NEED OVERLAP ANALYSIS

MANAGEMENT METHODOLOGY may be a good thing in volunteer programs, as long as we don't forget the basic item we're managing: the quality and relevance of the volunteer's job. Sophisticated management of an inappropriate volunteer job is no better than mismanagement of a good one, and it may be worse. If we forget that, we may simply be putting better management locks on the barn door after the horse has gotten out; the horse being the volunteer job, the locks being program management functions.

Consider the "Sanskrit Translator's Aide" program. We have a Sanskrit Translator's Aide Program because lots of other folks have a Sanskrit Translator's Aide Program. Besides, we once saw an article about it in a learned Tibetan journal. We have a precise job description, six weeks pre-service training, guilded certificates, a full-time paid coordinator, and two banquets every year.

There are only three problems with our Sanskrit Translator's Aide Program. It is (1) irrelevant to clients, (2) virtually meaningless to volunteers, and (3) a pain in the neck for staff. The consequences are low volunteer retention rates, high staff resistance, and nothing for clients.

Far-fetched? Perhaps so. But how many volunteer jobs can you name that have been systematically and empirically tested out as needed by consumers, volunteers, and staff? I know of very few.

Volunteer job development is a prerequisite, the motivational necessity of volunteer programs. If Sanskrit Translator's Aide (STA) is a token job for volunteers, or threatening to staff, or irrelevant to clients, all the slick management in the world won't save it. Since the horse is already out of the barn, more intensive recruiting of STA's may simply be putting on more volunteers (in two senses); better screening is meaningless, better training a waste of time, etc. . etc. .

This is an obvious point, perhaps; it is also more than a choleric introduction to ho-hum. We are not going to talk about writing better volunteer job descriptions. We are going to talk about a process by which we can arrive at meaningful volunteer jobs. It is the process and its product that is important; construction of the job description follows easily and logically.

Surprisingly little attention has been given to job development as a process of negotiation that should be both systematic and humane.

The National Information Center on Volunteerism has been developing such a system over the past year. The name is NOAH: Need Overlap Analysis in the Helping process. It is one spin-off of the broader "people approach" strategy of volunteer programming.*

A Technique for Job Development

DR. IVAN H. SCHEIER
Director, National Information Center on Volunteerism
Boulder, Colorado

NOAH attempts to reach the three kinds of people who must be pleased by a volunteer program: volunteers, clients, and staff (in agency-related programs). It is commonplace to say that volunteers need a motivational paycheck. It is less commonplace to include staff; but they must need the volunteer program too, actively and directly. If they do not, staff resistance rears its head. Ordinarily the consumer is last and least. Our good feelings about volunteer programs do not guarantee a good impact on the client. He or she should be regarded as an expert to be consulted on whether his or her needs are being filled by a volunteer service.
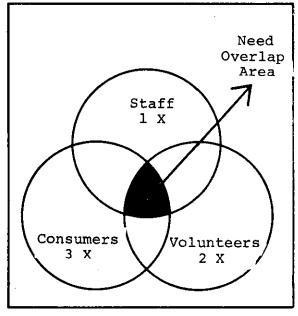
All three members of the volunteer program constituency must need the program; the volunteer to reduce attrition and promote fulfillment; the staff, to promote participation and head off resistance, and the consumer, because that is who it is all about.

These three sets of needs are not identical of course, but they probably *overlap* in some respects, and that is what Need *Overlap* Analysis depends upon. It seeks the need consensus area, as a motivational tripod on which to base a solid program. Balancing a program on only two stilts is tricky; one stilt is acrobatics.

Where the needs overlap, then, we seek what staff wants volunteers to do, what volunteers want to do, and what consumers need. This is a motivational matrix out of which volunteer jobs can be articulated.

Then and only then, can we apply sophisticated management procedures.

So far, the concept is based on common sense. The object is to connect common sense with systematic process.

First a schema:

The *non*-overlap areas, marked X, are: (1) Staff wishes for volunteer jobs that volunteers don't want to do (e.g., empty wastebaskets), (2) things volunteers want to do that staff won't accept (e.g., "we want to critique the agency"), and (3) consumer needs that neither volunteers nor staff will accept. Thus, the first expressed need of prisoners is likely to be: "I want to get out of here today." Without the reality-testing of NOAH, this suggestion might lead to a "volunteer escape artist" program.

NOAH is a process of communication, negotiation, and reality testing among volunteers, staff, and consumers. The process is healthy in itself, and it produces need overlap volunteer job definitions, wanted by all three groups.

Participants in the Process

1. The Volunteer Coordinator

2. The staff Committee: All agency staff. As many as 100 have participated at one time, but a group of 40 or less is preferable.

3. The Volunteer Committee: Five to eight people, including, if possible, the coordinator and two or three volunteers experienced and respected in the agency. Add two or three people who know the community and what volunteers can do, have done, or want to do in it. Directors of a university or community clearinghouse, volunteer bureau, or VAC, FISH, or similar groups would be appropriate here, or even a long-time active and successful service volunteer(s) in a range of community service areas. Every lucky community has one or two of these.

4. The Consumer Committee: More on that later.

NOAH: PHASE I
STAFF AND VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE SEEK THEIR NEED OVERLAP AREA

Allow at least two hours for this phase. Its object is to establish a need overlap area between staff and volunteers, leaving consumers aside for the moment.

Step 1: Staff Inputs, Volunteers React

Obtain a good group leader for the process. He can be the coordinator, director or facilitator of the volunteer program, but it is even better if you can get a respected outsider skilled in group process.

Begin by not mentioning volunteers, and avoid mentioning them until later. The task set for staff is a job factoring or analysis of their own work. Tell them the following:

That no one will see their work except as they themselves choose to share it later in a limited fashion.

Make a list of all the things you have done during your last three days at work (not after work hours). List activities as specifically as you can. Allow up to 15 minutes.

On another piece of paper list your dreams: all the things you'd like to do for and with clients or in your work that you never have time to do, and are never likely to have time to do. Give your positive imagination free rein. Allow up to 15 minutes.

Go back to your activity list and put an asterisk next to each item that meets the following definition: You do it only because there's no one else to do it, you feel your experience and training fits you better to do other things, and you'd rather be doing them. Allow up to 10 minutes.

Note that any item on the activity list that is marked by an asterisk is a possible job for a volunteer, if we can find and properly support one to do it.

To the extent that you can get volunteers to do these jobs, you are freed to do more of the things you want to do and are trained for. You will have more time for your dreams. To the extent that you aren't thus freed more to deal with your "dream list" (list 2), every item on that dream list is also a potential volunteer job if we can find a volunteer willing and able to do it.

Bring in the Volunteer Committee, which has been in another room. Explain that their purpose is to respond to the staff's ideas for volunteers (asterisked activities plus dream items).

It is crucial at this point to instruct staff to submit specific job ideas from their lists, while volunteers should answer specifically in three ways:

(1). Unconditional yes. "We think volunteers in this community can do that for you" or "we actually know some who are doing it now in this community."

(2). Unconditional no. As above but "no, volunteers today will not empty your garbage."

(3). Conditional yes. In volunteer committee response to staff job ideas, this is more frequent than either unconditional yes or no, e.g., "We might know of a volunteer who will do that, but first you have to be more specific about hours, qualifications and the kind of training-support you would give them in return." A process of negotiation with staff then begins, out of which volunteer job descriptions are born in a healthy atmosphere of direct communication and give-and-take.

A pitfall at this point is generalized discussion of volunteer and agency philosophy. Save that for another time; NOAH's purpose is to home in on meaningful job specifics.

A second pitfall is too much dialogue solely among staff or solely among volunteers without checking with each other for reality-testing interaction. The communications among staff may be a valuable spin-off for the agency, to be followed through at some other time, but it is not the principal objective here. The principal objective is to set a pattern of direct communication between staff and volunteers. Not incidentally, you will know that you are succeeding if you start receiving role identification cross-over, e.g., a staff person says something like, "let me respond to that from the viewpoint of a volunteer."

The Step 1 negotiation phase can easily last an hour or more.

Step 2: Volunteers Input, Staff Reacts

While staff were preparing their activity and dream lists in Step 1 the volunteer committee was in another room, independently preparing their own shopping list of volunteer job ideas. These are based on their primary knowledge of the actual and potential work capability of volunteers in the community, plus some secondary knowledge of the agency.

Staff has their innings in Step 1 (and it's important these be the first innings).

At the end of Step 1, explain to the staff that the volunteer committee will present their ideas and that staff will have a chance to reality-test them.

If staff has had their innings first, establishing that volunteers will indeed serve some of their needs, staff often shows surprising receptivity to job ideas which now emanate from the volunteer committee.

The Step 2 process can easily go 45 minutes to an hour. Again, watch for the Step 1 pitfalls.

In summary, Steps 1 and 2 of Phase I have a primary job development function with important positive spin-offs in establishing a pattern of direct communication and negotiation between staff and volunteers.

Second, there may be benefits of communication among staff and volunteers, and clarification of staff roles, irrespective of volunteers. NOAH, or a variation of it, might be valuable simply in clarifying staff roles in the agency. Finally NOAH directly diagnoses staff receptivity to volunteers. This can be at least inferred from the level of participation by individual staff members, the level of volunteer job suggestions they offer (all "drudge" jobs, vs. the sharing of some dreams), and their reaction to volunteer committee attempts to negotiate upgrading of the jobs offered.

PHASE II
SEEKING NEED OVERLAP CONSENSUS BETWEEN STAFF-VOLUNTEERS AND CONSUMERS OF SERVICES

The consensus in Phase I could easily be 15 to 20 ideas in the volunteer-staff need overlap area. Even four or five is successful enough.

Phase II takes these ideas to the consumer committee. This is a representative group of eight to ten clients that has been meeting four or five weeks prior to Phase I, not on the topic of volunteers, but on the topic, "What are our needs?" A staff member and volunteer meet with them, mainly as facilitators. The object is to form a real group in which people trust and reality-test each other. At the five or six-week point, bring the Phase I yield of volunteer job ideas to them. Their task is to compare these with their list of needs, and make comments.

They are to indicate clearly: (1) volunteer job ideas

to which they strongly object as irrelevant or actually at cross purposes with their needs and (2) needs from their list, which they believe neither the Phase I job listings nor regular staff functions address. The consumer committee might easily take two or three meetings on this task. They should not be hurried.

The selection of the consumer committee is a matter of individual decision for each agency. Some agencies may decide to have several consumer committees reflecting important differences in the nature and needs of their clients. In any event, if there is only one consumer committee, they should not reject a job idea solely because it doesn't serve the needs of all clients. If it might serve the needs of any significant segment of consumers, in their opinion, it can be accepted.

A second issue area is the competence of some kinds of consumers to function as a review committee; for example, mentally retarded children. Our only suggestion would be when in doubt, try it, and when it seems not to work for consumers themselves, seek a group as close as possible to them, that can represent them as advocates.

PHASE III
SEEKING NEED CONSENSUS BETWEEN ALL THREE GROUPS

Representatives from each of the three committees meet together for final discussion of the yield of Steps 1, 2, 3. Suggested composition of the group is two or three each from the consumer, volunteer, and staff committees, the coordinator, and perhaps the staff or volunteer who worked with the client committee.

CONCLUSION

We recommend application of NOAH not only in program planning stages, but periodically thereafter, perhaps every six months or so, for development of new volunteer jobs, reexamination of old ones for "people approach" relevance, and freshening of communication between volunteers, staff, and consumers.

However, only a general process strategy has been given for NOAH here. The coordinator can and should adapt appropriately to her/his program situation.

Indeed, the "method" is very new, conceptualized within the past year and field-tested for only six months or so. Phase I has been most frequently tested in practice. Phase II is modeled on the Youth Advisory Group of Oakland County Michigan Juvenile Court. For further information, the best source is Mr. Ray Sharp, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Oakland County Juvenile Court, Oakland County Courthouse, Pontiac, Michigan 48053.

The National Information Center will continue to develop the NOAH process, along with other "people approach" processes. We will be glad to share field feedback experience with anyone else who ventures a voyage with NOAH.