

APPROPRIATE VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

RESPONSE TO THE TAX REVOLT

Second Draft

12 July, 1978

For Discussion Purposes Only

Status of this Paper, 12 July 1978

An earlier draft (29 June) has been responded to by California people, also initially by NCVA and one or two people at NICOV. This draft attempts to incorporate that response. More intensive input will be coming from NCVA about July 12-14. Objective is for NICOV and NCVA to issue a joint national policy statement, as early as possible via our regular communication channels and special mailings (VAC's, State Offices, etc.)

Bob Presson is the manager of this development at NICOV; review responses should be conveyed to him. Several people at NCVA will be involved, and Bob can identify them.

I. BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

A. Basic Assumptions

1. The tax revolt is real and will spread.
2. Among its effects may be presentation of unusual challenges to volunteer leadership.
3. Improvised, ad hoc, uncreative, self-centered response by volunteer leadership will have serious consequences for the entire community and for the volunteer community.
4. Volunteer leadership people and organizations must quickly move to establish a well-considered clear position, guidelines, and policy for that response.*

This paper attempts to begin the dialogue. At this point, it is not an official position of NICOV or any other organization.

B. Identification of Significant Groups, Impacting or Impacted

1. A large segment of taxpayers (property owners) gains relief. The apparent price of this relief is transfer of pressure or potential damage to five other groups:

*The scope of reference is the United States. However, the possibility of analogous implications for some other nations has been pointed out to us.

2. Government decision-makers, elected and appointed, state to local. In a somewhat different way, federal decision-makers.
3. Local and other government (line?) employees who are laid off, (unemployment), or suffer less drastic consequences such as wage freezes, damage to pension plans or other fringe benefits, etc.
4. Non-profit organizations, including volunteer resource organizations, via loss of funding.
5. Consumers of services provided by either government or private non-profit sources. The consequences are withdrawal or attenuation of some of these services; the probability is for most damaging impact on low-income or disabled people whose more marginal existence depends most heavily on these services.
6. The volunteer leadership community
 - (a) by virtue of challenges to respond with levels of visibility, intensity, and creativity rarely or never before expected of it, and
 - (b) serious loss of funding support, at approximately the same time.

C. Analysis of Significant Groups

1. There is obviously some overlap between the six groups, for example, #1 and #6.
2. There are also some interactions; for example, all other groups influence government decision-makers at election time, via polls, advocacy, etc.
3. #1 is primarily impacting
 - #'s 2 and 6 are both impacting and impacted
 - #'s 3, 4 and 5, are primarily impacted, especially the un-advantaged segment of consumers of services (#5)
4. Probably, all citizens belong to one or more of these six groups. Thus, consequences are potentially universal in any state or community.
5. Any policy response will necessarily reflect value priorities, in concern for one or another of these groups. These values should be stated explicitly.
 - (a) We respect and take as a given, the democratically expressed will of any majority which succeeds in enacting tax revolt measures.

(b) Our primary concern is for consumers of vital government or private services, especially those consumers whose existence is marginal and who will therefore suffer most from deprivation of these services.

(c) Our concern is also for deserving* service-providing employees, in government or the non-profit sector, whose jobs or job benefits are threatened or lost. This includes volunteer leadership people and organizations employed or supported by government or the non-profit sector.

(d) Government decision-makers are identified as those responsible for producing humane and effective solutions to the existing challenges. Secondly, and with their support, leadership of the volunteer and the non-profit sector are also responsible for producing these solutions.

II. SOME EVENT SEQUENCES

A. Not Calling Substantially on the Volunteer Sector for Participation

The volunteer sector may not be considered convenient or viable enough to be called on for significant assistance. Accordingly, we may find ourselves in the position of initiating attempts to persuade decision-makers to accept our assistance and participation.

1. Among the more traditional and convenient options open to government decision-makers are the following, or any combination of them.

(a) Allocate existing budget surpluses to alleviation of the crisis in service delivery, or at least delay of this crisis.

(b) Continue to draw for this purpose from other budget categories.

(c) Seek federal or other outside funding assistance.

(d) "Austerity" budget cuts in services.

2. The consequences of the first three steps would be:

(a) At least for a time, preservation of the illusion that taxpayers and citizens can "have their cake and eat it too."

(b) Accordingly, lulling of voluntary citizen response to crisis.

(c) Preserving the electability and other political well-being of office-holders.

(d) Preserving the jobs of most government employees, and many non-profit private employees.

Comment: In austerity budget-cuts, build in matching citizen participation concep

*Definition of "deserving" is crucial and will be examined later.

3. The consequences of option (d), austerity budget cuts in the service area, would be:

- (a) Loss of all the consequences described in paragraph 2 above.
- (b) Probably disproportionately greater impact on less powerful individual consumers of services, e.g., low income, disabled, etc..
- (c) Relatively more quick-acting and serious loss of revenue in the non-profit sector. This is because this sector frequently receives a substantial portion of its financial support from government sources, and is probably considered among the most expendable by them.

(United Way of California expects that "taxes saved" revenues will probably not go into United Way or non-profit coffers, in the main.)

Note that virtually all VAC's and many local volunteer programs are in the non-profit sector.

B. Reliance on Volunteer-like Resources, not Traditionally Considered

"Volunteer"

1. Attempt to fill gaps in services with CETA, or VISTA-type employees, that is, people who receive stipends rather than full wages for their services, and are thus in some sense at least "partly volunteer."

(a) The consequences would be similar to those described in paragraph IIA2, "preserving the illusion and electability, etc."

Other consequences would be:

(b) Acquiescence in more job loss for government and non-profit human service employees, with partial alleviation for them only as they might be able to transition to CETA or VISTA-type positions.

(c) Acquiescence in more local and state dependency on federal programs and resources.

2. Attempt to shift responsibility from traditional government and private sector service providers, to recipients of services by emphasizing the concept of community mobilization for self-help.

This is healthy in the long term, and self-help is today more widely accepted as a kind of volunteering.

The danger is that this will be used as a "cop-out" by service providers, a sudden, expedient delegation of responsibility, without the consideration of the need for supporting the maturation of local self-help capabilities, and the time necessary for this maturation.

I'm not sure I agree. I think the country has an obligation to provide a number of basic services while encouraging the public to participate.

C. If the Call Comes for Us: Factors in an Appropriate Response by Volunteer Leadership

Note: As indicated previously, there is some doubt as to whether we will indeed receive a call for substantial contribution ⁱⁿ the crisis. We might instead have to initiate an offer of participation and sell it to the decision-makers. This paper has previously described a number of other options open to them.

1. Strength of the Volunteer Leadership Sector

Somewhat ironically, among the first paid employees to be cut could be volunteer leadership people who are directly or indirectly funded by state or local government, or by non-profit organizations. The same certainly holds for resource organizations such as VAC's/VB's.

We see no alternative but to incorporate into our guidelines the impossibility of getting stronger volunteer response to crisis by weakening volunteer leadership individuals or organizations.

There is at the same time a corresponding responsibility of volunteer leadership. Described in the remainder of this paper, it includes more emphasis on embracing and implementing a wider and lower-cost concept of volunteering, and interaction as colleagues with those outside the traditional volunteer sector, for whom this wider concept is central and natural.

There may also be necessary some re-direction of responsibility from less to more vital volunteer-involving service areas.

2. The Supply of Volunteers

(a) Even prior to the tax revolt, we were operating in a scarcity economy of traditional volunteers.

(b) The tax revolt crisis will probably create the need for substantially greater numbers of volunteers, to replace staff and/or services cut by government or non-profit agencies.

(c) Therefore, it will be the responsibility of volunteer leadership decisively and responsibly to increase the supply relevant to the expected crisis.

(d) This can be done in two ways:

(1) Systematic exploration of dimensions in volunteer space beyond the traditional, for example, self-help, informal neighborhood networking, etc. NICOV has been working hard in this area, for several years.

(2) If necessary, encouraging "re-recruiting" of traditional volunteers for more vital volunteer positions.

The former is considered the more feasible and relevant response. It includes taking more responsibility for the CETA/VISTA and self-help models described in the previous section, for neighborhood networking, skillsbank, advocacy, and other community mobilization models. It also includes interacting collaboratively and facilitatively with those who are now involved with such models.

Some advantages of this model are:

- a) It tends to be much lower-cost per volunteer hour. In a tax revolt situation we must seek deflation, and avoid further inflation of the cost of putting a volunteer to work and supporting her/him in that work.
- b) It tends to avoid conflict between paid employees and volunteers, on the issue of volunteers replacing paid employees. This is because the volunteer in the wider geography of volunteer space resembles the paid employee far less in role.
- c) By involving a wider range of people, frequently not participating in traditional agency-related volunteer programs, it avoids an undue "tax on time" of the traditional volunteer.

Nevertheless, the intent is to expand, not forsake the traditional agency-related model of volunteering. Nor should we forget that the traditional model has its own dynamism, and has been steadily expanding into a wider geography of volunteer space.

The remainder of this paper applies primarily to agency-related volunteer programs in the private or public sectors.

3. Prioritization of Volunteer Placements

- (a) We assume that any reasonably possible increase in the number of volunteers may still fall short of the increased demands for volunteers in agencies.
- (b) Therefore, a process must be developed for determining which employee-layoff positions will be filled first, or filled at all by volunteers.

(At this point, the fact of some government and private employee

layoff is taken as given.)

(c) We suggest the following bases for prioritizing:

- (1) Nature of service loss from vital to mere inconvenience. For example, loss of fire protection, public safety protection, basic sanitation, and basic education might be considered more vital than, say, loss of recreational services.
- (2) Nature of consumers of services. Loss of any service will be more damaging to low-income, infirm, aged people who are already leading a marginal existence.

(d) (1) In general, however, we would assume the community at large should be consulted in setting these priorities; volunteer leadership would not set them.

(2) The role of volunteer leadership is to respond to requests for volunteer assistance, in terms of the realistic feasibility of filling these gaps with volunteers. Key questions addressed would be: how many volunteers are likely to be recruitable for this role; what would be necessary to motivate and support them; how long would it take to recruit and train and place them?

4. Government and Private Employee Job Protection

(a) A legitimate point made by many administrators, even without serious budget cuts, is that any increase in volunteers can be used as a justification for future budget leveling or reduction.

(b) This is even more so in a serious budget cut situation. True, it is desirable, if not necessary, to involve replacement-type volunteers in a crisis-priority service situation. However, in most circumstances their ability to serve in such situations is not in itself a justification for removing that position from the roster of paid positions.

(c) Therefore, I believe such "replacement volunteers" should be engaged only:

- (1) after maximum consultation with and acceptance by paid employee representatives.
- (2) even so, only under short-term contracts, not renewable, unless government decision-makers clearly justify their inability to renew paid positions in this service area. The burden of proof should be on them, in collective bargaining with jointly represented volunteer leadership and paid employee groups.

(d) Possibly, there should be some evaluation of the relative feasibility of volunteers or paid employees in some paid positions, newly occupied by volunteers. This is because some percentage of these positions may in fact be better performed by volunteers.

(Ian Bruce and other labor-volunteer guidelines.)

Please respond as soon as possible to:

Robert Presson, Deputy Director
National Information Center on Volunteerism
P.O. Box 4179
Boulder, Colorado 80306

tel. (303) 447-0492