

PAVine Special Issue Supplement

Pennsylvania Association for Volunteerism

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Supplement

Traditional Agency Volunteers and Volunteers In Membership Organizations— Some Thoughts On The Issues

by Arlene Grubbs
PA Vine Editor

My own experience in working with these two types of volunteers is that they know very little about each other. They seem to exist in separate pockets, each with its own reality. Several years ago the Western Region of PAV had a program in which a panel of leaders from all volunteer community service groups were asked to talk with us about their organizations' volunteer efforts. PAV members were dazzled by the amount of time and energy that service groups were able to mobilize from their members and with the impact of their efforts in the community.

What keeps these two sectors of the volunteer community from talking to each other more often? And what can volunteer programs which operate inside community organizations learn from the all volunteer model?

SPECIAL ISSUE SUPPLEMENT

This is the second of our "Special Issue Supplements." In each of these we hope to address a current issue in the field of volunteerism. We hope that the facts and commentary presented will stimulate some discussion both in the local regions and in our Letters to the Editor space.

In this Special Issue Supplement of the *VINE* we take a look at two different aspects of our volunteer world and attempt to discover what bridges, if any, there might be between them. Many of you belong to all volunteer membership organizations, such as, church groups, community service organizations, auxiliaries or friends of groups, alumni associations, self help groups, etc. The question we are trying to explore is what is the connection between all volunteer membership groups and the volunteer who works in a more traditionally structured organization, that is, one with paid and volunteer staff and one in which the volunteer generally works to enhance and extend the work of the paid staff component?

We hope you will share your experiences in linking all volunteer organizations and volunteer programs in agencies. Let us know what other issues you'd like to have discussed in future special issue supplements. Send your comments to: PA VINE Editor, 21 Briar Cliff Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15202.

We all know that most volunteers come to volunteering because "someone" has asked them—but how do we help volunteers become really committed to our organizations? In a thought provoking article in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, William Stephens comments on how membership organizations begin to "claim" their constituents. "If you are a member . . . and you volunteer to do something—and you do it all right, then you will be asked again. And again. And again. In such fashion you can soon become a mainstay of the group. The group will be depending on you; you will feel obligated."¹

As Stephens notes, working in a membership organization allows one to move gradually (or rapidly!) into greater and greater positions of authority and leadership. The pathway is clear. More traditional volunteer programs are less likely to provide such an open door to leadership roles, many of which are occupied by paid staff. The opportunities for an outstanding volunteer to exercise judgment, power, and leadership are more likely to exist in the all volunteer group than in the traditional volunteer program.

This seems to me to have some obvious implications for depth of commitment. People who have had the opportunity to shape an organization and to see their efforts produce results for the organization are more likely to be firmly committed to its work than those who exist on the periphery, as volunteers in traditional programs so often feel they do. In meetings and training programs I still hear people saying, "I'm *only* a volunteer!" Efforts to give status to volunteers in traditional settings have often overlooked the real status that comes with knowing you are in a position to influence the work of the organization. Clearly membership groups offer this opportunity more readily.

One example of this is the fact that membership groups by their very nature must be self organizing. If the members don't do it—it won't get done. In agency-type settings the paid staff generally organizes the volunteer activity and, if one volunteer won't or can't do the work, another one is recruited or, as often happens, the paid staff try to fit in the unfinished work. This difference is one reason Ivan Scheier feels that there have been so few collaborations between traditional volunteer programs and membership groups. He suggests that the question of control and accountability may be stumbling blocks for the traditional volunteer program coordinator.² However, such collaborations can be enriching for both groups if they are carefully done. (See article from Junior League)

In addition to the differences in leadership opportunities and the level of commitment of volunteers, there are real differences between all volunteer groups and traditional volunteer programs in terms of their ability to meet socialization needs. Again Mr. Stephens suggests that "prospective volunteers who need to make friends, get involved socially and become grounded in the community" will have better opportunities to do that in a membership organization than in a traditional volunteer setting.³ The thought occurred to me as I was preparing this article that most membership organizations seem to meet around lunches, dinners or other social events (in addition to their community volunteer work). There exists in these gatherings then an opportunity for individuals to get to know each other and to spot new talent for committees and special projects. I suspect that the social nature of these gatherings creates an equality among members, so it would not occur to these volunteers to say, "I'm only a member!" Being a member confers rights, privileges, and responsibilities which gives everyone equal voice and equal opportunity to do the work.

In more traditional volunteer programs volunteers arrive and look to paid staff to tell them what to do and how it should be done. Rare are the volunteer jobs in traditional settings that are organized by the volunteer. Rare are the traditional settings that encourage the volunteer to jump in if s/he sees anything that needs to be done or could be done better. As we mentioned before, membership organizations must be self organizing. There's no one else to do it. And so, their structure tends to reflect the work and interests of the current membership with some areas being given less attention and others more as the membership changes. Those of us in organizational settings need to ask the question, "How can more traditional programs help volunteers be "in charge of their work?"

Finally, membership organizations usually require financial contributions either by way of dues or by way of participation in fund raising activities. In some smaller membership groups, such as some self help groups, the financial contribution may be as low as 50 cents a week to help pay for the refreshments, but the expectation is usually there. More traditional volunteer settings often do not expect volunteers to be engaged in the financial well being of the organization. Volunteers in traditional settings are often completely unaware of how the organization is funded or what its financial dilemmas are. Part of this comes from their distance from the core of the organization (unless they are board members), but much of it comes from the lack of mechanisms to involve volunteers deeply in the work of the organization.

It is important to remember that there exists in organizations a wide continuum of opportunities for leadership, commitment, socialization, independently structured work, and financial contribution. But, it would appear that membership organizations tend to cluster around the end of the continuum which offers more of these opportunities while traditional volunteer programs tend to cluster around the opposite pole. An interesting middle ground seems to exist in grass roots organizations that may have some paid staff, but in which volunteers are clearly in control.

There is, I believe, much that traditional volunteer programs can learn from membership groups. And there is much that traditional programs have to offer community volunteer groups. In particular more traditional programs seem to be better at developing job descriptions, establishing a clear chain of command and instituting record keeping and communication systems. With so much to learn from each other, both sectors need to begin to put some energy into getting to know each other better.

An interesting example of one successful collaboration is outlined in the article "Organizations as Volunteers for the Rural Frail Elderly" in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. The article notes "Aside from the relative ease of identification, community organizations have other characteristics which appear to be favorable for volunteer recruitment: they are a ready source of community leaders and doers; they are generally distributed throughout the area in proportion to the client population; and their members are drawn from the same cultural backgrounds as the persons to be served."⁴ Given some of the concerns currently being voiced by traditional volunteer programs about the dwindling sources of volunteer support, making the connection with all volunteer membership groups may be really worth the effort.

¹Stephens, William N. "Contrasting Reward for Volunteering in Agencies' Programs with Volunteering in Clubs and Churches." *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Summer 1989. p. 21.

²Scheier, Ivan. "Building Bridges Between Traditional and All Volunteer Groups." Workshop. Pennsylvania Conference for Volunteerism. June 1989. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

³Stephens. op cit. p. 22.

⁴Young, Christine L., et al. "Organizations as Volunteers for the Rural Frail Elderly." *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Fall 1983. p. 34.

Finding Common Ground

by Susan J. Ellis
President, ENERGIZE, Inc.

When we talk about the "volunteer community," how broad is our vision? When PAV says its mission is "promoting and strengthening volunteerism," how many different kinds of volunteer activities might this include?

Volunteering occurs in a number of ways. A great number of volunteers work within formal "volunteer programs," generally associated with established nonprofit or governmental institutions. In most of these settings, volunteers provide services in cooperation with (often under the supervision of) employees. These settings are also the major employers of paid volunteer administrators. It is comparatively easy for such leaders of formal volunteer programs to find each other and work together. At a minimum, they have an established mailing address and some continuity.

But an enormous number of people volunteer through all-volunteer organizations in which they become "members" in order to participate in group community and social projects. Such all-volunteer organizations frequently have no paid staff at all and are governed by a board of directors elected by the membership; projects are run by committees. Some of the large all-volunteer groups may actually employ office staff or even an executive director, but it is the membership that controls the operation.

Volunteering in Membership Groups— Three Personal Perspectives

Pennsylvania Association of Women's Clubs

*by Myrtle L. Council
Honorary President,*

Pennsylvania Association of Women's Clubs

The range of interests of all-volunteer organizations is enormous: civic groups such as Kiwanis or Soroptimists; self-help organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous; fundraising bodies such as auxiliaries or "friends of" groups; political activists such as anti-nuclear plant protesters; community improvement groups such as block organizations or the Junior League; etc., etc. It is also legitimate to think of church and synagogues as predominantly volunteer organizations.

No one argues that both of these types of volunteer settings are truly examples of "volunteering." But if they are both part of the same activity, shouldn't there be some connection and communication between them? The honest truth is that so far the two worlds have been separated from one another. "Professional associations" such as PAV, AVA, and others tend to attract paid directors of volunteers rather than presidents of all-volunteer groups. Here are a few reasons why this separation occurs:

— It is easier to "find" directors of volunteers because they are at a fixed agency address. Volunteer presidents change from year to year and therefore so does the mailing address for their organization.

— Directors of volunteers have a full-time focus on their volunteer management work and carry that as their "identity." Volunteer presidents, although many put in countless hours of service, still tend to see their volunteer management role as secondary to other identities.

— Meetings and conferences are generally held during the week and travel expenses can mount up. Volunteer presidents, often with other full-time paid jobs, cannot get away to attend volunteerism programs.

— Volunteer management training programs tend to use the vocabulary of the formal agency and rarely "interpret" the material for someone working in an all-volunteer setting.

So it takes some effort to do *outreach* to our colleagues in all-volunteer organizations. The effort is only worth it if we acknowledge our similarities and realize how much we can learn from one another. Consider:

— Recruitment is recruitment is recruitment. Motivating people to "join" and later to take leadership roles is a need common to agencies and to all-volunteer groups.

— Both types of organizations need to orient, train, and keep volunteers interested ("retention") in the work to be done. Both also need recordkeeping systems and ways to say thank you.

— Insurance and liability affect both - as do legislative issues such as volunteer mileage tax deductions. Childcare and transportation to enable volunteer work are also mutual concerns.

— Both are concerned with clout: having the maximum impact and gaining the respect of other community resources.

— Dealing with inter-volunteer relations is something the all-volunteer groups can teach agencies: blending veterans and newcomers, accommodating aging members, tapping experienced leaders, etc. On the other hand, agencies may be more adept at mixing male and female volunteers, those who work outside the home and homemakers, etc.

— Many all-volunteer groups and formal agencies share a commitment to the same cause or belief. Working together can maximize everyone's effort.

The challenge of finding common ground faces all of the volunteer community. Even our vocabulary can separate us. But if we can join together more effectively, we will become a greater force for the social change we all seek.

Volunteering through a service-oriented organization has many advantages for both the volunteer and the recipient, as well as the organization itself.

There is always strength and power in numbers. What one person can do, when multiplied by others, becomes a force that is unobtainable by the individual and sometimes **unbelievable** to all concerned.

When a project is adopted by an organization the research, education, and training needed by the volunteer is provided by the organization. Thus the volunteer's effort is better planned, better motivated, and better accomplished. The recipient's time, effort and/or money is not required—or at least lessened—by the organization's providing volunteers who know the what, why, and how before hand.

The individual volunteer gains as much from the training and education received **prior** to the actual time donated as they gain in the satisfaction of having done a job well on the project itself. In addition, what was learned by the volunteer about effective planning etc. will benefit the volunteer individually and thus impact on all later projects.

Working with others on the same project becomes more **fun** than **work**. Of course, the adage "more hands make work lighter" comes into play, but the sociability and the comradery cannot be overlooked! And, the innate striving to keep up with your peers becomes a strong motivation to get the job accomplished and with the best results possible. What more could any recipient ask?

If there is a Volunteer Director involved, the work between the organization and the recipient becomes one of coordination and planning. But this effort is done once—for the group—rather than repeated for each volunteer. Thus, the load is made lighter for the Volunteer Director while the results are multiplied for the recipient.

If there is no Volunteer Director, the organizational Chairman takes on the full responsibility which otherwise would have been shared with the Volunteer Director. It becomes a greater job for the Chairman but often offers the potential for administrative capabilities to be tried and many times leads that person into a field of endeavor that would not have been possible otherwise. Many people have found full-time careers arising out of this kind of situation.

The organization gains also—in prestige, reputation, and effectiveness. Members want to be part of an active, caring, group. The more this is demonstrated, the better self-worth the members have of themselves and the organization to which they belong. This, in turn, motivates the members to do more volunteer work through its successful projects and good reputation of the past.

Volunteering through a service-oriented organization benefits all parties involved.

The Junior League

by Constance D. Mockenhaupt
President,

The Junior League of Pittsburgh, Inc.

The Junior League of Pittsburgh, Inc. is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism and to improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

The Junior League of Pittsburgh (JLP) with over 600 members is an arm of The Association of Junior Leagues International, whose collective membership numbers more than 187,000 women in the U.S., Canada, England, and Mexico. The JLP is open to all women regardless of race, religion or national origin who demonstrate an interest in and a commitment to voluntarism.

The premise of Junior League projects is to identify a community need; work to achieve a solution and ultimately create the means by which that project may be returned to the community. Since 1922, our members have worked to improve the community by researching, initiating and funding projects in the areas of the arts, aging, health, women and children. Past projects include the Pittsburgh Children's Museum, Vintage Inc., Three Rivers Adoption Council, International Organ Transplant Forum, Chemical People, and Transplant Recipients International Organization. Our activities have included opportunities for advocacy, public education and direct service. Each project established or supports significant community programs and, at the same time, fulfills the League's commitment to voluntarism.

With community impact as a goal, our membership will be focusing on North Hills Affordable Housing for the next three years. We have joined a collaboration of over 50 agencies for the purpose of developing safe, affordable housing and support services for families in crisis.

Recognizing the complex problems facing the Pittsburgh community today, our organization is challenged to find better ways of utilizing our member's time, talents and expertise to help create solutions for homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy etc. In the future we see the JLP acting in the role of the "convener." As a "convener" we will gather together academia, agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations who are all working at solving the difficulties of our society. Due to the complexity and the interdependence of these problems, I believe a multi-faceted approach is needed to get at their roots.

The Junior League of Pittsburgh will respond to community issues, needs and challenges by choosing a critical problem and gathering groups together who share a desire to eradicate the roots of the problem. We will offer the leadership and action of our trained volunteers to provide the greatest community impact.

Parent Teacher Organization

by Deborah J. Bodnar
Past President

and Board Member of PAV

When I read the title topic I started ticking off in my head what organizations I'm involved in both personally and professionally. The majority of my experiences involve organizations or institutions that have at least one paid staff member whose mission is to reach out for volunteers who in turn provide their time and caring to provide services and/or programs to a certain clientele. But there does exist one type of organization that I find myself involved in that activates the "traditional volunteer" and that is the P.T.O., Parent/Teacher Organization.

This organization is traditional to me—as I have inherited my involvement from my mother. My fondest memory revolves around the Christmas Holiday. My mother was cutting out red and green Christmas stockings from construction paper. And being artistically inclined, I remember thinking how lucky I felt my mother was because she had the opportunity to be involved in this festive act. I admit, I don't remember where those stockings went exactly. What I do remember is the warm feeling I got from my mother's involvement with my school—reminiscent of the warm feeling I derive from my involvement at my children's schools.

Of all the organizations I find myself affiliated with—it is this organization that I find easiest to juggle my schedule to accommodate. I juggle best not because the volunteer schedule fits easily with my personal schedule, but most likely because the benefits are many. Beyond the schools ability to offer more enriching programs and educational opportunities because of parental involvement, are the bright eyes, smiles and hugs I've received from classmates, who I meet for the first time. Lastly and most hopefully, I am passing on the legacy of volunteer involvement to not only my children but to the other children who touch my life.

The connection?—The parents are there because they **want** to be—nobody has told us we **have** to volunteer. The schools would still provide educational opportunities as is their mission, but we make those opportunities **better**. Isn't that why people come together in a volunteer situation—to make theirs or someone else's life better? And all those involved—parent, teacher and child leave with that "traditional" warm feeling of involvement that springs from the Spirit of Volunteerism.

