The establishment of a free-standing status could easily offset this so-called man-hour deficit by promoting an urgent need for man-hours spent in individual fund raising from the community. The latter could easily become the main focus of the Volunteer Center, rather than being involved in helping to solve community problems. The Volunteer Center would, of brutal necessity, need to focus on fund raising as a matter of sheer survival.

Re: Volunteer Centers being ruled by the United Way Board.

United Way Volunteer Centers are not ruled by the United Way Board, except as being required to adhere to the same standards that apply to qualifications for United Way funding of service agencies. Rather, there is an Advisory Council whose chairman also sits of the United Way Board to facilitate coordination and planning.

Re: Volunteer Center's being independent and doing fund raising for them selves.

The whole idea of United Way funding a Volunteer Center is to provide at no additional cost to the community volunteer placement for the non-profit agencies within a said community. The purpose of volunteering is to save individual agencies the expense of hiring additional staff, which would cause them to need additional funding from the community thus creating a vicious cycle of financial burdens on the community they and the Volunteer Centers serve.

Re: Day of Caring providing opportunities for United Way funded agencies only.

Agencies, in order to qualify for either funding or volunteer placement services need only be 501(c)(3) and adhere to the non-discriminatory requirements United Way demands of itself. The Day of Caring involves many agencies who are not United Way funded, and who, as a matter of record, have their own independent sources of funding.

Submitted on 16Dec02 by Jill Alfrejd, Director, United Way of Lake County IL, USA

While Susan's comments may apply to certain communities, they cannot be applied as blanket statements to all UWs, internal VCs or communities. It is simply not valid to take one example and project that to all communities.

As Director of an Volunteer Center (VC) internal to United Way (UW) and as chair of a Points of Light Foundation task force, focusing on the Volunteer Center/United Way relationship with the goal to promote models where VCs and UWs have developed ways to leverage the strengths of each, we have found a number of examples where the internal VC is a valuable and essential component of impact in the community.

In addition:

- Within the 1400 UWs there exists a wide variety of missions, goals, programs & services, etc. Statements such as “Volunteering is so much broader in scope than the human service agencies within the umbrella of a United Way”, “In most communities, it is only United Way-funded agencies which are asked to develop a volunteer project”, “As staff of the United Way, Volunteer Center workers can – and usually are – diverted and deployed to “priority work” when necessary” does not ring true in any of the internal VCs that I am aware of.
- Given any community’s limited resources does it really make sense to demand that there must be two separate organizations serving similar if not compatible missions? What about all the independent VCs that have had to close their doors? Being internal to UW can provide stability and access to resources that many of the independent VCs would love to have; resources from internal HR, MIS, Marketing professionals etc.
- “...to keep internal costs down, an in-house Volunteer Center is expected to stay small. Becoming an internal program of a United Way is the kiss of death to future growth”; the opposite may actual be true. In IL we have a number of small independent VCs that have not been able to add staff or increase their budgets, most have remained part-time single staffed offices while my Center has been able to add both.

Each community must decide how best to provide the necessary resources to get and keep its citizens involved. This may mean a VC housed in a UW, an independent with a UW partnership, or a VC internal to another organization. Our national network needs to include a variety of structures that can meet the specific needs that exist in each community and not be restricted to a “One Size Fits All” model.

Submitted on 6Jan03 by Robbins, Consultant, Washington, DC

Good piece. The start of something? Who knows? It's a classic case of the organization's survival and related self-interests trumping the mission, however well-stated, noble or heart felt. It's just the way of the world...if you don't watch it.

Submitted on 6Mar03 by Darci Shave, Chair, Red Deer Volunteer Managers Network, Red Deer, Alberta, Canada

I recently had a privilege to attend the Volunteer Development Leadership Institute in Cornwall, ON hosted by Volunteer Canada. 200 representative from Canada's Voluntary Sector participated in this Institute. Contrary to Alberta, I learned that many of Canada's Volunteer Centres are internal to United Ways. Based on comments I heard about their experiences and those of the respondents to this hot topic...I truly believe that it comes down to what is best for that community - how services are BEST delivered in THAT community. I see the benefits and challenges of both sides.

Submitted on 03Apr15 by Ed Bales, Vice Chairman - Philadelphia Volunteer Referral Organization, Philadelphia, PA

I agree with Susan 110%. As the Vice Chairman of a privately funded volunteer center in Philadelphia

and a member of the Points of Light Foundation, we feel that we have been squeezed by the Points of Light Organization in favor of the United Way of SE PA. The Points of Light Organization gives the United Way of SE PA a very broad territorial area and now wants us to leave the POLF or change our geographical location. How can the United Way of SE PA take such a large "slot", I am not sure, but I think the POLF has become a United Way concession.

Submitted on 03July28 by Laura Becker, Volunteer Coordinator - Hanover Area Family YMCA, Pennsylvania

WOW! The United Way in our area has an integral Volunteer Center. Our YMCA is a member. Thankfully, our local United Way does put a higher emphasis on the Volunteer Center than it sounds like other UW's do. However, we (the YMCA) do recruit our own volunteers AND raise our own funds, in addition to our annual allocation. I think this is important to note. We collaborate with the United Way, but we are still self sufficient both in our financial and our human resources. United Ways have their place, but woe to the agency that "puts all their eggs in one basket" by relying solely on their funding and volunteer service through the United Way.

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