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What's Hot, What's Not

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Last week, in trying to locate something, I found myself browsing the [Archive of my past Hot Topics](#). Over the past six years, I've written 63 of these essays (actually, three were guest authored), and we've posted well over 700 responses from all over the world. Quite remarkable...and definitely one of the highlights for me of this amazing technology.

Re-visiting my past writing, however, made me decide on a different approach for this month. I started asking myself which topics still made me heat up. What's remained "hot," and maybe gotten even steamier?

The very first Hot Topic appeared in [April 1997](#), coinciding with the Presidents' Summit on Volunteering/America's Future. I titled it "Is the Challenge Recruiting Citizens to Volunteer or Making Sure Agencies Are Ready for Volunteers?" and it could be applied today - word-for-word - if you simply substitute "USA Freedom Corps" and "Bush Administration" for any references to the Summit or President Clinton. This is either impressive as fortune telling or very depressing! And don't be fooled by the American theme. The basic issue is quite international.

In 1998, I posed [Some Nagging Questions](#):

- Why do so many people affiliate only with directors of volunteers within their own setting specialty and not also with the field at large?
- Why don't we read and write more?
- Why aren't we using our networks for clout and advocacy, as well as for self-education?
- Why don't we involve volunteers who are leaders of other volunteers in our professional associations?

These still nag at me today, just as [The Wall of Executive Indifference](#) remains the biggest windmill our field must tilt at. As I said in 1999, "No matter how long I've been in this field, I simply cannot understand the inability (or unwillingness) of otherwise smart, creative leaders to embrace the enormous potential of volunteer involvement." I noted how rarely the topic of volunteers is included

in professional education for top administrators or, when it does appear, they don't attend the sessions. Executives understand fund raising, it seems, but not people raising. This was also one of my themes in [If the Whole World is Changing, Can Volunteerism Stay the Same?](#)

Last year I focused on the pressing need to deploy volunteers in significant ways beyond "helping" ([Tackling Causes, Not Symptoms: New/Old Roles for Volunteers](#)). I asked: "Are we engaging enough volunteers, enough of the time, in advocacy and activism along with direct services?" Of course, the very question presupposes that agencies WANT activists or prefer helpers.

I also realized that, from somewhat different angles, I talked about young volunteers three times:

- [Mixed Messages: What Do We Really Think about Young Volunteers?](#)
- ["Youth Involvement" in Our Field](#)
- [It's Time to Start Counting Volunteers Seriously](#)

I noted that we speak glowingly about the importance of making sure children, teenagers and young adults develop habits of service as early as possible so that they will be life-long volunteers. But, in practice, too many organizations are afraid of giving young volunteers meaningful work to do or simply aren't creative enough to do it well. I further observed that we see a division - based on prejudice on both sides - between younger and older volunteers, each of which feels the other is "less" community involved. Our ambivalence on the subject is further demonstrated by the recent Independent Sector decision to stop counting the volunteer contributions of anyone under the age of 21 in their statistics on the field.

Finally, I think that the question of vocabulary is definitely an ongoing quandary. Sarah Jane Rehnborg dealt with this in her guest Hot Topic, [The Limits of the V Word](#), and I returned to it in terms of the International Year of Volunteers, [Who is Celebrating IYV? Connecting the "Streams of Service](#) More and more people are repelled, not attracted, by the word "volunteer." What does it mean when others use terms such as *community service*, or *service-learning*, or *donated professional services*? Do we recognize ourselves in these projects? Do such participants understand their relationship to us? How come the school-based service world is so disconnected from the volunteer world? And what about all the discussion of "civil society" and "civic engagement"? Shouldn't volunteerism practitioners be front and center when these themes surface?

So I'm challenging you to re-read and re-consider some issues, sharing your opinions about where we ought to put our attention. What do YOU think are the current "hot" buttons in our field? Please let us all know. I may pick up some of them as future Hot Topic essays in this space. And maybe some of you can be guest contributors, too.

Related Topics: [Trends and Issues](#) | [Profession of Volunteer Management](#)

Editor's Note: Because we reviewed past hot topics in this current hot topic, some responders chose to comment on the archived topics. We have posted these responses here but still encourage

responders to also share with us what they think is "hot" right now.

Submitted on 02Jul14 by Cathy Philipky, Volunteer Coordinator - St. Francis Home, Wisconsin, USA

I agree that you need to start children early to be "life-long" volunteers. I work for a nursing home and my goal is not only to develop youth into long-term volunteers, but to also see the benefits of working with the elderly and the long-term health care field.

When I first started coordinating the volunteer program, I was told not to have anyone under 16 volunteer because they would be a waste of my time. I have found many volunteers under the age of 16 who have been more reliable than some of my adult volunteers. They enjoy volunteering and the residents really enjoy the contact.

I would like to see more families getting involved in volunteering - parents spending time with their children, having a sense of community, and helping others at the same time. How can we show them that volunteering is worth while, important, and it does not take that much of a time commitment?

Submitted on 2002July3 by Colette Mandin, Coordinator of Volunteers, The Support Network, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

What gets the heat going? I want to respond to your statement about executives understanding fundraising but not people raising. This is true in our area as well and is reflected in planning, priority setting and attitudes. And yet, the value of contributed time for organizations often supercedes the financial support.

I'm not sure what the huge leap is in understanding that one is about cultivating relationships, and the other is about cultivating relationships! One is about supporting the organization and the other is about supporting the organization! Because the means to the end are different, there is a sudden leap of understanding. People raising is hugely important to both fundraising and volunteer support.

Volunteers are often donors, donors are often volunteers.

There sometimes, though, seems to be a black hole between the management of the two. How can we, as volunteer human resource managers, get that message out?

(This answer was also posted to the response page of [Wall of Executive Indifference.](#))

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