



How is Traditional Volunteering Being
Represented
Advocated
Protected
By Other-Than-National Organizations?

A Discussion Paper
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CONTENTS

	Page
1. On the Evolution of Questions	1
2. Meanings	2
3. Who's There? Identifying Relevant Nonnationals	4
4. The Impact of Nonnational Organizations on Traditional Volunteering	7
5. Main Themes	10
Footnotes	11
Appendix	13

On The Evolution of Questions

It is hard to get a good answer when you're not sure what the question is. One National Forum achievement has been posing progressively more useful questions about how to influence volunteerism in the 1980s. The evolving search distinguishes: 1. traditional and nontraditional forms of volunteering. 2. national and nonnational organizations. 3. three ways in which the two types of organization can positively influence the two varieties of volunteering.

One generalized query thus becomes four:

<u>Type of organization</u>	<u>Impact on</u>	<u>Type of volunteering</u>
National	→	Nontraditional
Other-than-national	→	Nontraditional
National	→	Traditional
Other-than-national	→	Traditional

At the same time, impact articulates into representation, advocacy and protection.

Other-than-national impact on traditional volunteering is our sole responsibility here. This makes the assignment manageable, more or less. But no one really believes any one of the four subjects can be fully understood in isolation from the other three. Reintegration is a challenge for panelists, though I have seen no way to resist a small part of the comparative challenge in this paper.

There is the story of the old Vermont farm lady who, when asked "How's your husband?" replied: "Compared to what?" I have found it impossible fully to answer the question "How's your other-than-nationals impact on traditional volunteering?" without comparing them to "what." The most relevant "what" is the impact of national organizations on traditional volunteering.

Meanings

To prevent the deterioration of dialogue into concurrent monologue, we begin by defining key terms in our question. But definitions are more than arbitrary exercises in the volunteer field; they are instead platforms which assert positions on real issues of inclusion-exclusion and interrelations. Critical review of definitions is therefore not only legitimate; it is a substantive part of the forum dialogue.

"Volunteering" is "any relatively uncoerced work, intended to help, and done without primary or immediate thought of financial gain." This definition was one of several proposed in earlier Forum discussions.¹ It is further defended and analyzed in my recent book.²

Volunteering is "*traditional*" (vs. nontraditional), insofar as:

1. Its participants self-consciously identify themselves as "volunteers".
2. It is relatively organized and structured.
3. It vests responsibility for the volunteer "program" in a director/coordinator/administrator/supervisor of volunteers, or people in closely similar roles under different names. These different names can include chief of voluntary services, or even social worker, probation officer or club president.

Traditional volunteering also tends to:

4. Concentrate on service rather than advocacy.
5. Be part of and often auxiliary to human service delivery systems such as hospitals, schools, welfare, mental institutions, youth service, disaster relief, etc.
6. Have a relatively long unchanging history in the above roles.³

Some volunteer efforts merit the "traditional" title on most or all of these six counts; such as hospital volunteer programs, Big Brothers and Sisters, school volunteer programs and Red Cross. Such efforts are in fact usually labeled traditional.

But what about the crucial involvement of volunteers in churches and synagogues? Many of us would call this traditional even though such volunteering frequently fails to meet criteria 1, 2 and 3, and may miss 5 as well. The PTA is a similar example, and there are others. Apparently, a more inclusive definition of traditional volunteering would rely more heavily on criteria 4 and 6, and perhaps 2 as well.

An organization is considered "*other-than-national*,"⁴ insofar as it:

1. Is responsible for a territory less than national in scope: city, county, state, region.
2. Is assumed to have significant impact on traditional volunteering in this territory.
3. Is substantially independent of any national organization in setting policy, in choice of projects and in operations generally. "Substantial independence" is substantially subjective. The closest approach to objectivity confers independence on an organization, insofar as:
 - a. Its funding is from sources not controlled nationally.
 - b. Its governance and accountability is not by or to people representing national organizations.
 - c. Its operations cannot be predicted from nationally originated model projects, guidelines or recommendations. There is in this sense a "spontaneity" about projects as they are nonnational. More subtly, even when the national puts out the project seed catalog, the local selects the seeds, maintains the garden and produces new varieties of flower in local soils. Moreover, the national seed catalog might, in the first place, be largely borrowed from local green thumbs.

The decision to deposit an organization in a national vs. nonnational category is still flagrantly subjective. What we really have are *degrees* of "nonnationalness," eminently discussable in every degree.

Thus, about a dozen statewide offices of voluntary citizen participation depend heavily for funding on the national ACTION agency. But these offices are also directly accountable to their own governors and to state ACTION offices which are far from entirely controlled by the national ACTION office.

Many local volunteer bureaus or voluntary action centers receive much or all of their funding from locally governed United Ways. To this extent, they are independent of any *national* organization. On the other hand, local United Ways are subject to general guidelines laid down by United Way of America.

Many local volunteer centers also seek guidance from national organizations, such as the Association of Volunteer Bureaus and VOLUNTEER, via affiliation, credentialing or requests for technical assistance. But their decisions to do so are voluntary, and do not assure acceptance of national guidance. Indeed, there sometimes is actual conflict between nonnationals and nationals about preferred strategies for the advance of traditional volunteering. Such conflict is almost chronic enough to qualify as a defining characteristic of nonnationals.

Who's There? Identifying Relevant Nonnationals

To my knowledge, the overall nonnational support apparatus for traditional volunteering has never been seriously inventoried.⁵ When in doubt--almost always--I have tried to estimate conservatively. The appendix tables (page 13) indicate how these approximations accumulated; they are in no real sense a *documentation* of the estimates, except for occasional allusion to imperfect sources.

One reason for the dearth of data is the previously noted difficulty in deciding what to count. When does an organization become nonnational enough to be no longer national?

On these two related concerns--clear classification and reliable counting--some nonnationals scan better than others. Mainly for this reason, I have considered nonnationals in three distinct types, ranging from moderately clear to deplorably vague.

Type A: Generic nonnationals

Generic organizations aim to represent, advocate for and protect all volunteers or potential volunteers in their territories, in the widest possible range of traditional volunteer involvements.

Prime examples of generic nonnationals are voluntary action centers, volunteer bureaus or other local volunteer centers; statewide offices of voluntary citizen participation; and regional university-based volunteer resource centers.⁶

An approximate count of generic nonnationals is given below, with estimates for a roughly comparable set of generic *nationals* following in parentheses:⁷

550-700 organizations (5-8)

700-800 full-time equivalent paid staff (40-60)

6,000-7,000 regularly involved unpaid staff, advisors or policy-makers (150-200)

Collectively, the generic nonnational support apparatus for traditional volunteering is large--20 to 40 times larger than the comparable national structure in paid and unpaid staff resources.

Type B: Special-population organizations other than national

Like generics, these organizations tend to be concerned about needs in their entire territories. The difference is that a special-population organization draws volunteers from and provides support to a defined subgroup of people within the community or territory.

Thus, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program works with people 60 years of age or more. Similarly, we have volunteer clearinghouses or placement centers in and for a university, a corporation, a church or synagogue.

The estimates for Special-Population Nonnationals are:

1,700-2,000 organizations

1,500 or more full-time equivalent paid staff

Many thousands of volunteer staff, advisors, and policy-makers.

Once again, this is collectively a large structure, many times larger than the comparable national apparatus.

But are such organizations relevant to forum discussion? Can these organizations, each concerned with only one segment of the traditional volunteer population, collectively advance volunteerism as a whole? There is some evidence that they can and have done so, though their stake in doing so is not as clear as for generic organizations. But this certainly is an issue, even more so for the next type of organization.

Type C: More Fully Specialized Nonnationals

These organizations deal with special populations (Type B), but also specialize more in their output of volunteer involvements or projects. That is, they are more likely to place their volunteers in relatively restricted ranges of involvements chosen by the organizations. Or, the kind of involvement itself may imply *de facto* that "not just anyone can do it," such as, criminal justice volunteering, which on the record has drawn mainly from middle-class people who never were in serious trouble with the law.

Examples in this complex category might include: statewide volunteer involvement offices in education, welfare, criminal justice, mental health, etc.; statewide associations of hospital volunteer directors; independent or semi-independent local volunteer resource organizations formed for special purposes, such as aid to struggling businesses by retired executives; and any local unit/chapter of a national organization which is substantially independent of its national in policy formulation and choice of projects.

Those local units and chapters must run into the hundreds of thousands: the 5,300 branches of AAL (plus all the local lodges of some 200 other fraternal); the 2,000 local units of Church Women United; the 175 chapters of the Association of Junior Leagues, all the local chapters and clubs in AAUW,⁸ Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Zonta, the League of Women Voters and on and on. While many of these local units might fail our independence test of non-nationalness, they ordinarily do exert significant influence on their national organizations, financially or in policy matters, and they are far more than tame appendages of healthy national organizations.

The appendix attempts a rather pathetic scan of the "more fully specialized" nonnational sector. The fact that this sector overwhelms counting says only one thing clearly; it is extremely large.

Conclusion to this Section

Readers may differ on the point at which these comparisons got away from us in terms of unacceptable uncertainty. But even if tolerance of uncertainty forecloses serious considerations after Type A or B, one general conclusion seems clear:

The nonnational support apparatus for traditional volunteerism is collectively large. It is far larger than the comparable national support apparatus, in every sense of larger.

But sheer size doesn't guarantee effectiveness and that is the issue in the next section.

The Impact of Nonnational Organizations
on Traditional Volunteering

All impact is divided into three parts here: representation, advocacy and protection.

How well is traditional volunteering represented by nonnationals?

Representation by nonnationals is understood as the practical extent to which people have input into the goals, policy and activities of an organization. Input means not only the chance to have input; it also includes the probability that the input will be heard, considered and sometimes accepted. Nonnationals have four major advantages in representing their memberships, consumers of services, other constituents or even passerbys.

1. Nonnationals are more accessible geographically, and this will be increasingly important in our era of energy shortage and inflation.
2. Nonnationals tend to be smaller than nationals, with less hierarchy to block, ignore or lose ideas.
3. Nonnationals can more easily give the poor a vote. Their fees for belonging tend to be low or zero; hence there is less temptation to listen hardest to those who contribute hard cash. National membership or other belonging fees range from about \$25 to \$200 yearly, averaging about \$50 to \$75. But a person can belong to a local association of volunteer directors for \$5 to \$10 annually, and a priority hearing at the local volunteer center might cost nothing more than a little work.
4. Nonnational budgets typically range from meager to nonexistent. Therefore, nonnationals have little choice but to depend heavily on volunteer participation in the organization's work. And today's volunteer is more insistent about having ideas accepted, along with service. Thus, the persevering participant in a nonnational is more likely to have a genuine sense of ownership.

With *representation*, the natural advantages seem to be all with the non-nationals. As a consequence, they are indeed closer to the pulse of traditional volunteering. But the picture is less clear about the fate of *input*, specifically the ability to put it in action.

How well is traditional volunteering advocated for by organizations other than national?

Advocated for is defined as the attempt to implement input by influencing policy, regulation, legislation and staff or public attitudes towards increased support of traditional volunteering.

Advocacy will be discussed in two sections.