

The

# Rants and Raves Anthology

What's  
on the  
Minds of  
Leading Authors in  
the Volunteer  
World



The  
**Rants**  
and  
**Raves**  
**Anthology**

Edited by Susan J. Ellis

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# Introduction

Thank you for participating in the 2003 Energize Online Bookstore Festival! We are on a mission: Quite simply, we want to transform the way in which the volunteer world exchanges information and knowledge. This *Anthology* is one of our strategies to reach as many of our colleagues as we can with our message.

We thought that a great way to introduce you to e-books would be to give you one for free. To this end, we invited the field's most popular authors (from three countries) to write brand new essays for this book, letting loose on whatever issues they saw as hot buttons today. The result is this *Rant and Rave Anthology*. Happily, these folks are also friends and they enthusiastically contributed some wonderful and provocative reading material for you. We unapologetically close each essay with links to the books and e-*Volunteerism* articles by each author that are sold in the Energize Online Bookstore.

To each author I say thank you for your commitment to volunteerism and for joining Energize on our electronic path forward!

## **Some Context**

In 1978, Energize published what was only the third book ever to be written in English on any aspect of volunteerism: *By the People: A History of Americans as Volunteers*. Katie Noyes Campbell and I went this route because, at the time, no major publishing house felt they could adequately market the book to what was an untested audience. The manuscript, completely re-typed three times by my mother, Ann Ellis, from what was truly "cut and paste" mounds of paper, had to be placed manually into type to be printed.

In 1990, we revised the book and felt it was a victory of sorts to have Jossey-Bass publish it as part of its newly-launched "nonprofit series." This time we wrote the book on the computer with a word processing program, but still presented the manuscript to Jossey-Bass on paper (we may have sent along some 5¼" floppy disks, but I'm not sure the publishing house used them at all). The published book was printed from tape in a mainframe computer and we corrected galley proofs and blue lines on the way to press.

Now, in 2003, we are working on the third edition of *By the People* (in hopes of producing it by the end of the year), and it will be written on computer, formatted in-house with QuarkXpress software, and produced once again by Energize but this time completely electronically. It will be the first book from Energize to be made available in print-on-demand form, which means that customers will have the

choice of buying the electronic version or paying a surcharge to have a printed book generated just for them. But we won't be "holding inventory" or paying for a press run of several thousand copies. The book will be transformed from a digital file into a paper text one copy at a time (and you won't be able to tell the difference between it and any traditionally-published book).

### **The Power of Electronic Publishing**

This remarkable 25-year metamorphosis from metal type to e-books is astonishing and worth celebrating. For Energize, it means that we can serve the volunteer field in ways truly unimaginable in the past:

- We can publish quality materials at lower cost, and make them instantly available to colleagues anywhere in the world.
- We can find and share materials from international sources to an international audience.
- We can respond quickly to produce new material, to revise or adapt existing works, and even to translate items into other languages.

Further, when Steve McCurley and I inaugurated *e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community* [www.e-volunteerism.com](http://www.e-volunteerism.com) in 2000, we provided the field's first full-length subscription journal online. The issue that will be posted on July 15, 2003 marks the end of the third full year of publication—over 1200 pages of completely new articles in twelve issues, with contributors from 23 different countries! And the whole publication is interactive—at least in principle—which means readers can respond to everything and exchange ideas with each other.

### **But...**

None of this matters if our colleagues are not comfortable with electronic publications! Or if only a tiny percentage of people make use of interactive options. So our mission is to be your guide to this brave new world.

If you have already purchased electronic publications from Energize in the past half year, consider this a thank-you gift!

If this is your first attempt to use an e-book, welcome!

Regardless of your level of experience, be sure to read the following essay by Cara Blank, the Director of Online Publishing at Energize, with great tips for working with PDF files. Then continue through the rest of the book and try out her suggestions.

We hope you'll value the thoughts of the authors in these pages...and enjoy the e-book experience at the same time. The future is here and it's on your computer screen right now.

Susan J. Ellis  
President, Energize, Inc.  
Philadelphia, PA, USA  
July 2003

# E-books, Schmeeeebooks! Some Rants, Some Raves, and a Little Practical Advice

Cara Blank, Director of Online Publishing  
Energize, Inc.

*"e-books, schmeeeebooks. What's the deal with all these people trying to get me to read books on my computer screen?"*

That's what some of you are saying. And, let me tell you, I truly know what you mean. My first experience with an e-book was a manual for some computer software program I'd purchased. At first I was irritated that the software company would only give me an electronic copy of the manual. How dare they not send that 4-pound book in the box with my software?! I had always been able to grab a fat book off the shelf, balance it on my lap while trying to operate the computer, and search in the index for the answer to my question. Why would I want to take the time to figure out an e-book? Little did I know that this technology was actually a really neat tool with some great functions that could help me.

In my contacts with the volunteer world, I've heard other rantings floating around:

- *I like to hold my books in my hands.*
- *I sit at my computer all day; I don't want to read even more online.*
- *I can only do my reading at home, where I don't have a computer.*
- *Reading the screen for that long will give me a headache.*
- *I want to be able to take my books to and from my office.*
- *I'm not very computer savvy; I don't know how to use an e-book.*
- *I don't want to wait to print the entire book on my printer.*

Yes, yes, yes. I agree with all of the above and have even voiced a few of them myself. But now I LOVE e-books. Why? Because I have learned that, with most electronic publications, all of the above *does not apply*. In response, I can rave that:

- **Energize e-books are "holdable."** You may print them and read them in your office, in your easy chair, propped up in your bed when you're working late...wherever and whenever.

At Energize, we like to put our print-outs into colorful plastic binders for use by visitors to the volunteer management library in our office.

- **Even if you don't print it out, reading an e-book on-screen can be even easier on the eyes.** You can increase the viewing size of the page so the text is as large as you like (see my hints for using e-books below). This can come in extra handy when you've misplaced your reading glasses...again.
- **Energize e-book files can be copied** (for individual use only, please), so you can save them to a virtually indestructible CD-ROM and carry it anywhere you like.
- **E-books are quite easy to use.** Yes, you do need to know how to turn on the computer and open a file in Adobe Reader (you know, that free software that's popping up everywhere in the cyber-aspect of our lives, from filing our taxes to completing a university application online). But, with only some basic computer knowledge, once the e-book is open, you'll find familiar or intuitive icons (such as arrows and a magnifying glass) that help you turn the pages and move through the material. (Plus, I've listed a few other easy-to-use functions at the end of this article.)
- **With Energize e-books, you can print just one page or many.** So, if you're concerned with saving the environment or need just an excerpt for your management training workshop, you can print only what you need.

Now, my favorite aspect: **e-books create enormous possibilities for sharing information in the world of volunteerism.** And I mean WORLD. Do you realize that with the advent of e-books you can actually afford books and articles about managing volunteers from Canada, the UK, the USA and Australia?! That means fresh new information from new perspectives. Just last week, I opened an e-mail from Clarissa Lempp at Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland (Academy for Volunteering Germany) in Berlin who shared with us the *German translation of one of Susan Ellis' articles!* Another example is the brand new *Volunteer Management: Essential Guide* published in South Australia just weeks ago. In the past, to purchase this book you would have had to pay "an arm and a leg" to have the book shipped and then wait four to six weeks to get it. (Let's face it, you don't find your average Australasian volunteer management text on the shelves of your local bookstore on most continents.) The dawn has risen—this book is now available to all North Americans, Europeans, New Zealanders, Singaporeans, et. al., in electronic format. No shipping costs, no waiting, and no worrying that the postal service will lose, crunch, or soak the box.

My conversion from doubter to fan happened as I grew more comfortable with the technology. Once I learned a few "tricks" for using Adobe Reader, I realized that this tool, called an e-book, can really enhance my work and reading experience. Take a look at my list on the next page of really neat things you can do with Adobe Reader and your e-books<sup>1</sup>. Go ahead and test them as you read this *Anthology*. You'll soon see why everybody's trying to get you to welcome electronic publishing!

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<sup>1</sup> However, just like you, I'm a real "land-lover." I don't sail through computer systems and hardware connections with ease, and I certainly don't work for Adobe. So if you have some truly technical questions about the software such as "Why won't Adobe Reader work on my PC with Windows 95?" please contact *their* technical support staff at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) for the correct answers.

## **Cara's List of Easy-to-Use Functions for Reading E-books in Adobe Reader**

### **Storing e-Books**

You can save Energize's electronic books into a folder (such as "My Documents") on your hard drive, on a floppy disk or Zip disk with enough memory, or on a CD-ROM if you have a CD writer/burner. Just click the little icon that looks like a computer disc and choose where you want to save it. (I always suggest saving the e-book file to the hard drive first, to be sure you have a copy.)

Here's a neat idea: You can create your own computer Library by naming a folder "Volunteer Management Resource Library" into which you download all e-books or you can create a small shelf in your office for a collection of books on CD-ROM.

### **Making e-Books Easy on Your Eyes**

Many of you are concerned with reading electronic books on screen. With Adobe Reader you can change the size of your document and even read the document in full screen view.

To increase or decrease the page size, look at the top or menu area of Adobe Reader. There should be a small icon shaped like a magnifying glass. Click on the magnifying glass with a + sign to increase the size of the document; click on the magnifying glass with a - sign to decrease the size. I often read a document at 125% magnification.

To read the book in full screen view, go into the Menu option "View" and select "Full Screen" or press Ctrl+L. This will fill your computer screen with the entire page. To "flip" pages, use the left and right arrows on your keyboard. Since this option hides your normal screen toolbars, remember to press Esc on your keyboard to get out of Full Screen view and back to normal.

Also, I suggest using the recommended settings for your monitor to gain optimal viewing, but you'll have to check your computer's manual on how to do that since every computer can be different.

### **Printing PDF Files**

PDF files can be set to various security options by the publisher. However, we decided to allow all Energize e-books to be printable. We know that you, our colleagues in the volunteer management field, are honest and will use printed copies only for your personal use within your organizations.

Printing is a great feature with Adobe Reader because you can print just one page, a range of pages, or an entire document. Simply click the little icon shaped like a printer on the Adobe Reader toolbar. On the dialog box that appears, leave the default at "All" to print the entire book, change the selection to "print current page" only, or enter the page range to print a section of the book.

## Browsing a PDF File

One of the greatest advantages of owning an electronic book is the ability to browse through your book easily and quickly. Gone are the days of flipping page-by-page to find something you remembered was in this book. Here are a few different techniques:

### Navigating Buttons

Using triangle-shaped buttons at the top or menu area of Adobe Reader, you can move through your document quickly: back one page, forward one page, move to the first page, or to the last page.

### Find

The Find (or sometimes called "Search") function is one of the best unknown or forgotten tools available in most document software (try it in Microsoft Word, too). You can use one of three ways to search for a keyword or phrase to locate important information:

- Press <CTRL+F>.
- Go to the Edit menu and select "Find."
- Click on the small icon shaped like a pair of binoculars.

A dialog box will appear where you can enter a keyword or phrase; then press "Find." You can move throughout the document by clicking "Find Again" on the same dialog box.

### Links

Many electronic books have hypertext links which allow you to jump to another place in the book. You will know that you can *link* to a new area if the text is blue and/or underlined or when your cursor transforms into a pointing finger as you move the cursor over the text.

Even more exciting and helpful are links that connect you to or open a Web site mentioned in the text. Of course, you must be connected to the Internet while you are reading the book to use this function.

### Bookmarks

Several of our e-books will open with a narrow window at the left-hand side of the book page with a list of links, looking like a table of contents. These links are called "bookmarks" and, when pressed, will jump to a specific place in the book.

If you prefer to use the entire window to view your page, you can close the Bookmarks window by clicking on the Bookmarks tab to the far left of the window.

## Copying and Pasting **T**

E-books make preparing for a workshop, training session, or presentation very easy. You may “copy” paragraphs of text and “paste” them directly onto a page in a writing software program such as Microsoft Word. Here are some simple instructions for doing so:

1. At the top or menu area of Adobe Reader, click on the small icon with a capital “T” (for Text Select Tool).
2. Now, while pressing your mouse, highlight your chosen text. Release your mouse (the text should still be highlighted) and right-click on the text.
3. A short menu will appear and you must select “Copy.”
4. Now, open the document you are working in or start a new document and right-click on the page. (I actually find it easier to open my document before copying from the e-book; you can keep both a Word document and an e-book open at the same time.) Select “Paste” and the text should appear on that page.

As I said before, you can test all of these features as you read this *Anthology*. We hope you will find the experience easy and enjoyable

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*Cara Blank is Director of Online Publishing at Energize, Inc.—a position no one has held before since we could not have envisioned it until now. She brings us expertise in electronic book design and is most likely the person customers will meet via e-mail or telephone if they need help using the Energize Online Bookstore. Cara is starting her second year of immersion in the volunteer world and admits to some amazement at both the scope of the field and the degree of technophobia still present in it!*

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# Genetic Engineering of the Volunteer Movement

Linda L. Graff, President & Senior Associate  
Linda Graff Aard Associates Inc.

This is a rant. I say this not by way of apology, but rather by way of a caution. If you're not in the mood for a rant, don't read this. I write it for two reasons. First, I am passionate about these issues and feel the need to send my concerns "out there." Second, I want to stimulate some dialogue about these issues. Debate and disagreement are equally welcomed.

## **An Historical Perspective**

For centuries volunteerism in Canada and the United States has evolved in a natural manner, shifting and changing shape in response to other shifts in culture, society, and notions of social responsibility.

In the United States, volunteerism has a history directly traceable to the first European settlers who, seeking refuge from religious persecution, established a new society founded on individualism, and individual action. Over time, volunteerism has become deeply entrenched in the American way of life. The general pattern seems to be, if something is wrong, Americans set about to fix it. Full stop.

In Canada, volunteerism is also deeply embedded in our way of life. I suspect that, in our country, volunteerism is more the product of vast spaces, a harsh climate, and the need for early settlers to help one another to survive. The inclination to help one another continued to thrive in small, relatively isolated rural communities well into the twentieth century, and remains alive and well to this day.

In both countries, volunteerism and the volunteer movement have changed significantly over time, evolving naturally in response to changes in our larger societies. From the relatively unorganized, individual-based charity of the 1800s, volunteerism mutated as government agencies and nonprofit organizations began to deliver services to "the needy" in the early and mid decades of the 1900s. Informal volunteering has continued to thrive in both of our countries (people are still marvellously willing to help one another), but formal volunteering—volunteering through organizations—has flourished as the number and variety of nonprofit organizations have increased dramatically.

We don't think about it much, but the nature of volunteering has been shifting. At one point it was almost exclusively unorganized. People were just helping their

neighbours and family members as needed. What “charity” happened was individually based. This is the classic “lady bountiful” typology in which individuals—women mostly—administered unto the sick and the orphaned. As the sense of social responsibility grew, and as governments began to take on the provision of more and more services to those “less fortunate,” citizens also began to organize more formal efforts to reach out to persons in need. Many of our organizations today had their beginnings in such grassroots organizing by citizen volunteers who saw a need, rallied support and, over time, built organizations to respond.

Then the nonprofit sector discovered professionalism. Health and social service professions sprouted and multiplied, and a sense that only formally trained “professionals” could deliver effective services tended to drive volunteers into back rooms and onto sidelines. Paid, academically-trained staff, working in those very organizations that volunteers created, came to dominate service delivery efforts while volunteers were typically confined to support functions. The philosophy of “volunteers will supplement but never supplant the work of paid staff” took firm hold in the new profession to spring up in the 1970s: volunteer management.

From the perspective of how services are organized, both countries have seen a steady decline in government-based programs since the heyday of public services in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A growing distaste for the warehouse nature of institutional care combined with worsening economic conditions have pushed more and more services out of the realm of state sponsorship and into the community where they have been taken up by a continuously growing nonprofit sector. Not only can nonprofits typically deliver more sensitive, responsive, and humane care in their communities, but their smaller and more efficient administration makes them a cost-effective alternative to government-run programs.

We all understand that nonprofits also enhance their services and keep costs down through the involvement of volunteers. And, while we don’t really like to talk about it too much, we know that nonprofit organizations are becoming increasingly reliant on volunteers for front-line service delivery. As budgets are slashed, staff numbers diminish, and administrators desperately seek cheaper ways of meeting rising demands, an army of volunteers has been recruited into the human service delivery system. In contrast to the “supplement but never supplant” mantra of 25 years ago, volunteers are now at the very heart of the real work in our sector. Ask any collection of managers of volunteers what would happen if volunteers withdrew their labour for a month and the resounding response would be: “Our agency would cease to function” and “Our clients would simply not receive service.”

During the recent SARS outbreak in Toronto, hospitals went into lockdown as a strategy to contain the spread of the disease. All volunteers were suspended from duty. It only took a few days for the staff to realize just how important volunteers were to daily functioning, and administrators and managers of volunteer services were pressured to bring volunteers back as soon as possible. Some hospitals even looked to volunteers to help with SARS screening protocols, placing them on the most frontal edge of the front lines during the crisis.

### **From Evolution to Engineering**

So, volunteerism and the work of volunteers have grown and diminished, changing in shape in Canada and the United States over the last two to three hundred years, naturally evolving in response to structural, political, economic, and social changes in our larger societies. Volunteers and the volunteer movement have been what we needed them to be, and their evolution has been relatively unplanned, and unmanaged. I liken this to the Darwinian notion of evolution, whereby species mutate and evolve, survive and become extinct, not according to some grand scheme, but in response to shifts in external conditions that, by happenstance, make certain mutations more “fit” than others. The process is one of natural selection rather than good management.

But things are changing. Over the last decade or so in the United States, and more recently in Canada, volunteerism has been “noticed” in a more formal sense. Instead of quietly evolving in a natural manner, volunteerism as a movement has been “taken in hand.”

For example, the Points of Light Foundation in the United States is literally attempting to recreate voluntary participation. Its mission “to engage more people more effectively in volunteer community service to help solve serious social problems” steers volunteers towards laudable efforts in areas such as homelessness, violence, poverty, personal abuse, substance addiction, and health. Nothing wrong with that. But it is still *steering*.

Vast federal resources over the last decade or so have been channelled through the Foundation and its public parent, the Corporation for National and Community Service, to mobilize volunteers in a specific direction (most recently, towards homeland security and disaster planning). Encompassing the volunteer centre movement, the Foundation has been marshalling volunteerism towards government-defined ends. More recent expansions in a wide range of national community service programs have directed large numbers of citizens into community work. While not formally called “volunteering” by its proponents, the lines frequently blur between what some call “community service” and volunteering, and many have argued that, from a practical perspective, the distinction is inconsequential. It’s all necessary and valuable. And certainly it is.

To be clear, it is not my intent to be critical of either the Points of Light Foundation or other US government efforts to mobilize community involvement. I am observing only. And what is happening to our south is of great interest because what happens to volunteering and volunteer management in the United States typically migrates north into Canada seven to ten years later.

In Canada we have only in the last two years seen any discernable political consciousness about volunteering as a social phenomenon. Unlike the United States, which has deliberately promoted and supported volunteering through every Presidential Administration since Kennedy to the present (from creating the Peace Corps and VISTA through governors’ and mayors’ offices on volunteerism, protective legislation, etc.), volunteerism has operated in a virtual public policy void in Canada. But that is changing, too.

As a result of extraordinarily effective advocacy in Canada during the International Year of Volunteers 2001, politicians and bureaucrats have begun to realize that volunteering exists. It is now drawing some attention. Funding for research is beginning to flow. Resources are beginning—really for the first time in this country—to be available for volunteerism per se.

### **The Critical Question**

The question that arises for me as I observe the shifts in volunteerism over the last century, compared to shifts in volunteerism taking place right now, is this: *to whose ends?*

Unlike the pre-1990s volunteerism which naturally evolved in response to changes in community, society, and human need, volunteerism is now being managed by political forces. Not all of it, of course, but large chunks of it to be sure. And what has our experience been when volunteerism is seized and turned to political ends? Well, here are a few examples:

- The criminal justice system grabbed onto community service one and a half decades ago and defined it as a cheap alternative to jail time. So we now say to convicted offenders: *Jail or community service—which punishment would you prefer?*
- In the social service system here in Canada we have created workfare programs (often called welfare reform in the United States). We say to persons on extremely limited public funding: *Would you like to volunteer and retain your benefits, or would you like to see your benefits cut or curtailed altogether? This is a voluntary program you understand. You can choose which option you would like.*
- And in the education system in Canada, we have just begun to formally integrate community service into school programs. In Ontario, for example, which is the province where I live, the provincial government just three years ago decided that high school students must do 40 hours of community service—typically called volunteering—as a condition of high school graduation. No community service, no certificate. This program, ostensibly, has been designed to encourage civic responsibility, promote community values, and provide expanded opportunities for learning. So, in 40 hours, students will be screened, oriented, trained, and placed...and receive meaningful learning from whatever hours of service might be left for them to give after the upfront administrative functions have been satisfied.

And they *are* to be placed in meaningful positions. The organizations that receive the service of these tens of thousands of students flooding into the sector must do all of the record keeping for the schools to ensure that the hours have been worked, and find meaningful positions that can be done by these young people in the remaining few hours available to them.

As the end of school year approaches, the headline in my local newspaper recently read: “Students warned to volunteer—or miss graduation.” Remind me, this is the program that was developed in the hope of creating life-long volunteers, right?

If I sound a little sceptical about government attention to volunteering, it is because the track record hasn't been stellar to date. Programs are developed by politicians and bureaucrats without consultation with managers of volunteers who are, we must surely admit by now, the *only* group of people in our society who truly know anything important about how to mobilize and coordinate the efforts of volunteers. Some bright spark in some government office decides that 40 hours is the right number. Where did that come from? Go to jail or volunteer? Mmmm, let me think. I wonder what does that do to the public image of volunteering?

Here we are, struggling to promote volunteering with too few resources. Politicians and other funders cut budgets year after year. They push agencies into ever-greater reliance on volunteers. They don't consider volunteer program infrastructure costs as eligible funding items (go figure that!), and they promote community service through their own initiatives by making it mandatory on penalty of jail, being cut off of welfare, or failure to graduate.

As the volunteer movement is steered to meet political ends, who's in charge? Who's making the decisions? What do those people know about volunteering and volunteer management? Are there any representatives from "our side" at the table?

It's a bit like genetic engineering, don't you think? Some scientist locked away in a lab somewhere is messing about with genetic material, creating new species from existing ones, all with the promise of the "greater good." Do you really believe it won't get out of hand?

With regard to volunteering, the question for me at the end of this rather long rant is this: Volunteering to whose ends...and will it still be volunteering when the genes are shuffled?

---

*Linda L. Graff is President and Senior Associate of Linda Graff And Associates Inc. (<http://www.lindagraff.ca/>), a Canada-based international consulting firm focusing on volunteerism and nonprofit management. As an author and speaker, she is best known for scaring people silly about risk management in volunteer programs and then providing no-nonsense, practical advice for keeping everyone safe. As this essay shows, Linda brings strong commitment and thoughtful vision to the volunteer field.*

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Books by Linda L. Graff on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):

*Better Safe...Risk Management in Volunteer Programs & Community Service*

*Beyond Police Checks: The Definitive Volunteer & Employee Screening Guidebook*

*By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs*

Articles by Linda in *e-Volunteerism* and available by individual purchase:

"Emerging Trends and Issues in Volunteerism and Volunteer Program Management"

"It's Never Over: Ongoing Screening of Volunteers and Paid Staff"

# Barking Up Some Different Trees

Betty B. Stallings, President  
Stallings and Associates

This is not about my famous volunteer therapy dog, Mikey. (Sorry, all you dog lovers!) Rather it deals with how I am currently looking at the biggest gap I see between desiring to have a well-run volunteer initiative or program and turning that desire into reality. It is about the need to be barking up some new trees!

For nearly 30 years I have been involved in a variety of ways in the support and promotion of volunteerism and in the infrastructures that support these endeavors. My entry into the field came from my experience in founding and then directing a volunteer center for 14 years. I moved into training and consulting because I was adamant that matching prospective volunteers to poorly-conceived experiences was neither serving nonprofit organizations nor the volunteers.

My initial focus in the field was to train those folks who had been selected to lead volunteers within an organization. They were primarily called volunteer coordinators and in most circumstances were very nice people who would accept a low salary to design and sustain volunteer programs. (A 24/7 job requiring incredible skills!)

For too many years I saw individuals leading volunteer programs labor diligently, trying single-handedly to manage a volunteer program in organizations where there was little buy-in, support or appreciation for their efforts. This was taking its toll on the volunteer coordinators and on the programs they led.

Within a few years of training large numbers of eager volunteer coordinators, I began to realize this alone could NEVER be the total answer to reaching excellence in volunteer programming. The profession was growing in numbers but was not simultaneously improving in quality.

The gap, it seemed to me, was that once a volunteer coordinator was hired, the organization gave a collective sigh and thought that they no longer would need to be dealing with the problems associated with volunteers. Volunteer programs were laid (and often accepted) squarely and completely on the shoulders of the one person designated to manage it.

My response to this frustrating dilemma has been three-fold:

- Encourage directors of volunteer programs to function as in-house consultants and staff trainers, building commitment, capacity and competency of *all staff* within their organization who interface with volunteers.
- Reach the audience of executive directors, board members, development directors and other upper level management to engage them in discussions of benefits for them to commit to volunteer resources and to perform critical roles to support the organization in developing its volunteer program.
- Educate funders as to the value of evaluating an organization's effective utilization of volunteer manpower, and supporting it financially.

Initially I began by designing training modules (my [55-Minute Staff Training Series](#)) to compress the time it would take for managers of volunteer programs to present critical skills to staff who utilized volunteers. By the response to the product, it met and continues to meet a great need to have boilerplate modules that managers of volunteer programs can easily adapt for use in a limited time frame. Many national organizations have adapted/modified them into a standardized training system for all of their chapters. I am thrilled that they are now available as an e-product from [Energizeinc.com](#) and can be at your office with a click of your mouse.

### **Beyond Training the Staff**

While training has made a big difference in staff's commitment and competency levels, there was something significant still missing. At the end of nearly every workshop I led for volunteer managers I would hear the similar lament, "I sure do wish my Executive Director (board member, development director, etc.) could have heard this."

Within the past year it has become increasingly obvious that unless upper management understands the critical roles they need to play in support of the development of an outstanding volunteer program, we will continue to see high burnout in our field and volunteer programs that never reach their potential.

With this in mind I am now dedicating myself primarily to reach audiences that include the TEAM of folks needed to contribute to an excellent volunteer program. This is not easy. As a field, we have whined for years that we need executive-level support but, with the exception of Susan Ellis' excellent book, [From the Top Down](#) (read mostly by volunteer coordinators), there are few resources and even less opportunities to focus on the clear, distinctive roles needed to be carried out by senior-level leadership.

In my latest workshop, "A New Look at What Makes Volunteer Programs Successful," the focus is on the roles that top-level administrators/board members can play and the support they need to carry out these functions effectively. A new tool to stimulate this crucial discussion is in the design phase. (Stay tuned...it may be available in late 2003!)

Trainers in the volunteer field must make proactive efforts to be speakers and trainers at sessions attended by EDs and other administrators. And, simultaneously, Managers of Volunteer Resources must learn how to “influence up” in an organization where there is little understanding and support of their leadership role. Unfortunately the typical set up at a conference is a workshop on volunteer management scheduled at the same time as a workshop on “How to Raise a Million Dollars for Your Organization—with No Effort!” Guess which one the ED attends?

### **The Critical Third Party**

My third response to this dilemma is to bring funders into the loop. Now that we have begun to identify funders who value the impact of good volunteering, we are increasingly able to hold seminars which invite funders to speak about their support of volunteering, their appreciation of the infrastructure that enables effective volunteering to happen, and ways to directly support volunteer programs with needed financial resources.

It has taken years for research by *funders* to show that volunteering is not free. And, the best volunteer programs are saying: “Recruitment is not the big issue. We must first be able to design meaningful work for volunteers and provide adequate structure and support to make certain that the experience is positive for the organization and the volunteers.”

The *UPS Study on Volunteering*<sup>1</sup> and now the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service’s recent study, *The Cost of a Volunteer*<sup>2</sup>, are tremendous breakthroughs coming from the funder community. We in the volunteer field must be at the forefront leading and responding to these initiatives. Managers of Volunteer Programs should be giving funders in their area a copy of *A Guide to Investing in Volunteer Resources Management*<sup>3</sup> a booklet produced by UPS, the Points of Light Foundation and the Association for Volunteer Administration. It’s free in electronic form at [www.avaintl.org/advocacy/fundersguide.pdf](http://www.avaintl.org/advocacy/fundersguide.pdf).

When funders speak about the value of volunteerism and support it with their financial resources, upper level management pays attention. Thus, to positively impact the work of the manager of volunteer resources, we must “bark” more clearly and loudly to these folks who give out money. They are, I believe, the key to reaching top administrators and board members of nonprofits, who in turn are trying to design the strategic and tactical plans to meet the missions of thousands of organizations.

Perhaps the conclusion of *The Cost of a Volunteer* said it best:

*As a nation our efforts to address important human and social problems may benefit from broader and deeper community involvement in service and volunteering, but a non-specific call for thousands of new volunteers will not by itself create effective engagement. The national call to service needs a comparison effort to ensure that volunteers are deployed in meaningful and effective ways and that nonprofits are prepared to deliver a quality volunteer experience so that volunteers can deliver a quality service to their communities. Without adequate nonprofit capacity to receive and engage*

*volunteers, a call to service risks drawing potential volunteers into a disappointing or frustrating experience that discourages them from volunteering in the future. (p. 12)*

So, that's it in a nutshell. It is my observation that, up to now, we have been spending 95% of our effort educating the person who takes on the role of volunteer management and 5% of our time trying to influence others (all staff who utilize volunteers/upper management/boards/funders) who are positioned to have tremendous impact on the quality of volunteer programs.

Let's not go to the dogs. Start barking up some trees that can revolutionize our profession and field.

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<sup>1</sup>Managing Volunteers:A Report from United Parcel Service,  
[www.community.ups.com/community/causes/us\\_relations/1998\\_survey.pdf](http://www.community.ups.com/community/causes/us_relations/1998_survey.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, *The Cost of a Volunteer*, 2003.  
<http://www.gfcns.org/pubs/Cost%20Volunteer%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>A *Guide to Investing in Volunteer Resources Management*, produced by UPS, Points of Light, and AVA , November 2002. [www.avaintl.org/advocacy/fundersguide.pdf](http://www.avaintl.org/advocacy/fundersguide.pdf)

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Books and training materials by Betty B. Stallings on sale in the Energize Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):

*55 Minute Staff Training Series: Training Staff to Succeed with Volunteers*

*Training Busy Staff to Succeed with Volunteers: Building Commitment and Competence in Staff/Volunteer Teams*

Training Designs by Betty in *e-Volunteerism* and available by individual purchase:

"Building Organizational Commitment to the Volunteer Program"

"Designing a Strategy for Persuasion"

"Exploring the Impact of Volunteer Trends"

"Icebreakers: Getting Your Training Off to a Good Start"

"Six Training Exercises to Enhance Recruitment of Volunteers"

# Road Kill on the Information Highway

Steve McCurley, Partner  
VMSystems

On the desk next to the computer where I'm typing, lies one of the world's largest collection of volunteer management materials—about 4,000 various articles, books, manuals, brochures, posters and assorted other publications. It occupies a space about eleven inches long, nine inches wide and one inch high. It weighs 5.8 pounds.

As I'm typing it's growing—downloading material on disaster volunteers, about four megabytes so far this morning. It's doing this both because I obsessively collect information on volunteer involvement and because I'm having lunch later this year with some friends in England who are setting up a massive disaster volunteer program and I thought I'd bring them a present. The printed version of the present is, so far, 200 pages of pretty good stuff.

I'm an Internet junkie.

The bad news is that most volunteer managers aren't.

Consider some facts:

- As of March 2003, regular Internet users in the US numbered 122 million, in the UK 22 million, in Australia 8 million, and in Canada 17 million.
- Average time online in the US now exceeds 100 hours per month.
- 30% of US households have a broadband connection; by 2007 over 60% will.

In the nonprofit world, life is a little different, particularly among smaller nonprofits. A recent survey by Telosa found that nonprofits with budgets under \$500,000 are placing only minimal emphasis on acquiring or using new technology. How minimal you can imagine from the fact that only about 5% of nonprofits in the US are even using the Web to solicit donations.

And you can't call the Internet a central focus for most volunteer managers, either. Here are the total number of subscribers to the main listservs on volunteer management:

- CyberVPM (US and Canada)—633
- UKVPMs (UK)—288
- OzVPM (Australia)—126

Out of an estimated population of volunteer managers which probably exceeds 100,000 people, that's not too good.

The simple truth is that we are entering an era when the online universe will in many ways dominate the way that people interact. Ten years ago I sat in a workshop for directors of volunteer services in hospitals—only about 10% had e-mail addresses. Nowadays you're startled to find someone who doesn't have at least one.

You might want to ponder the impact on volunteer involvement of these facts about the current generation of college students:

- 93% of college students access the Internet in any given month
- 88% of college students own a computer and 56% have broadband connections
- 72% of college students check e-mail at least once a day
- 20% of current college students began using the Internet between the ages of 5 and 8

This is a generation accustomed to using the Internet to help manage their lives—to communicate, to shop, to explore their community. It's how they will continue to run their lives after they graduate and the generation that follows will be so immersed in the Internet that they won't be able to imagine not having it—to them an organization without a Web site will almost literally be an organization that does not exist. "If Google can't find you then you just aren't there." Or you might as well not be.

Willie Sutton, noted bank robber, was once asked "Why do you rob banks?" His answer was simple: "It's where the money is."

In the future, the Internet is where people will be.

The saddest part of all this is that we are probably looking at a future where some nonprofits will make the transition to the electronic age and some will not, with the smaller and poorer organizations being least likely to adapt. If you're in a small organization you might reflect on whether or not your Internet access—type of computer, connection speed, etc.—is better at home than it is at work. You can pretty much bet that the access of your volunteers is probably better than your organization's.

Try the following simple test to determine what your future will probably be like:

1. How old is the computer you're using at work? How likely are you to get a new one in the next two years?
2. When was its basic software last updated—operating system, word processor, Internet browser? How well do you understand how any of it actually works?
3. How often are you online during the day? What percentage of that is on something besides e-mail?
5. Is your online connection via modem, DSL or cable?
6. How often do you check your e-mail? How long does it take you to respond to it? If you're out of the office on travel or vacation, does anyone else check it?
7. Do you collect the e-mail addresses of your volunteers? Do you use these to communicate with them? Are you surprised when they contact with you via e-mail?
8. Does your organization have a Web site? How often is it updated? Can you update the part that's devoted to the volunteer program?
9. Do you solicit volunteers via that Web site? Is this solicitation an active presentation on what volunteers do for your organization or merely a passive notice that you exist?
10. If you wanted to find something fast on the Internet, where would you look?

If your answers depress you, start worrying now.

But remember the Good News—the mere fact that you're reading this probably means you're already one of the Winners.

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*Steve McCurley is a partner in VMSystems with Sue Vineyard, a management consulting firm they started in 1984 to help organizations improve their utilization of volunteers. Known for his laid-back demeanor and sharp, dry wit, Steve speaks to more than 10,000 trainees around the world each year. In collaboration with Susan Ellis, he is the co-founder of e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community ([www.e-volunteerism.com](http://www.e-volunteerism.com)). A lawyer by training, Steve tries to temper his analytical mind with a healthy disrespect for conventional wisdom. See a more complete bio at <http://e-volunteerism.com/team/mccurley.html>.*

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**Books by Steve McCurley on sale in the Online Bookstore** ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):

Watch for [Steve's books](#) to be converted to electronic files during the coming year!

Steve is co-editor with Sue Vineyard of the newsletter [Grapevine](#), the current and immediate past issues of which are available in the Online Bookstore.

**Articles by Steve in e-Volunteerism and available by individual purchase:**

As one of the Publishing Editors, Steve contributes to every issue of the journal. He co-writes the "Points of View" article with Susan Ellis and writes the "Along the Web" feature area. To see the complete list of her articles, go to the middle of his author page in the Online Bookstore.

[http://www.energizeinc.com/xml/Ei/ALL.php?SHOPPINGtopic\\_navG\\_Au-Mcc\\_Btn=1](http://www.energizeinc.com/xml/Ei/ALL.php?SHOPPINGtopic_navG_Au-Mcc_Btn=1)

# In Loving Memory and with Some Anticipation...

Ivan H. Scheier, Dream-Catcher

Sitting here, surrounded by packing boxes, breathing the yellow dust of Southern New Mexico (until recently hidden safely behind the couch), I hear a call for words from friends and colleagues on the topic: "The Single Greatest Challenge To My Area of Volunteerism, Right Now and Likely in the Near Future."

My area of volunteerism? I trust that means interest, rather than ownership. Because I never did "own" any area of volunteerism in the latter sense. Indeed, if ultimately volunteers themselves and their clients do not own volunteerism, I don't see that it's worth owning.

Well, how do you do that? I can only hope my friend Susan Ellis will continue her long habit of forbearance *re* my unconventionalities, and permit more pieties from an unredeemed elder. Essentially then, as free association, but for sure pious, here are my thoughts.

My text is from Pogo and whomever he got it from: "WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US." That is to say, the greatest challenge to organized volunteerism is organized volunteerism. It's also its best friend. We are, at this point in time, something like a gardener who can cultivate a flower—or kill it.

Stated too extremely, of course, but something like this is what I mean in asking all volunteerism professionals and managers to remember, if you can:

- The true measure of volunteerism is not so much what you can count, as who you can count on.
- Volunteerism isn't about the leavings of work not worth paying for; it is about the dreams that loving work makes happen.
- Volunteerism should aim not so much to control the behavior of volunteers as to trust it, and release it. This, even when control is disguised euphemistically as management, supervision, evaluation, or training. (None of these *have* to be raw control, but all of them have to be watched that they don't *become* it.) Remember, wasn't it at one time all about freedom?
- Technology is no substitute for heart. The method has never been developed that can substitute for values. Equipment can support compassion, but beyond that, forget it.

- Volunteerism is not a “program,” it is hope. And it is a process, not a structure.

Let us hope it is not too late to shift some focus to all the wonderful kinds of volunteering that can happen outside of programs in staffed agencies, e.g., entirely-volunteer groups, freelance and informal volunteering and, above all, etcetera. Mostly, though, I feel volunteerism is more about individuals than organizations, especially BIG organizations.

Let us remember that resource organizations and their programs exist not ever for their own sake, but only to help field leadership of volunteers; field leadership exists only to help volunteers; and volunteers exist only to help people in need, directly or indirectly. One of the few times I remember seeing Hat Naylor be stern as well as eloquent was some thirty years ago at a conference on volunteers working with disabled children. She did not allow us to go un-reminded that the conference really was not about *volunteers*; it was about *children*.

I, too, someday hope to find out what it’s “all about.” Maybe it’s more about always reaching and seeking, rather than firming things up forever.

I wish you were back, Hat.

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*Ivan H. Scheier—ostensibly retired but hardly retiring—remains one of the cutting-edge thinkers in the field of volunteerism. For over thirty years he has contributed to the formation of the field while being gadfly, rabble rouser, and conscience to those lucky enough to have met him in person or in print. He is presently Consulting Editor to e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community ([www.e-volunteerism.com](http://www.e-volunteerism.com)), to which he contributes periodic "Musings," and practices and teaches Reiki in Truth-or-Consequences, New Mexico. More formal details about Ivan can be found at <http://e-volunteerism.com/team/scheier.html>. Here is how he signed his most recent e-mail:*

My phone number remains (+1) 505-894-1340

My e-mail remains [ivan@zianet.com](mailto:ivan@zianet.com)

My computer equipment remains obsolete.

My archives Web site remains <http://academic.regis.edu/volunteer/ivan>

I have a new Web site online and still under development, a collection of my poetry over the past forty years: <http://www.verseus.net/index.html> (the collection is largely not about volunteerism; not specifically, anyhow)

Books by Ivan L. Scheier on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):

*Building Staff/Volunteer Relations*

*Making Dreams Come True without Money, Might or Miracles: A Guide for Dream-Chasers and Dream-Catchers*

*When Everyone's a Volunteer: The Effective Functioning of All-Volunteer Groups*

Articles by Ivan in *e-Volunteerism* and available by individual purchase:

"Finding Our Profession"

"A Poetry of Volunteering?"

"Relapse Into Volunteerism: An Unsuccessful Attempt to Resign from the Field"

"The Self-Employed Volunteer"

"They Hardly Ever Do the Hula in El Paso"

# Why Is There No One Nipping at Our Heels?

Sue Vineyard, Managing Partner  
VMSystems

I'm concerned.

Not to the point that I have to take happy pills or spend an hour on some head-case doc's couch, but still, concerned.

For any of you who have been long-time subscribers to my newsletter, *Grapevine*, which is written for volunteer program managers, you will recognize my issue as one I've dealt with on that tome's pages in the past. Obviously, my concern is no less now than it was before....

The concern I raise is the lack of national trainers in our field who are "coming up" behind those who have been around...and around...and around...and, well, you get the idea.

To be sure, there are local, regional and/or topic-specific adult educators who can fill a program's roster, but I don't see many folks saying: "Yep, I wanna run all over the country doing stand-up routines on volunteer program management topics while juggling airport security, marketing needs, airplane food (or lack of same) and learners who want pink pills and easy fixes...yep, sir, count me in!"

There might be several reasons for the lack of such cockeyed optimists, including a realistic sense of what that means. (More on that later.)

Or...it could be a nasty combination of forces that have collided over our heads as we were busy running our programs. Consider, for example that:

- Budgets have been slashed so that individual groups can rarely afford the cost of a trainer for a day, who would require: 1) a daily fee of \$500 (if local and new to the game) to \$1500/\$4000 (if a biggie name); 2) travel expenses of plane, taxi/limo services to and from airports; 3) lodging expenses—and even Motel 6 isn't \$6 a night anymore (probably because of the electric bill to keep the light on all the time!); 4) rental of a hotel training room or conference center to accommodate the hoped-for crowd; and finally, 5) those pesky "incidentals" that can eat up, swallow and regurgitate a budget halfway through the planning process.

- Those same budgets that cut into expenses you might incur to bring a trainer to you also impact anyone on your staff who might like to attend a national conference far away in such exotic spots as Baltimore, Cincinnati or Seattle. Program directors of every ilk tell me that they are allowed ONE out-of-town conference, so that they cannot go to both their state association meeting in the next town AND a national conference.
- More and more programs that are filled with volunteers are being reshaped by government regulations or boards with unrealistic expectations. My husband resigned after 15 years of being a Boy Scout art-badge volunteer when told he must have another responsible adult and the Scout's parent present when reviewing projects, as well as sign a waiver that said if sued he was fully responsible for damages! Exit Mr. Vineyard.

### **A Home Base**

Yet another issue with a serious impact on nurturing new trainers is that there is no home base for our field in the United States (for non-American readers, think about this in terms of your country). I'm not sure we ever had just one, but we did have a few. The one that comes to mind and which introduced me to our profession, its leaders and national trainers, was the Volunteer Management Program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Held in one week segments, three times each year, it allowed participants (typically 100 per session) to get to experience established national trainers (Ivan Scheier, Marlene Wilson, Arlene Schindler, Hat Naylor, etc.) as well as "newcomers" such as Sue (who??) Vineyard in 1979, who were taking their first tottering steps into the national arena.

Our second home base came within the framework of the conferences held by such groups as our profession's Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) and American Society of Directors of Volunteer Services (ASDVS) for hospital volunteer directors which, each fall, gathered folks from every corner of our field, brought them together, offered networking and diverse training workshops where attendees could experience (a.k.a. "audition") trainers of varying expertise and skills.

Every trainer who had the good fortune to be involved with either of these options, as well as conferences sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation (and its forerunner, the National Volunteer Center) or other meetings of such specialties as criminal justice, research, etc., benefited from the exposure. Folks saw what you could do and made judgments on how well you might "fit" the needs and characteristics of their own organization. It was a win-win marketing relationship.

The Boulder program is gone and most conferences have fewer and fewer attendees or have disappeared completely (whether because of budget restraints or due to post 9/11 concern over travel safety and terrorist alerts)—our very own Catch-22!

### **Those Dreaded Economics**

As for the trainers themselves, the playing field has changed. Economically, it is far less affordable to try to earn a living as a national trainer. Don't be fooled by higher daily fees—the lower ones of yesteryear were possible because a trainer, with national exposure to hundreds if not thousands of folks, got lots of job opportunities. A fee of \$300 per day times 100 training days per year equaled

\$30,000, plus sales of books to add to that income (most trainers are also authors). Those two income streams, with a likely bonus of some consulting and material development fees, meant that you could make a respectable living.

Today, a truly “busy” trainer, and one that is well known, MAY be booked for 20-25 days during the year, cutting down on training income and book sales, too. Large conferences which once reimbursed high-profile trainers in order to market them as an attraction, are increasingly negotiating for trainers to pay travel, accommodation and registration costs from their own pocket, unlike most attendees who are there on the dime of their organization. Another Catch-22!

Add to this the cost of travel (astronomical) for all weekday training throughout the year and the accompanying energy drain (waiting in lines, scrutiny by airport security, time spent at airports, etc.) and you have another less appealing facet of being an on-the-road trainer, both for the hiring organization and the individual.

So...add it up: Squeezed budgets, less income, higher travel costs, fewer engagements, less revenue from book sales (it now costs more to reprint some of my books than it did to produce the first run, which used to be three times higher than reprints!) and too few home bases for marketing yourself, and you have a less-than-attractive set of circumstances to consider as a person thinks about adding “Have Flipchart. Will Travel.” to their business cards.

### **A Simple Truth**

I will now inspire, yet survive, the wrath of my peers who may choose to ignore the calendar and admit that we are all getting a little long in the tooth—not necessarily by birthdays, but by the length of time that has gone by since our days of actually working in the front lines of program management. I started on the road in 1979, when I was a mere sprite of 41. Do the math and you will see that I became eligible for Social Security just a month ago. I carry my AARP card proudly and do not color my hair; I’m gray and proud. I’m not elderly but I am a Senior, and my creaking bones prove it while wrestling my carry-on into the overhead rack of various airplanes!

More important, however, than the number of candles on my last birthday cake, I am very removed from my program leader experiences. I’ve been involved in starting a church ministry program over the last 18 months and will specialize in that as well as timeless issues such as wellness, motivation and recognition, but I’d be a fraud if I tried to tell audiences my general program experiences were current.

My hope is that a new crop of trainers is just over the hill, out of my sight, and that they are fresh out of volunteer program leadership positions so that they bring more current experiences into their teachings. I hope they can bring their own experiences to others on such issues as technology, regulatory impact, the changing volunteer and client, capacity building, clout, marketing, organizational interdependence, cultural diversity, partnering, climate and pace—plus many other issues that were not on the playing field when I began my national trek those 24 years ago!

Maybe I've answered my own concern, laying out all the reasons why we don't see a new crop of national trainers on the horizon. The climate is rather daunting and it might be more profitable, though less satisfying, to clerk at the dime store or sell Amway products door to door. Oops, I've dated myself with those references!

This last paragraph is reserved for my most obnoxious, outlandish and goofy statement:

If you have recently led a program with great success, are passionate about volunteerism, feel your greatest contribution can come by sharing what you have learned with others, are a good communicator and a wee bit of a ham, and don't mind eating airport hot dogs that have rolled around for hours in a stainless steel machine that promises gastronomic satisfaction, come on and join us. What you can share with others, especially newcomers to our field, is invaluable.

It 'tain't easy, but it's worth it!

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*Sue Vineyard is Managing partner in VMSystems, a management consulting firm she and Steve McCurley started in 1984 to help organizations improve their utilization of volunteers. She is also President of Heritage Arts Publishing which has produced many of the volunteer field's most popular books. In addition to her knowledge of volunteerism, Sue is known as an advocate for self-care and wellness, always exhorting colleagues to "take care of you, too."*

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**Books by Sue Vineyard on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore)):**

[Recognizing Volunteers and Paid Staff: The Art, the Science, and a GAZILLION Ideas!](#)

Watch for [Sue's books](#) to be converted to electronic files during the coming year!

Sue is co-editor with Steve McCurley of the newsletter [Grapevine](#), the current and immediate past issues of which are available in the Online Bookstore.

**Articles by Sue in *e-Volunteerism* and available by individual purchase:**

[101 Tips for Trainers or How To Survive Life "At the Front of the Room"](#)

# Not 'Just' a VPM!

Andy Fryar, Founder  
OzVPM

Be warned.

The next few pages are not rocket science!

They are, however, necessary reading for all managers of volunteer programs who have ever complained about the way they are viewed or treated within their organisation or protested about issues such as their rate of pay, the number of hours they work or just how overworked they are!

Those of us in the volunteer management sector have become really good at chastising those volunteers who periodically spurt out that age-old rhetorical saying: "...but I am *just* a volunteer!" We incessantly preach to those who transgress this sacred boundary about the value that they hold to our organisation and about how they achieve such good work. We vehemently encourage them to consider all of the benefits they receive from participating as a volunteer. We are quick to espouse their value to our organisation's hierarchy, we diligently ensure that recognition systems and training opportunities are first rate, and we are always on the lookout for any signs of dissatisfaction amongst our ranks—ensuring that the satisfaction of our charges remains our highest priority.

Yet how often do we practice what we preach?

Sadly, volunteer program managers are amongst the worst advocates for their own profession going around!

For example:

- How often do we find an organisation's volunteer department tucked away in some windowless basement level corridor?
- How many times do we experience understaffed and under-funded volunteer resource departments?
- Why is it that there is such a high turnover of volunteer management positions?
- Explain why there are such difficulties in getting volunteer program managers to attend and join into network meetings, conferences, workshops and online discussion groups?

Sadly the answer lies in the fact that we are not good at transferring the rhetoric we deliver to our volunteers to our own professional circumstances.

It is high time as a profession that we added the term **“not just a volunteer program manager”** to our repertoire of phraseology!

We need to write it on our office walls so that we see it everyday (to which end you'll find a printable mini-poster at the end of this essay!), we should set our electronic diaries to send text message versions of the quote to ourselves on a regular basis, and we should make a point to tell a colleague that his or her work is valued.

We should say it often, we should say it loudly, and we should say it where and when it matters most. We should believe it but, more than that, we should live it!

Let's consider for a moment the difference that volunteer program managers (yes, *that's you*) make every single day.

### **Achievement of Organisational Goals**

For starters, if you are managing your volunteer resources well, you'll be meeting your organisation's mission and achieving the goals you were employed to achieve in the first place. Too often we overlook this in the face of growing piles of paperwork, urgent volunteer requirements, and the need to be planning our next recruitment drive or training session.

We are all aware that the management of volunteer programs is a complex and demanding role, and it is beneficial to sometimes sit back and take stock of exactly what you have accomplished. Spend a few minutes writing a list of all your achievements for the past week, month or year. The results are usually staggering and you'll be surprised at just how much you have achieved.

A job well done is a job that should be celebrated—and a job well done is a job that you can and should be justifiably proud of.

### **Facilitation of Meaningful Roles**

One of the most obvious differences you make as a volunteer program manager is that you facilitate, on a daily basis, the provision of meaningful activities and roles for the members of your volunteer team.

I am not talking here about the process of finding a placement for a new volunteer to work as a gardener in the local community garden, but the fact that, through that placement, you potentially offer that volunteer an entree to a whole new way of living. If you think that's taking things just a little too far, think of those times when a brand new potential volunteer calls your office to ask about what volunteer opportunities you may have available. Have you ever heard his or her voice shaking on the other end of the phone? I know I have on many occasions.

We must not assume that all volunteers come to us filled with confidence and warmed up, ready to go! For many volunteers, the act of calling and then following through with a volunteer role is a huge step—often filling huge gaps in their own lives. Redundancy or retirement from paid work, the loss of a loved one, the

gaining of work skills and experience, or trying to connect with people in a new community are just some of the reasons that people volunteer in the first place.

How many times have you interviewed a shy and retiring person, and then sat back and watched her or him blossom over the following months and years? It is a great feeling, and one that you, as a volunteer program manager, should be justifiably proud of—after all, it was *you* who made that transformation possible.

I was at a function recently, when a young woman approached me. She looked vaguely familiar, but I would not have recognised her as being someone I knew, had I passed her in the street. Upon recognising me, she introduced herself and proceeded to explain that she had been a volunteer in a program I managed nearly a decade earlier, when she first left school. What she told me next was most interesting, because she explained to me just what a difference the experience of volunteering at that point in her life had made. She spoke to me about her trepidation when she started, about how she had valued the support mechanisms we had in place, and about how her confidence had grown as a result of the experience. I might add it had grown to the point where she had eventually enrolled in and graduated from university with a social work degree.

What I remember most about that discussion however, was one sentence. This young woman said to me: "There is no way I'd be where I am today if it wasn't for you!" She didn't say "...if it wasn't for your organisation," she clearly said: "...if it wasn't for you." For her, the value of her experience was directly related to the role I had played as volunteer program manager.

While we could argue that she may eventually have arrived at the same or a similar position via other avenues, this young woman's experiences as a volunteer with our organisation was quite life changing. Yet, this is just one example of the daily changes we make to the lives of our volunteers, simply by doing our jobs and doing them well. We should never forget that we are facilitators of change and not merely the managers of departments that offer warm and fuzzy experiences!

### **Facilitation of Meaningful Outcomes**

In addition to our ability to shape the lives of our volunteers, we have an equally important role, through the work of our volunteer teams, to make a significant difference to the lives of others in the community.

Think of the elderly gentleman who lives alone, and receives a range of volunteer services throughout the course of each week. Meals on Wheels deliver his food, a friendly visitor drops by for a social chat, and Red Cross provides transport for him to visit the local shops. These services, all coordinated by a volunteer program manager, make living independently possible for this person.

Consider the environmental volunteer team who, under the guidance of a volunteer program manager, regenerate an entire section of forest where logging has occurred, or aid in ensuring that a particular breed of sea bird does not become extinct. While the outcome of their efforts may not be so readily apparent, their volunteer role will be certainly be appreciated by future generations.

Think about the researcher who one day finds the cure to a previously untreatable disease, largely as the result of funds made available by volunteer fundraisers, working under the guidance of a volunteer program manager.

Or think about the many hundreds of people that young woman I spoke to recently will help throughout her career as a social worker, a career that started with a desire to volunteer and a meeting with a volunteer program manager.

The work that we all do as volunteer program managers is vitally important in facilitating volunteer effort and allowing a difference to be made throughout our communities.

### **So Where Does the Problem Lie?**

If we are able to clearly understand that our work is critically important to the development of the social fabric of our communities, why is it that our profession is still seen in so many ways as being such a lowly one? We always hear about the great work volunteers do—but what about *us*?

Just why do so many of us accept mediocrity when it comes to the way that our organisations position us and our department within the overall organisational framework?

Why are we so accepting of the fact that it is OK for the volunteer department to operate on a shoe-string budget when all the other more 'important' departments have far more resources?

Sadly, I believe the problem is twofold.

Firstly, volunteers work for free. People mistakenly misinterpret *free* for *cheap*, so when considering the resources and skills that might be required to operate a volunteer management role, there is little comprehension of the fact that the provision of volunteer resources may actually cost some money.

But to me, the more important reason is that far too many of us are just far too nice for our own good! It's time that each and every one of us took responsibility for making a change for the betterment of our profession.

Now before I go any further, I can already hear you thinking, '*...but what difference can I make?*' The truth is that you can make a monumental difference, if you just hold on to the understanding that your role is an important one.

So, here are a few ideas about what *you* can do to ensure that, in a decade's time, our profession is not still wandering about complaining about the same old things:

- Read this essay again, and really think about the difference *you* make. Write down notes.
- Share those thoughts (and this article) at your next DOVIA network meeting.
- Share them, too, with your line manager or CEO. Don't assume these colleagues deliberately set out to make life difficult for you. You may

influence them more than you think (*and they can then take that with them as they deal with volunteer groups as part of future appointments*). Any administrator I have ever dealt with, who truly understood the role of volunteers in an organisation, could tell me the name of the volunteer program manager who challenged and educated *him or her* in the past!

- Stop whining about issues such as your rate of pay, and instead do something about it. Write a discussion paper and send it to your CEO. Find a time to discuss the matter with your line manager. Even if your pay doesn't change, you've at least had the chance to highlight what a great role you play in the organisation.
- If you haven't already done so, read Susan Ellis' book, *From the Top Down*, and then give it as a gift to your CEO.
- If you don't already belong to a DOVIA network—what are you waiting for? Learning from other VPMs that you are not alone in your struggle is the first step to solidarity.
- Join an online discussion group and link with others doing similar work.
- Submit an article in your organisation's newsletter about your role and the difference you make. Promote, promote, promote!
- Tell your colleagues that they matter. Then tell them again!
- Join AAVA, AVA or a similar professional association in your country.

Now if any of you have had any thoughts along the lines of "I don't have the time for all that," let me suggest you start back at the beginning of this essay again—right now! Because you have obviously missed something.

You are not **just** a VPM.

You are an agent of social change on many levels and you and your role are important.

Find the time today to start believing it, expressing it, and developing the great profession that we all share!



**Not**  
*just*  
**a**

**volunteer**  
**program**  
**manager!**



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Andy Fryar is the founder and owner of OzVPM (Australasian Volunteer Program Management)—a consultancy, training and resource company specialising in volunteerism—particularly as it relates to the Australasian region. His new Web site is [www.ozvpm.com](http://www.ozvpm.com) (and the first international affiliated partner of the Energize Web site). Andy is the consummate time manager (it helps that he never sleeps), juggling a full-time volunteer management job at Lyell McEwin Regional Volunteer Association in South Australia with being the President of Volunteering Australia, the peak national body representing volunteerism in his country, Chairperson of Volunteering South Australia, the volunteerism resource centre for his state, and Manuscripts Developer for e-Volunteerism—all while raising 5 small children (including two sets of twins!).

See his full bio at <http://e-volunteerism.com/team/fryar.html>.

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**Books by Andy Fryar on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):**

*[Volunteer Management: An Essential Guide, 2nd edition](#)*

**Articles by Andy in e-Volunteerism and available by individual purchase:**

Andy has been a Convening Editor of the Keyboard Roundtable feature area of the journal since its start. See the list of topics at [http://www.energizeinc.com/xml/Ei/ALL.php?SHOPPINGtopic\\_navG\\_Ev-Key\\_Btn=1](http://www.energizeinc.com/xml/Ei/ALL.php?SHOPPINGtopic_navG_Ev-Key_Btn=1)

# Let's Be Politically Incorrect!

Bill Wittich, President  
VolunteerPro

To start a seminar on volunteer management I will ask my audience what their major frustrations are. They always follow the same theme:

- They can't depend on their volunteers.
- The volunteers start something and never finish the task.
- The volunteers don't dress appropriately.
- The volunteers can't handle confidentiality.
- They show up late and leave early.
- They consider themselves as "just volunteers."

I usually ask the group how they would handle a paid staff member who did the same thing. They have no problem answering that question. They tell me they would talk to the staff member about the issue the first time it happens, and then give more counseling if it occurs again, and eventually the paid staff member would be terminated. I then suggest that they therefore have the answer for the problem volunteer: just follow the same practice. They look at me as if I had committed a cardinal sin. What? Treat volunteers the same as professional staff? You can't do that!

The problem is not with volunteers, it is with the lack of professional standards on the part of the agency involving volunteers. It may seem appropriate to have double standards, one set of high standards for paid staff and a set of lower standards for the volunteer staff. But you are setting yourself up for failure with this approach.

You start on this road to failure whenever you refer to one group as "professional" and the other as simply "volunteer." Being a professional means having a professional attitude along with the needed skills, talents, and abilities. Receiving a salary does not automatically make someone qualified, any more than not getting paid negates professional qualifications. My career involves being an author who speaks to groups, which I do for a fee. Most people would then say that I am a professional since I am paid to deliver a speech. But do you think I would put any less effort or preparation into a presentation delivered to an audience for no charge? Of course not, because my professional attitude does not change based on the fee or the lack of a fee.

I assume that you select volunteers based on their skills, talents and abilities as well as on their professional attitudes. Therefore volunteers will perform based on your *expectations* of their professional contributions.

What do you expect from volunteers? Do you expect less because they are volunteers? Have you expressed your expectations to *all* of your staff, both paid and unpaid? Have you set equally high standards for all staff?

Somehow some think of volunteers as people who care but really can't get the job done. The common observation that they are "only volunteers" says it all. Even volunteers themselves have been heard saying, "well, I'm only a volunteer"—meaning, therefore don't expect too much of me. The attitude seems to be that *because* the volunteer is not getting paid, it's unrealistic to expect a professional attitude or performance. This is absolutely silly. Look at college athletes. They don't get paid, but they will play their hearts out on the football field or basketball court. Does the college player say: "Well I am just a college player, don't expect too much from me until I get a big salary in the pros"? You and I know that such an attitude would never get them to the professional ranks. In the same vein, the fans don't pay top dollar for college stadium fifty-yard seats and then say: "We don't expect too much from these teams because they are only unpaid beginners." So why do we allow minimal expectations to be applied to volunteers? It's our job to raise the bar, begin to expect excellence, and to commit to excellence.

Lou Holtz in his book, *Winning Every Day*, says it directly:

*Leaders must challenge and inspire. I know that many people today believe that demanding excellence is politically incorrect. We are supposed to accept whatever an individual gives us as the natural expression of his ability and not pressure him or her by asking for anything more. Nonsense.*

Our job as volunteer coordinators is just like the college coach: to find and develop the best volunteers we can. Our job is to encourage our players and help them reach their goals. Every volunteer arrives at your front door fired up to perform a job that will make a difference. All have a burning desire to create change for people. Read the mission statement of your agency. Isn't that what it says the agency will accomplish? And volunteers want to do tasks that will make that difference. So what happens? Many times it is the manager or the staff who deflate that excitement by offering only low-level ways to be of help.

Don't be afraid to be politically incorrect and demand excellence and enthusiastic commitment. Holtz uses the example of General Patton who, when quizzed about the ability of his army to finish one battle, march one hundred miles and then fight another encounter in less than forty-eight hours, said: "That's what we're in business for." Every leader must think that way.

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Dr. Bill Wittich is a nationally known speaker who has spoken on leadership and volunteer management to audiences of thousands. A former professor at a major California university, Bill's background in non-profit, educational, and governmental agencies led him to start *Volunteer Pro* (formerly Knowledge Transfer). Bill and his wife Ann spend about 250 days a year on the road conducting seminars. During their off time, they enjoy cooking, discovering red wine, and living in Northern California.

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Books by Bill Wittich on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):

*Keep Those Volunteers Around*

*Model Volunteer Handbook*

*77 Ways to Recognize Volunteers*

*77 Ways to Recruit Volunteers*

# Questions on the Common Good

Melissa Eystad, President  
World Spirit Consulting

For the past year, my “day job” has been in the field of philanthropy, working for an association of grant makers. In my work, I get to look at the voluntary, nonprofit sector through a different lens. Volunteerism fades into the background, and money takes the stage. Community brokers look for the best “investment” in applying financial resources to the seemingly endless needs of many people. Priorities are often chosen from a different set of values than those of the community being helped. In these times where everything seems to be either upside down or speeding backwards at an amazing pace, there are questions that seem to be begging for answers:

- What is the “common good”?
- Who should foster it, protect it, defend it?
- Who gets to define it?

Traditionally, the role of government has been to take the perspective of the whole and assure that the “good” of all citizens is protected. But government is abdicating this responsibility—supposedly at the “will” of taxpayers. By pushing more and more services to the local level and “privatizing” previously-public facilities, what was once “common” has been fragmented into many parts. Funders such as foundations have been positioned to provide the “extra” resource in communities, and so face their own challenges in these times demanding primary funding.

Volunteers, for all that I can tell, are being called upon to shore up the dike, at a time when they must deal with their own personal dramas—aging parents, losing jobs or decreasing wages with more work hours, and overwhelming needs in the community. This is true in the United States and increasingly visible in other parts of the world.

Emmett Carson, President and CEO of the Minneapolis Foundation and a leading voice for the nonprofit sector both in Minnesota and nationally, calls this current environment “the perfect storm” for the sector—when the infrastructure to support it is being shaken by deep cuts from all sides. Walter Cronkite, a well-known and respected American journalist who retired from television news more than 20 years ago, at age 86 will be starting to write a syndicated newspaper column because he feels we are in one of the two most critical periods for democracy that he has experienced in his decades of life (the other was the 1960s).

You may be tired of hearing this gloom and doom scenario. But I find hope in the potential of volunteering. I believe most volunteerism is about creating a common good for society, since—almost by definition—personal benefits are secondary to a volunteer’s commitment to civic engagement. What we in volunteer management need to highlight is that volunteering requires free choice and opportunity to thrive. It is up to all of us in the field to fiercely protect and advocate for everything that we know enables and supports volunteers.

We might feel somewhat shell-shocked by the hits to our sector, but hold the faith that it is only a matter of time for a groundswell of response that says enough is enough! We deserve to live in safe communities without guns, to breathe clean air and drink clean water, to have living wages that allow enough time for our families and for giving back to others through volunteering. We should fight the forces combining to limit such freedoms.

As in times past, a lack of financial resources will drive community and government leaders back to citizens for “free” labor and leadership. The question we need to ask ourselves as volunteer leaders and managers is: “Are we ready for the challenge?”

In the United States, we’ve also seen the infrastructure to support our field eroding—state offices of volunteerism closing, volunteer centers and coordinator positions being eliminated. But we know from past history that, paid or unpaid, volunteers *will* step forward to address needs. And as they do, they will need defined work and a sense of direction. They may begin by filling gaps in service delivery, but ultimately it will be their role, *as citizens*, to lead the nonprofit sector back to balance.

One way I see this happening is through political volunteering. For the first time that I can remember, quite a number of people I know from very different backgrounds are getting involved in political campaigning out of a concern about what is happening in our country and world. Most of them have never done this before, but they are worried and motivated to work for change. Others are getting involved in “systems change” activities, working from outside government and nonprofit structures to help shape ineffective or crumbling community support services.

When I worked on [Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make : A Guide to Outcome Evaluation for Volunteer Programs](#), for the Minnesota Department of Human Services just seven years ago, times were very different. Even today, requests continue to come in from all over the world for this publication, and that has convinced me that there are fundamental philosophies and strategies that do work to ensure volunteers can contribute effectively to improving the “common good”—whatever society deems that to be.

It is up to those of us who value and understand the role of volunteers to continue to make the case for supporting all it takes to make their involvement worthwhile. I’ve started on a follow-up guide to *Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make* that will help volunteer managers and leaders show their organizations how involving volunteers in a quality way leads not only to more effective services, but also to

programs and operations that are attractive to funders and stakeholders. (You'll be hearing more about this new resource in the coming year.)

Colleagues, we have a great opportunity now to help people overcome their sense of frustration and powerlessness by taking action through volunteerism. Let's rise to the challenge by being willing to give time ourselves to the causes and issues we feel passionate about, by not closing down and feeling overwhelmed, but by advocating for and leading efforts to build and preserve a good quality of life for all in the community.

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Melissa was the editor and main writer of the best-selling book, *Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make : A Guide to Outcome Evaluation for Volunteer Programs*, published by the Minnesota Department of Human Services in 1997. Now out of print, the book is available for free electronic download at <http://www.energizeinc.com/art/elecbooks.html>.

However, Melissa is working on a revision of this important tool and it is planned for publication by Energize soon. Keep watching the Online Bookstore for announcements!

Articles by Melissa in *e-Volunteerism* and available in the Online Bookstore are:

“Focus on Membership Development: Three Organizations Share Effective Techniques”

“Fun and Simplicity Make These Recruitment Techniques Work”

“Giving Help to Get Help: Where Do Service Exchanges Fit in the World of Volunteerism?”

“Highlights from ‘Flying Under the Radar’: The Significant Work of All-Volunteer Organizations”

“Protecting and Serving the Public through Volunteers: Old Traditions, New Challenges for Volunteer Fire and Safety Programs”

“Unseen but Heard: Ham Radio Volunteers Help via the Airwaves”

“Volunteering as a Reflection of Life or Wanted: Volunteer Toad Callers”

# Unleashing Our Imagination

Susan J. Ellis, President  
Energize, Inc.

While we have come a long way in the past quarter century in the evolution of the profession of volunteer administration, such “professionalism” is a two-edged sword. Yes, effective coordination, facilitation, and leadership enable volunteers to have the maximum impact. But too often volunteer “management” is misapplied to maintaining the status quo and controlling volunteers. Re-read Ivan Scheier’s essay in this book—often.

I believe that volunteering is the way ideas move from dreams to action. Not all volunteering is about innovation or advocacy, but even what we might call “maintaining” or “supporting” volunteer roles allow individuals to act on their values and beliefs. Volunteers give time and effort to causes which they want to see succeed. We work with the world’s greatest optimists.

In principle, volunteer projects can turn on a dime, responding to needs today, with whatever approaches are necessary. We can rally people to do what is most important without first writing a grant proposal or even establishing a track record. Volunteers are uniquely positioned to experiment, pilot test, and do reality checks.

Sometimes I feel guilty that, by writing and training on best practices of volunteer program management, I may have played a role in narrowing rather than expanding our field’s vision. For example, I am *not* really concerned about fitting volunteers into organizations. I’m trying to find ways that enable volunteers to exercise their freedom *on behalf* of organizations and causes. For me it is increasingly a dead end to design volunteer programs around the question of “how can we help the paid staff?” The much better question is “how can we help those we are trying to serve?” Let’s ask volunteers to do out-of-the-ordinary things that simply don’t fit into neat job descriptions.

The worst thing we can do as volunteer program managers is to measure our success by how happy our agencies are about how the volunteer program is going! Of course this isn’t irrelevant, but it needs to be seen in the context of whether or not the organization has true vision about what the possibilities are. Executives, in fact, frequently settle for minimal volunteer involvement, being happy simply to have volunteers, no matter what they do or don’t contribute.

So it’s easy to become complacent, routine, or stale. And that’s equally true for officers of all-volunteer organizations, who are themselves volunteers. (The minute

anyone says, “well, the bylaws won’t let us do that,” you’ve lost sight of the fact that *you* are in control of the bylaws!)

The biggest responsibility we have as leaders of volunteers is to grow our imaginations and become what the Walt Disney Corporation calls “imagineers.” We ought to train ourselves to ask the following questions as often as necessary:

- Why are we doing \_\_\_\_\_? Is it still the most important thing we can ask people to give their precious time to do?
- Why are we doing \_\_\_\_\_ *in this way*? Are we addressing the right issues but using an approach that limits us instead of enabling us?
- Why aren’t we doing \_\_\_\_\_? Might it be worth some effort to focus volunteer attention on this new area of need?
- What are we waiting for? Permission? Approval? Money? What are the possible consequences—or rewards—of acting anyway?
- Whom have we asked recently about what the priority needs are? Are we talking only to ourselves and a few staff members? Have we asked volunteers and, even more critically, our consumers or the recipients of service what *they* think is needed?

Perhaps we should convene “Let’s Imagine” sessions during which we engage as many people as possible in thinking creatively. There are lots of fun and effective tools available for generating new ideas. One source I highly recommend is the book, *A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative* by Roger Von Oech, et. al. It gives dozens of exercises to allow you to see things from new angles. A “Let’s Imagine” session could include:

- Pretending you were forced to start from scratch and had to do things totally differently from what’s in place today.
- Inviting guests from organizations seemingly unrelated to yours and letting them ask questions from their “uneducated” (but possibly insightful) perspectives.
- Dividing into two teams, one of which must develop a scenario in which all funding for the organization is lost and the other a scenario in which there is more money than ever before. What would be the priorities to keep no matter how hard and what would be the first things to spend money on?
- Picking the names of three organizations at random from the phone book and figuring out a project on which you all might collaborate.

The challenge is not to think of how to do something better, but how to do it differently. This is not to say that change is always what’s needed. But why not make sure that as well as doing something right, you’re doing the right things right? Always keep in mind that it may be OK to pay someone to do something useless, but it’s a sin to waste the time of a volunteer.

### Imagination into Practice

In this *Anthology*, Linda Graff's essay on "Genetic Engineering" warns us about allowing politicians to mold volunteering in their image. Bill Wittich speaks about challenging low expectations of volunteers. Sue Vineyard is seeking new leaders and teachers for our field. Betty Stallings wants us to refocus our energies to influence and educate executives. Steve McCurley puts us on alert that the Internet cannot be ignored and just might change everything. Melissa Eystad urges us to engage in political action. Andy Fryar notes that we are seriously undervaluing our own impact. There are two common denominators among all these essays:

1. **Pay attention.** Don't get so involved in the daily grind that you can't see what is happening, whether in the world at large or under your nose.
2. **Use your imagination...**or create the environment in which others can dream creatively. Before anyone can do something, someone has to imagine that things can be different.

In preparing this essay, I did some imagining of my own. Here are a few of the thoughts that crossed my mind. ***Just imagine...***

...If we could get past fears of risk and lawsuits and do things simply because *not* doing them is inconceivable.

...If we could organize and support self-help projects among clients rather than always using the model of outside volunteers "serving" those in need.

...If the students "forced" now to do community service as a requirement for graduation do indeed grow into adults with a personal commitment to civic engagement (and especially if the boys grow into men who are willing to change today's stereotypes about who volunteers for what).

...If we, as volunteer leaders, were willing to advocate and even agitate on behalf of volunteers, even if this places our jobs in jeopardy sometimes.

...If we developed ways for competent seniors over the age of 80 to remain involved as volunteers in new roles suited to their abilities (since more people are reaching the age of 100 than ever before and why waste 20 years?).

...If volunteers were recruited specifically to be as *different as possible* from paid staff, so that our organizations gained as many new perspectives as possible.

...If as many volunteers were working on the *causes* of social problems—to eliminate them in the future—as are working to help those affected by today's situation.

...If we applied the principles of volunteer management to the entire work force, paid or not, and started offering all workers choices, flexible schedules, recognition and thanks.

...If we acted on the attitude that it is easier to apologize than to ask permission and simply went ahead with the mandate we've been given: tap the community for any and all resources to help us achieve our mission.

...If, instead of spending money on "corporate philanthropy," large businesses instead made a commitment to hire a set number of hard-to-employ people and nonprofits recruited volunteers to support these new workers.

...If everyone valued the skills of "people raising" on a par with fund raising, and we understood that there is a spectrum of ways individuals contribute their time, money, votes, and other support. So we could evolve the expectation of a life of service that allows for ebb and flow of involvement, depending on a person's age and circumstances at any given time.

...If we considered it matter-of-fact that we exchange ideas with colleagues anywhere in the world because there are more things that unite us than separate us.

...If volunteers, as private citizens willing to circumvent jurisdictions and boundaries, found others of like mind and worked together for a better world.

The American Association of University Women used to distribute a decal with this wonderful quote: "Only she who attempts the absurd can achieve the impossible." It could be our motto, too.

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*Susan J. Ellis is President of Energize, Inc., the international training, consulting and publishing firm she founded in 1977. A prolific (but hardly tireless!) author, Susan has provided books, columns, articles, and online Hot Topics to the volunteer field for the past 26 years. She is known as someone who speaks her mind, challenges colleagues to aim for high goals, and welcomes controversy if it means that people are forced to articulate and advocate for their perspectives. Susan has spoken to audiences around the world and delights in her reputation as being on the cutting edge of trends and issues in the field. She is proud of serving an international audience with Energize's Web site ([www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com)) and of the success of e-Volunteerism: The Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community ([www.e-volunteerism.com](http://www.e-volunteerism.com)), which she co-founded with Steve McCurley. Read a more complete biography at <http://energizeinc.com/ener/susbio.html>.*

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**Books by Susan J. Ellis on sale in the Online Bookstore ([www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html](http://www.energizeinc.com/bookstore.html)):**

*Children as Volunteers: Preparing for Community Service*

*Church Puzzle Game*

*Focus on Volunteering KOPYKIT™: Ready-to-Print Resources for Volunteer Organizations*

*From the Top Down: The Executive Role in Volunteer Program Success*

*The (Help!) I-Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management*

*Proof Positive: Developing Significant Volunteer Recordkeeping Systems, 21st Century Edition*

*Volunteer Management Audit*

*Volunteer Recruitment (and Membership Development) Book, Third Edition*

*The Virtual Volunteering Guidebook: How to Apply the Principles of Real-World Volunteer Management to Online Service* (free!)  
<http://www.energizeinc.com/download/vvguide.pdf>

**Articles by Susan in e-Volunteerism and available by individual purchase:**

As one of the Publishing Editors, Susan contributes to every issue of the journal. She co-writes the "Points of View" article with Steve McCurley and writes most of the contributions to the "Voices from the Past" feature area. To see the complete list of her articles, go to the middle of her author page in the Online Bookstore:  
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