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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VOLUNTARY AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS

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Building Relationships Between Voluntary And Labor Organizations
MONOGRAPH

Voluntary and labor organizations both maintain high work standards and desire the best possible service for clientele. However, conflicts between the two groups occasionally arise. This often happens when there is a lack of understanding between the two types of organizations or in agencies where volunteers work with union employees, and the respective roles and responsibilities have not been clearly defined.

Efforts have been initiated at the national level to improve the communication between labor and volunteer-involving organizations and to address concerns that have been raised. However, more dialogue is needed, particularly at the local level where conflicts are more likely to occur. The following are some frequently asked questions about relationships between voluntary and labor organizations.

- * How can conflicts between labor organizations and volunteer programs be minimized?
- * How can organizations that use volunteers draw upon the volunteer resources of unions?
- * What can you do to involve unions in planning with volunteer organizations?
- * What steps can be taken to build team feeling between paid and volunteer staff?
- * Should volunteers be used in a strike situation?

In addressing the question of minimizing conflicts between labor and voluntary organizations, it is important to remember that organized labor has a long and strong history of providing and supporting voluntary efforts. The trade union movement, because it is organized from "bottom to top," is founded on the principle of volunteers who serve their members in a sense of common purpose in building better lives for themselves and their children and their fellow citizens. Union concerns for the overall well-being of members, their families, and the community lead naturally into participation in voluntary organizations.

For instance, the AFL-CIO's constitution, clearly requires the federation to actively stimulate its members into fully participating in the affairs of their communities and the development of sound relationships with social agencies in such communities.

In addition to their efforts to help voluntary agencies carry out their programs, union officers, staff, and members are deeply involved in helping the organizations financially, both through contributions and fundraising.

Organized labor participates in voluntary efforts in many diverse ways - through their local Community Services Committees, by members serving on boards of directors of non-profit organizations, through involvement in fundraising campaigns, etc.

Some labor-sponsored programs are designed to serve union members (i.e. information and assistance centers for unemployed members, job retraining programs, emergency food shelves and food-buying clubs for unemployed members, financial counseling services or legal advice for members, resume preparation services). Many other labor-sponsored programs serve the entire community (i.e. free medical and hospital services for persons denied treatment, sponsorship of special-need children for camps and other outings, distribution of holiday food baskets and toys to the needy, restoration of old buildings for community centers, development of parks, renovation of buildings for emergency shelters).

Not only do unions sponsor their own programs, they often develop partnerships with other organizations to provide needed community services (i.e. police appreciation efforts, assistance with flood control, emergency food and shelter programs, blood donor drives, scouting activities disaster preparedness, first aid and CPR training, crime prevention programs).

While organized labor activity in voluntary services differ from community to community, some form is evident in almost every community where unions are found.

Too often the relationship between labor and voluntary organizations has been seen in adversative terms, without the recognition that these two groups have worked together successfully for many years.

Large and small volunteer-involving organizations can tap the volunteer resources of unions by developing collaborative projects with local unions or by recruiting volunteers through their unions. It is worthwhile to build formal relationships between voluntary organizations and organized labor.

This can be accomplished by involving labor from the earliest planning phase of a volunteer program, encouraging labor participation and input throughout the volunteer program, and publicly recognizing labor's investment and involvement in volunteerism. Labor representation on volunteer-related boards, advisory committees and planning groups should be actively sought. These individuals will bring valuable skills, expertise and perspectives to the volunteer program.

Organized labor has at times expressed concern over such issues as: the problem of replacing paid staff with volunteers, the role of volunteers in strike situations, the relationship between volunteering and job retraining and re-employment opportunities, and how to work effectively with volunteers who also hold full-time jobs. These issues should be of concern to any volunteer-involving agency and not just in situations where union employees are involved.

Many interrelated steps can be undertaken in order to strengthen understanding and trust between voluntary and labor organizations. Encouraging teamwork between voluntary and labor organizations might be accomplished by including both as partners in the initial and ongoing planning phases of the volunteer program. Adopted philosophies about roles, relationships, and rights of each group need to be promoted and reinforced. Some ways to work toward strengthened relationships include: implementing the policy that volunteers augment and do not replace or displace paid staff; delineating division of responsibilities between paid staff and volunteers; encouraging teamwork between paid staff and volunteers; expecting paid staff involvement in planning for and training of volunteers with whom they will work; and providing paid staff with both an orientation to the organization's volunteer program and training in the area of volunteer supervision prior to assigning them to supervise volunteers.

It is the primary responsibility of paid staff, in almost all situations, to integrate the assistance of volunteers into the overall service delivery plan. For example, in situations where there are certification or licensing requirements for paid staff, it is the formal charge of staff to assure professionalism, appropriate staffing, legality and ethical behavior with regard to all services which they provide or supervise.

For these reasons, it is essential for paid staff to participate in planning for, training and supervising volunteers in areas such as: the mission, philosophy and standards of the organization; the purpose, methods and specific parameters of each specific volunteer position and the necessity for reliability and confidentiality. In addition, in order to monitor service quality, it is essential to have ongoing communication between paid staff and volunteers regarding progress toward the goals of each volunteer position.

People have many motivations for volunteering. In addition to such reasons as the desire for personal growth, academic or employment credit, social opportunities or the chance to utilize their skills and interests, volunteers donate their services because they are committed to an organization and its goals. They, too, desire excellence in their performance and are concerned about ways in which they can be most helpful to staff and clientele. Once thoroughly familiar with the mission of the organization, their designated role and parameters for their positions, volunteers are almost always supportive of the "system". Through their volunteer experience, volunteers acquire firsthand knowledge about the requirements of and demands upon paid staff, and as a result, often become strong advocates for the needs of both the organization and its paid staff.

Whether or not volunteers should be called upon in a strike situation can be a complicated question. Under most circumstances, it is not advisable to involve volunteers in a strike. In order to avoid hasty decisions during a time of stress, it is important to develop a strike plan prior to a potential strike. The plan should specify whether or not volunteers are to be involved in a strike, and under what circumstances.

To be consistent with the philosophy that volunteers are not to replace paid employees, volunteers should not be organized, by the agency, to replace striking workers. The following actions could be helpful in easing tensions during a strike: inform volunteers of the impending strike; explain to volunteers the provisions in the strike plan relating to volunteer involvement; do not coerce volunteers into volunteering during a strike. Realize that, organizing volunteers to work during a strike, will most often result in staff resistance to working with volunteers after the strike.

However, consideration should be given to whether or not individuals, who have a vested interest in preserving some level of services to clients or patients, can be kept out of an agency during a strike. For example, family members or friends may choose to help during a strike-particularly in public agencies. This is a different situation than organizing existing, or recruiting new, volunteers to fill a void created by striking workers.

To summarize, positive relationships between voluntary and labor organizations will develop through conscious team building efforts. Involving unions in the initial phase of volunteer program planning and preparation of a strike plan will minimize chances that conflict will arise. Unions provide a largely untapped resource of volunteers and deserves to be called upon and recognized for their voluntary contributions to society.

MINNESOTA OFFICE ON VOLUNTEER SERVICES
Department of Administration

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VOLUNTARY AND
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- AFL-CIO VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS FORUM MINUTES. AFL-CIO Volunteer Organizations Forum, Michigan, November, 1983, 23 p. Summarizes speeches, panel presentations and discussions from the AFL-CIO Volunteer Organization Forum. RESOURCE
- THE AGING AND THE COMMUNITY. AFL-CIO, Publication Number 128, Washington, D.C., Revised January 1979, 8 p. Advocates on behalf of the elderly and encourages local unions to be aware of the needs of the elderly and provide them with support services. RESOURCE
- ALCOHOLISM. AFL-CIO, Publication Number 52, Washington, D.C., revised July, 1982, 2 p. Describes the nature of alcoholism and related community programs. Encourages union involvement in helping to address the needs of people dependent upon alcohol. RESOURCE
- EXPERIENCING SUDDEN ECONOMIC DISRUPTION. United Way of America, September 1979, 21 p. Prepared by the AFL-CIO and the United Way of America, this booklet encourages community groups to work together to resolve problems created by sudden economic disruption in communities. Background information and techniques for developing a community project are included. RESOURCE
- BEYOND THE PICKET LINE. AFL-CIO, Washington, D.C., Publication 78, July, 1980, 32 p. Explains how to organize a strike assistance program. Topics covered include organizing for strike assistance, meeting with social agencies, training strike counselors, and operation of a strike assistance center. RESOURCE
- BROTHER, SISTER, CAN YOU SPARE SOME TIME? AFL-CIO, Department of Community Services, Washington, D.C., March, 1983, 2 p. Explains the Big Brother/Big Sisters Program and encourages union members to become volunteers. RESOURCE
- EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES BY ORGANIZED LABOR DURING 1982 and 1983. October, 1983, 5 p. Lists examples of AFL-CIO volunteer activities in various states and includes brief descriptions of programs. RESOURCE
- LABOR AND UNITED WAY, PARTNERS FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS. United Way of America, 1983, 2 p. Describes liaison structure and involvement between United Way and the AFL-CIO. RESOURCE
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NOTE: This is a partial listing of M.O.V.S. Resource Library materials pertaining to alternative sources of volunteers. Additional materials will be added to the library on an on-going or other basis. To borrow these materials for a three week time period, write to Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services, 500 Rice Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55155; or call (612) 296-4731 (metro) (800) 652-9747 (non-metro Minnesota).