The Correlation between Time Donors and Money Donors

By Susan J. Ellis

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All research shows that people who volunteer tend to give more money to charity than people who do not. This often-quoted finding only tells part of the philanthropy story. As leaders of volunteers, we need to make sure our organizations see that money donors and time donors are closely intertwined – and that people move in and out of both roles over a lifetime, even within the same organization. On an ongoing basis, we need to be cultivating *all* supporters of our organizations because they *all* have the potential to contribute or connect us to money, time, expertise, and community contacts.

Start by understanding the key *similarities* between volunteers and donors:

- Both must be found and nurtured.
- Both must come to believe in your cause and in your organization.
- Both must value philanthropic activity.
- Both must feel that their contribution can be helpful – and then see that it indeed made a difference.
- Both need to be recognized.
- Both can generate a ripple effect of goodwill, community education, and other positive promotion to bring in even more supporters.
- Both can eventually stop contributing.

This list makes it clear that many of the activities we do in volunteer management are aligned with what the staff in the development office are doing, and vice versa.

Now consider the list of *differences:*

- The action desired from the donor is to give money, which is comparatively simple to do. Funds can be given online, mailed in, or telephoned and all amounts are accepted at any time.

Volunteering is not "one size fits all" and is far more complicated, for both the organization and the doer. The "actions" desired range from quick help to an intensive commitment of time and talent.

- Money is easier to control than people. Once an organization receives a donor's money, it is in the bank to use. The gift of time requires continuous contact with volunteers, who need all sorts of management and are less predictable as a resource.
- Apart from some political and ethical considerations, an organization will happily accept money from just about any source – and donors expect their gifts to be accepted. Prospective volunteers must undergo an application and screening process. Not everyone is accepted or can volunteer on his or her own terms.
- Donors can contribute once and, depending on the size of their check, make an enormous contribution in a few minutes of their time. They only have to think about your organization occasionally. To have a sizeable effect, volunteers must remain involved for a duration of time. Volunteers must maintain enthusiasm for your cause on an ongoing basis.
- Giving money is a low-risk action. It certainly may diminish the donor's resources, but physically, the donor can remain far away and uninvolved – and is rarely held liable for what happens once the money has been received. Volunteering, on the other hand, can be a risky activity. The person must be engaged in the work of the organization, which brings the possibility (even if a low probability) of injury or liability.
- Donors need very little else besides money. Volunteers need skills, personality, accountability, and a schedule that meshes with the work of the organization.
- Death ends volunteering, but may generate new money.

Implications

Leaders of volunteers must position the contribution of *time donors* as a critical component of an organization's mix of resources. First, volunteers give expertise, care, and effort that, in themselves, allow the organization to spend all of its money and then do *more*. Second, the true *value* of volunteer time is not limited to marketplace wage equivalency. Third – and this is the point we don't make often enough – volunteers are also a potential source of *money*.

It is gospel in fundraising that donors must be "cultivated." While unexpected gifts of large sums are exciting, donors most often start with much smaller amounts of money. Development officers take a long-range view, nurturing regular donors towards increasing their gifts over time. The ultimate is estate planning, through which an organization knows that, if it bides its time, after the donor dies a big check is going to come in.

There is rarely similar long-range thinking when it comes to volunteers, despite evidence that cultivation of time donors leads to the giving of more time *and* more money. Some people move in and out of volunteering as time and funds allow during their lives. Some contribute service when they are young and have less income or, conversely, when they have the luxury to volunteer after financial success. A retired person on a fixed income may volunteer while considering a future cash gift through estate planning. The head of household who writes the donation check may encourage other members of the family to support the same cause with volunteer effort.

The moral? Never assume that volunteers have no money to give or that they will not give it!

There is also evidence that annual donors can lose interest over time, but that being asked to share their time and talent revitalizes their commitment to give money – even if they do not accept the invitation to volunteer. In addition, money may follow volunteers from their employers as matching funds and from family and friends who want to support a volunteer's devotion to a cause.

Last but not least, volunteers provide *access* to tangible items: donations of goods and services, loans of equipment and space (and even money), and other resources they can solicit from their employers, family, friends, and circle of contacts.

When organizations totally separate time donors and money donors – in long-range planning, staffing, budgeting, and executive attention – they are missing endless opportunities. Development officers and directors of volunteer involvement are both engaged in *friend raising* – cultivating supporters of their organization's mission for the long-term.

- *Have you seen first-hand the connection between volunteers and money donors? Did you plan for it or did you discover it happening on its own?*
- *Do you and the development staff meet regularly to compare the lists of volunteers and donors and discuss what you find? How is this working for you?*
- *Do you ask volunteers to help you locate donations, in-kind services, and other resources in the community?*
- *How do we maximize the positive about volunteers leading to money without raising the negative attitude of "using" volunteer contributions mainly as a means to the end of getting cash?*

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Submittd 29 July 2010 by Andrea Henry, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center,
Director, Volunteer Services, Lebanon NH U.S.A.
I read this article with interest. I have recently surveyed peers in Health Care Volunteer Management and discovered many of us choose not to share our volunteer lists with the Development Offices in our organizations. I believe this is because we have not recognized the opportunities for partnering in our engagement with our communities.

I have recently starting meeting with colleagues who work in Development in an attempt to learn how we can work together to steward our similiar groups of donors and volunteers. We have much to learn from each other.

Thank you for bring attention to this timely topic.

Submitted 7 July 2010, anonymously

This is so apropos! Just last Friday, I learned that our very first e-newsletter project (which I wrote and submitted to marketing and only needed final touches on) was being downgraded because it was decided that our Graphic Arts staff member's limited time means he can only work on projects attached to financial return on investment! It is a sad perspective that needs to change, and I will be using the article to build a presentation to management to increase their absolute understanding and buy-in that volunteers ARE ROI.