

**The Volunteerism Project:  
History, Accomplishments and Goals**

**March, 1992**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. The Origin & Purpose of The Volunteerism Project.....	1
A. The Volunteerism Project was Created in Response to the Bay Area's Need for a Stronger Volunteer System.....	1
B. The Purpose of The Volunteerism Project.....	2
C. An Overview of the Services Provided by Volunteer Centers.....	3
II. Phase One of The Volunteerism Project: 1990-1992.....	4
A. Accomplishments: 1990-1991.....	4
B. Goals: 1992.....	9
III. Phase Two of The Volunteerism Project: 1993-1995.....	10

# **I. The Origin & Purpose of The Volunteerism Project**

## **A. The Volunteerism Project was Created in Response to the Bay Area's Need for a Stronger Volunteer System**

At the time The Volunteerism Project was conceived, the need for volunteers had never been greater, as community-based organizations struggled to meet a steadily increasing need for human services in the face of shrinking government funding. At the same time, the Bay Area was experiencing a shortage of volunteers despite a population full of potential volunteers.

For example, a 1989 study found that a heart-warming 89% of the population in the Bay Area believe in doing volunteer work and helping people in need.\* Therefore, there should be more than enough volunteers available to meet the needs of the Bay Area's community-based organizations. Yet, the same study found that only 38% of the population was actually involved in a volunteer activity.

Thus, despite their best intentions, people had difficulty gaining access to volunteer opportunities, and there seemed to be several reasons for this discrepancy. For instance, some people reported that they had never been personally asked to volunteer, while others didn't know how to connect with a program that needed their help. Others had volunteered in the past, but when their volunteer task was completed, no one referred them to another position. For others, the problem was that available volunteer tasks simply didn't seem to match their personal interests or time availability. This last group felt particularly stymied by a lack of volunteer jobs that were short-term in nature, or took place in the evenings or on the weekends.

In response to the need for more volunteers, the Strive for Five Campaign was launched through the joint efforts of The United Way, The San Francisco Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation and leaders from Bay Area businesses and government. The purpose of the three-year Campaign was to help meet the needs of Bay Area community-based organizations by significantly increasing the number of potential volunteers.

However, before rolling out the Strive for Five Campaign in 1990, the organizers sat back and asked themselves a leading question. If we do succeed in attracting large numbers of new volunteers, can the Bay Area's volunteer system handle the influx? A study was commissioned to look at this question, and the answer that came back was no.

\* From a study conducted in 1989 and published in 1990 by Market Opinion Research for the Bay Area Strive for Five organization.

Recognizing local Volunteer Centers as the focal point of the Bay Area volunteer system, the study offered a list of recommendations for strengthening the Centers. The study concluded by suggesting that one central organization should be established to bring the various Volunteer Centers together. This umbrella organization would enable the Centers to work as a group to solve their common problems, strengthen the services they offer and manage volunteer referral and placement more effectively. Thus, in 1990, with funding from The San Francisco Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation and The United Way, The Volunteerism Project was born.

## **B. The Purpose of The Volunteerism Project**

The purpose of The Volunteerism Project is to develop a coordinated, regional system of Volunteer Centers across the San Francisco Bay Area, and to help the system expand its capacity and reach its fullest potential for professionalism and quality of service. In its work with the Bay Area's Volunteer Centers, The Volunteerism Project plays two roles: consultant and networking facilitator.

As a consultant, The Volunteerism Project provides technical assistance to the Volunteer Centers, helping them to improve their operations. For example, The Volunteerism Project helps the Volunteer Centers to develop stronger management team structures, strengthen their Boards of Directors, utilize their Boards more effectively and develop strategic plans.

As a networking facilitator, The Volunteerism Project brings the Volunteer Centers together to share ideas, work to find common solutions to problems and to set common standards and goals. In this role, The Volunteerism Project also strives to establish beneficial relationships between various entities within the Bay Area volunteer system and other organizations. These organizations include major local businesses, community groups and other regional and national volunteer organizations.

The network of Volunteer Centers served by The Volunteerism Project spans five of the Bay Area's counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo), and it is hoped that Santa Clara County will join the group in 1993. This regional network is the only such collaboration of Volunteer Centers in the United States, and since 1990 when The Volunteerism Project was launched, the group has made impressive steps towards strengthening the volunteer system across the Bay Area.

## **C. An Overview of the Services Provided by Volunteer Centers**

Before discussing the actual achievements and goals of The Volunteerism Project, it is useful to understand the role played by Volunteer Centers within their respective communities. Each county in the Bay Area contains one or more established Volunteer Centers. These Volunteer Centers are the backbone of the Bay Area's volunteer system, and serve their communities in two basic ways.

First, Volunteer Centers serve individual volunteers by acting as a clearinghouse on local volunteer opportunities. Community-based organizations give their local Volunteer Center a description of the kind of volunteer help they need, and potential volunteers can get this information by either calling or visiting the Center. Once a potential volunteer contacts a Volunteer Center, personnel at the Center work hard to help each individual find the volunteer opportunity that best matches that person's interests, talents and schedule.

Second, Volunteer Centers offer a variety of services to the community-based organizations themselves. On the most basic level, Volunteer Centers work to create public awareness of volunteerism and to attract new volunteers. Then as noted above, the Volunteer Centers screen potential volunteers to ensure that each volunteer is steered to the most appropriate organization. Finally, Volunteer Centers also offer training and technical assistance to the personnel of community-based organizations in areas such as recruiting volunteers or utilizing volunteers more effectively. As of 1992, the Bay Area's seven Volunteer Centers were serving a total of nearly 3,000 community-based organizations.

The following pages provide an overview of The Volunteerism Project's accomplishments to date, and a look at the Project's future goals. Section II covers Phase One of The Volunteerism Project (1990-1992), and Section III looks forward to Phase Two (1993-1995).

## **II. Phase One of The Volunteerism Project: 1990-1992**

### **A. Accomplishments: 1990-1991**

The most significant accomplishment of The Volunteerism Project in its first year was pulling together six Volunteer Centers from across the San Francisco Bay Area into one collaborative network. These Volunteer Centers are located in five of the counties in the Bay Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo.

Following are highlights of the many achievements that resulted from the partnership between The Volunteerism Project and the Bay Area Volunteer Centers in 1990 and 1991:

#### **1. Increased Volunteer Recruitment**

- From 1990 to 1991, the number of volunteers referred to community-based organizations through the Bay Area Volunteer Centers increased significantly, peaking at a 73% increase before leveling off at a 25% increase for the year.
- 24% of all the new volunteers were attracted to the Volunteer Centers through localized print media marketing efforts made by the Bay Area Volunteer Centers themselves. For example:
  - The Centers ran want ads in local papers and sent press releases to local editors.
  - Flyers were developed highlighting volunteer opportunities in special interest areas such as environmental issues.
- The Volunteer Centers instigated outreach efforts aimed at special populations.
  - The Centers worked to recruit "special" populations such as the elderly, working people and youth to serve as volunteers.
  - Efforts were made to increase the number of short-term, evening, and weekend volunteer opportunities to accommodate working people.

## **2. Improved Methods for Screening and Referring Volunteers**

- The efficiency with which the influx of new volunteers was handled exceeded the goals set by The Volunteerism Project. The Bay Area Volunteer Centers achieved this by taking the following steps:
  - The number of paid and volunteer staff members was increased.
  - Evening and weekend hours were expanded.
  - Individual centers adopted additional methods for interviewing potential volunteers utilizing a combination of telephone, in-person and group interviews.
- The Bay Area Volunteer Centers also took actions to improve volunteer screening and referral on an ongoing basis:
  - A new method was developed for collecting, analyzing and reporting statistics on volunteer screening and referral.
  - Several methods for following-up on volunteer referrals and determining the success of each referral were tested and analyzed.
  - Volunteer referral forms and referral procedures were revised, and new training manuals were developed.
  - The Centers experimented with new sites for interviewing volunteers, setting up booths at shopping malls and intake desks at community centers.

## **3. Made Technological Improvements**

- A number of technological changes were made within the Bay Area Volunteer Centers to keep the information available to volunteers as current as possible and to enhance communication.
  - WATS lines, telephone lines, computers, software and faxes were added.
  - An existing 800# for providing information to volunteers across the Bay Area was promoted by the Strive for Five campaign. As a result of the Campaign's vigorous promotion, the number got wide use during the Campaign and is still in use.

#### **4. Initiated Collaborative Projects**

- The first strategic plan ever drafted for a regional network of Volunteer Centers was developed.
- Monthly meetings were held for the Executive Directors of the Bay Area Volunteer Centers, including a two-day retreat on the topic of multicultural awareness and a special training session on volunteer management during a disaster.
- Planning was begun on the topic of how to maximize the efficiency of the Bay Area's volunteer network in responding to regional disasters.
- Joint principles were developed for recruiting and managing youth volunteers.
- Investigations were begun on the idea of developing a common computer system to be utilized by all of the Bay Area Volunteer Centers.
- A common method was decided upon for gathering and reporting statistics, and the program managers started meeting quarterly to analyze results and trends and to develop new services based on this information.
- Guidelines were developed on how non-profit agencies can best utilize the services of the Volunteer Centers and of volunteers.
- The Volunteerism Project helped various Centers with organizational assessment, planning and board development and management. As a result, new management structures were introduced and boards were strengthened and diversified.

#### **5. Improved the Services Offered to Community-Based Organizations**

- The information kept at Volunteer Centers on individual nonprofit organizations and their requests for volunteers was updated.
- Newsletters were introduced to enhance communications between the Volunteer Centers and the agencies they serve.
- New reference materials for managers of nonprofit agencies were introduced.
  - The Volunteerism Project commissioned and managed the development of the first comprehensive resource kit ever created for managers of nonprofit, community-based organizations. The kit is designed to get new managers up to speed as quickly as possible, and was a big success when tested. The final

kit will be produced in 1992, and calls requesting the kit have been received from across the country.

- The Bay Area Volunteer Centers improved the informational resources available to community-based organizations. Specifically, the Centers enhanced and advertised their library collections, and The Volunteerism Project developed two bibliographies of materials on volunteer management. One bibliography offers a concise list of essential reading, while the other offers a comprehensive listing of all the materials currently available on the topic of volunteer management.

## **6. Increased the Quality and Quantity of Training Opportunities for Community-Based Organizations**

- Beginning, intermediate and advanced training courses on a range of topics were offered to over 1,000 representatives of community-based organizations in 1991. Topics covered included: how to recruit volunteers; how to manage volunteer staff; designing jobs for volunteers; managing cultural diversity; and using volunteers in fundraising.
- Individual technical consultation was provided by the Bay Area Volunteer Centers to over 2,000 organizations in 1991 on the topics of volunteer management and job design.
- Contra Costa and Alameda counties started a total of five roundtable series across their respective counties. The purpose of these roundtables is for managers of volunteers from nonprofit organizations to meet and share ideas.
- The Volunteer Centers from Alameda County started offering joint training courses for managers of volunteers on multicultural issues in volunteerism.
- The first regional conference for managers of volunteers was held during National Volunteer Week. The conference was called "Celebrating Your Success with Marlene Wilson" and attracted 300 attendees.
- Three regional conferences were organized in collaboration with the Strive for Five Campaign on the topics of multiculturalism, volunteerism and philanthropy. Approximately 500 people attended these conferences.

## **7. Expanded Networking and Increased Collaboration with Other Volunteer Organizations**

- The Oakland Museum ran an exhibit called "I Dream a World" in 1991 and asked The Volunteerism Project for assistance in developing a recruitment plan to find 75 African-American volunteers to serve as guides for the exhibit. As a result, the museum got 150 new volunteers for the exhibit, and many of them have stayed on as volunteers at the museum.
- The Volunteerism Project was the facilitator for a joint venture between the Bay Area Volunteer Centers, AIDS service organizations and the AIDS Service Providers Association. The purpose of the venture is to recruit and retain multicultural volunteers for service organizations working with persons with AIDS.
- With the help of The Volunteerism Project, the Bay Area Volunteer Centers and the Association of Professional Volunteer Managers began a collaboration. The collaboration centers on developing a coordinated approach to the professional development of volunteer managers and includes the investigation of a new mentoring project.

## **8. Dissemination of Project Results**

- Articles on The Volunteerism Project have been published in the California State Volunteer newsletter as well as in local newspapers.
- The Volunteerism Project made several presentations at national and international conferences on volunteerism to discuss the Project's achievements.
- The Volunteerism Project is being studied for possible replication in other regions of the country, and the Project regularly provides information on the Bay Area Volunteer Centers model to other cities and regions around the country.

## **C. Goals: 1992**

- **Work to increase the visibility of Volunteer Centers.**
- **Continue to support and stabilize ongoing system improvements.**
- **Promote greater diversity among volunteers in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and socio-economic status.**
- **Encourage more ethnic diversity on the staff (paid and unpaid) and boards of Volunteer Centers, aiming to have these groups reflect the ethnic make-up of their communities.**
- **Maintain a current listing of the names of the Directors of Volunteers at non-profit organizations and initiate regular meetings for these people.**
- **Improve the utilization of volunteers within the Volunteer Centers themselves.**
- **Investigate the feasibility of creating a certificate program in volunteer management.**
- **Raise additional funding for Phase Two of The Project.**

### **III. Phase Two of The Volunteerism Project: 1993-1995**

Phase One of The Volunteerism Project will be completed at the end of 1992, but stopping The Project at that time would be like sitting down to write a novel and walking away just when a solid working draft had been completed. Instead, The Volunteerism Project hopes to extend the life of the Project, building upon the accomplishments of Phase One and on the increased awareness of volunteerism in the Bay Area that is the legacy of the Strive for Five Campaign.

Furthermore, a number of programs on both the state and national levels (such as the Points of Light Campaign) are focusing awareness on volunteerism as never before. Such campaigns are expected to result in significant numbers of new volunteers, but their ultimate success will rest upon the ability of local volunteer systems to effectively screen and refer the new recruits. Thus, the model created by The Volunteerism Project for strengthening the Bay Area's volunteer system could well become a model that is applicable nationwide.

Currently, The Volunteerism Project is seeking funding to extend The Project through a second, three-year phase. Phase Two of The Volunteerism Project is expected to extend from 1993-1995, and sets the following goals:

- To broaden the geographic region served by The Project, adding Santa Clara County to the Bay Area Volunteer Centers and exploring options for including other Northern California communities as well.
- To continue to provide better and new services to the community-based organizations served by the Volunteer Centers, including referring more volunteers and expanding and improving on workshops offered.
- To expand and coordinate a basic set of volunteer center services (like youth programs and board referral programs) to be offered in each county, and to coordinate cross-county services (like disaster coordination or corporate referral programs).
- To keep improving the volunteer referral process, striving to attract new volunteers and keep more volunteers participating in the volunteer system on an ongoing basis.

- To help the Volunteer Centers do a better job of educating their communities on the need for volunteers and the importance of volunteerism, to clearly position the Volunteer Centers in a local leadership role, and to ensure that a consistent message is promoted across the region.
- To assist the Bay Area Volunteer Centers in reaching their strategic plan.
- To identify additional opportunities for the Bay Area Volunteer Centers to collaborate on projects with other organizations, and to serve as a catalyst for such collaborations.
- To effect and/or sponsor local, county, regional and state policies and legislation related to volunteerism.
- To study the strengths and weaknesses of The Volunteerism Project itself and develop a plan for replicating the project's successes in other parts of the state or country.

### **Contact Information**

To learn more about The Volunteerism Project, its accomplishments to date and its plans for the future, please feel free to contact Nora Silver, Project Director, at the following address.

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