



STRATEGIES FOR STARTING A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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PREFACE

This paper is an outline of the steps required to start a volunteer centre. You will find that this same plan could be applied not only to a volunteer centre but to any new community group. It has been written for people in British Columbia, Canada, but it is suitable for a wide variety of situations. I would like to suggest that those outside the province should check their regulations with respect to the registration procedures.

I was instrumental in developing a volunteer centre in Victoria, B. C. It was an exciting and stimulating experience and I hope that this paper will encourage others to undertake a similar venture. To provide some insight into the practical application of these ideas, I have enclosed sections in framed boxes entitled Personal Perspective. These are my own personal experiences or techniques used. They can be read in conjunction with the paper or can be ignored if found to be irrelevant. It should be stressed that this is not a manual on operating a volunteer centre but is only suggesting a step-by-step plan for starting one. The paper begins from the formulation of an idea and records the development necessary to lay firm foundations for a volunteer centre. I have used the term "volunteer centre" throughout. This term could be replaced by "volunteer bureau" or "volunteer action centre". Each community will need to consider the title most appropriate for itself. This is only a guide. Each community is different and will need to vary the outline. However, my hope is that the paper will give you helpful information and, in addition, the confidence to undertake the development of a similar community service.

I. THE FIRST STEPS

Volunteers and Volunteer Centres

A volunteer is a person who is willing to give time and energy without pay to help the community become a better place or, more directly, to help another person. Volunteers are all ages, all types, all religions, all colors, all income groups and all sizes. In fact, volunteers are people of such diversity and complexity that no one could make enough categories to cover all of them.

Community services of every type depend on volunteers. They start organizations and keep them going and when an organization has outlived its usefulness, they ignore it or deliberately dismantle it. Volunteers are people, but people who see a little further and a little wider than non-volunteers. You can start a community organization without funds, premises, or typewriters, but you can never start one without people. The reasons that motivate people to volunteer are very varied. Some are altruistic and some are self-oriented, but most are a combination of the two. The important thing is that people who volunteer are committed to what they are doing and believe it to be worthwhile.

In recent years, our communities have responded to dozens of diverse needs -- battered babies, increase in suicides, the lack of cultural/recreational facilities or specific problems for handicapped people. In this paper, we are concerned with the strategies required to start an organization in the community that will provide opportunities for citizens to find individually meaningful volunteer work and at the same time meet expressed community needs, or, conversely, help organizations in the community to find sufficient numbers of volunteers. Our concern is voluntary action and how to start a volunteer centre. The volunteer centre is a resource centre in a very real sense. It acts as a place to which any person can come to discover how best she/he can make a worthwhile contribution by giving time, skill and energy to an organization. Each community agency can register its need for voluntary help and through the volunteer centre obtain suitable helpers. So the centre becomes a resource to the community -- an information centre on volunteerism for both groups. The centre staff are in a position to advise organizations on setting up and administering programs incorporating voluntary help, plan training sessions and provide workshops for all aspects of volunteer activity such as service volunteers, board members, and self-help groups. It can also co-ordinate public relations efforts, and stimulate interest in voluntary activity. In addition, the centre becomes a place where a great deal of information on individual and group activities is recorded and available.

(See Supplement #1: "What Does A Volunteer Centre Do?")

So the basic ingredient needed to develop a volunteer centre is a person (or people). This person has an idea -- this person is probably you! You or your organization have seen a need and now have to discover if other people in the community recognize it too. Then you will have to find one or two other people who will help you find out what a volunteer centre is all about. To have a community organization succeed there must be support for it and you will have to explain your idea to some key people in your community. Then there must be an all-out effort to arouse interest through the area, possibly by holding a community meeting or conference. At this meeting, the idea can be discussed more fully. Here a core group of people who are prepared to put in time and effort to plan necessary action will emerge. This group, the Steering Committee, will plan and direct the start-up phase and set policy for the volunteer centre. Your plan for starting might look like this:

TIME CHART

IDEA
5 minutes to 5 years

TALK IT UP!
8 to 12 weeks

GATHERING SUPPORT
6 to 12 weeks

- COMMUNITY MEETING
1 day
- PLANNING FOR ACTION
4 to 12 weeks

Here is your plan in more detail:

THE IDEA

There has to be some spark that sets the fuse. There must be someone, or several people who believe there is a need in the community. They must be enthusiastic, have a lot of energy and may even need to be a little mad! Every project needs someone who has an idea and realizes that it may be possible to develop it.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

The centre I started out with — from the egg, as it were — followed closely along a course similar to the plan laid out here. A social worker in the local social planning office knew the community extremely well and was aware that many organizations were mourning the demise of a former bureau. I had an IDEA — and became interested in the operation and concept of a volunteer centre. I walked into the social worker's office one day and before long, we were already at the "TALK IT UP" stage.

TALK IT UP!

So the idea has been born. You know you want to start a volunteer centre and you may have found another person or two who share your enthusiasm. You are aware of the need, but you and your associates may be the only people in the community who have recognized it! The first thing to do is to assure yourselves that you are on the right track.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

To discover how other centres started and to see if my experience was part of a pattern, I did a survey of centres across Canada in the summer of 1978. Of the centres responding, 45% were started with the support of one organization or through the energy of one person. In actual fact, it is likely that the figure should be much higher, but through lack of historical records or individuals' unwillingness to blow their own trumpets, this was the proportion reported. I also established that it takes a volunteer centre from a few months to three years to get underway. Of all centres replying, the average length of time taken was one year and seven months.

There are two important things that should be done at this point:

Assess the need:

It is all very well for you to believe there is a need, but you will have to develop some way of identifying this more clearly. (See Supplement #2: "Needs Assessment")

Ask the questions:

- Which organizations would use a centre...health, education, cultural, recreational, social?
- Who is the target group?
- How many people are you hoping to be of service to?
- Who will benefit?
- Are there organizations who need help in using volunteers well?
- Are there organizations who have not yet developed plans for using volunteers?

After finding out the answers to those or other questions you may find more relevant, be sure to find out how many agencies and projects there are who may need volunteers.

It is hard to discover how many people may want or need to volunteer. However, most centres find that if jobs are carefully thought out and properly presented and if it is an appropriate volunteer job, people will volunteer.

Check out what a volunteer centre is and does:

- Local social planning councils (by whatever names).
- Volunteer centres in other cities or towns. You will find that some rural areas have developed special types of centres.
- Regional or provincial agencies or organizations that have specialist knowledge. For example, in British Columbia, we have the Voluntary Action Resource Centre in Vancouver that has information specifically for volunteer groups.
- Provincial and federal government departments.
- Local libraries, university and specialist libraries. (See Supplement #3: "Core Library About Volunteerism")
- National organizations that cater to voluntary non-profit organizations. For example, the Canadian Association of Volunteer Bureaux/Centres and the Canadian Council On Social Development.
- Knowledgeable people in your own community with experience in non-profit groups.

GATHERING SUPPORT

By now you will have:

- Assessed and confirmed the need for a volunteer centre in your community.
- Gathered a large amount of information about volunteer centres from a variety of sources.

You and your fellow enthusiasts will want to get down to work to lay a good foundation on which to build community support. This can be divided into five parts.

- 1) Preparing information to share with others. This may need to be done in a variety of ways:

- preparation of a brief.
- preparation of a formal presentation -- including brief, diagrams, or charts to put on the wall or duplicate for individuals.
- preparation of talks for various groups.
- preparation of a simple brochure.
- preparation of answers to questions you may be asked.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Preparing a brief: Some tips that have helped me:

Decide why you are writing a brief. Then you will know what to stress.

Keep it short and clear, but don't sacrifice important back-up material.

Include name, brief general background. State your need, objectives, scope and limitations -- all carefully thought out!

Make it look good, well-typed, and well-spaced. One "expert" suggested purple paper...something to make it stand out!

Names of sponsors or other supportive groups.

N.B.: If you or your organization are asking for money, more detailed information will be needed and a tentative budget prepared.
(See Supplement #4: "Budget Outline")

- 2) Find and talk with key people in the community. To ensure a successful start for your organization, it is important to explain your plans to the key people in your community, so that they will be sympathetic to your cause -- or at least knowledgeable. Often these people are busy and

over-extended and you may not be able to get their active support although this is worth aiming for. However, good will is very valuable and can make the difference between success and failure.

Who are the key people?

The best way I have found to discover this, especially if you are fairly new to the community, is by a system devised by Stanley Levin, reported in the 1976 Proceedings of the Association of Volunteer Bureaux Inc. He discusses how to identify the key people in the community and maintains that a reliable method is by developing a cross-reference system based on local reputations. Through selecting recognized leaders, you can draw up a list of the most influential people. (See Supplement #5: Stanley Levin's Plan)

It has been documented that if a project or program has the support of the influential community people, it is twice as likely to be successful. Levin also makes the point that the "cause of volunteerism" does not have the appeal that many other community concerns enjoy, and that it is therefore even more necessary to plan community involvement carefully.

By whatever method you choose to enlist support, you will be able to develop a list of the people you should talk to about your project. If you use Stan Levin's plan, you may want to add one or two names that YOU feel are valuable. Some people, who may not be seen as community leaders or opinion-makers, will work especially well with you. However, make sure that everyone agrees on the philosophy and goals of the proposed community service.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I did not know of Stan Levin's plan when we started the Victoria Volunteer Bureau, but in fact I did develop a strategy quite similar. In this way, there were people in the social service field, business, and church communities and local politicians who were all aware of the project. This had an added benefit -- it was possible to approach several of these people to become members of the Interim Board of the Society when it was formed.

It is worth spending time talking to people at this stage. You will be glad you did. Not only do you arouse interest in the community, but you get a clearer picture of your objectives from discussing your plan with others. The people you talk to will have a wide variety of experiences in many fields, and you may find you have missed some important point. You may also discover that your planning is pretty vague in some respects.

3) Discover where opposition is likely to arise...

Who will oppose this plan?

Why will they oppose it?

What can we do to reduce opposition or modify our approach to reach consensus?

It may take you some time to answer these three questions, but it is a big help to consider the opposition now before it can become a threat. Write down the way you could develop a positive attitude in these people or groups so that they will not oppose your plan. One possibility might be collaboration.

4) Plan for community meeting or conference

A meeting will focus attention on your project and provide a forum for information giving and discussion. You need to plan and arrange every detail of this meeting. Include time, date, place, speakers with special knowledge.

5) Publicity

With your foundation firmly laid, you will now have to turn your attention to publicity. You will need to:

- a. Inform a specially selected group. This will include the key people identified and people who will be especially interested in the volunteer centre:

- People known to be involved in voluntary activities in the community.
- Staff or board members of organizations using volunteers.
- Professional people who will have an interest in improving and developing volunteerism in the community.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

One group who were eager to see a volunteer centre in its community not only spoke to key people, and prepared a brief suitable to present to funding bodies, but also sent out a large number of fliers saying, "The golden age of the volunteer is here -- throughout North America there is a fantastic increase in the use of volunteer citizens in local community programs and services. The scope and variety of voluntary work has expanded..." It went on to explain the aims and objectives of a volunteer centre. Through carefully prepared material and excellent publicity, the group was off to a flying start! (See Supplement #6: "Format For Press Release")

- b. Inform the community. This will require publicity to alert people to the purpose of the project, through the media (radio, newspapers, and T.V.). Posters can also be made and distributed. Word of mouth is also a valuable method to consider. It will pay off to plan carefully the publicity for the community meeting or conference. Include date, time, purpose of the meeting, sponsors (if any), place, cost, refreshments, speakers (if any). This information must go out to each person in the special group and also be publicized by any method available to the whole local community. Check your plans (see Supplement #7: "Planning A Meeting Or Community Conference").

In addition:

- Confirm the meeting place.
- Make follow-up phone calls to people you are especially keen to have at the meeting. Phone calls do increase turn-out.
- Make sure you have sufficient information and have it available for presentation if called upon.
- Confirm speakers, refreshments, etc.
- Be there early to prepare the meeting place and welcome people as they arrive.

COMMUNITY MEETING OR CONFERENCE

We are now at the next step of our overall plan. This meeting could be a public meeting lasting one or two hours, or it could be an all-day conference.

Possible Agenda:

- 1) Introduction. Who are we?
- 2) Two-way information sharing.
 - a) Your committee gives information on the work you have done: assessing need for service, exploring other programs.
 - b) Other resource people (if any) make a contribution.
 - c) Participants ask questions, give information or comment on experiences they have had. (This item takes place throughout the day, but will be the major activity at this time.)
 - d) Give out any relevant written material you have prepared.
- 3) Discussion of specific topics such as:
 - a) What help does a volunteer centre need to get started?
 - b) Who will help?
 - c) Does the volunteer centre need sponsors?
 - d) Can it start without money? If so, how?

It must be realized that many questions cannot be answered in a couple of hours or even in a day's conference, but by establishing the issues, a great deal of progress will have been made.

4) Made decisions.

The chairperson will need to focus on one or two urgent priorities, especially if time is short. You need to involve more people who are willing to give time and energy to get this project off the ground (e.g. volunteers). So, your first priority will be to get some help -- this is your chance. Set up a Steering Committee for the volunteer centre before the meeting ends.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

One community arranged an all-day Saturday meeting. It started at 10 a.m. and finished at 3 p.m. There were about 20 people present from a variety of local organizations and general public with a sprinkling of church and business association representatives. Participants brought \$2.00 for lunch (you could bring your own), coffee, tea, and juice were free. Volunteers prepared and served lunch. A short history of the work done preceding the meeting was given and the chairperson explained how he "got the job"! He asked each person to identify himself. Three resource people present each gave additional information from their own experience and indicated other forms of available help. After lunch, participants separated into two groups to discuss topics. A plenary session, with everybody present, ended the afternoon — with sharing of main points, selecting of priorities for acting and the FORMATION OF A STEERING COMMITTEE.

Some reminders:

- 1) Enjoy the day.
- 2) Make sure you have a list of all participants -- with their addresses.
- 3) Stick to the agenda.
- 4) Finish on time.
- 5) Take notes or minutes. Write down:
 - decisions made
 - people volunteering for the Steering Committee
 - those unable to serve who nevertheless offered some support in other ways
 - offers or suggestions for material help (facilities, money, supplies)
- 6) At the end of the meeting, make a clear resume, including decisions, plans, and date of the next meeting.
- 7) Follow up to make sure people carry through on agreed tasks.

8) Hold a Steering Committee meeting as soon as possible.

It is quite possible to start an organization without any form of community meeting -- and it has often been done. However, a public meeting does have valuable spin-offs, as people in the community have become part of the planning process. A great deal of help and good will can develop. Of course, if it is a badly planned and badly run meeting, it can have the opposite effect!

II. PLANNING FOR ACTION

Steering Committee

This committee will be the group who plan and arrange for the start of the volunteer centre. Depending on the previous history of the project, this may be a short intensive period of work or a lengthy survey of the community. (See Supplement #8: "Process For Starting A Volunteer Centre")

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

When visiting the Boston Volunteer Centre, the oldest recorded centre in North America, I discovered that it took three years to get through this stage -- from 1923 to 1926. The original impetus came from a single person, a social worker, who involved three other groups in the community in addition to her own: the YWCA (and support residents), the Junior League and a powerful group of professional people who met informally for lunch.

In our original plan, it was suggested that the time needed from committee formation to the actual "opening of the door" of the centre would take from one to three months. This may depend on the size of the community and the availability of start-up funds. Most committee members have made a commitment and are willing to put in a great deal of concentrated effort over a short period if they can see some definite results. However, many different things can happen!

Usually, committee members will feel more enthusiastic and relaxed if expectations are discussed and decisions made on:

- Tasks
- Time frame in which each is working
- Objectives the committee wishes to achieve

This is a volunteer group and, as such, each person's needs and limitations (time, skill, etc.) will have to be realistically considered. As a "model" volunteer program, the volunteer centre must "practice what it preaches"!

Four decisions have to be made right at the beginning of the committee's work:

- What type of structure will the centre have?
 - a) Independent
 - b) Satellite (part of a parent body)

- Do we want paid or volunteer staff? Or both?
- Where will the centre be located?
- What equipment will be necessary?

Type of structure - Independent or Satellite Group:

From the cross-Canada survey undertaken, it appears that many volunteer centres got started through a parent group. This does help in some ways, as it gives the new organization some stability. Usually, funds, facilities, and personnel are more easily allocated through an existing organization. If the volunteer centre is part of a larger organization, it is unnecessary to develop a constitution or form a board of directors. Although some form of on-going management committee will be necessary, it can usually take a simpler form than that of the parent group.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

One area of the City of Victoria -- James Bay -- developed a neighborhood volunteer centre. It was part of the James Bay Community Association -- a combined Health and Social Service Project. The centre was responsible to and received funds from the Board of Directors of the parent body.

If your committee favors an independent group, a non-profit society should be formed. Each province of Canada varies in its regulations for non-profit societies. In some provinces, there is no formal registration. In British Columbia it is necessary to:

- Write a constitution and by-laws.
- Choose a name for the organization (and check that there is not already another organization registered with that name).
- Pay a small registration fee.
- Elect a board of directors.
- make sure records are kept and accounts are audited annually.

This may seem to be a lot of work, but it will give you recognition as a viable community organization and the board will provide energy, enthusiasm and a wide variety of local contacts.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

When a society is formed, an interim board of directors is appointed for the first few months until a properly organized general meeting is called. Many of these people will become the first board members, although in Victoria, some interim board members only assumed the temporary position to assist the group to commence operation. The first board included a retired naval officer, a director of a community agency, a social worker, a municipal employee, a retired mayor, a college instructor, several volunteers, and a community worker. The varied background, ages, and experience of the board members gave us different points of view and each brought his or her own strengths and interests.

It may also be wise to register as a charity under the federal law, so that donations to the society can then be tax deductible. (Contact the local District Taxation Office for Form T2050.)

Paid Staff:

Some community groups resist the idea of hiring paid staff, as they may have formed a group that sees a need and set out to provide a service, and may wish to keep the reins in their own hands. Volunteers are our most valuable resource, and there are stories of volunteers who have carried out tremendous tasks. Of course, every volunteer centre will have its own volunteers working with it.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

The centre which employed me uses volunteer help in many ways: typing, bookkeeping, design (brochures, etc.), photography, interviewing, T.V. and radio work, newspaper researching, preparing mail-outs, orientation of other volunteers, statistics, recording, filing, etc.

I have worked both as a volunteer and as a paid staff person and have become convinced that, in the long run, some paid staff is essential for a well-run centre. In some organizations, there is less need for continuity in the office, but in the volunteer centre the flow of information is continuous. Paid staff form a nucleus to which both volunteers and agencies can look with confidence, knowing that at least one person will be there again tomorrow. The number of staff need only be small -- anything from one half-time director to two or three people depending on the size of the community and the planned activities of the centre. The director of a volunteer centre is crucial to the organization's success, and great care should be taken in the selection of someone for this position. (See Supplement #10: "Job Description: Director of a Volunteer Centre")

Location of Centre:

The location of the centre must be in a place that volunteers can get to easily. Some things to consider in this regard are:

- Access to buses or a pedestrian area
- Car parking facilities
- Access to the building for handicapped people
- Visibility
- Space -- including privacy for interviewing
- Cost

Equipment:

Equipment must also be considered when thinking of office space. It can be divided into:

<u>Essential</u>	<u>Very Helpful</u>	<u>Helpful</u>
Telephone	Duplicating machine	Projector and other visual aids for public relations
Typewriter	Calculator	Tape recorder
Furniture (such as desks, chairs, etc.)	Second typewriter	Storage cupboards and shelves
File cabinet	Second telephone	Carpet or rugs
	Bulletin board	
	Kettle or coffee urn	

All these items can be borrowed, donated, or bought. They need not be new; community organizations need money for more important things. A friendly, informal atmosphere helps people to feel at ease.

Money:

During the above discussion of the first four things that the Steering Committee should be concerned with, you will have probably been saying: "Yes, but what about the money?" (Review Supplement #4: "Budget Outline") One of the committee's major tasks will be to raise the money to provide the essentials for the centre. These will fall into several main categories:

- Salaries
- Office rent, telephone, expenses
- Purchase of equipment and supplies
- Volunteer out-of-pocket expenses
- Public relations
- Staff travel
- Development and training (staff and volunteers)

There are many decisions that have to be made when deciding on a budget:

- If you have paid staff, what will they be paid?
- Can you get free office space or will you have to pay rent?
- How much will a telephone cost? Could it be shared?
- What equipment do you want to buy?
- What supplies will be needed?

- What will you budget for volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses?
- What will you budget for public relations?

You will realize very quickly that if the basic task of the centre is to recruit volunteers, there will need to be a public relations budget. The media in many communities are very generous with free public service time and space, but some custom printed matter, like brochures, will be essential.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

A tentative monthly budget compiled for the start of a volunteer centre in 1974 looked something like this:

Salaries and benefits	\$1,100
Rent	90
Telephone/postage.....	62
Supplies.....	16
P.R.	35
Miscellaneous, including:	
Bank	12
Staff/volunteer travel	20

Even at 1974 costs, this was a bare survival budget. The items and the general proportions have remained much the same -- adding a large % for inflation!

Fund Raising:

The next job is to find the money to finance your project. This can be a long and complex process. Each community has its own possibilities and you will need to check out all avenues. My recent survey of Canadian volunteer centres indicates that the United Way is the major source of funds. The Junior League has played a significant part in the development of many centres. There is a trend towards more direct involvement with governments, both federal and provincial. This may help to take some of the pressure off United Way in some places, but unfortunately in many cases, governments (for political reasons) have a bias towards project funding. The volunteer centres are then in the difficult position of constantly seeking short term funding while at the same time trying to plan for the future and attempting to work in an orderly fashion towards their current goals. Some sources of funds to consider are:

- United Way
- Service clubs
- Junior League
- Business and industry
- Provincial government
- Professional groups and unions
- Federal government
- Municipal government
- Foundations
- Memberships and individual donation

Much more could be said about most of those sources. Money Isn't Everything by John Fisher has some excellent suggestions in the section on resource development. He also makes a very good point when he reminds us that there are other resources besides money. If you fail to obtain money, quite often you may receive some physical help or assistance in kind: donations of furniture, equipment, etc.

One trend that is worth noting is a move to find a variety of different sources of funding to obtain some security for the project during difficult times.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE VOLUNTEER CENTRE'S SERVICE

The Steering Committee will have made the decision regarding staffing and will have approached possible sources of funds. When sufficient start-up funds have been assured, the staff (volunteer or paid) will need to work with some members of the committee to develop guidelines for the service.

Volunteer Recruitment

This will be one of the major tasks of the centre, so it must be carefully planned. It is important to have a list of jobs for volunteers before recruitment starts. (See Supplement #11: "Volunteer Job Description Form") A survey of local organizations using volunteers is a good way to start compiling the necessary information on jobs for volunteers.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Our original survey at the Victoria Volunteer Bureau went out to 119 organizations and 80 responded. During the first 6 months of operation, volunteers were placed in 76 of these agencies and projects. This survey gave us the basic information needed and was followed up by staff visits.

Organizations which are potential users of volunteers should also be contacted. (Review information obtained in Supplement #2: "Needs Assessment")

Later, it will be necessary to prepare careful plans for reception and interviewing of volunteers before welcoming the first person.

Agency Visits

A personal visit to each organization by centre personnel is very important to gather additional information:

- Understanding of the philosophy and aims of the organization.
- Name of contact persons for potential volunteers and for centre interviewers.
- Required qualities and/or skills of potential volunteers.
- Type of "climate" e.g. formal/informal, hierarchical/cooperative.

- Type of orientation given to volunteers.
- Type of support given by staff members.
- Volunteer benefits: travel expenses, meals, uniform, babysitting, etc.
- References provided for a volunteer if so requested.

It will also be an opportunity for the volunteer centre to explain the aims and the limitations of the service being offered. (See Supplement #12: "Recommended Working Agreement Between Volunteer Centres And Agencies") Here are some suggestions which may prove helpful:

- Each organization is free to continue its own individual recruitment of volunteers. In fact, it is encouraged to do so.
- The volunteer will be referred to the organization with all possible care being taken to make an appropriate referral, but it is up to the person in charge of volunteers at the organization to accept or refuse the potential volunteer. Placement is the responsibility of the individual organization and not of the volunteer centre.
- The volunteer centre is the advocate of the volunteer and, therefore, expects any organization accepting referrals to provide orientation, support, evaluation, and recognition to the volunteers in their program.
- The volunteer centre will provide a basic orientation to the individual on volunteerism, but orientation to the organization and the provision of necessary training is the responsibility of the organization. (Unless specific arrangements are made for special events.)
- The volunteer centre will be an information resource on volunteerism and will provide help and training opportunities as requested or when possible.
- In large organizations where unions are involved, the volunteer centre might suggest consultation with the union during the planning of volunteer programs.

Direct Service

With many volunteer centres, the issue of "direct service" is of crucial importance. The term "direct service" is used to describe the service provided directly to an individual in the community. There are two basic types of volunteer centres. The first type is usually a neighborhood service (in a larger community), or a rural service. This model does mainly direct service where neighbors are linked with neighbors to try and fill all needs. For instance:

- Mrs. S. phones the centre and requests help in her garden.
- Mr. G. calls for a ride to a doctor's appointment.
- Mr. O. (a social worker) asks for a daily phone call to an elderly client.

In each case a volunteer is found who will undertake to fill the request.

The second type of centre does not give direct service to people in the community. If this type of centre received requests as described above, they would refer the individual to some other organization in the community or would suggest a referral through a professional such as a nurse, doctor, or social worker. The centre would give necessary information to the caller for them to be able to receive the help required. (See Supplement #13: "Both Direct and Indirect Service")

The Steering Committee will need to make a policy decision right at the start to decide which model is to be followed.

In general, it is best for a volunteer centre to avoid providing direct service, especially at the beginning when the implications may not be fully realized. There may be no organization providing the "direct" service, but even so, it will be found that the staff (paid or volunteer) are unable to carry out their fundamental task if swamped with requests by individuals for help. It is extremely hard not to respond to a need when it is presented to you. But, this will fracture the work of the centre, and the volunteers who would be sent out in response to individuals might be exposed to situations they will not be prepared or trained to tackle. They will also be without the support necessary to carry on.

Office Management

The big job staff and volunteers will need to do before the service commences operation is to develop efficient, easily carried out procedures for recording information. This is a vital part of the service.

As the organization gets going, the staff will develop methods with which they feel comfortable. The list of suggestions below is one that I have found useful. The system can be expanded in some respects, but it is a good basis for starting.

- 1) Bookkeeping: This must be started immediately even if only in a very simple form so that there is an accurate record of all money coming in and going out.
- 2) Agency information file: As agencies are visited, a brief summary of relevant information should be filed in an easily accessible form. Information needed would include: name, address, telephone number, name of Director, name of Coordinator of Volunteers (or person responsible), number of volunteers presently employed and brief notes on the type of service provided. (Interviewer's comments can also be helpful.)

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We found that in addition to a file, a small 3" x 5" card file on the receptionist's desk was invaluable. We received many telephone calls with requests for this type of information. Included in the card file are other community agencies not using volunteers, media contacts, etc.

- 3) Appointment calendar: This is to record interviews for potential volunteers and others.
- 4) Information forms: (Registration) for volunteers to complete. (See Supplement #14: "Volunteer Registration Form") You will find it easy to study various types during your search for information from other centres. Make up your own, but keep it brief. Do not insist on volunteers filling it in. The interviewer can jot down the name, address, and other information if it is necessary. Omit age, marital status, and other touchy questions. Be sensitive some people have an aversion to forms, write with difficulty, or cannot read English. However, the information form is basically just a help and not the major focus of the interview. It also assists the volunteer to think about the type of work she/he wishes to do and such things as time available to volunteer.
- 5) Permanent Volunteer cards: These are cards that act as cross-references with information forms previously filled in by potential volunteers. They should be large cardex-type cards. Some centres have a sophisticated file; ours were in shoe boxes!
- 6) Agency Requests for volunteers: There are various ways to record these -- a book near the telephone is good for immediate recording of all requests. Information should include name, date of request, person making the request, telephone number, number of volunteers required, job description, length of contract (assignment), any other special information. (Review Supplement #1 "Volunteer Job Description Form")
- 7) General office files: These are the usual sort of thing, for correspondence, funding information, board and committee notes.
- 8) Minutes book: For board meetings. Decisions made by board and committees must be recorded in an orderly way. This can save you from arguments that sometimes waste much time and even destroy a group.
- 9) List or book to record volunteer referrals: This should list agencies and names of volunteers referred. It is also helpful to send some sort of a note to agencies each week/month to tell them who has been referred. Some centres send a letter out after each referral. (See Supplement #15: "Sample Agency Follow-Up Letter" and #16: "Sample Volunteer Follow-Up Letter")
- 10) Data and evaluation information: You will want to keep some records month by month and will need some method of recording this information. (See Supplement #17: "Statistics") Evaluation techniques and results should also be documented.
- 11) Public relations material: This will include brochures, posters, and other display material .

Interviewing

This is such an important part of the work of the volunteer centre that it should be considered in some detail. Interviewing is the single most important task undertaken by staff. Poor interviews will result in inappropriate referrals. Individuals will not experience the very real personal rewards of a volunteer assignment and the agencies and organizations will soon lose confidence in the volunteer centre if people with the wrong skills or temperaments are referred. It is true that the potential volunteer has the choice of jobs, but the interviewer has the knowledge of the organizations and their expectations and guides the person in his/her choice. The opposite is also true — a successful referral can be so beneficial to the volunteer and the organization that the interviewer can have the satisfaction that his/her part of the process is truly positive.

The interviewers must, therefore, be chosen with extreme care, given all the information necessary to be able to do a good job and given the opportunity to improve their skills. (See Supplement #18: "Job Description For A Volunteer Interviewer")

There are some very good books available to help develop your own and others' skills. Most communities also have people available who would be very willing to come along and do some staff training. (See Supplement #19: "Guidelines For Interviewers")

Personnel

Much of the success or failure of this organization will depend on the person or persons the community recognizes as "the volunteer centre" -- these people will be both paid and volunteer. However, by far the most important person to those OUTSIDE the organization is the Director (Coordinator, Manager). Within the centre, there will be a team of interested and dedicated people -- staff, board members, and other volunteers, but the community is likely to recognize the Director as the contact person. (Review Supplement #10: "Job Description - Direct

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

It is the policy of the Victoria Volunteer Bureau to have a volunteer (usually a board member) act as the spokesperson for the organization on every possible occasion, but even so the Director remains the most visible individual in the eyes of the community.

It is easy to list all the desirable characteristics of the Director of a volunteer centre, but it may be worthwhile to briefly consider some of the things that are especially valuable. The basic dichotomy in the position can be a problem. On the one hand, the person requires empathy, tact, courage, and honesty (the traditional social worker attributes) and, on the other hand, the person must have organizational ability and management skills. Perhaps one should add a third facet to the character and abilities of this person -- creativity or innovative thinking linked with the ability to avoid becoming seduced by bureaucracy.

Other personnel are also of vital importance. Each one must be picked with great care to be sure that a warm, friendly climate develops. This is partly established by the physical surroundings, but largely by the members of the group working together when in contact with the public. (See The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs by Marlene Wilson, pp. 57-67) The receptionist, on the phone or in the office, is a key person. This is where the centre's reputation is often made.

Staff Meetings

These should be frequent -- at least once a week. They are indispensable. Meetings should include paid workers and volunteers. Any member of the group should be able to add any item to the agenda. The meetings must be informal and open enough for people to voice concerns, ideas, successes, and potential conflict without fear. In the rush of everyday affairs, it is difficult to take time out for this meeting, but if it helps to promote harmony in the office, problems encountered will be overcome with confidence and energy.

Opening The Door

Finally, all your planning is complete. The volunteer centre is a reality. The furniture is in place. The staff is ready. All you have to do is open the door!

One last task is necessary -- to inform the media, your key community people and the agencies who have asked for volunteers. Publicity material must be prepared, interviews with radio, T.V., and the newspapers arranged. (Review Supplement #6: "Format For Press Release") The date is set, but you will find there is still much to do, and so it goes on. Your first volunteers arrive and now you have to prove that the plan can work.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are many aspects of managing a volunteer centre that have not been dealt with in this paper. It has been necessary to keep the focus on the strategies for starting a volunteer centre. (Review Supplement #8: "Process For Starting A Volunteer Centre") Even so, I hope that through it all, I have been able to keep the individual person in the centre of the plan. So often people feel like a cog in the machine or a number in a bureaucracy. The volunteer centre is one place where the person comes first. To encourage this service to individuals, it is important that there is help for people with enough courage and enthusiasm to start such an organization. The necessities are few and the budget is small compared to the tremendous benefits which a volunteer centre provides to organizations and citizens in the community.

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