

[News and Hot Topics](#) » Who is Celebrating IYV? Connecting the "Streams of Service"

Who is Celebrating IYV? Connecting the "Streams of Service"

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

January

2001

Happy new year and happy new millennium to everyone! And, of course, happy International Year of Volunteers 2001 (For those of you, still not aware of the event, check out the <https://www.unv.org/> site.) It's finally here and I hope it will be wonderful for each of you.

As the January Hot Topic is usually reflective, I come to my keyboard asking myself: what do I most wish for in this unique year? The answer is: recognition of our scope and influence.

Sometime in the last decade, someone coined the phrase "streams of service" to encompass the major populations that attend the annual Points of Light conference. The metaphor was intended to convey the image of various forms of service, all starting from different sources, eventually meeting and combining into a mighty river with a strong current. It's a great metaphor. Unfortunately, in our daily work, what we have is more like a bunch of puddles.

IYV provides an interesting prism. Who sees what through it? Who feels affected by the Year and intends to celebrate it--and who is oblivious to it? Let's map the potential pool of people who could be touched by IYV.

Stream 1: They Definitely Know They're Volunteers or Connected to Them

If you're reading this Hot Topic, you're probably part of this core audience! The volunteerism circle includes all those who self-identify with the word "volunteer" in a direct way and who feel connected to the "field" of volunteer management. This means all agency-related volunteer "programs" plus those all-volunteer organizations such as national service clubs who consciously consider their "members" to be volunteers. IYV is for everyone focused on volunteer work, from whatever perspective.

But, if you are working in a nonprofit organization, ask yourself whether or not the members of your board of directors consider themselves "volunteers" (which they are) and therefore feel celebrated

by IYV. For that matter, have YOU planned to include this key group in your IYV festivities?

Stream 2: They're Volunteers, but May Not Identify with the "Field"

As we all know, there are many, many activities that involve non-paid workers who either never apply the word "volunteer" to their participants or who somehow never get connected to the formal volunteerism field (Stream #1). A partial list includes:

- faith communities
- neighborhood and tenant organizations
- political campaigners
- fire, ambulance and rescue companies
- foster families
- alumni organizations
- community parade and festival organizers

Sure, some leaders of these groups have found their way to volunteerism conferences or to the field's literature, but mostly they work separately. Will they learn about and participate in IYV?

Now ask yourself: what do we consider *donors* to be? Are they "volunteers" in any sense of the word and ought they consider themselves included in the IYV celebration?

Stream 3: They're Not Sure They're Volunteers (and We're Not Either)

The Corporation for National Service has muddied the waters. On the one hand, they administer RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program), which everyone agrees is "truly" a volunteer effort. But they also run the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs, both of which have a minimum income requirement for participants and were conceived as a combination income supplement and community service project. Further, CNS has AmeriCorps and the other full-time stipended programs. Are these volunteers? When does a living allowance or stipend become a low wage (and vice versa)? If they're volunteers, how come they have to obey all the laws applicable to federal employees, such as the Hatch Act (forbidding partisan political activity)?

For purposes of IYV, will we include CNS program participants in the celebration? Do they think of themselves as "volunteers"? What is the connection between "service" and "volunteering"--and does it matter?

Now add in the ongoing debate about "mandated" volunteers or, as Anthea Hoare says, "voluntolds." These include people fulfilling hours of service through court orders, graduation requirements, or welfare reform projects. Where do they fit into IYV?

Stream 4: The Service-Learning Field

Maybe service-learning fits under Stream #3, but it is so huge that it deserves independent status. Service-learning has evolved its own specialized "field." Educators and students have immersed themselves in all varieties of experiential learning and service, from required hours of service to

totally volunteer projects done by extracurricular clubs. Students from elementary school through graduate school engage in all sorts of activities that apply classroom learning to the real world. Of course, in a majority of cases, their entry point to the community is through us--those who lead volunteer programs. But we often have a translation problem. Some students don't like to be called "volunteers"; they do "community service." So, does IYV relate to them?

I once did a workshop at the National Service-Learning Conference that I called "Words Apart or Worlds Apart?" Mainly nonprofit organization representatives attended, while the educators went to other workshops. The query remains unanswered.

Stream 5: Proponents of "Civil Society"

Coined by academics, the term "civil society" has swept across the globe. It means different things to different people, but at its heart the concern for civil society revolves around the engagement of citizens in their own communities. This may mean acts of common courtesy, voting, local decision-making, and other activities, but it clearly also involves volunteering. What other action allows people to put their bodies where their beliefs are? Yet, for the most part, the word "volunteer" is rarely uttered in discussions of civil society (which is why we sell one of the few books that does, thanks to Australian Margaret Bell's wonderful chapter in "Civil Society at the Millennium"). Why not? And will the proponents of civil society see themselves in any aspect of IYV?

What IYV Can Do

The potential of IYV is to break down the dams and build bridges between these streams! Unless and until we recognize our connection with each other, instead of our differences, we cannot work together towards our mutual goal: making the world a better place. IYV offers us a neutral meeting place. If we can come together to celebrate the volunteer aspects of all our work, we will open new communication.

Energize's Look Back to Look Ahead project (*Webmaster note: The tips shared from this project are located in the [History](#) section of our library*) is but one idea for linking everyone in a community with some stake in citizen participation. For example, NYC/IYV has already scored a coup by collaborating with the "Downtown Alliance" to place a plaque commemorating the spot where the first all-volunteer organization in NYC was formed in 1737--the Volunteer Fire Department of New York. Think of the impact on visibility and on showing the connections among us if every town and city erected even one or two such historic plaques celebrating volunteer accomplishments.

Whatever technique you use, make sure you invite everyone who ought to be cheering alongside you this IYV. If you do, you'll find 2002 and beyond to be much more powerful.

Have I missed any "streams"? What have you done or do you plan to do to reach across these sectors? If you are part of Stream 2 through 5, how do you think your "stream" views IYV?

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Posted 7/24/01

Submitted by Lynda Leicester, Manchester England

As manager of the largest volunteer department in Manchester, England and a long-term member of the National Association of Volunteer Managers, I am disappointed at the lack of interest here in this country. Locally my hospital hasn't a clue about IYV, even the other Volunteer agencies/charities to whom I am a host. My staff (5) all wear the IYV ribbon and as yet I have not been asked once what it represents!! We held a Special Volunteer Party during our National Volunteer Week and IYV was a big part of the Agenda. Otherwise not much interest anywhere I'm afraid to say. Thanks for the regular info. Its great!

Posted 2/21/01

Submitted by Hillary Roberts, Director/Project Linus NJ, Inc., NJ/USA

Think Big, Be Creative, Go Global.

With those words I began my active partnership with IYV2001. Since last November, my organization has been planning a project in New Jersey. We have not run into any roadblocks, nor did we sit and wait for direction. We are self-motivated by the thought that global volunteerism exists in our world. I am saddened to hear that your readership has not found the same solidarity that we have. If you visit www.iyv2001.org and hit the United States link you will see hundreds of participants in the USA registered. If you visit the main site, www.iyv2001.org and visit Partners & Events...you may be surprised by the number and more importantly excitement that has been created in praise of IYV2001. Further, most states have some form of volunteerism headquarters. Perhaps a Volunteer Center, Historical Society, Community Leader or Government-based agency that would be more than happy to share their time and energy in forming a committee that on the local level, can come together to create a one day event. I hope each of you finds a way to embrace IYV2001.

Posted 1/18/01

Submitted by Frank Pomata, Outreach Coordinator, IYV2001-NYC, New York, NY USA

Here in New York City, we're utilizing IYV2001 to address the very divisions you mention, Susan. Our IYV-NYC group has worked very hard (for over 2 years now) to bring together various groups/streams in our metro region to collaborate on a variety of projects related to IYV2001. We hope to use IYV2001 as a springboard for future projects, collaborations and coalition-building. Best of all, we've been working in a grassroots fashion with ideas and involvement from people throughout the City and Long Island. It has not always been easy, and not everyone has accepted the invitation, but we're still plugging along. Along the way, we've crashed through some existing barriers and built some new relationships with much promise for the future. I hope that more cities do the same before this special year is over and the moment is lost.

Posted 1/10/01

Submitted by Shawn McCann, Coordinator of IYV, MACA, Coordinator of Volunteers, Stanton Health Board, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada

Board volunteers are our most important volunteers in our tiny, isolated Northern communities, where the President of the Soccer association is also the head coach, and chief fundraiser (More than likely the Girl Guide leader, Winter Carnival coordinator, and a volunteer firefighter as well). The issue of whether a board member is recognized as being a volunteer is an issue of great importance up here. What is an issue is who is supposed to plan the celebration of this year? The volunteers that are already over-extending themselves to ensure that, though their community is small, the level of activities available competes with Southern cities? When a few people form the backbone of the community through their volunteering, how do we mobilize those in the community that have not been past volunteers to plan the celebration for those who do? I cannot get over the number of times I have been forwarded the name of certain busy volunteers, as the ideal candidates for helping to coordinate and plan the International Year of Volunteers events.

Posted 1/10/01

Submitted by Sarah Jane Rehnberg, Consultant in Volunteerism and Community Service to the RGK Center on Philanthropy and Community Service at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA

Just a word on words.... If I recall correctly, the first time that I heard the expression "streams of service" was from Harris Wofford, director of the Corporation for National Service. He had coined this expression in an attempt to capture the worlds of AmeriCorps/Vista AmeriCorps and the other CNS programs with the world of volunteerism and other service endeavors. He also spoke of flying the plane -- the twin engines of service and other expressions that served to carry his analogy a step further. I would be interested in knowing if anyone has a different memory for the origin of this expression. If this is the point of origin, it also suggests that he was grappling with this dilemma of how does one bring together all those who serve for the good of others, regardless of the variation in the pay status. Here in Austin, Texas our DOVIA is introducing the year's program with an IYV event where the Mayor will be speaking.

Posted 1/9/01

Submitted by Debbie Thompson, Assistant Director of Outreach and Director of Adult Ed. Faith Lutheran Church, IL/USA

Susan has hit it on the head again. I work in stream 2 in the area of religious volunteering. Although we all know we are volunteers, whenever I try to use professional volunteerism materials for training or development, I get told we don't fit the need for that. After advocating for more professional attitudes and connections, I was elected assistant outreach chairman and the first thing I asked myself is, "Now what do I do?" Thanks for giving me an idea for how to begin the year and a way to publicize it to our congregation. This will be the opening topic for our newsletter column and can help put into place the planning for the rest of the year's activities.

Posted 1/8/01

Submitted by Cindy Fairs, Okanagan Volunteer Management Services, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

Coincidentally, I recently attended a workshop where this very topic came up at our table. "Who do you consider to be volunteers? Are they only people from the community who willingly give of their time and talents or should we include those who are required to do community service as well? What about the students that are required to fulfill a minimum requirement of 30 hours before graduation?" and so on and so on... This made for some interesting and somewhat controversial conversation. Having worked in this field as a Coordinator of Volunteers (and Consultant) for several years now, I've had the opportunity to experiment with many groups of volunteers and I am of the opinion that "yes" they are all volunteers no matter how you look at them. What we expect and how we recognize them however, may look a little different from one to the next. In developing our policies, the absolutes are defined more clearly. For example if a "Community Youth Action" volunteer is required to work a certain number of hours in exchange for monies that are applied towards university or college, do we acknowledge this volunteer in the same way that we acknowledge all of the others who may not be acquiring these type of benefits? Not likely. We may still recognize this volunteer for their dedication, commitment and hardwork but we may do it in a different way. It's important to recognize that even if they are being (subsidized) directly or non-directly it somehow means they are benefiting in other ways that volunteers traditionally have not. In the end, is it going to make a difference in how they view the world? Have they made a positive change or difference by the work they have contributed? Has our society also benefited? Let's hope so! Thanks Susan for providing a forum for people to exchange their opinions and information openly!

Posted 1/8/01

Submitted by Sister M. Peter Bernard, SCMC, Director Public Relations/Volunteers, Connecticut

Although I was somewhat aware of IYV it did not have the full impact on my mind until I read this month's e-mail update ([how to subscribe](#)) of which I am always glad to receive. The dilemma you put forth on who is a volunteer has been tossed around here at Holy Family as we have all of the above helping out at various times. Now that I have been put to rights about IYV, I plan on doing something about it. I have a work study student who will be returning in middle January and she will be the pivotal person in pulling this off. Thank you for keeping all of us in this field of uncertainty and need abreast of what is happening.

Posted 1/5/01

Submitted by Bonnie Esposito, Director, Minnesota Office of Citizenship and Volunteer Services, Minnesota, USA

Good analysis, Susan, of the "Streams". I think we worry too much about the "words". All persons mentioned do valuable service and need to be honored and recognized, no matter what they call themselves or their service. I believe this year is a golden opportunity for those of us in the "First

Stream" to do a better job collaborating with, recognizing and honoring ALL streams. We certainly are striving toward that goal in Minnesota and would welcome examples and successes from other places.

Posted 1/5/01

Submitted by Cathleen Coward, , Arvada, Colorado

The potential of IYV is to break down the dams and build bridges between these streams! After reading this paragraph, I thought that the CNS programs should be included in this celebration. As a former director of a FGP program, I feel a stipend of \$2.55 does help to start them volunteering. However, other reasons take over after that, and the Grandparents are truly volunteers who need some financial assistance to allow them to volunteer. The Americorps programs also should qualify. These programs often mean that the participants become lifelong volunteers. Recognizing all of them promotes volunteerism.

Posted 1/5/01

Submitted by Lynn Harshman, Director,Community Life Center, Fort Gordon, Georgia, USA

I think Ms. Ellis has hit the nail on the head! Not only do I echo her words but add that until we in the business behave as professionals and demand to be treated as managers, program developers,marketing experts, etc. we will continue to be an "after-thought". Sadly, until there are more males in this field we will continue to be "patted on the head" and thanked for all of our work once a year during National Volunteer Week.

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