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Warning! We're about to Waste an Opportunity!

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

March

2000

It is over two years since the United Nations declared 2001 as International Year of Volunteers. While this fact has been broadly publicized, many are rightfully disappointed in what is NOT happening. You can visit the IYV2001 Web site yourself and see what you think :

<http://www.iyv2001.org>

I have consistently said that IYV is "ours" and we shouldn't wait for someone else to coordinate it--and that my biggest fear is that the volunteer community might waste this unique opportunity. Unfortunately, this fear seems to be coming true. So, in a last-ditch effort to stimulate productive discussion, I've decided to "go public" with my frustrations.

Background Information

First some background information/explanations might be helpful. Then I'll talk about what could still happen. My particular concern is the lack of movement in the United States around IYV and many of my comments reflect this perspective. However most of what I write applies throughout the world and I encourage all nationalities to respond.

1. The UN apparently does not fund its "Year of __" events--it just designates them. It also appoints some unit of the UN to be the contact point for the "Year" in question. For the International Year of Volunteers, they assigned what seemed a logical choice: the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program. UNV is a Peace Corps-type program placing volunteers from all over the world into other countries for economic development assistance (in fact, the Peace Corps is the US affiliate of UNV).
2. While the UN is headquartered in New York, not all its agencies are. And, as it turns out, UNV is one of those NOT located in the U.S. It operates out of Bonn, Germany. That's why you'll keep seeing a German address on all IYV2001 materials. Further complicating things, of course, is that the 150+ UNV staff are scattered around the world, working in each of the countries that receive UNV volunteers.

3. Because UNV is a full-time, stipended volunteer effort, the UNV staff really knows very little about what we call the "volunteer community." Legitimately, UNV staff are more tied up in international affairs, developing country (they don't say "Third World") concerns, and work projects of year-long duration or more. UNV initially saw IYV2001 as a diversion from their primary work (as it meant lots of extra stuff to do without extra money). Then they began to view it as a chance to position UNV more visibly. So there has been a good amount of internal United Nations politicking going on.

4. UNV started off admirably with a wonderfully-worded mission statement and various documents that (to me and I suspect to most of you) sound exactly on target in terms of cutting-edge volunteer issues. They articulated goals for IYV that went way beyond "feel-good" celebrations. On paper, IYV had (still has) the potential to focus attention on the support volunteers need, the importance of funding volunteer efforts appropriately, respect for the skills of volunteer leadership, etc. Read their material and you'll see some wonderful things. UNV also recognizes that the word "volunteer" engenders all sorts of stereotypes (even in other languages) and has tried hard to be as broad in scope and inclusive as possible in what the concept of "volunteering" might cover in many cultures.

5. UNV deserves praise for its vision, but they made a strategic decision that I feel was a major mistake. From the beginning, they refused to create any unifying project for the year. They felt that an international conference (such as the one in Beijing during the International Women's Year) was not very effective in terms of its ultimate usefulness, an opinion with which I agree. But apart from creating a central Web site to share information, UNV insisted that each country should develop its own, independent way of celebrating IYV2001--without any single project or goal to connect these national celebrations together. As I have already expressed to UNV leadership directly, this creates a "Multi-National Year of Volunteers," but it does nothing to stimulate an "International" one. More important, it places IYV2001 squarely in the middle of the internal politics of every nation in the world! Without an external, let's-put-aside-our-differences-so-we-can-link-with-our-global-colleagues reason to get together, the status quo reigns in every country.

6. Now it is nine months before the December 5, 2000 kick-off (International Volunteer Day--and, for some, the 2nd annual VPM Recognition Day) and ten months before the start of the year itself. In some of the developing countries, steering committees have indeed been formed and activities planned (see the IYV2001 Web site)--almost always with government leadership. UNV has decided to put quite a bit of money (I'm not sure of the source) into some sort of an extravagant sound and light show at the UN building in New York (they have hired a show business company to produce it). This is a great idea and may generate publicity at the time, but it is sizzle without steak. They also have a "quilt" idea going, in which any organization can submit photographs of volunteers (again, see their Web site). On December 5, a montage of these photos will be unveiled, creating a huge "quilt" (think AIDS) to represent graphically the diversity of faces of volunteers. Another lovely idea, really. But not tied to anything else, in my opinion.

7. Here and there I have heard of national steering committees in Europe and other continents trying to do something in their respective countries, especially those in which there is a national volunteer

center under government funding. But those nations with the most developed volunteer communities are nowhere with their planning. Again, since there is no external project to motivate people to link together, the inertia of business-as-usual takes over. And so does the politics: Who should convene a steering group? What is a neutral meeting site? Who will get credit? Who will fundraise and who pays for the fundraising? etc., etc. [A special note praising NYAVA, as they are the only volunteerism folks who have moved forward independently to make sure New York City's volunteer community celebrates IYV. They have generously shared their newly-announced [mission statement](#) and welcome comments from colleagues.]

8. Into this vacuum steps IAVE: the International Association for Volunteer Effort. IAVE has been around a long time and has a track record for running biennial World Volunteer Conferences attracting thousands of people from over 90 countries. Leaving aside any pro or con opinions of IAVE, they obviously are a natural "fit" to IYV2001. The first thing IAVE did was move its traditional conference time of late summer to January. And so, on January 14-18, 2001, IAVE's World Volunteer Conference in Amsterdam becomes the first global event for IYV2001 (see <http://www.iave.org>). And it should be an exciting event. Good for them for seizing the opportunity.

9. I hope that Canadians, UK folks, Australians, and people from non-English-speaking countries will respond to this Hot Topic by sharing their national plans for IYV2001. But as an American, I am at a loss. From where I sit--and I have been really looking--I see no activity at all at the national level. I have heard rumors of an American "steering committee" convened with the help of the Junior League, but none of the usual channels of communication have shared any news about this (the committee is mentioned in the IYV Website country list). Points of Light is not taking leadership in spreading the word, although they probably should. One complicating factor there is that Kenn Allen, the operating head of POLF, happens also to be the "World President" of IAVE, presenting some conflict of interest. The Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) supposedly has an internal committee looking at this, but neither their 1998 nor 1999 conference provided an opportunity to make collaborative plans and October 2000 is too late to engage a broad spectrum of people in planning.

What Can We Do?

So that's some background. I find myself wondering: What's wrong with us? What is it about the leaders of volunteers that we cannot grab an opportunity placed in our laps? 2001 could be the chance we've been waiting for to focus attention on the value of volunteers and program managers. It could be the excuse to foster long-sought collaboration among national associations mired in historical antagonisms. It could help agency-based volunteering and all-volunteer associations find common ground. And it could allow us to reach out internationally in ways not dreamed of before.

We need:

- The involvement of every volunteer center, governor's office, state association, DOVIA, specialized professional association, and national organization with affiliates in every state.
- Some common theme or project. ([Possible Ideas](#))

- Some way to communicate both strategies and results.
- A source of funds.

Please--if you are already planning things--let the rest of us know! If you are seeking participants in a project, ask for help! If you feel isolated and don't know what you, as one person can do, post a response and see if someone nearby feels the same way! I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Related Topics: [Image of Volunteering](#) | [Trends and Issues](#) | [Infrastructure to Support Volunteering](#)

Posted 4/18/00

Submitted by Leigh Wintz, CAE, Executive Director, Soroptimist International of the Americas, Philadelphia, PA 19102

Just thought you should know that Service Club Leaders (Soroptimist, Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, National Exchange Club, GFWC and many others) are planning an event to precede our annual conference in November, in Atlanta. Our hosts this year, Civitan and Pilot International, plan to use this event to spotlight the millions of volunteers represented in Service Clubs around the world. We would welcome the opportunity to participate in any events or public relations activities. Each of the organizations that are part of Service Club Leaders Conference are promoting the UN Year in a variety of ways. We would welcome the opportunity to assist UNV, Points of Light or any other organization that coordinate our collaborative efforts to make this year a success. Service Clubs are willing to work together to promote the value of volunteering. I wonder why no one has asked us to participate. Service clubs have been in the business of volunteering for more than 100 years!

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Lillian Kerr Haversat, Ex. Dir. Maine Volunteer Connection, Maine, USA

We have established a statewide volunteer referral center network. This group is now entertaining the possibility of holding volunteer recognition New Year's Eve parties throughout the state. In our cities at bigger locales, in our rural areas at schools, churches, etc. This will then tie into some of the special events planned by regional and local groups throughout the year. The nicest thing about this event, it can serve a number of purposes: awareness of the need for volunteer, recognition, recruitment, and even fund raising. Our "how to" list should be ready by early June. Oh! yes, the parties can be as ambitious as the organizing group wants it to be: small parties in the homes of volunteers, big bashes at a hotel or school, medium sized events at the Grange Halls, etc.

Posted on 4/2/00

Submitted by Roger Tweedy, Chairperson Wellington Volunteer Centre and Volunteering Consultant, Wellington New Zealand

You have raised many issues which impact on even little ol' New Zealand on the other side of the world. Getting the International Year activated in NZ was complicated by a change of government in November last, but we now have full government involvement with the budget allocation for the year accepted in June. The Volunteer Centres hope to take a key role in the year, taking as you have suggested the best ever opportunity to promote volunteering we have ever had.

Posted on 3/31/00

Submitted by Gerald (Jerry) Pannozzo, CVA, Rivington House Health Care Facility, New York, New York, USA

Susan, my initial response was to contact folk with regard to what was happening--my investigative nature. I'm working on my personal issue--not being so reactive. However, what I discovered was I was checking your site almost daily to see responses as my circles (local and international) were in fact limiting. As we end the month I want to state that I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to read the responses. It also reminds me that it was only a year ago that my internet access was limited. We need to keep in mind not everyone has access. Finally, I'm impressed with what people (who ran with the ball) have done. I celebrate their successes and see them as an inspiration for me and hopefully others. Thanks for providing this opportunity for all of us to communicate and posting a wide variety of opinions!

Posted on 3/28/00

Response from UNV- United Nations Volunteer Program

(Due to the length of the response, we had to post it on a separate page.)

Posted by 3/23/00

Submitted by Nancy Amos, International Year of Volunteers, Volunteer Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Very interesting article and lots of great food for thought around this opportunity/challenge. Volunteer Canada is the lead voluntary organization for IYV in Canada. We are working with the government departments "co-leading" the year (Canadian Heritage and Human Resources Development Canada). We began last April by hosting a national Leaders' Forum; the report is available on our web site (<https://volunteer.ca>), along with other materials, including planning kits for the year.

There are five strategic objectives for the year in Canada:

1. Celebrate volunteerism.
2. Promote volunteering for all.
3. Expand the definition of volunteerism in Canada.
4. Improve voluntary organization infrastructure.
5. Develop the voluntary sector knowledge base.

From those objectives, there are four priority areas for action. Tentatively, the activities at the national level look as follows:

1. Promotion / Events / Information

Events: IYV international launch (Dec. 5, 2000) National Volunteer Week 2001 (April 22-28) Youth Volunteerism Summit, Canadian Forum on Volunteerism, August 2001, Vancouver (in conjunction with CIVICUS assembly)

Promotional Resources: four promotional campaigns over the year, each with a different theme

around volunteerism.

Information: Web site, Information Hotline

2. Broadening IYV Engagement: Grantmakers Leadership, communications.
3. Organizational infrastructure and capacity: Toolkits for voluntary organizations and development of on-line education for volunteer managers.
4. Research and knowledge development: Research program

Posted on 3/22/00

[Response from the Points of Light Foundation, plus Susan's Response to POL](#)

(Due to the length of the response, we had to post it on a separate page.)

Posted by 3/22/00

Submitted by DeAnn Lowder, Safe Place/Volunteer Coordinator; Youth Services of Tulsa, Oklahoma, United States

DeeAnn Paisley, Volunteer Recognition Chair of the Tulsa Association of Volunteer Administrators, brought information regarding IYV 2001 to our group before the first of the year. Since that time, a steering committee has been formed in order to plan several events starting with the December 5, 2000 kickoff date and throughout 2001 honoring volunteers and volunteerism. Already with DeeAnn's leadership, the committee has been able to reserve the football stadium in our community where volunteers will get together to form the IYV 2001 logo, have high school bands present, flyover by Nat'l Guard, etc. If my memory serves me well, I believe DeeAnn heard about IYV 2001 at last year's AVA conference. With enthusiasm and leadership, DeeAnn Paisley has initiated getting something planned for IYV 2001 in our community. If other communities were to get organized, this would be great opportunity to showcase, illustrate the importance of volunteers and volunteerism to all of our communities and the world.

Posted 3/20/00

Submitted by Jackie Norris, Executive Director, Metro Volunteers!, Denver, Colorado, USA

Once again, thank you for raising issues we all need to address. I hope you'll include this in your opening session at our Colorado Conference on Volunteerism...a great place to get all the folks here energized about doing something. You've got me going! I plan to bring this up at our "large volunteer center affinity group" meeting in Orlando in June, as well as share some of the great ideas listed here with our state association of Volunteer Centers and DOVIA's. I look forward to the continuing dialogue...and to taking some action.

Posted 3/16/00

Submitted by Rob Jackson, Royal National Institute for the Blind, London, England

I agree completely with your fears Susan, especially in respect to the lack of the international focus. Here in the UK, each separate country is pursuing its own plan for 2001. If we can't be national across the UK, we have no hope of being international! In England, a meeting was held in December to brainstorm ideas for making the most of IYV2001. The first committee meeting arising from that

brainstorm is March 17. I think we might be ready in December 2001! And I say we because, as a VPM, I have to take some of the responsibility for not doing things sooner too.

Where does that leave us? We need to make the most of what is happening but everything really smacks of too little too late. So here is my own solution suggestion. Why don't we make the most of the Energize site being international and form partnerships with volunteer involving agencies in other countries working in similar fields? Through those partnerships we can plan, conduct and publicise joint activities throughout the year. So, to get started, I work for an organisation that provides services to visually impaired people across the UK. I'd love to hear from anyone else in a similar organisation elsewhere in the world who wants to get active in IYV2001.

Posted 3/16/00

Submitted by Irene Goodgame, DVS Tanner Medical Center, GA.

What about "A Year of Sharing, A Year of Caring". This would be diverse enough so that all types of volunteers could be included. It could be the goal of each volunteer group to recruit at least an additional 10% of current membership to add to their rosters. Introduce volunteering to others.

Posted by 3/10/00

Submitted by Sarah H. Elliston , Senior Volunteer Resource Associate, Cincinnati, OHIO

I guess you hit the nail on the head when you pointed out that Kenn Allen has a conflict of interest - I don't think he needs to - in his role he could galvanize both organizations - I don't know the answer, Susan - Maybe if your talk at the statewide conference in Ohio in a few weeks reflects this concern, maybe the vol centers in Ohio will get cracking - And sometimes I think it is not worth trying to teach people what volunteer is - I begin to wonder if we shouldn't call it "community initiatives" thus encompassing community activists and organizers who are so rabidly NOT working with volunteers- (even though their community people are not getting paid) maybe it's time to draw the circle with them by using their terms, instead of constantly telling them they are part of it using our words - does that make any sense at all?

Posted 3/8/00

Submitted by Lori Hutson, Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, TX, USA

Our Houston AVA is looking into what we can do for IYV. Your info on the website is great. I really appreciate the ideas (see [Susan's ideas](#)), it got me starting to think: here's one very easy/inexpensive idea: Add the IYV logo to organization & volunteer newsletters, AVAs/DOVIAs newsletters, website, PRESS RELEASES (might make the person reading wonder, and call to ask for more info.!). Or what about a "thank you" of the day - possibly a gift to volunteers? Some inexpensive container with 365 "Thank you"s or inspirational notes. Or 365 Hershey's hugs & kisses (got milk?) - one for each day for the year. And your photo idea - wouldn't it be great to have the photo in the shape of each state, so they could be put together as a "map" of the USA? That's enough from me. MANY thanks for your creativity - it can be easy to see this as a huge undertaking that requires time & money, you've really given me a little inspiration.

Posted 3/8/00

Submitted by Kathy Cunningham, Manager, Volunteer Services, Baltimore, MD

Johns Hopkins Hospital will address this issue with an exciting program. We have a very large International Services Department with at least 100 foreign-born volunteers who act as translators and tour guides. The Office of Volunteer Services is planning on working with International Services to make 2001 "The Year of the International Volunteer."

We will have international pot lucks, fashion shows, a bulletin board with International displays, singing, dancing, instrumentals, craft exhibits at different times. This will bring in foreign born people from diverse countries. We can also draw from the different foreign groups in the community who have annual festivals at local parks to showcase their heritage. We can encourage our foreign born volunteers to wear Hopkins International Volunteer T-shirts, have a Hopkins table at the festivals and talk about volunteering. We also can have them educate us about volunteerism in their home countries.

On our volunteer application, we ask if the new volunteer can speak a foreign language and could be a translator. This would be a "second job" for the volunteer, one that ties them in with volunteers from their home countries. Since many of our volunteers are Hopkins U students who are foreign born, it gives them a chance to meet countrymen and speak their native language. It is a custom made group for volunteer projects.

Posted 3/7/00

Submitted by Rosemary Fox, Chair, AHA Committee on volunteers, Atlanta, GA

Our healthcare collaboration is planning activities which will coordinate with activities of the IYV. We are made up of members of the AHA Committee on Volunteers, ASDVS, Veteran's Association Voluntary Chiefs, State Auxiliary Leaders are dedicated to revitalizing health care volunteerism. Teams composed of stakeholder leaders have addressed the issues of fundraising, publicity, communication, research & reporting, resources & event planning and vision & values. A three year plan was to coincide with the national conference of ASDVS/Auxiliaries/Volunteers is underway.

- 2000 Orlando- "Blast Off" of Volunteer Summit Campaign (Susan Ellis will be a speaker)
- 2001 St. Louis- Volunteer Summit implementing IYV agenda.
- 2002 Seattle- Evaluation and Celebration of campaign

Local and regional events and promotions will continue throughout the years. Plans are in progress for a national public awareness campaign to publicize the importance of health care volunteerism, accentuating our "best practices" both internally to hospital administration and staff and externally to new audiences in the community. We welcome all those who would like to join us in our campaign!

Posted 3/6/00

Submitted by Michele Louwse, FCSC Director, National Council of YMCAs of Japan, Tokyo, Japan

The "IYV Possibilities" is a great idea starter. After reading that and Susan Ellis's article, I met with my

director to discuss ways in which our organization can help publicize the year, including putting the IYV logo on our letterheads, 2001 calendar, and Xmas cards (with a message inside announcing the opening of the year). We've also thought about setting aside some funds to recognize a Special Volunteer (possibly a continuing award), and using the theme in our promotional materials and speeches, including our CEO's address in the 2000 annual report (released in 2001). Thanks for the wonderful ideas, and for a great motivating piece!

Posted 3/6/00

Submitted by Michelle Jokic, Manager Geelong Volunteer Resource Centre, Victoria

Hi, I'm from a small Volunteer Resource Centre in Geelong, Victoria Australia. I am working on our marketing plan now for the International Year of the Volunteer 2001. We plan to have something happening each month including walkathons, church services and a picture show for volunteers.

Other projects ideas include:

- a corporate design 'bumper' sticker for the IYV 2001.
- mountainous banners on volunteerism at a football game which will be televised throughout Australia.
- street flags
- updating our Website at <http://www.geelongvolunteer.org.au>
- a National Volunteer Conference in 2001
- a booklet for volunteer recognition ideas for the \$1.00 budget agencies up to the \$40,000 funded agencies for volunteer programs.
- theme parks, museums, art centres and bus companies having free days during 2001 for volunteers.
- Lions club and the Rotarians sponsoring us to create a volunteer coupon booklet.
- a photograph collage in the front windows of our shopping stores (a well known shopping centre)
- messages for 2001 on our local milk dairy cartons.

Here's an idea for everyone: Why don't you contact all businesses and invite them to display "IYOV 2001" on their screen savers during a particular week? Same for colleges and UNI's, all not-for-profits, etc.

Posted 3/6/00

Submitted by Carol Friedland, CVA, Deputy Director, Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, New York, NY, USA

Thank you, Susan, for saying what we need to hear. As volunteer administrators we should take advantage of the PR opportunities offered to us and I do agree that the national organizations have failed to follow up on IYV. I also want to thank you for highlighting the work of NYC/IYV. The credit goes to Rustie Brooke, NY AVA and Norma Gindes, United Hospital Fund, whose creative leadership has brought together an impressively diverse group of nonprofit and government agencies, coalitions

and corporations. The door is not closed: any New York City group involved with volunteerism, that is willing to work, is welcome.

Posted 3/3/00

Submitted by Thaddeus M. Figlock, Director of Volunteers, Marian Manor Nursing Home, MA

I like the "I am a volunteer, too!" idea using labels at conferences. But I think we need a whole year of "I am a volunteer" activities in every community. Organizations - businesses, civic groups, schools,... almost everyone except hermits involve volunteer action (and with the internet and virtual volunteering that can change.) Organizations could make commitments to "put volunteers first" and announce / thank / mention a volunteer at the beginning of all important meetings and functions for the year. Imagine... Every chairman of the board at every hospital mentioning at the start of every board meeting -Do you know so and so, she is a wonderful volunteer... Every school committee meeting starting out with a salute to a volunteer... The mention may take a minute, but what a message if the first minute of every meeting would focus on volunteers. It should snowball - the minutes to every meeting would then mention a volunteer - the news coverage would mention a volunteer.

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