



ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION:
HOW NONPROFITS CAN REACH YOUNG ADULTS



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In creating this manual, we have relied in part on studies and reports from various organizations and news sources, all of which are publicly available from those sources.



INTRODUCTION

There are 26 million young people between the ages of 18-24 in the United States; a whopping 13% of the adult population. They have grown up with their own unique sensibilities, with more ethnically diverse peers, and in a world that is changing dramatically each moment. A list compiled by the faculty at Beloit College in Wisconsin demonstrates how drastically different their worldview is from that of older Americans: They were born into a world without Atari or record albums. Most have never seen a TV set that stops at channel 13. They do not remember the Cold War and have no fear of nuclear war.

How many of these young people are currently volunteering with your nonprofit organization? How many do you think would volunteer if you used the appropriate messages and the best vehicles to reach them?

Our assumption going into this project was that young adults were not active participants in their communities, that people were getting involved in high school and then later in life, but not as young adults. The goal was to find out what steps nonprofit organizations could take to get them engaged and involved.

We were excited to find through our research involving marketing experts and young adults that young people are interested in getting involved in their communities. (See Appendix One for research methodology.) More often than not, they are tremendously engaged by the world around them, and they want to find ways to make that world a better place. In fact, today's young adults are a natural target for nonprofit organizations because they were raised to believe that they can make a difference. That's the good news.

The bad news is that young adults are not easy to reach. They are a complex group that faces an astounding array of stimuli on a daily basis. Their priorities are distinctly different from those of their Baby Boomer or older parents. Most importantly, young people today typically want to get involved, but they want to do it on their own terms. They are interested in volunteering, but want to contribute in different, less institutional ways than their predecessors.

What does that mean in your efforts to attract these young adults? Yesterday's marketing strategies need to be rethought and retooled in order to reach this group. The imperative today is to develop communications vehicles that speak to young adults, reach them at the right time and right place, and tap into their definitions of community and involvement.

In this manual, you will find that much of the work necessary to succeed in developing these vehicles has been done for you. We will tell you who these young people are, what your organization needs to do to attract them, and how to communicate with them.

Communicating with target audiences is about possibilities more than "right answers." We hope that, whether you work for a small community-based coalition or a large national organization or something in between, you will find some possibilities here that will work for you.



INITIAT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



There is a huge untapped pool of potential volunteers and social activists in the U.S today: the 26 million young adults between the ages of 18-24. Success in reaching young adults requires you to rethink your messages, your recruiting methods and vehicles, and your expectations for volunteers. Those nonprofit organizations that have found ways to reach and attract this group have benefited enormously from their volunteerism, energy and creativity.

The Busy Lives of Young Adults

Young adults today are fiercely individualistic, and are media-savvy to a degree never seen before. They are comfortable with – and bombarded by – the abundance of technologies that exist today, from cell phones to beepers to the internet. As a consequence, they are also extremely stressed in their everyday lives. They also strongly believe that they can make the world a better place – a perfect springboard for getting them involved as volunteers.

Establishing roots within communities – whether neighborhoods, schools, work or religious institutions – is essential for many of today's young adults. They consider community involvement to be a core part of their self-definition. Others believe that their lives are already too busy and stressful to pay much attention to the community. They have hardened themselves, and have turned inward – to friends and families – to distract themselves from the world's problems.

Today's young adults are open to finding several different ways to care, as opposed to earlier generations who often found one specific area in which to make a difference. Among the issues they find compelling are: health, substance abuse, children's issues, the elderly, violence prevention, animal rights, and the environment.

Volunteers vs. Non-Volunteers

There are several keys to getting young adults to volunteer initially – and to retaining them as volunteers: informing them of the opportunities, convincing them that their time is important to the success of the program, getting them to see the cause as a personal one, showing them how their involvement can benefit them personally, and ensuring that they realize they are making a real contribution to changing the world.

There are several reasons why some young adults choose not to volunteer, including being unaware of opportunities, having a fear of volunteering, and lacking the time. Another key factor is the lack of volunteer role models in their lives. Many non-volunteers have very specific images of volunteers in their minds, and these images stand in stark contrast to the way they view themselves.

Attracting and Retaining Volunteers

Begin by selecting and training a Volunteer Coordinator whose mission is to coordinate all volunteer efforts and communications. Her first goal is to make each young adult volunteer feel a sense of affiliation with you and your cause. She should establish recognition systems so volunteers feel that their time and efforts are appreciated. The Coordinator must also stimulate introspection among the volunteers to help them find meaning and passion in their volunteer work.

Volunteers must be given meaningful work to do within your organization. And it is important to foster relationships between volunteers, as that will often be a strong motivator to inspire them to keep coming back.

Simplify the volunteering process for young adults. Anything you can do to avoid wasting their valuable time will send a strong message that you care about your volunteers and understand their needs. Offer a variety of time commitments to help them fit volunteering into their busy lives, including one-day projects, once a week projects, ongoing "fit it in when you can" projects, and part-time internships.

Creating and Delivering Your Messages

Among a variety of messages tested, the one that resonated best with young adults was: "By getting involved in a social cause, I know that I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference in someone else's life." Both volunteers and non-volunteers related strongly to the simple statement "it makes me feel good to help others."

Nonprofit organizations have much to give back to those who get involved with them. Whether it's gaining new friends, new skills, or a broader sense of meaning about the world, volunteering can contribute to a young person's life in ways few other activities can.

Of course there is no one key message that will work for every organization. The goal is to find a story or message that works for your organization, and then incorporate it into all of your communications. By coming at today's young people with one consistent message, you'll reinforce your brand and be more likely to stand out amidst all the clutter.

Try to position yourselves as people who have a common passion, rather than as an institution. You can also position volunteer

work as being all about ideas. Today's entrepreneurial young adults, more than any other generation, have embraced the power of ideas.

Many nonprofit organizations choose celebrity spokespeople to heighten the profile of their organization or cause. If you choose to use a celebrity, look for one who cares deeply about the issues your organization is involved in. Or consider working with "alternative" celebrities, such as authors, local musicians, athletes, and new/emerging actors and actresses.

A less expensive alternative is to find a spokesperson who is an opinion leader, or an influential young person in your community. If an influencer is involved with or supports your cause, his peers will begin to ask him about it, and eventually they too will seek you out.

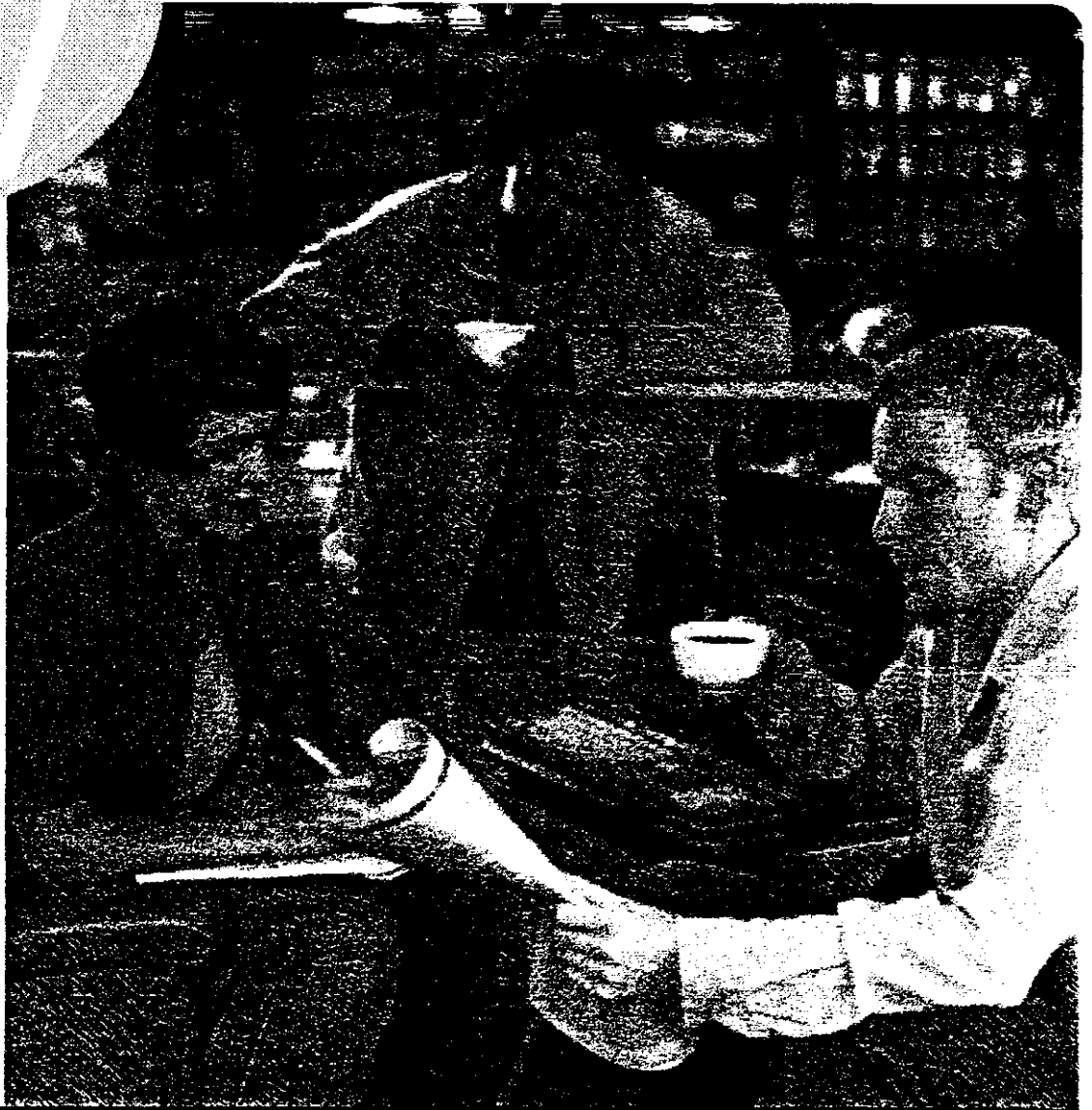
Choosing Vehicles to Reach Your Audience

Once you have developed your messages and selected and trained your spokesperson, the challenge is to ensure that your messages are heard by and resonate with your target audience. This requires using a variety of media and marketing tactics, including symbols such as logos, ribbons or pins, and t-shirts. Use the mass media that appeal to young adults -- cable access and local TV programming, magazines aimed specifically at young people, and postcards, letters and newsletters sent directly to their homes. Young adults listen to an average of 23 hours of radio programming per week, so use this medium to reach them with your messages. And of course the internet provides a multitude of ways to reach young adults, from chat rooms and bulletin boards to listservs and e-mail.

Conclusion

There has never been a better time to engage young adults in the vital work nonprofits are doing in communities across the country. They are being bombarded concurrently with often confusing messages about opportunities for amassing great wealth, about growing social problems such as poverty, lack of adequate health insurance and increasing violence, and about politics. It is entirely possible for nonprofit organizations to cut through the clutter with targeted messages for getting young adults involved in causes and organizations that are meaningful to them. Using the tools and strategies included in this manual will help you succeed in cultivating young adults as lifelong volunteers.

WHO ARE WE TRYING TO REACH?



Overview

- Of the 26 million 18-24 year olds in the U.S., 46% said they had volunteered in the past year.
- Young adults today are individualistic, media savvy, and extremely stressed out.
- Young adults view "community" in a variety of ways - as their neighborhoods, the people they know, their religious institutions, their schools, their work, and their families.
- Today's young people have no clear common causes to rally around, and so are much more likely to take their own unique approaches to getting involved.
- Young adults are open to finding several different ways to care, as opposed to previous generations who often wanted to find one specific cause to believe in.

Nonprofit organizations should borrow a page from the book of today's for-profit marketers who carefully target their efforts around "segments" of the population whom they have found to be more predisposed to purchasing their products. The more you know about young adults, the more success you'll have at drawing them into your organization as volunteers.



A Demographic Snapshot

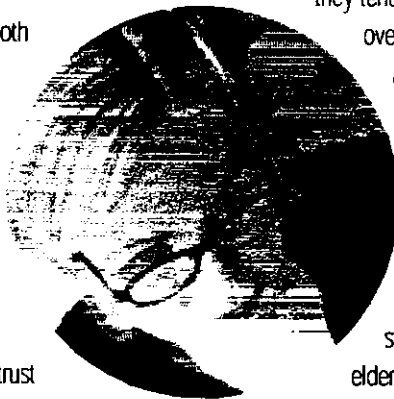
There are 26 million 18-24 year olds in the U.S. Today's 18-24 year olds are more diverse than the general population – part of a trend of the changing face of America. According to census projections, in 2000:

- 14% of 18-24 year olds are Hispanic (any race); Hispanics make up 11.4% of the total population.
- 15% of 18-24 year olds are Black; 12.7% of the general population is Black.
- 4.4% of 18-24 year olds are Asian/Pacific Islander; 3% of the general population is.

According to the census, one-third of men ages 15-24 work full-time, earning an average of \$19,500 per year. Some 23% of women ages 15-24 work full-time, earning on average \$17,300. Overall, this age group doesn't have much money. The average annual income for all 15-24 year olds is \$7,345, with 20% of them working part-time. According to the 1995 census, 36% of women ages 20-24 had children.

According to the 1999 Current Population Survey, 66% of 1998 high school graduates went on to college, up from 62% in 1992.

This audience of 18-24 year olds straddles both Generation X and Generation Y. It is important to distinguish between the two groups. Gen X'ers are held by demographic experts to be those born between 1965-1980, meaning they are currently ages 20-35. Today's 18 and 19 year olds are the beginning of Generation Y, a group known as the Echo Boom or Baby Boomlet generation. Generation Xers are generally considered to be fiercely independent – they only trust in themselves, largely because so many of them are the product of



divorce—realistic, pessimistic (they graduated into a recession), savvy, skeptical of marketing, and looking to create their own definitions of success. Generation Y is similar, but much more optimistic, more social and group-oriented, more empowered because of their computer and Web expertise, and entrepreneurial – 13 year olds talk of growing up to be entrepreneurs.

46% of 18-24 year olds said they had volunteered in the past year, according to independent Sectors' Giving and Volunteering in the United States 1999. Some 29% of them volunteered in the past month, and they volunteered an average of three hours per week. According to Independent Sector, in 1998 less than half (43%) of 18-24 year olds were asked to volunteer. Of that group, 87% volunteered. Of the 57% who weren't asked, only 16% volunteered.

The Busy Lives of Young Adults

While it is impossible to generalize about an entire generation of people, the descriptions below have proven true of the many young people we have encountered in our research.

Young adults today are fiercely individualistic. This is true of everything from the brands they consume to the causes they support. They like to create their own looks, listen to their own music, pursue their unique ambitions, and support their own causes.

They are incredibly media-savvy, which makes sense given the context in which they have grown up. By the time they reach their late teens, young adults have typically seen over 400,000 television commercials. They have also witnessed an explosion of innovation, in areas ranging from music to phones to computers. It's no wonder they tend to be wise to marketing language and wary of over-hyped products and services.

At this age, young people are still exploring and finding out what is important to them. Savvy as they may be, they do not yet have all of life's questions answered. They are still incredibly open to new ideas and they want to dabble and experiment.

Young people today are extremely stressed out. Odd as it may seem to their elders – who are juggling full-time jobs, families, and mortgages – young adults lead very stressful lives. According

According to Independent Sector, in 1998 less than half (43%) of 18-24 year olds were asked to volunteer. Of that group, 87% volunteered.





to a recent New York Times article, a record 30% of college freshmen said they felt frequently overwhelmed by what they need to do. This is due to many influences, including:

- Over-programmed lives where every minute has been planned for them since they were young.
- Competing with an increasing number of peers for a finite number of college slots and jobs (especially those in the "Echo Boom").
- Having an abundance of information at their fingertips (the Internet, while it gives them boundless opportunities to learn, can also be time-consuming, overwhelming and frustrating).
- Being wired as they never have been before (the prevalence of cell phones, palm devices, beepers, pagers, and walkie talkies has taken its toll, leaving young people feeling like they cannot escape from those around them).

The stress in their lives has left young adults searching for balance at an incredibly young age. Determined not to repeat the mistakes they have seen their parents make, they are surveying all of the elements of their lives (family, friends, career, hobbies, health) and doing their best to optimize the equation across all of the elements. This means figuring out what they're passionate about and making sure they make time for their passions. It often means pursuing entrepreneurial careers rather than heading straight for corporate America. And, yes, for some it means giving back to their communities.

The good news is that, with all of the stress in their lives, young people are a very upbeat group with a celebratory approach to life. From a fashion perspective, they are donning bright colors and fanciful accessories. They are expressing more interest than ever in traveling the world, and they believe they can make the world a better place. This, of course, is good news for those who hope to get this group more involved in civic roles and issues.

No central cause has united today's young adults as a group. Look back to the Boomers, and you can point to the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam and the death of John F. Kennedy. Look to the present, and you hear young people talking about a broad array of issues.

This presents you with both a challenge and an



opportunity. The challenge is that it is difficult to predict the types of issues that will resonate with young people, though we'll point out some common themes in these pages. The opportunity lies in the fact that there are many different ways to appeal to this age group today. If nonprofits can find the right message, strike the right tone, and deliver the news through the right media, you have a good chance of getting young people interested. You'll find suggestions for doing this in the pages that follow.

Using This Information: As you think about ways to reach young adults, consider your organization's situation, mission and programs. What do you know about this audience? Who are the young people in your community? Are they in college or working? Does your organization have specific sub-groups or committees that would be a good fit with this age group? What are the programs that are most likely to appeal to young people? How can you talk about your programs in ways that are exciting and fresh? And is there a way to introduce young adults to the volunteer opportunities you offer so they can "sample" them without feeling pressure to commit immediately?

EXAMPLE: Volunteering vs. Voting

A study conducted in June, 1999 by the League of Women Voters indicated that just over half (51%) of young people ages 18-30 want to become more involved in community and volunteer activities. To put that statistic in context, roughly a third indicated that they do at least occasional volunteer work. Compare that to census figures showing that in 1996 only 32% of 18-24 year olds voted, as a decline in young voting continued – a decline that started in 1972, when the voting age was lowered to 18. The bottom line is that young adults told us that they do care about issues, and they want to be involved. They simply want to express themselves and get involved in their own way.

It is partially this reasoning that leads young people to be much more engaged in volunteering than they are in voting. In volunteer activities, young people say they can witness the changes they are making and the effects they are having on people's lives. Voting, on the other hand, is often seen as not making a difference to anyone except for the politician who is trying to advance his or her career. As a result of this cynicism, 18-24 year olds pay much less attention to national and local politics. According to Project Vote Smart, only 26% of 18-24 year olds say they pay a lot of attention to national politics, as compared to 45% of those over the age of 26.



We heard [young adults] define their communities as "somewhere where there is love,"
"a place where you feel comfortable," and "where everyone works together."

How Young Adults Connect with Community

In order to fully understand motivations toward community involvement, it is important to understand the role that community plays in the lives of today's young people. The focus groups we conducted helped to illuminate a range of definitions of the term "community," and also provided perspective on what makes community important – or unimportant – to young adults.

While they described "community" in a range of ways, our focus group respondents were consistent in considering their communities as places "where I belong." They connected this sense of belonging to several things:

- **My neighborhood**

Several respondents pictured their physical environments when they heard the word "community." They talked about the comfortable feeling that comes from having a routine or from "knowing where I'm going" around town. One respondent put it succinctly when he said, "My community is my two block radius." The non-volunteers were most likely to talk about this very physical, non-emotional definition of community. Young adults with children seemed to feel stronger ties to their communities, which is logical given their desire to raise their children in safe, child-friendly environments.

- **The people I know**

Many respondents were able to extend the definition of the community from the buildings around them to the people they interact with on a daily basis. Particularly to our urban respondents, community is "not necessarily where you live: it's a network of friends and colleagues." These respondents also mentioned organizations such as their church, school and work as essential to their communities.

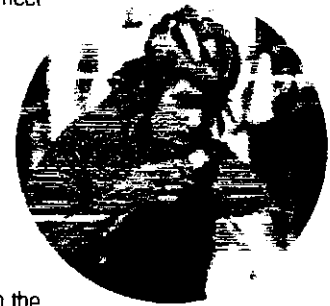
- **Wherever I am in my life stage**

Several respondents commented that their definitions of community had changed as they entered new life stages. Moving away from the towns in which they were raised was one of their biggest adjustments, and respondents



had different ways of dealing with this change. Some chose to "hang on" to their hometowns as their true communities: One woman fondly reflected on her intimate knowledge of every corner and street in Indianapolis. Others were willing to "adopt" their new environments as their communities.

Young singles were often especially interested in embracing new communities. Many of them saw their communities as a way to meet new friends, connect with others, and explore new areas.



- **A mindset**

Many of our respondents, particularly the volunteers, found a deeper meaning in the word "community." Their definitions transcended people or places, and were more reflective of an entire state of mind. We heard them define their communities as "somewhere where there is love," "a place where you feel comfortable," and "where everyone works together."

These respondents spoke with passion about the sense of ownership they felt about their communities, telling us "wherever I am is my community." They talked about the importance of a common set of values, ranging from religion to abolishing drugs. In short, they seemed to have derived their definitions of community from their own personal values, rather than from any external influences. This may be why so few of them mentioned local organizations – government or otherwise – as examples of community.

Reaching Out to Those Who Feel Connected to Communities

Respondents who said their communities were central to their lives offered a number of explanations. Among the simplest was the feeling that "My community is my roots." This was particularly pronounced for people who still lived in the communities in which they had grown up. Generally, they had



developed strong ties and loyalties and had a sincere desire to be available for their neighbors, many of whom they had known for their entire lives. The League of Women Voters study also found evidence of this bond, as over 40% of 18-30 year olds surveyed said they had spent time talking to their neighbors about issues of concern to them.

Several respondents also spoke of a sense of shared responsibility with their neighbors. As one respondent explained, "Sure, I help people all the time. But part of it is I'd want them to help me in my time of need." Other respondents agreed, highlighting times when their neighbors had helped them weather crises ranging from family sickness to fires in their homes.

The bottom line is that many of the young people we talked to considered community involvement to be a core part of their self-definition. As a result, they constantly made themselves available to others. One young woman noticed her elderly next-door neighbor lived alone, and started buying groceries for her. Several men told stories of the sports teams they created and coached, out of their love for the sports and in an effort to help local disadvantaged kids. Interestingly, these gestures were so "second nature" to our respondents that many did not even consider them to be volunteering because no one had recruited them to the job.

Understanding Those Who Don't Feel Connected

Of course not all of the young people we talked to shared this mindset. Several of our respondents were simply more inwardly focused and less attentive to others and their needs. As one man explained, "It's not like I don't care or anything, it's just that we all live our own lives. They do their thing, I do mine."

Other young people simply felt less of a connection to those around them. One woman summed it up by saying, "This is just where I live. It just doesn't go any deeper than that." These respondents typically told us that they had chosen to spend their time on other things beside their communities, such as friends, family, or career. They seemed to feel that their lives were



already too busy and stressful to pay much attention to the community. This was particularly true of those who were caregivers, either to small children or elderly relatives, because they felt that their work was already "doing good" for their communities.

Many of our respondents had hardened themselves, and had turned inward – to friends and families – to distract them from the world's problems. Jaded by constant media coverage of problems and disasters, they had distanced themselves from their communities as a result.

How Else Do They Get Involved?

Above and beyond the differing degrees to which young people feel connected to their communities, they have a wide variety of perspectives on "civic involvement." There were, however, a number of common themes in what they told us about involvement. Happily, the most common definition we heard was "giving freely of your time." Several young people spoke of "giving without expecting something back."

Some of the people we talked to – primarily the non-volunteers – defined involvement as making monetary contributions. In fact, according to Independent Sector, 49% of 18-24 year olds contributed money to a cause in 1998. Only 30% of those who contributed were non-volunteers, though. Those non-volunteers who gave seemed to feel as if, by offering some of their own money, they were giving as much as they needed or wanted to.

The other main theme revolved around the difference between being proactive and reactive in one's involvement. The volunteers with whom we spoke tended to be more proactive. They typically made the effort to find the causes and people they wanted to help. One volunteer told us she first got excited about volunteering when a friend invited her to help paint houses one day. "To me," she explained, "it's all about outreach. It's about looking for ways that I can contribute and make a difference."

She was countered by those who preferred to help out only as the need arose. One man summed it up by saying, "If someone's right in front of me who needs help, sure, I'll do



"It's all about outreach. It's about looking for ways that I can contribute and make a difference."

– 21 year old volunteer, New Jersey.



This is a generation of dabblers with respect to everything
from brands to careers to causes.



that. I'll help someone across the street or give a hungry person something to eat. But I don't go out and look for stuff to do."

The Causes They Support

Nonprofit organizations should be cheered by the news that young people are excited by a variety of causes. This makes them different from earlier generations, who often wanted to find one specific area in which to make a difference. In fact, one of the biggest generational differences we uncovered was the idea that young people are open to finding several different ways to care. As mentioned earlier, this is a generation of dabblers with respect to everything from brands to careers to causes. It is also a group that prizes individualism – and a cause can be a big part of a person's uniqueness.

In terms of the causes that are important to young people, we heard a broad range of answers from both respondents and experts. A few examples:

- **Health**

Health issues, including abortion and AIDS, are extremely important to young people today. Indeed, this is the first generation to realize that having sexual relations with someone may have more severe consequences than pregnancy. The spreading of AIDS is one of their largest fears.

- **Substance Abuse**

Drugs, as well as drinking and driving, are important concerns. Groups such as the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and Mothers Against Drunk Driving have likely contributed to the awareness of and respect for substance abuse as a very real issue among young people today.

- **Children's Issues**

Many of today's young people have a desire to protect those younger than they are. Issues ranging from child abuse to education were compelling according to a number of our respondents and experts. Many of our volunteers also spoke of making contributions to children by supporting local athletic or after-school programs.

- **The Elderly**

On a similar note, several of our volunteers talked about their work with elderly people. It was vitally important to show their elders that they were still important and still loved – even if they were tucked away in a nursing home with little contact from friends and family.



CASE STUDY: North Little Rock Keystoners

The Keystoners, a program for older teens run by Boys & Girls Clubs, have a "Paint Your Heart Out" initiative where they help senior citizens keep their government-assisted housing up to code. One elderly woman with medical problems found it difficult to keep her apartment clean enough to meet specifications. A high school football player was assigned to help her clean her apartment every few weeks, after which she would give him milk and cookies and they would chat. Although her family members and physicians had tried for years to get her to quit smoking, it was this hulking athlete who finally got her to kick the habit. The lives of both the football player volunteer and the senior citizen were improved greatly by their participation in the program, and in ways neither one could have predicted at the outset.



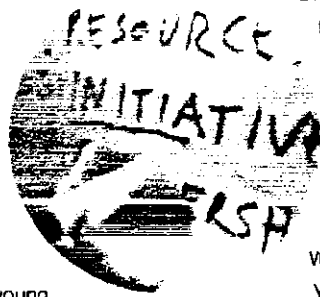
• **Violence**

As young people witness more and more unexpected violence, particularly in local schools, and see more and more media coverage of youth violence, it has become of increasing concern to them. Several of our respondents talked about working with victims of violence or wanting to do something to prevent more unrest in the future.

• **Others**

A few respondents mentioned other causes such as animal rights or the environment. The common thread among all of these causes seemed to be that young people will gravitate to whatever causes they can relate to.

According to the experts, some segments of young adults have their own biases toward causes. Marie Claire Magazine's issues about rape, abortion, and prostitution are among their best sellers. The University of Illinois' most popular volunteer activities relate to hunger, homelessness/housing, and health issues/hospitals. Causes may even differ between urban and suburban areas. According to Tony Phillips of Persaud Brothers, many young adults in the inner cities care intensely about religion and helping disadvantaged kids.



Using This Information:

While the focus group information included in this book should be extremely helpful to you, it might be worthwhile to do a mini-focus group in your own organization. If you already

have volunteers between

the ages of 18-24, ask

them to spend a few minutes

telling you why they chose to volunteer. What was it about your organization, cause, or issue that attracted them? Have they told any of their friends about their volunteer work; if so, have any of their friends become volunteers with your organization?

You might also want to take a critical look at the issue(s) that you deal with. Do they fit into any of the categories listed above? Are they issues that are highly visible in today's media? Are they causes that would clearly resonate with a segment of young adults, but not with others? Are there issues that would be of importance to young people in your area? What is the general level of involvement in your community? Identifying these factors will give you a more focused approach to reaching that segment of young adults who are predisposed toward your issues.



NOTES

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WHAT MAKES YOUNG PEOPLE VOLUNTEERS OR NON-VOLUNTEERS?



Overview

- Young adults who volunteer do so because: they were told about the opportunities, understand why they need to be involved, have some personal connection to the cause, believe that getting involved will benefit them personally, and hope to help other people as much as themselves.
- A good volunteer experience provides rewarding work, life-enlarging experiences, a sense of affiliation with an organization, clear communications, flexibility, recognition, streamlined logistics, and a belief that the volunteer's input matters.
- Non-volunteers cite lack of time, a fear of volunteering, a lack of volunteer role models, and a belief that they don't possess the appropriate skills as reasons for not getting involved.

Our research helped us gain an understanding of volunteers, their motivations, and what drives them to get involved. While you will probably have more luck with current volunteers or those who have volunteered previously, it is equally important to examine the motivations of those young people who choose not to volunteer. While some people will never volunteer, their motivations can inform your work in many ways. Combined with information about those who do volunteer, you will have an invaluable resource as you develop a plan for involving young people in your nonprofit organization.

Those Who Volunteer

It is critical to differentiate between what makes young adults volunteer for the first time and what keeps them involved on an ongoing basis. In the words of Tom Shields, Director, Office of Volunteer Programs for the University of Illinois, "The key thing to remember with volunteers is that getting them to help out the first time is easy: You just ask them. It's getting them to come back that's the difficult thing. If it's a bad experience, there's no reason to try it again. There's simply not a lot of external influence to go back."

We tested Tom's point of view – based on the more than nine years he has been working with college students – in our volunteer focus groups. Our respondents gave us a number of insights on why they got involved for the first time.

- **They were told about the opportunities.** Several respondents were asked to get involved by a friend or family member who was familiar with the cause. Others heard about opportunities through local groups such as a church or school. Again, of those who were asked nationwide, 87% volunteered, compared to only 16% of those who were not asked and volunteered, according to a 1999 study by Independent Sector.



- **They were told why to get involved.** Don't underestimate the importance of having a compelling message about what young people can do to contribute and why it's critical that they offer their time and talents to the causes around them. Without this type of message, young adults will see little impetus for devoting their increasingly scarce free time to a particular cause.
- **They had personal ties to the cause.** The attraction to specific issues was often driven by the fact that they could relate to the causes these organizations support. Some volunteers explained that family illness had led them to cancer clinics; one woman said a friend's addiction spurred her toward anti-drug programs. A few volunteers also mentioned that, somewhere along the way, they had struck up a relationship with a needy person that they eventually extended into a more formal relationship with a support organization.
- **They believed getting involved would be beneficial to them.** Volunteers voiced a wide range of benefits they wanted to gain from their civic efforts. These ranged from creating new routines and meeting new people to building career skills and getting experience to put on their resumes. Several volunteers told us that volunteering provides them with a way to dabble, to figure out who they are. In fact, several had identified passions through their volunteer work, which they had parlayed into careers such as teaching or nursing. Volunteers believe that volunteering is a fun way to spend time. While they acknowledge that it's a selfish activity for them, in the words of one volunteer, "it's good selfish."
- **They hoped to help other people as much as themselves.** There was a clear sense of a "volunteer mentality" that differentiates those who have gotten involved from those who have chosen not to. Volunteers, in short, seemed to have the most pronounced desire to make a difference in the world. They also tended to be more empathetic than non-volunteers, and more

.....
 "Getting them to help out the first time is easy: You just ask them.

It's getting them to come back that's the difficult thing."

– Tom Shields, University of Illinois.



While they acknowledge that it's a selfish activity for them,
in the words of one volunteer, "it's good selfish."

proactive. They were often more idealistic than non-volunteers, and more likely to get excited by how the world should be.

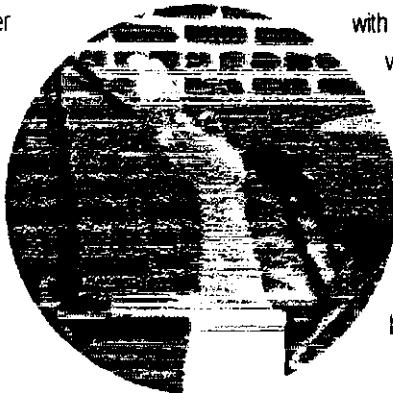


volunteers agreed with the woman who summed up her motivations by saying, "it's just that I like who I am when I volunteer."

As to the question of why young people volunteer on an ongoing basis, there is a much longer list of reasons, many of which are closely linked to factors that nonprofits can control.

- **Knowing.** Volunteers continued to stress the importance of knowing about the opportunities that are out there. This knowledge seemed to be easier to come by for those who had volunteered in the past. As one woman explained, "you just do one activity, then you're in the know. After I did the AIDS walk, I found I was on all the mailing lists."
- **Mindset.** The same attitudes and mindsets that got volunteers involved in the first place kept them involved over time. We heard a lot of discussion about how privileged they felt, as well as how much they wanted to help those who have less. Volunteers held these beliefs so strongly that they were determined to find a way to integrate volunteering into their schedules.
- **Rewarding.** Given their desire to help themselves by getting involved, it was not surprising to hear that volunteers often stayed involved because they found their work to be an invaluable experience. Some explained that volunteering had taught them valuable life skills such as organizational skills and the ability to work in groups. Others enjoyed the connection with another person – either another volunteer or someone they were helping. A few appreciated the opportunity to reach outside of their own worlds and learn about other people and cultures.

Some used volunteering as a way to pursue their existing hobbies. Several of the men we spoke to kept their sports passions alive by coaching kids' teams. Finally, many of the



- **Tangible results.** Naturally, many volunteers were also "hooked" on volunteering by the feeling that they were making a difference and helping others in a meaningful way. To this end, many volunteers talked about the charge they get from seeing tangible results of their efforts. Interestingly, only a few had seen actual facts or comparisons that gave them a sense of their organization's progress toward an objective. Frequently they gauged their "progress" simply by noticing smiles or other simple gestures on the part of those they were helping.

It's important to note, however, that one of the primary differences we noticed between volunteers and non-volunteers was that volunteers, although they appreciated a sense of progress, felt less of a need to measure their progress or to be recognized and rewarded for what they were doing. They often spoke of the need to simply have faith that what they were doing would make a difference.

Using This Information: Keep in mind that much of what gets volunteers to stay involved is within your control. Volunteers told us that they were highly likely to stay involved with an organization if they enjoyed their first experience with the group. So what is it that makes for an enjoyable first experience? Much of what we heard from our volunteers corroborated the experts' theories. How do the volunteer opportunities your organization provides match up with what young adults are looking for in a good volunteer experience?

- **Rewarding, substantive work.**
- **Life-enlarging experiences.**

This, in the words of one volunteer, is the feeling that there's "something out there that's bigger than I am."

- **A feeling of escape.** As one man explained, "I do a lot of work with children. I do it because it's like going to a totally different world when I'm with them."

- **A sense of affiliation with the organization.** Respondents tended to be drawn to organizations that combined good deeds with entertainment or social activities for their volunteers.

- **A clear understanding of the roles an organization wants them to play.** It should be noted that respondents also wanted to feel as if they could provide input on their roles, as well as on ideas to help support the organization.

- **Appreciation for their schedules/flexible scheduling.** This is perhaps the biggest factor for today's nonprofits to consider. Young adults, though they want to give back, do not want to feel pressured to contribute on a certain schedule or at a certain pace. Rather, they want flexible schedules and a range of volunteering options to suit their time constraints over the course of the year. Both volunteers and non-volunteers spoke of the importance of being able to pursue "quick," easy activities for busy months, or more extensive activities when they have more time. And respondents to the League of Women Voters' survey indicated that the top two things that would get them to contribute more time to volunteering are "being able to schedule the activity at my convenience" (63%) and "being able to do volunteer work at home at my convenience" (55%).

- **Clear communications.** Many of our respondents and experts recommended monthly calendars of events to keep young people informed and to help them integrate volunteering into their schedules. With all of the stresses in their lives, young people generally welcome any tools to help them be more productive and plan ahead.



- **Streamlined logistics.** It is important to make the volunteering process as seamless and straightforward as possible. For example, if possible, nonprofits should have an office or "home base" that is convenient to most parts of town. If the office is out of the way, it may be worth providing transportation services to volunteers, if you can afford it, so they don't have to worry about logistics. These types of services may be costly in the short term, but in the long run they will likely play a big role in getting, and keeping, volunteers.

- **Reward and recognition.** In spite of what volunteers told us about "not needing to be thanked," we highly recommend that you do all you can to make young people feel appreciated. Reward and recognition programs need not be expensive or elaborate in order to have the desired effect. A sincere thank you note from the head of your organization should go a long way toward letting a young person know that the time he devoted was noticed and appreciated. Even a pizza can make a big impression. The important thing to remember is that most volunteers don't want to be recognized out of obligation – they want to be recognized because they enjoy feeling that they made a difference to someone.

- **Belief that their input matters.** Lastly, today's young people have an important voice – and they very much want to be heard. As discussed earlier, 18-24 year olds are passionate about the causes they believe in. They are also extremely savvy about marketing and are very entrepreneurial. They are a potential source of powerful creative ideas for nonprofits. The organizations that can make them feel their input is valued, and provide them with ways to contribute, will likely be rewarded with their loyalty and boundless energy.



"It's just that I like who I am when I volunteer,"

– 23 year old volunteer, Cleveland.



[Young adults] want flexible schedules and a range of volunteering options to suit their time constraints

Those Who Don't Volunteer

It is important to realize that there are some young people who will simply never get involved, no matter how compelling the need or persuasive the message. They may already have "their own ways" of giving back, or may be disinterested in the causes, or may be overextended and too stressed to give their time to anyone but those closest to them.

Overall, people are volunteering less in institutional organizations. A fair number of young people don't define themselves as "volunteers" even though they are highly involved in working with their communities. Some people are more likely to say that they "help out" rather than "volunteer." According to the study by the League of Women Voters, community engagement is "often localized, personalized and tends to be channeled through individual and group-based activities rather than through established organizations."

And don't assume that all those in the non-volunteer category can't be moved into the volunteer category. It is instructive, when determining how to get young adults involved, to understand what makes non-volunteers tick. A number of their reasons for not

volunteering are, in fact, the logical opposites of what we heard from the volunteers with whom we spoke. However, a number of their thought processes were intriguingly different.

Why They're Not Getting Involved

Our focus group respondents offered a number of explanations for their lack of involvement, including being unaware of opportunities, having a fear of volunteering, and lacking the time. While we cannot say that getting them involved is as simple as telling them you exist, there were a number of non-volunteers who claimed they might be interested if they were made aware of the range of available opportunities, particularly those which fit their interests.

The majority of the non-volunteers, in fact, were at a loss to say where they might go to find information on volunteer opportunities. Their confusion is a definite indication that more, clearer communication about the opportunities available to them would go a long way toward getting them involved.

- Lack of time – or a lack of flexible volunteering alternatives that fit into their time constraints—was without a doubt one of the biggest impediments to involvement. As one haggard non-volunteer remarked in *The Wall Street Journal*, "it's only an hour a week...it doesn't sound like a lot, but there's weeks when you'd kill for 15 minutes."
- One of the biggest issues seemed to be the perceived time commitment required of new volunteers upfront. As one of our focus group respondents explained:
"Here I am, struggling to make my own ends meet. Then I say I want to volunteer. Then you tell me I have to go through all of these training classes before I can even help out? That's just not going to happen!"
- The fear of volunteering is another issue, a complex one with several different dimensions. First, there is the fear of the unknown. Many of today's young adults have grown up under a

"VOLUNTEERING" VS. "GETTING INVOLVED"

The Ad Council recently conducted research for a public service campaign for the Office of National Drug Control Policy to encourage people to get involved with local drug prevention efforts. One of the key learnings from the research was that the word "volunteer" is a highly loaded term to some, implying structured, high-commitment activities and scaring some of them off. In communications, looser terms such as "get involved with" or "help" were seen to be more inviting and therefore more successful.



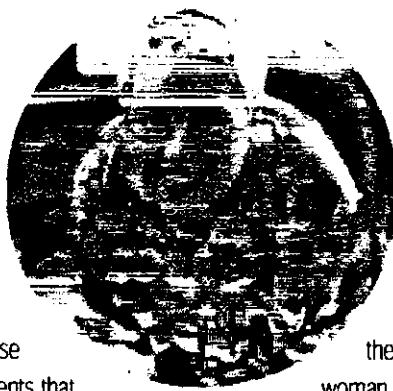
regime of crowded calendars, multi-tasking parents, and days that are scheduled to the minute with activities with known outcomes. Not surprisingly, this context tends to color their views about the activities in which they participate as young adults. There is also the fear of attachment. They worry about getting attached to an elderly or sick person who might die, or to a child who will grow up and not need their support.

- We heard numerous comments and questions about how the process might work. Several respondents wondered how long volunteering would take and how often they'd have to go. Others worried about what they would physically do once they showed up for their projects. "Will I know what to do and when?" lingered in the air as respondents tried to get their arms around an activity that did not fit neatly into other aspects of their lives.

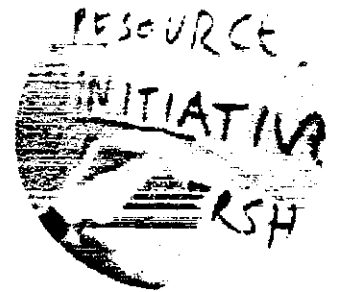
Distinguishing Characteristics of a Non-Volunteer

One of the differences between volunteers and non-volunteers, which may help to explain the latter group's mystification about volunteering, is the apparent lack of volunteer role models in non-volunteers' lives. The volunteers with whom we spoke made countless references to family, friends, or co-workers who had "nudged" them to get involved. Non-volunteers, in contrast, did not typically have any close colleagues who were actively involved in a cause of any kind. As a result, there was no one to turn to for the "real answer" to their questions, or to show them the ropes. This underscores the importance of good training and mentoring programs.

Perhaps related to their fears about how the volunteer process would work, non-volunteers raised concerns about the perceived lack of organization on the part of today's nonprofits. There appeared to be a significant fear that nonprofit organizations are either buried in layers of politics and bureaucracy or are simply disorganized. They seemed to feel that they could not afford to get involved with an organization whose structure might create unnecessary time commitments that would weigh them down.



The fear of "bureaucracy" is something we hear a great deal about from young people – and this fear is not limited to nonprofits. Bureaucracy is mentioned as a disincentive against everything from corporate jobs to mass-marketed brand names. In short, today's young people tend to be far more responsive to small, nimble, creative, and locally relevant organizations.



Non-volunteers often had a different mindset than volunteers, and their views of the world led them to different conclusions on the importance of being involved. Some simply felt less responsible to their communities, or were comfortable that they were already giving back in other ways. As one man noted, "My company is one of the biggest employers in town. So that's my way of giving back. I employ people!"

Some had a more significant need to be recognized and appreciated for their efforts. Unlike volunteers, they were unwilling to devote their time to anything for which there would be no guaranteed payoff.

Some non-volunteers appeared to subscribe to the idea that they could compress their volunteering efforts into one chapter of life, as opposed to making volunteering part of a lifelong pattern. As a result, they seemed to feel that they had "done their time" at some point – usually in high school, when many students are required to volunteer – and there was no need to continue trying to fit volunteering into their busy lives.

Perhaps most dramatically, many non-volunteers seemed to have very specific images of volunteers in their minds, and these images stood in stark contrast to the way they viewed themselves. As a result, they reasoned, they were not cut out to be volunteers. Some non-volunteers, for example, ascribed ulterior motives to their volunteer counterparts, calling them "people who just want to look good." As one woman explained, "that's what I think of people who volunteer all the time, and I don't want to be perceived that way."

Some people are more likely to say that they "help out" rather than "volunteer."

[Non - volunteers] failed to see the "selfish" aspect of involvement, and could not see any personal benefit to devoting their time to volunteer efforts

Non-volunteers also sometimes envisioned volunteers as martyrs, who would "rather give than receive." They failed to see the "selfish" aspect of involvement, and could not see any personal benefit to devoting their time to volunteer efforts.

Finally, many non-volunteers thought of those who were involved as nothing short of "saints." Not surprisingly, these people tended to sell themselves short, believing that "I'm not good enough" to be one of them. For example, one of the key findings for the Ad Council's public service campaign for Save the Children, which targeted potential mentors, was that people believed they needed special skills to be a mentor. The mistaken belief of many potential volunteers that they didn't possess those skills prevented them from participating.

Non-volunteers tended to be almost overwhelmed by the scope of the world's problems – and underwhelmed by their own ability to make a difference. Interestingly, several of the non-volunteers with whom we spoke had a strong desire to help. But they seemed to have written off volunteering as a part of their lives because they were worried that once they got started, they would never be able to give enough. Like many in their generation, they have striven to avoid letting others down.

Volunteers had the same desire, but they seemed to have less of a feeling that they would have to solve all of the world's problems within an already crowded work or school week. They were also more willing to take it on faith that their efforts were making a difference.

Using This Information: When we talked about the volunteering process, many of our non-volunteers geared their comments around the theory that "an hour isn't going to be enough."

As one man explained, "The amount of time I have to give is never going to satisfy an organization, and it sure isn't going to be enough to make a difference in anyone's cause. I just don't want to feel the guilt of letting someone down."

Before you give up entirely on large groups of potential volunteers, consider ways to assure them that even an hour of their time can make a difference in the lives of the people you serve. How can you prove to skeptical young adults that they can have an impact during the limited time they have to volunteer with your organization? How can you convince them that they have the exact skills/abilities/potential that you are seeking in a volunteer?

Also, take a good objective look at any barriers within your organization or volunteer structure that might add to the fears and insecurities of non-volunteers. What can be done to remove those barriers, making it easier for you to attract a broader range of volunteers?

Given the myriad reasons for not volunteering however, it is important to realize that there are some young adults who will probably never get involved, no matter how compelling the need or persuasive the message. So once you've exhausted all your strategies for drawing in volunteers, let go of those who repeatedly decline to get involved.

NOTES

HOW YOU ATTRACT VOLUNTEERS



Overview

- Appointing and training a volunteer coordinator who is in charge of all volunteer efforts and communications is key to a successful program.
- Volunteers should be instilled with a strong sense of affiliation with your organization and cause, and should be recognized and rewarded for their efforts.
- When you're thinking about the types of work that need volunteers, don't be afraid to think big.
- Your process is as important as your product—think through your entire volunteer process and try to see it through 18-24-year-old eyes.
- Offer volunteers as much flexibility as possible, with opportunities to volunteer ranging from one day to once a week to "fit it in when you can."

Before you begin the hard work of finding and attracting young people as volunteers, you need to make sure that your organization is prepared to handle them as they come through the door. Everything we've learned from both volunteers and our experts tells us that this is no small piece of the puzzle. In fact, it may be the key piece when it comes to the question of how to get volunteers to come back after their first time working with you. As for-profit marketers would say, this is all about building customer loyalty – creating committed young people who want to come back and support your cause again and again.



time and efforts are appreciated. Often they will get this feeling of appreciation directly from the people they have come to help. However, a few well-timed thank you's in the form of anything from thank you notes to pizza parties will be an often unexpected bonus to them.

Finally, the Volunteer Coordinator should facilitate reflection among your volunteer forces. The goal here is to help young people realize what they have learned in their dealings with you, to make it mean something to them. One of the best ways to do this may be to offer a feedback mechanism to collect volunteers' reactions at the end of each experience. This feedback, whether oral or written, can alert you to problems as well as getting your volunteers to think back on what they've experienced.

If the Coordinator is able to stimulate this type of introspection, she will likely bind young people even more intimately to your cause. They will likely realize that they have developed a passion for what they are doing.

One of the other reasons for having a Volunteer Coordinator is to make sure your volunteers feel well taken care of from the moment they cross your threshold. As Tom Shields from the University of Illinois explained, "You just don't want to treat volunteers as free labor. They don't want to feel taken for granted."

Setting Up Systems That Work

The Volunteer Coordinator

One of the most critical steps, according to the experts, is to appoint a Volunteer Coordinator who has been carefully selected and trained. This person's mission is to coordinate all volunteer efforts and communications across your enterprise. Typically, he or she will be the first "point of contact" a volunteer will have with your organization. So he or she will figure heavily in the creation of first impressions. The Coordinator will also be volunteers' key liaison to your organization throughout their relationship with you. As a result, it's imperative that the Coordinator be organized to a fault, be respectful of the volunteers, and be aware of and sensitive to their needs.



Once you have a Volunteer Coordinator, there are a number of issues you'll want to have her mull over. First, she should be charged with giving every volunteer a sense of affiliation with you and your cause. The goal is to make young people feel like part of your organization. The Coordinator will achieve this goal primarily by setting up an accountable communications system with the volunteers. She will ideally call to remind them of big events, and check in with them if you haven't seen them in a while. More importantly, she will be vigilant about returning their calls within 24 hours.

The Coordinator should also come up with a plan to give volunteers a sense of achievement. While our respondents were varied in their opinions about how important it is to see tangible signs of progress, it cannot hurt to come up with simple benchmarks to measure how far you – and they – have come toward meeting your goals.

The Volunteer Coordinator should also put a variety of recognition systems in place. Though the young people we talked to were sometimes reluctant to admit it, it is important that they feel their

Better Ways to Involve Your Volunteers

There are several steps you can take to create an appreciative atmosphere for your volunteer team. Consider sponsoring new member orientation sessions to acclimate new volunteers to your organization. The orientation can serve as an opportunity for current and prospective volunteers to get to know each other.

This type of session also gives you the chance to ask new volunteers how they want to get involved. You can distribute a simple survey that lists the different ways to participate, and asks them to rank their top choices. This gesture, even if you're not able to meet every volunteer's needs, will provide them with an important sense of control.

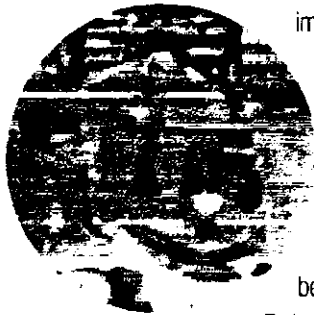
Try to offer periodic orientation sessions to your young team. They'll appreciate the sense that their development is important to you.

Of course, all of the orientation sessions in the world won't get you an all-star volunteer team if you're not able to offer meaningful roles to the volunteers who come to you.

Studies have shown that young people who choose to get involved generally seek out the most



substantial roles they can find. As one of our respondents explained, "I don't have that much free time in my week so, of course, I want to use those extra hours to do something important. Why would I want to use the time to photocopy or collate?"



So, when you're thinking about the types of work that need volunteers, don't be afraid to think big. If you're worried about giving someone too much responsibility before he has proven himself, consider offering volunteering internships at your office.

This will allow you to "test the waters" with a new person and determine whether his skills are a good fit with your needs. If you're concerned that your organization alone cannot offer enough "meaty" opportunities to attract young volunteers, consider partnering with other organizations to create joint projects.

You might want to think about increasing the number of young adults who sit on your board of directors or on committees. You send a strong message about valuing volunteers when former volunteers are named to sit on the governing board of your organization, and are given a say in how your organization is run. The bottom line is that your best bet for attracting talented young people is offering them projects that challenge them and allow them to grow.

It's also important to create connections between your volunteers. After all, many young people are looking for ways to connect with others with whom they have something in common. You should do everything you can to facilitate these relationships, as they will often be one of the strongest motivators to get your volunteers to keep coming back. Make sure to offer a range of social opportunities for your volunteers, as this can go a long way toward maintaining the momentum of your program.



EXAMPLE: Volunteers Take Charge

In October 1997, four students at the University of Illinois were in the midst of planning extensive activities for a Hunger & Homelessness Week when they heard some disturbing news. A local shelter for homeless men was shut down when a contractor discovered asbestos in the basement. The men were moved to a facility without showers; the nearest showers were one mile away. Rather than dropping their commitment to the Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week, the University students increased their commitment to both priorities. The students drove a van to the shelter every morning at 6:00 to transport the men back and forth to the showers. They also began an emergency clothing, food, and toiletries drive. They continued this schedule for four weeks, through midterm exams, until the shelter re-opened – the week before Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week.

"The Process is the Product"

One of the most important things to understand about young adults, according to Wieden & Kennedy's Claire Grossman, is that for them "the process is the product. That's why you have someone like a Priceline.com who can come along and create a whole new market for something as basic as airline tickets. Because they're turning the purchase process on its head – which makes it a whole new, much more appealing product."



What this means for nonprofits is that you must think carefully about your process, to try to view it through the eyes of your 18-24 year old target. In fact, one of the more meaningful projects you may wish to offer a volunteer is the opportunity to participate on a "process review" team. The team would be charged with thinking through your entire volunteer process and coming up with ways to make it better.

All of the orientation sessions in the world won't get you an all-star volunteer team if you're not able to offer meaningful roles to the volunteers who come to you.

"For [young adults], the process is the product." – Claire Grossman, Wieden & Kenney

The "process" is everything that happens—from signing up volunteers to getting them to the events to completing the events. Among the topics the team should discuss are recruiting, new volunteer orientation, staffing and assignments, volunteer communications, logistics of getting to and from volunteer events, evaluation and tracking mechanisms, and reward and recognition.

With every step of the process, the team should discuss ways to make the logistics a cinch. Event logistics probably deserve special attention, as volunteers and non-volunteers alike were extremely sensitive to the demands of their overly crowded calendars. By doing all you can to keep volunteers' time productive, you will send a strong message that you care about your volunteers and understand their needs. This may mean holding events in central locations or even providing transportation for those who need it.

Flexibility

More and more, today's young people are begging for – even demanding – flexibility in their lives. They demand it from friends and employers, and they will surely demand it from you. The rationale is that they are giving you their most precious resource – their time. The least you can do is grant them a bit of leeway in how they allocate their time.

So, when you're reviewing your process, take a hard look at the array of options you offer to your volunteers. Then make sure you are offering a variety of time commitments to help young people fit volunteering into their lives. For example, it would be ideal for you to offer:



- One day projects
- Once a week projects
- Ongoing "fit it in when you can" projects
- Part-time internships

You may also wish to think about how, if at all, you can incorporate the Web into your volunteer processes. There appears to be a new, growing trend toward "cyber volunteering" which, while it may not fit with your every need, may allow you to attract volunteers you would not otherwise have attracted to your cause. For example, ImpactOnline.com is a virtual volunteering site that lists projects that can be done on the Internet, and provides links to the sponsoring organizations.

Using This Information: Once you've created this array of options, it is vitally important that you "make the contract clear" to your volunteers. Essentially, you want to let them know what you need them to do in what period of time, and what they can expect from you in return.

Of course, let volunteers know that you're always open to expanding their roles, should they so desire. Encourage them to form committees around issues of interest to them, and to play off each other's strengths. In that way, you will create the ultimate flexibility for them and, in doing so, will be granting their number-one request. If you can do this, you will attract an ambitious group of volunteers and, hopefully, you'll retain their loyalty over time. That is perhaps the greatest definition of success.

NOTES

HOW TO DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN



Overview

- Develop messages that resonate strongly with young adults. Be direct and candid, be personal, stay focused, don't preach or patronize.
- Consider a spokesperson - a celebrity, a "real person," or an opinion leader - who has credibility and influence with young adults.
- Create a plan to ensure that your target audience hears your message. Consider using local media, national media, direct mail, the Internet, and unconventional marketing approaches to reach young adults.

Once you have systems in place for using and retaining young people as volunteers, it is time to create a plan for communicating with them and attracting their attention. There are countless ways to make your organization more appealing to young people. In this section we'll talk about the primary issues most marketers think about when planning their communications:

- **How to position the product/service**
- **What types of messages to send**
- **How, if at all, to incorporate spokespeople**
- **What media to use**

However, there are a few important things to do before you start to think about your communications plan. First and foremost, it's critical for you to be clear about your objectives. This is often much easier said than done. Only once you have set a core team in place and determined what your organization is trying to accomplish can you clearly convey that mission to the people you are trying to attract as volunteers.

This clarity of mission is critical to today's young adults. After all, if they're going to give you their time, they'll want to know exactly what purpose their efforts will serve. They'll be curious to know about any benchmarks you have created to measure progress against your goals.

Young people are also likely to be impressed by an organization that knows its reason for being because, by stating explicitly what you stand for, you show them your passion for that very specific cause. As previously stated, passion is extremely powerful in appealing to this generation.

After you've determined your objectives, it's important to craft a strategy to meet them, and to identify the roles you want volunteers to play in implementing that strategy. Again, this sounds obvious – but every would-be volunteer who's had the experience of arriving to help out and getting no clear sense of how he could help or when he would be needed will understand the importance of this point.

Many of our experts also recommended including young people as advisors to and managers of your planning process. This may be one of the most effective techniques you can implement, and it's something nonprofits of all sizes can take advantage of immediately. You're likely to be pleasantly surprised by young

people's energy, positive outlook, and creativity.

Last, but not least, don't ignore for-profit organizations as teachers. Like you, they are competing vigorously against one another for whatever attention they can get from a very time-strapped audience. Their marketing tactics, while geared around increasing market share rather than creating social change, can often be instructive and inspirational. So don't hesitate to glance at the business and marketing press, and talk to your for-profit colleagues. You're likely to find countless good ideas and examples that you can apply to your own efforts.

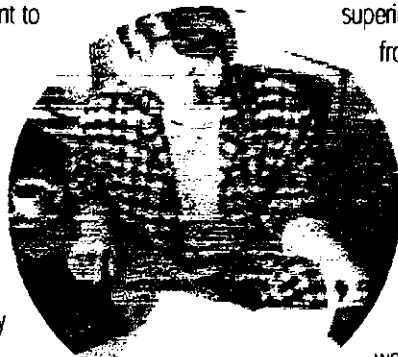
Positioning Your Organization

When for-profit marketers develop communications plans, they typically begin with the question of how to position their products and services – how to make their products stand out in a crowded marketplace. A product's "positioning" is supposed to give consumers a clear sense of how the product is different from, and presumably superior to, all of the other products they have to choose from. Once they have agreed on how to position their products, marketers try to incorporate that positioning in all of their advertising and communications efforts. In a perfect world, the consumer hears a consistent message from many angles, and thus gets a clear sense of why he or she should buy the product.

Nonprofit organizations can adopt this technique as well. The national organizations among you probably already occupy a "position" in consumers' minds. This position can be molded or adapted, with some focused communications. New or smaller organizations tend to start out as a blank slate in consumers' minds. To the extent that you have the opportunity to position your organization, our research uncovered a number of platforms that should resonate with young people.

Messaging Strategies for Volunteers

We exposed our volunteers and non-volunteers to a series of potential positioning statements on engaging young adults, several of which resonated strongly with them. (See Appendix 2 for a complete list of the positioning statements.)



The statement that got the best response from young people was

"...I know that I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference
in someone else's life."





The statement that got the best response from young people was:

"By getting involved in a social cause, I know that I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference in someone else's life." This makes perfect sense, because the statement frees young people from the pressure to take

on all of the world's problems. It instead points out the value of "small" contributions. Volunteers had several reactions to this statement:

- "This is right on. After all, if everyone had to change the world, we'd never get started."
- "If you didn't think this, you'd get flustered and never just dive in."
- "I don't have to change the world – I'm motivated by just the smile."
- "You can't look for instant rewards. That's not what volunteering is about. You just have to have faith."
- "This is a really motivating statement. It gives you permission to try, without worrying about failure."

Another well-received statement was: "it makes me feel good to help others." Both volunteers and non-volunteers found it to be a powerful idea. Volunteers commented:

- "This is just a fact. It's the most basic reason you volunteer."
- "It's important to feel good by just showing up!"
- "Making you feel good is an end product of making others feel good."

Non-volunteers chimed in as well:

- "This speaks to the idea of 'doing it from the heart.' I like this. It makes me feel as if people's intentions are pure."
- "It's hard to say why I like it. I guess it just makes me feel warm and fuzzy."

"I have been fortunate in life and would like to give to others who are less fortunate," was also liked by our respondents, particularly the volunteers. Many of our volunteers or their families had overcome personal hardships, which made them value what they have today. Among other things, we heard about immigrant parents and relatives with debilitating diseases such as cerebral palsy. Our volunteers' personal experiences often influenced their favorite causes. One woman whose father was homeless and mentally ill spoke of her desire to help build shelters for those in need. Another who had been stalked in her teen years wanted to work to stop others from suffering the same fate.

The other message idea that appears to be quite powerful is that nonprofit organizations have much to give back to those who get involved with them. Whether it's gaining new friends, new skills, or a broader sense of meaning about the world, volunteering can contribute to a young person's life in ways few other activities can.

Of course not all of these positioning ideas will work for every organization. You may feel somewhat constrained about how complex your positioning can be depending on your organization's outreach strategy. The key is to find a story or message that works for your organization, and then incorporate it into all of your communications. By coming at today's young people with one consistent message, you'll reinforce your brand and be more likely to stand out amidst all the clutter.

Using This Information: Here are some ideas, in addition to those above, for positioning that our experts developed:

- Try to position yourselves as people who have a common passion and rally around a cause as people, rather than as an institution. Young adults are much more likely to gravitate toward small organizations and people they can connect with than to large and (in their mind) nameless, faceless organizations. Large organizations can get around this by setting up smaller programs or task forces within their organization.
- You may decide to emphasize certain volunteers and the contributions they've made, and to position your organization around them. You might choose to ask the question, "Who is a volunteer?" and use a campaign to answer that question in a series of different images or vignettes. This type of positioning can be quite effective at dispelling some of the false images non-volunteers have of their volunteer counterparts.
- You could also position volunteer work as being all about ideas. Today's entrepreneurial young adults, more than any other generation, have embraced the power of ideas. They have learned that having the right idea – and assembling people to bring that idea to life – can make someone very successful. If you choose to adopt this "idea" positioning, you could use a series of simple vignettes to show how one or two people made something happen just by acting on an idea.
- You can also develop a positioning based on the mission of your organization.



Give them the facts and the whys and let them make their own decisions

VIGNETTE: Eddie Armstrong

Eddie Armstrong was only seven years old when his mother fled an abusive relationship, taking him and his younger brother from Memphis to a public housing project in North Little Rock, AR. When he was 10, he joined the local Boys & Girls Club. He told the staff that his housing area was in terrible shape and, when he was 17, one of the staffers recommended that he write a grant proposal. Eddie's proposal garnered him \$25,000 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to "restore and enhance" the parks and playgrounds around his building. In 1998, Eddie was awarded the Boys & Girls Club's Youth of the Year Award, which carried a scholarship stipend of \$10,000. Today he is majoring in political science at the University of Arkansas and aspires to hold political office.

- You can test potential positioning(s) by discussing them with a group of young people – current volunteers for your organization, or non-volunteers you might be trying to attract.

Do's and Don'ts of Creating Messages

Once you've agreed on how to position your organization and cause, what do you need to think about with respect to the actual message that you send? Young adults who viewed a series of PSAs in our focus groups responded favorably to humor, music, meaningful content and positive, actionable messages. They are also looking for messages that show cause and effect or a sense of accomplishing goals.

While we can't prescribe the perfect message for everyone, we can suggest some guidelines to keep in mind as you're crafting and delivering your message. The following suggestions are based upon our respondents' reactions to messages we tested.

- Be relevant to your target market. It probably goes without saying that if your message has no meaning to them, it will fall on deaf ears.
- Be direct and candid with young people. After all of the communications they've heard and seen, they tend to tire quickly of messages that are not honest.

- Be authentic in your messages. Do not try to be something you're not or try to be all things to all people. Marketers often use real people with real stories to contribute some authenticity – and young people tend to be quite receptive to their messages.
- Let them decide. The most effective ads today tend to make young people feel as if they made a decision. For example, Kristen Volk and Kevin Fay, who did the strategic planning work for Volkswagen's Jetta advertising, used this principle and created a highly successful commercial (where two young men cruise around town, pick up a discarded armchair, wrinkle their noses, and discard the chair). These ads don't tell young people what to do. Instead, they give them the facts and the whys and let them make their own decisions.
- Be personal. Effective communications also tend to adopt more of a personal than an institutional tone, as mentioned earlier. Whether by telling one person's story or simply by avoiding references to "organizations" or "associations," these messages are generally better received by their young target audience.
- Stay focused. The most effective tone in the world gets lost if a message is too broad or confusing. Given all of the stimuli in their lives, young people typically have no patience for anything but laser-sharp focus. Your message should be as specific and as clear as possible.
- Be true to yourself. Be true to your brand and your values. If Nike suddenly started to advertise itself as a manufacturer of dress shoes, consumers might wonder what was going on. But of course Nike hasn't changed the core message of its advertising. The company has done very well by sticking with "Just Do It" and maintaining that brand message over time.
- Make it easy for young people to learn more about your organization. Ideally, communication materials should tell young people what you need them to do, and should also provide them with a way to learn more if they so desire. This can be done by providing a local phone number or address, a toll-free number, or a Web site. These days, many nonprofits report that their Web sites are their best sources for fulfilling volunteer requests.



- Don't try to mimic young people's language, unless the person delivering the message is also from that age group. They tend to see right through adults who try to use slang in hopes of appealing to them.
- Don't preach or patronize. Young people don't want to hear your opinions, but they do want you to give them facts.
- Don't over-promise. Young people can see right through it. They would much prefer that you "tell it like it is."
- Statistics, while they can provide important evidence to support your story, should be used sparingly and never in a vacuum. Most youth marketers have found that a combination of facts and emotions work best when talking to young people. Indeed, the facts are important to give them a sense of the situation and why it's important that they get involved. But numbers and statistics can make people's eyes glaze over, and it is the emotion that typically brings your story to life. But be careful: Young people tend to resent marketers who attempt to manipulate their feelings. This may be because they generally have stressful lives, and are dealing with plenty of their own problems. In fact, several of the volunteers and non-volunteers protested that some of the Public Service Announcements they had seen made them feel guilty and helpless rather than empowering them to do something.

Delivering the Message

You've got the positioning, and you've crafted the message. Now who should deliver the message on your behalf? One of the common elements of today's for-profit marketing plans is the use of spokespeople. Many for-profit organizations have identified spokespeople as a way of making themselves stand out in the crowd, and there's no doubt that they are right in that assumption. Whether paid spokespeople are always the best use of marketing dollars, particularly when your budget is limited, remains inconclusive. Much depends on the type of spokespeople you use – celebrities or non-celebrities.

Celebrity Spokespeople

As the more expensive of the two options, celebrities offer a number of benefits. For those who can afford them (and sometimes they will work with you for free), celebrities bring instant recognition and can

heighten the profile of your organization or cause. The caveat, particularly in the nonprofit world, is that celebrities must have a credible connection with your cause. If this connection is not there, young people are likely to become more cynical about your organization as a result. They are well aware of the high prices celebrities command, and may well think you have "bought" a meaningless endorsement.

We've also seen that, while celebrities are incredibly appealing and interesting to young people, consumers today are often just as likely to respond to "real people" as used by Delia's (a girls' clothing catalogue) and The Gap in their marketing and advertising materials.

Celebrities also have very crowded schedules. Many are already overextended with brands or causes, and typically don't want to dilute their images by standing for too much.

You might want to keep your eyes open for celebrities who have spoken openly about having experience with or who care deeply about the issues your organization is involved in. It is much easier to approach a celebrity who has a natural affinity to the work you do or whose life has been touched by the issues you are concerned about. One option, for those who want a famous spokesperson without a top-tier price tag, is to consider working with "alternative" celebrities such as authors, local musicians, athletes, and new/emerging

actors and actresses. These people tend to have more to gain in terms of the beneficial PR they receive by supporting a cause and, interestingly, you may find that they create more of a buzz than a mainstream celebrity.

Several urban marketing companies have found success by tapping into athletes, particularly extreme athletes, and musicians. Both groups appear to be making themselves more and more accessible to cause-related marketing. A growing number of artists such as Mariah Carey, Lauryn Hill, and Whitney Houston have gotten involved with nonprofits, often through their managing agents. You can contact organizations such as RADD (Recording Artists, Actors and Athletes Against Drunk Driving) or the trade organization RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) to learn more.

According to Tony Phillips of Persaud Brothers, today's popular music genres such as Hip Hop and Latin music are at their core very upbeat and positive. So a partnership with one of these types of artists would be a logical fit for many nonprofits. Of course, depending on the size and location of your organization, it may not be practical to think along these lines. But if you're in a concentrated



Celebrities must have a credible connection with your cause.

Don't overlook influential young people who are already involved in your organization as either staff or volunteers.

Marketing Partnerships

You may want to consider attempting to market yourself in partnership with a record company or artist. This makes sense since both of you are reaching out to the same target audience and have similar communications goals. The exact arrangements of a partnership would vary based on each party's goals and strengths. Consider this potential division of responsibilities between a nonprofit and a new record label:

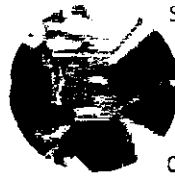
- **Human resources.** Your volunteers help them with their promotional campaigns such as tours, local events, etc. They provide advertising space for you on their materials from posters to brochures to CD inserts.
- **Budgets.** The two of you may be able to pool your resources and share budgets in multiple ways from sharing public relations materials to secretarial staff. According to Phillips, the great thing about working closely with emerging artists is that "they're used to the shoestring budgets." You may even pick up a few tricks from them.
- **Joint Events.** To the extent that your organization wants to conduct events to rally young people in your community, you could provide the crowd and the cause, and your partner could provide the entertainment. This type of event is a true "win/win" situation. You get the added draw of the entertainment, and they get the valuable exposure to their target market.

urban area and think there might be some appeal to working with these types of spokespeople, it may be well worth considering.

Opinion Leaders

Of course, it's probably more realistic for many of you to think about spokespeople who, while not nationally recognizable, are nonetheless compelling to the young people in your area. These people are what for-profit organizations call the "opinion leaders." They can be invaluable to your cause.

The logic behind opinion leaders is that it's nearly impossible to attract all 18-24 year olds to your cause. Knowing this, many



sophisticated marketers choose instead to get their messages across to influential young people.

The theory is that, if an influencer is using your product – or is involved with or supports your cause – his peers will begin to ask him about it, and eventually they too will seek you out.

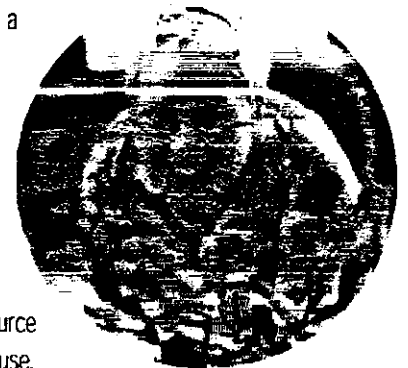
So who are the opinion leaders and how do you find them? Not surprisingly, it's much more of an art than a science to tap into this group. There are several options to consider. If you're located in a college town, you can mine the local universities for student leaders such as athletes, politicians, musicians, and presidents of the student clubs. You may find that someone on the faculty would be glad to work with you to get the students involved in some type of outreach. It's also worth contacting other local college marketing companies. They may be able and willing to give you insights into the college populations in your area.

Even if there are colleges nearby, you may want to tap into high school seniors. They're on the younger end of our target audience, but those who plan to stay in the community could be great supporters for your organization. At a minimum, they may be able to help you find recent graduates who are active and respected in the community.

You may want to talk to the large employers in your town to get a list of recent new hires. These folks, because they're newer to the community, may not have fully established themselves as leaders. But new entrants to a community are often eager to meet new people and can be a great source of energy for you and your cause.

Finally, it's worth keeping track of young local entrepreneurs who are "making it big." Newly minted millionaires, or just plain wealthy business people, generally like to speak out about what they have learned. They also seem to want to share their wealth with those who are less fortunate. If you can get them involved, you may have an interesting spokesperson opportunity.

And don't overlook influential young people who are already involved in your organization as either staff or volunteers. Keep an eye out for those young men and women who seem to exude charisma,





who serve as models of behavior and style for others their age. See if they are willing to help in either recruiting other opinion leaders or by serving as spokespeople.

Once you find opinion leaders willing to be involved, the goal is to educate them about your organization, if you can get them excited and engaged, encourage them to "tell two friends" as part of your recruiting process. These young people can also serve as "volunteer role models"— something our volunteers told us was important to them. Think of the power of having a small group of five to 10 influential young people spreading the message on your behalf. This is what for-profit marketers have come to call "viral marketing," and it can be incredibly powerful for you.

Local Heroes

The other tack you can take is to feature as your spokespeople a handful of young local leaders who are already involved in or supporting your cause. The idea is to profile these folks and have them speak about why they got involved, what they got out of it, and why they are passionate about the cause. You can also provide "snapshots" of what these individuals have achieved on behalf of themselves and others. For example, did they teach a kid to play basketball? Learn to manage a database? Motivate a group of sixth graders?

The benefit of this approach is that it allows your organization to come across in a very personal way, and it showcases one person's passion for what she has done. It also celebrates "the little victories" — the very simple things so many volunteers have embraced as benefits of their involvement. If non-volunteers hear

TJ Leyden: MTV's Anti-hate Spokesperson

Individuals whose lives have been profoundly touched or changed by the cause you support make excellent spokespeople. We showed both our volunteer and non-volunteer groups a series of public service announcements (PSAs) about such things as drug prevention, diversity, and activism. The PSA that received the strongest response was an anti-hate commercial from MTV. The spot featured TJ Leyden, a former neo-Nazi who spent 15 years "promoting hatred and intolerance," but who now works with the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, educating people about the "dangers of hate." That this man could be reformed was much more powerful and motivating than any celebrity's lecture would have been.

these kinds of stories, they may well rethink their views on what volunteering is about and what they might "get back" if they give some of their time.

Ensuring Spokespeople Succeed

Make sure that your spokespeople — whether celebrities, ordinary people or opinion leaders — are comfortable in that role. For most people, this means having the tools they need to sound and look credible. Provide scripts or position papers or talking points about your organization and issues. Keep the spokespeople up to date on developments that affect your issues. Offer spokespeople training in which an expert helps them both craft and deliver your messages. And always make sure your spokespeople continue to feel appreciated and needed.

Choosing Vehicles to Reach Your Audience

Once you've created your message and chosen your spokespeople, it is important to develop a plan to ensure that the right people hear that message loud and clear. This outreach step is one of the more complex parts of the marketing process. Indeed, our advertising agency experts told us that today's media decisions are getting increasingly intricate.

The bottom line is that it's getting harder and harder to break through to young people today. They are enthusiastic consumers of the media, but they've got a mind-boggling array of choices to make every time they visit a newsstand, flip on the TV, or boot up their computers. And young people are taking advantage of the variety being served up to them. In 1999, 18-24 years olds watched an average of 21 hours of television per week, and spent almost 23 hours per week listening to the radio, according to Mediamark Research Inc. Overall, research suggests that radio and magazines are the two most effective media for reaching young people, possibly because they are portable and this is such an active group. (See Appendix 4 for more on their preferences and behavior with respect to TV programs, magazines, and websites.)



Non-Traditional Media

According to the experts, you may want to hold off on using mass media until later in your campaign — if you use it at all. The primary reason for this, in addition to the expense, is that mass media is not a good fit with the small, intimate feel most nonprofits try to create for their messages. It tends to feel slick and impersonal to young people who are more likely to trust a message if it feels "homegrown."

The more effective way to start, in the words of Wieden & Kennedy's Claire Grossman, is to "Let young people touch, feel, and



embrace your idea. Your goal is to surround them with your message, and create a sense of discovery. In order to do this, you want to think of everything as a potential contact point. You're looking to connect, connect, connect!"

All of that may sound good, but how do you put these ideas into practice? There are several ways to come up with a non-traditional media plan. One idea is to think about where young adults go in your community when they have down time. Take your message to them there. You could post your flyers anywhere from school clubs to hair salons to coffee shops to art galleries to campus bookstores.

Also consider putting your message in unexpected places where it's more likely to be noticed. These might include posting flyers at local events such as parties and shows, or recreational areas such as skate parks and basketball courts. You can consider graffiti, or chalk drawings on high-trafficked sidewalks. You may even leverage a partnership arrangement to get your message printed on CDs or video games, both of which are popular with young people.

Symbols

You may want to consider using relevant symbols or accessories to convey your message. Your symbol may be your logo, or it can be some other picture that you think has a meaningful connection to your organization.

Symbols are very powerful among young people today. When a new symbol first emerges on the scene, it often feels very "underground" as consumers attempt to figure out what it is. Beyond that, young people love the idea of feeling as if they have "the inside

Two symbols: WWJD bracelets and the AIDS ribbon

A Christian youth group in Holland, MI read a book that inspired them to live according to the question, "What would Jesus do?" To remind themselves of the concept, they began wearing woven bracelets bearing the letters "WWJD." The bracelets spread to the wider community and then throughout the nation. Now WWJD bracelets, mugs, screensavers, T-shirts, CDs, pencils, and hats are available everywhere.

Similarly, the red AIDS ribbon, worn as a pin, was introduced in the late 1980s by VISUAL AIDS, a New York-based group. Use of the pin grew through the late '80s into the mid-90s as prominent celebrities wore them in support of AIDS research. In 1993, it even appeared on a public service postage stamp. Ultimately, it inspired the development of the lavender ribbon showing support for battered women and the blue ribbon in support of free speech on the Internet.

scoop." You may be able to create that feeling by using a symbol and perhaps getting opinion leaders to display or wear it on T-shirts, jewelry, or even temporary tattoos.

What you're striving for here is the ever-powerful "word of mouth" about your cause and your organization. Effective use of non-traditional media can help get you started, and can help you to build a network of "volunteer mentors."

Of course, you may decide that non-traditional media is just the starting point for your organization. If that's the case, there is a full range of local and national media you may also wish to consider, depending on your budget. There's also the option of using the Web.

Local Media

TV, print, and radio are all viable local media alternatives. All three options can be particularly powerful if you want to get your messages out within your community. Talk to the program director at your local cable access/public access TV station to see if you can tape a program about your organization or get a spokesperson on an existing show. It's also worth considering tapping into college media. Not only is it more targeted than most local media, it can also be cheaper and a more efficient use of your marketing dollars.

You might also consider doing presentations at local venues such as school auditoriums or bookstores. Many communities have annual job fairs or nonprofit fairs. These would provide an excellent opportunity to showcase your organization and your cause. If nothing like this exists, consider sponsoring your own fair. You could either get several local groups to come and celebrate your cause, or share the planning and expense with a few other nonprofit organizations. You may even be able to find a corporate sponsor or two to underwrite your efforts.

National Media

If you decide to broaden your scope and advertise nationally – which makes sense if you're part of a national network – you can consider TV, print, radio, or direct mail. Each medium has its benefits and its drawbacks. (See Appendix 3.)

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"Your goal is to surround them with your message, and create a sense of discovery. In order to do this, you want to think of everything as a potential contact point. You're looking to connect, connect, connect!"

– Claire Grossman, Wieden & Kennedy.

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Television can be a very powerful medium for reaching young adults. Not only are they avid TV watchers, they are also a very visual generation, so TV ads tend to be interesting and engaging to them. The drawbacks are that there are so many choices of TV stations available to them that it is often difficult to reach young people in a strategic way without a major financial commitment. There is also a great deal of competition for limited public service airtime. The good news is that the options for using TV continue to grow. In addition to the standard 15- and 30-second commercials, marketers can take advantage of:

- **Cross Promotions.** Some networks will encourage talk show hosts or news anchors to talk about your cause or organization on-air if you buy advertising time with them. If you can afford this option, it can give added emphasis to your message. You might also want to discuss with the Community Affairs or Public Service Director whether the station would be willing to collaborate with you on a public service campaign. This could be done successfully by literacy organizations, for example. The nonprofit helps the station develop public service announcements (PSAs), news stories and other programming encouraging literacy in the community. The station promotes the nonprofit's messages and even collects books at the TV station for the literacy organization. The TV station benefits by participating in a campaign to improve the community, and the nonprofit gets a lot of free airtime.
- **Product Placement.** Many organizations have spread the word by "seeding" their products or symbols with well-known celebrities who wear them on TV, serving as opinion leaders on a massive scale. Examples of these products include the AIDS bracelet and the breast cancer ribbon, both of which have given their causes enormous recognition.
- **Public Relations.** There is a growing trend toward devoting television episodes to cause-related topics. "Beverly Hills, 90210," one of the perennially popular shows targeted at young people, has become known for incorporating "causes" and morals into its storylines. At the end of the show – if a topic like teen pregnancy has been featured – one of the show's characters explains the topic and provides viewers with a number to call for more information. This can be one of the most powerful ways to get your message across. Viewers get the "one-two punch" of seeing your cause woven into a storyline, then hearing a popular actor or actress encourage them to get involved. There has been a recent surge in the number of TV programs aimed at 18-24 year olds, particularly



on the WB and Fox networks. You might want to check them out to see which might lend themselves to storylines about your cause.

Magazines

Magazines are another viable option, although an incredibly complex one, given the wide array of magazines aimed at young people. As detailed in Appendix 4, young people today enjoy access to a broad range of magazine titles, covering topics ranging from music to fitness to automobiles. The advantage of print, in addition to its niche marketing, is that it can be saved, re-read, and shared with others. And, unlike TV and radio, you are given more space to convey longer and more complex messages.

Which magazines you choose to advertise in depends on the types of young people you are targeting. If you are looking for sports enthusiasts to help coach Little League or serve as mentors to young athletes, you may want to consider magazines directed at active people, sports fans, or athletes.

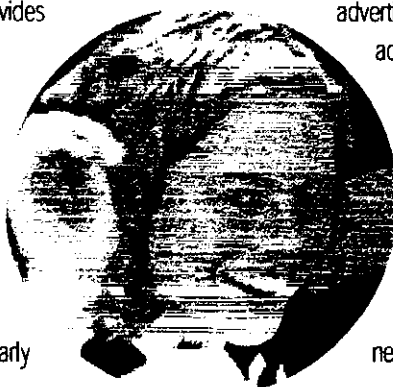
If your goal is to spread the word as rapidly as possible, you'll probably want to emphasize mainstream magazines with larger circulations such as *Allure*, *Mademoiselle* or *Rolling Stone*. Alternatively, you may want to opt for more targeted magazines, in hopes of reaching a more specific group of young people with specific interests related to your cause.

In addition to using advertising or public service announcements in magazines, which might carry a prohibitive cost for some, write to the Articles Editor with a story idea in the hopes that an article will be written about your organization or the work you do. Or, better yet, see if one of your opinion leaders will write an article about why she is involved as a volunteer in your organization, and submit it to a national publication.

The other thing you may wish to take advantage of is the latest print trend: "magalogues." These combination magazine/catalogs are extremely popular with young people today. A number of marketers, including *Delia's* and *Abercrombie & Fitch*, have generated loyal followings of young people with their engaging, creatively designed publications. While magalogues are a fairly new medium for advertising (*Moxie Girl* and *Alloy* are two of the very few actively soliciting advertisers at the moment), they can be an excellent, unique way to reach your target audience.

Newspaper

Since newspaper readership tends to skew older than 18-24, it is not likely that you will reach a large proportion of young people using newspapers. Consider alternative newspapers and



college newspapers, and take advantage of the opportunities they present for both advertising and editorial coverage. 18-24 year olds are much more likely to read the online versions of newspapers, so your best news-related opportunity might lie online.

Radio

Radio remains one of the best, most targeted ways to reach young adults. Marketers of all sorts take advantage of this relatively low-cost way to deliver their messages, and young adults listen an average of almost 23 hours per week. Plus, young people are more likely to identify with their radio station than with other media outlets. The future of radio bears watching, however, given the growing competition from the Internet.

One of the hottest activities on the World Wide Web is downloading music from sites such as the increasingly famous "MP3.com." According to Youth Intelligence's Cassandra Report (Nov. 1999), a youth trend tracking study, only 6% of "mainstream" kids downloaded music from the Web in the past month, while 25% of "trendsetters" did – indicating a rising trend. Trendsetters were selected based on their progressive and experimental attitudes and behaviors.

Young people are also buzzing about creating their own customized listening stations on the Web. Emerging technology will simply ask them to complete surveys on their listening habits, then deliver tailored music mixes along with local news and weather.

Direct Mail

Moving beyond the traditional mass media, an increasing number of marketers have begun to include mail as a more "direct" component of their marketing plans. Direct mail offers several advantages over its sister media. First, mail can often be a more effective means of delivering complex messages. To the extent that you want to convey extensive information about your cause, your organization and what you stand for, you may decide that a letter is the best way to go. You can also use mail to provide quotes from volunteers, pictures of recent events, and even calendars highlighting upcoming gatherings.

Mail is also the most targeted means of reaching your consumer. Once you've got a clear profile of the type of person you want to attract, you can work with any one of a number of vendors who will sell you a targeted mailing list. You may also be able to coordinate trades with vendors who are interested in your mailing list.

The other nice thing about mail is that, as people respond to your mailings, you can create a database of responsive volunteers. This database can become an invaluable marketing tool for you, as it will give you a pool of people to communicate with about upcoming events and news about your organization. It will also allow you to develop a profile of the type of person who is most likely to be

responsive to your cause.

Finally, mail is a flexible medium because it offers you a broad array of options. If your message is short, or your budget limited, you may wish to consider a simple postcard. This will save you money on both production and postage. If you have more to say, you can go for a letter. And, for your ongoing volunteers, you can send a monthly newsletter containing useful tips and interesting news. Your options are limited only by your creativity when it comes to mail.

There are a few other drawbacks to keep in mind when it comes to direct mail. Perhaps the biggest challenge is that young adults are typically a transient group. Whether moving in and out of college or simply following jobs to new cities, they often move around more frequently than other segments of the population.

The other issue is that Americans are becoming increasingly tired of the onslaught of mail they find arriving at their doors each day. As a result, direct mail marketers often find themselves struggling to achieve response rates of 1 to 2%. Still, 1% can be enough to get you started. And, as you learn more about which consumers respond, you may be able to improve your response rate.

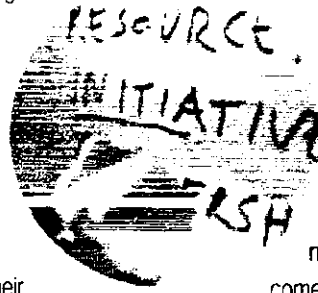
The Internet

Last, but certainly not least, is the Internet. While it's still an emerging medium, the Web has already become well known as an effective tool for reaching consumers, particularly young people. According to the census, 32% of 18-24 year olds currently use the Internet – that's almost 8 million users – compared to only 22% of the adult population that is online. And young people trust the Web more than newspapers or TV, according to Project Vote Smart.

The Web – specifically e-mail – tends to be one of the best ways to communicate with young people over time. Unlike physical addresses, Web addresses are portable and young people tend to keep the same e-mail addresses even as they move around. Also, young people have become accustomed to checking their e-mail boxes on a regular basis, so your message is likely to get to them relatively quickly.

Keep in mind that, just as young people are sensitive about receiving too much mail in their physical boxes, they are also unhappy about receiving an overabundance of unsolicited e-mail or "spam."

The Web can create, in the words of Kristin Volk of Arnold Communications, "an amazing sense of community. Anyone can have a voice there – and that's a powerful thing." Whether flocking to youth-targeted community sites or spreading the word through chat rooms, young



.....
"Young people seem to feel as if some sites have actually become 'their' sites
They have almost an emotional attachment to them."

– Kristin Volk, Arnold Communications.
.....

people are looking high and low to find each other's opinions online. This, according to Volk, "can make the Web feel very personal. Young people seem to feel as if some sites have actually become 'their' sites. They have almost an emotional attachment to them."

The Web is unique in its ability to provide volunteers with a sense of instant gratification. By enabling them to quickly gather information that once would have taken much more time and legwork, the Web has become a vital resource to young adults.



The Web allows young people to provide instant feedback or input to the organizations with which they choose to interact online. This ability to offer near real-time feedback seems to work well with the nonprofit world. Potential volunteers can use the Web to ask questions, chat with other volunteers, and offer their input about causes they're thinking of supporting—all with a few strokes of the keyboard. As the University of Illinois' Tom Shields noted, "You can send a letter to your Congressman within a minute. It's just so easy to get involved."

So how can your organization tap into the power of the Internet? At a minimum, it's worth considering e-mail as a distribution channel for information about your cause. Consider setting up a listserv, which is an online discussion group. Messages sent to the listserv are automatically distributed to all participants in the group. While the discussions don't take place in "real time," many listserv participants find the discussions to be passionate and informative.

You may also wish to create a Web site for your organization, if you haven't already done so. You should be able to find a local Web design firm, or university student, who can help you "hang a shingle" online.

Your website can be as bare bones or as extensive as you want it to be. At a minimum, you'll want to include information about your organization, its founders, your mission, a calendar of events, and contact information for those who want to learn more. You could also consider including pictures from recent events, profiles of your current volunteer staff, chat rooms, or an e-mail "question and answer" service. In order to draw young people to your site, you may also want to link the site to other youth-oriented sites and communities.

The most important thing to remember is that, for all of the Web's glories, no computer is a substitute for human contact. The Web should complement your personal interactions with volunteers and potential volunteers. It must not replace them. After all, volunteering is all about connections for young people. Forging those connections should be your most important recruiting goal.

CASE STUDY: United Students Against Sweatshops

In 1997, summer interns at UNITE! (Union of Needlework, Industrial & Textile Employees) realized that a great deal of college merchandise was being produced in sweatshops. Via e-mail, they brought the issue to the attention of activist students at colleges across the country. Students began demanding that their universities adopt Codes of Conduct to regulate the behavior of their manufacturers. In July 1998, students came together for a conference. It was there that they formed a national coalition, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), which is currently active on 30 college campuses. In the past year, Duke and Brown Universities have enacted Codes of Conduct, and the Collegiate Licensing Company has created a "Leadership Group," composed of ten representatives from member institutions to draft a Code and institute a system of independent monitoring.

For more information, see

<http://home.sprintmail.com/~jeffnkari/USAS/index.html>





Using This Information:

Putting the pieces of this communications puzzle together can be challenging. Sorting through the various media, figuring out how to combine free and paid media, and working out ways to do all of this economically may require the help of a professional. There are several ways to do this:

- If you have a good college or university in your community, set up an appointment with the head of the marketing or communications department. Ask if your organization could become a project for a group of students or for the entire class. Many nonprofits have benefited from free marketing or communications plans, situational analyses, and even focus group information provided by college classes. Similarly, if there is a video production class, you may get a free high-quality public service announcement produced for you.
- Consider asking an advertising or public relations executive to serve on an advisory committee or on the Board of your organization. You don't want to take advantage of this person's expertise, but most Board members are willing to do some pro bono work if they are believers in your cause.
- Consult with an advertising or public relations agency on how to build synergy among all the available media vehicles. To find a good agency, contact your local Ad Club. Ask for an agency that has worked with organizations with budgets, target audiences and goals similar to yours. Call those organizations to find out if the agency's work was truly beneficial. Ask to see examples of the agency's work, and

quantifiable outcomes of their campaigns. Know that agencies charge a great deal of money for their work, and the good ones are worth it. You can try negotiating for reduced rates, and many agencies offer special nonprofit rates. You can also ask if the agency is willing to donate some of its time if you pay for most of it. But make sure that both your budget and expectations are realistic before you initiate talks with agencies.

Conclusion

We hope you are excited, rather than overwhelmed, by the myriad possibilities presented in this manual. There has never been a better time to begin, with a fresh new outlook, planning ways to cultivate young adults as lifelong volunteers.

Young adults are a prime target for involvement in the vital work nonprofits are doing in communities across the country. They are being bombarded with often confusing messages about opportunities for amassing great wealth, about growing social problems such as poverty, lack of adequate health insurance and increasing violence, and about politics.

It is entirely possible for nonprofit organizations of all sizes to cut through the clutter with targeted messages for getting young adults involved in causes and organizations that are meaningful to them. Using the tools and strategies included in the manual will help you succeed in engaging young adults as lifelong volunteers. Maybe your organization needs to change several things; maybe you don't need to change much at all, but the important thing is to get started thinking about where you currently stand with 18-24 year olds, where you'd like to be, and how you're going to get there.

We leave you with the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead, a woman from the past whose vision was always toward the future: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

NOTES



APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

We consulted numerous sources for this study. In summary, we relied upon:

- An extensive collection of research on marketing to young adults and their relationship to social issues (see Bibliography for more details).
- The input of 17 "experts" from 10 organizations who have marketed to young adults in various capacities (10 in-depth interviews); and primary research with our target consumers (six focus groups conducted with volunteers and potential volunteers in suburban New Jersey and Cleveland).

APPENDIX 2: REACTIONS TO POSITIONING STATEMENTS

These statements were shown to 18-25 year old volunteers and "interested non-volunteers" in focus groups to find which were the most motivating and compelling to them.

1. By getting involved with social issues, I am improving my resume and developing skills, improving my chances of getting a good job later.
2. By getting involved in social causes, I can meet people with similar interests, find friends and maybe even find a boyfriend/girlfriend.
3. By getting involved with social issues, I am getting experience that will help me build my life in the future.
4. Getting involved in social causes is part of becoming a responsible member of society.
5. It's better to do hands-on work for a social cause rather than doing a fundraiser for the cause.
6. It's better to do hands-on work for a social cause than give money to the cause.
7. Getting involved with a social cause is part of who I am and expresses my individuality.
8. Volunteerism is a value that we all should have.
9. I need to see the results of my efforts in volunteering.
10. Volunteering enables me to use my personal strengths and skills in new ways.
11. I feel I should be rewarded and recognized for doing volunteer work.
12. I want the organization I help to listen to my feedback about how things should be run.
13. Volunteering isn't for everyone, only a core group gets involved.
14. I'll volunteer when I'm older and my life is more stable – it's too difficult to volunteer right now.
15. I don't know where to go to get started volunteering.
16. Volunteering has to fit my schedule and time constraints.
17. It makes me feel good to help others.
18. I'm part of something bigger than myself when I volunteer.
19. If I don't get involved with social issues, who will?
20. I have been fortunate in life and I would like to give to others who are less fortunate.
21. By getting involved in a social cause, I know I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference in someone else's life.

OVERALL COMMENTS

- Respondents "voted" for all the "right"/acceptable things, but the statements they liked were often inconsistent with their real attitudes and actions.
- Non-volunteers tended to be more cynical in their responses.
- Volunteers were not afraid to admit what they get out of volunteering.

LIKES (TOP THREE of the 21 STATEMENTS)

1. By getting involved in a social cause, I know that I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference in someone else's life.

Volunteers:

- If everyone had to change the world, we'd never get started.
- If you didn't think this, you would get flustered.
- I don't have to change the world – I'm motivated by just the smile.
- Reality is, you can't change everything right away.
- Can't look for instant rewards – just have FAITH.
- This is a MOTIVATING statement – gives them permission to try – without worrying about failure.

Non-volunteers:

- No comments

2. It makes me feel good to help others.

Volunteers:

- "Just a fact"/the basic reason you volunteer
- "It's important to feel good by just showing up!"
- Making you feel good is an end product of making others feel good
- Like the tangible rewards (paint a house, kids get better grades, etc.)
- Seems like a motivational statement.

Non-volunteers:

- This speaks to the idea of "doing it from the heart."
- Makes them feel like their intentions are pure.
- Makes them feel warm and fuzzy.

3. I have been fortunate in life and would like to give to others who are less fortunate.

Volunteers:

- They or their families often had overcome personal hardships – so value what they have today.
- Parents who were immigrants
- Cousin with cerebral palsy
- Don't take their fortunes for granted, given what they've seen others go through.
- Their experiences often influence their favorite causes
- Homeless/mentally ill father ⇒ wants to help build shelters
- Girl who was stalked ⇒ wanted to stop others from same fate

Non-volunteers: No comment

DISLIKES (BOTTOM 4 of the 21 STATEMENTS)

1. I feel I should be rewarded and recognized for doing volunteer work.

Volunteers:

- If you go into volunteering EXPECTING rewards, you'll stop volunteering very quickly.
- All they expect is to be treated politely, have things explained to them, be welcomed.
- Volunteering is like taking a chance without knowing what I will get in return.

Non-Volunteers:

- Overall, more upset by this than volunteers
- Feel volunteers need recognition/have a "holier than thou" attitude.
- This is an easy way out for people to say "this is why I don't do it."
- Being recognized "defeats the whole purpose!" You do it to help people, not to be thanked.
- If you reward people, they'll volunteer for all the wrong reasons.

2. By getting involved in social causes, I can meet people with similar interests, find friends, and maybe even find a boyfriend/girlfriend.

- No comments by volunteers
- Several respondents mentioned this as a reason for volunteering; however, they may have felt uncomfortable agreeing to the phrase.

3. I need to see the results of my efforts in volunteering.

- No comments by volunteers
- As above, this came up in conversation, but respondents were unwilling to admit to it when they were reacting to the statements.

4. I'll volunteer when I'm older and my life is more stable – it's too difficult to volunteer right now.

Volunteers:

- No comments

Non-Volunteers:

- This is the time, if ever the time, to volunteer.
- Life will only get more difficult, e.g. with families, kids, etc.



APPENDIX 3: PROS & CONS OF MEDIA VEHICLES

MEDIUM	PROS	CONS
TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach largest mass audience of all mediums High impact/intrusiveness Gets strong viewer attention Can show realistic situations – sight/sound/monon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive Rising clutter Networks often require commitments up front Long lead time for production
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly targeted – station format allows to reach specific group High frequency – listeners hear messages often Flexible – can change copy Short lead time Low production cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divided listener attention No visual cues or identification Reach limited group
Magazines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniquely allows to segment markets demographically and psychographically Allows to communicate the most information—ad can be studied at leisure Credibility/implicit endorsement of publication High reach potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readers control their ad exposure and can ignore campaign – non-intrusive Slow reach build Relatively inefficient for regional use Long lead time – difficult to exploit timing aspects (e.g. run a fatherhood-related ad the week of Father's Day)
Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely short lead time Locally-geographically targeted High (local) reach potential Timeliness/immediacy Allows to communicate a great deal of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-intrusive Amid great deal of clutter Short advertising life cycle Presumed lack of creative opportunities for "emotional" campaigns Low quality reproduction
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively inexpensive Highly targeted High accountability/easy to track Can reach targets globally, nationally, or locally Interactive—can collect information from the banner or from a link, short direct response cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banners have short lifespan; need to produce new work often No finalized standards; very fluid medium (this can also be positive)

Meatose Place	180
Steve Harvey Show	173
Sabrina the Teenage Witch	170
Friends	162
Aly McBeal	155
Just Shoot Me	155

Magazines - by Genre

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Baby Magazines	238
Women's Fashion Magazines	232
Entertainment/Performing Arts Magazines	201
Fitness Magazines	201
Automotive Magazines	191
Men's Magazines	166
Sports Magazines	148
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Magazines - by Title

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Allure	382
Vibe	379
Teen	344
Seventeen	342
Mademoiselle	327
Modern Bride	320
Rolling Stone	315
WWF Magazine	300
Baby Talk	287
Glamour	268
Bride's	267
Elle	266
Vogue	251
GQ	250
Muscle & Fitness	244
American Baby	237

Radio - by Format

Time spent listening to the radio, in hours, 1999: 22 hours, 45 minutes per week (7 days); 5 hours, 15 minutes per weekend

Format	Index
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Alternative	266
Contemporary Hit Radio/Rock	251
Urban Contemporary	250
AOR/Progressive Rock	244
Spanish	237
Classic Rock	147

Internet Services - by Usage

Usage	Index
Microsoft Network	151
America Online	149
Used World Wide Web in the Past Month	134
Used Any Online Service	132

Source: Mediarnark Research Inc., Spring 1999.

*An index is an indication of how much a particular subgroup's response (here, 18-24 year olds) differs from the average response (all adults age 18+). An index of 100 means that the subgroup gave an average response. An index of 120 or higher indicates that the subgroup has a significantly stronger response than the average.

APPENDIX 4: MEDIA HABITS

Significant Programs, Formats, Magazines and Activities for 18-24 Year Olds

Time spent watching

TV per week (in hours), 1999:	All 18-24	Men 18-24	Women 18-24
	20.5	18.5	22.3

TV Show - By Genre

Genre	Index
Situation Comedies-Primetime	149
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Program	Index
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Attend Movies 2-3 Times a Month	180
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Go to Bars, Night Clubs	154
Painting/Drawing	153
Attend Auto Shows	148
Chess	144
Trivia Games	142

Source: Simmons Market Research, Inc., Spring 1999.

APPENDIX 5: SUGGESTED MARKETING TEXTS FOR NON-PROFITS

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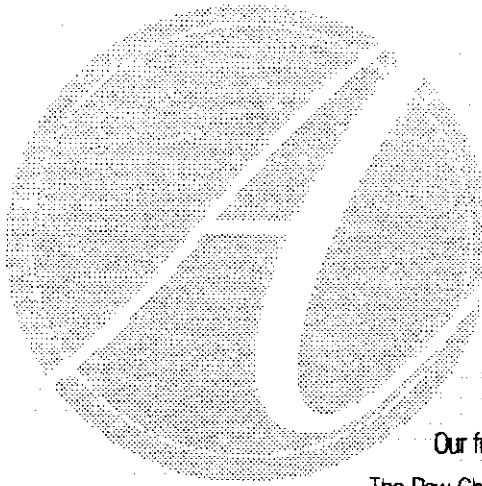
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