

ABSTRACT

Most, if not all, not-for-profit organizations struggle with limited human and financial resources. With more causes arriving on the Canadian not-for-profit scene, competition for both volunteers and donations will continue to drive this trend. Collaboration and cooperation between not-for-profits is increasingly very popular among benefactors, who see what they believe are natural synergies. Successful not-for-profits will work together in ways never before considered, including a more strategic alignment of work done by Managers of Volunteer Resources and the fund development staff.

Powerful Synergies Exist Between Managers of Volunteer Resources and Fund Development Staff

By Valerie Cooper, BA

Perhaps the most popular trend in the charitable sector in the past decade was the notion of rationalization of services within the not-for-profit sector. In fact, some organizations looking for ways to collaborate actually went so far as to merge their organizations.

For example, the Volunteer Centre of Red Deer Alberta operates three programs under one umbrella Board of Directors: the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and Teen Networking Support Counseling. According to the Volunteer Centre, this unique structure makes better use of human resources and guarantees better coordination of services.¹

The reality is that most, if not all, not-for-profit organizations struggle with limited human and financial resources. With more causes arriving on the Canadian not-for-profit scene almost daily, competition for both volunteers and donations will undoubtedly continue to drive this trend. In addition, collaboration and cooperation between not-for-profits is increasingly very popular among benefactors who by virtue of their exposure to many organizations see what they believe are natural synergies. There is no question that successful not-for-profits of this centre will be planning and working

together in ways never before considered.

It could be, however, that before organizations look externally for efficiencies and synergies, they might find some interesting possibilities from within. One excellent example lies in the potential synergies that exist between the management of volunteers and fund development functions of most not-for-profit organizations.

Managers of Volunteer Resources and fund development staff are essentially stewards of the same resource.

Would not-for-profits benefit if the staff of those traditionally separate functions looked for areas where they could collaborate? What might some of those areas be? These and other questions should cause practitioners in these areas to consider the possibilities of integration and collaboration between their operations.

First, it may be necessary to address a couple of traditional beliefs that may cause Managers of Volunteer Resources and fund development staff to be doubtful of the value of working together.

The first belief is that people who volunteer to help not-for-profit organizations deliver a service different from those who are recruited to raise funds for the organization. Recent research, however, appears

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to challenge that belief by illustrating that a typical volunteer is very similar to a typical donor. A survey done by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy found that Canadians aged 35 to 44 were the age group most likely to volunteer and most likely to donate.²

While it is true that Canadians aged 65+ tend to be more generous on average and volunteer fundraisers with considerable community influence are likely in their 50s and 60s, the reality is there are only so many star-quality, CEO-level volunteer fundraisers in any given community. This means that most not-for-profits are looking to recruit from the next rung down, age bracket down, the corporate ladder.

In other words, the numbers seem to reflect that, for most not-for-profits, there really is not as much difference between the volunteer service provider and the volunteer fundraiser as some may have traditionally believed.

A second belief that may be a barrier preventing a more productive working relationship between Managers of Volunteer Resources and fundraising staff is related to their perception of each other's role in the organization. Development staff may see the Managers of Volunteer Resources as mid level staff filling largely an administrative role within the organization. On the other hand, the Managers of Volunteer Resources tend to see themselves as helping people to fulfill a calling but may view fundraising as heavy-handed and perceive it as getting people to do something they wouldn't otherwise do (i.e. part with their money). The bottom line is that in many organizations these two important groups really don't know each other very well.

Is it possible that both groups would serve their organization better if they each made a point to step back from the daily demands and business of their individual departments or field of service and consider how together they could serve the organization as a whole?

Perhaps some examples of where these

two areas could collaborate would serve to illustrate the potential that exists. Three obvious areas include:

- Screening Volunteers
- Identifying Prospective Benefactors
- Training Volunteers

Here is how the Managers of Volunteer Resources and her/his staff can assist the fund development efforts of the not-for-profit organization.

Screening Volunteers

Some organizations are subject to mandatory screening procedures for volunteers. Other organizations require that as a volunteer you submit your resume with reference. The underlying principle is that not all volunteers are appropriate for placement in all situations. The Managers of Volunteer Resources and her/his staff are trained to properly place volunteers, assuring a high level of commitment and loyalty.

Fund development professionals are constantly striving to attract good volunteers. The difference is that development staff tend to welcome individuals who express any willingness to help. The bar of acceptance is fairly low. This often results in volunteers who are ineffective due to a lack of experience and genuine interest.

Screening methodologies used by the Managers of Volunteer Resources might help reduce the tendency of development staff to fill positions for the sake of completing the organization chart of the campaign committee. Besides the obvious benefit to development staff of this kind of service there may come a day (brought on by legislation) when every individual will have to follow the same route to become a volunteer.

Identifying Prospective Benefactors

A second area where an organization would benefit from development and Volunteer Resources staff working together is in the identification of prospective donors. Development staff spend a con-

siderable amount of time trying to uncover individuals who have an affinity to their cause.

Individuals are wined and dined, figuratively speaking, all in an effort to increase their interest in the cause. While development staff are busy casting about for possible donors, the Managers of Volunteer Resources are working with an army of people who have already made a commitment to the organization and the volunteers who are gaining an intimate knowledge of the organization's needs and potential. How many of those people make it onto the development office's list of potential donors?

Is it possible our gratitude for people who volunteer their time to help us causes us to think that somehow it would be wrong to also ask them to support us financially? While some people do indeed see their contribution of time in lieu of money, others would donate money, but they are never asked. If you are a Manager of Volunteer Resources, whether you know it or not, the odds are pretty good that you are working with individuals who could make a contribution of cash of significant proportions and/or name your organization as a beneficiary in their will. What would it take for the Managers of Volunteer Resources and development staff to tap into that potential?

Training Volunteers

The Managers of Volunteer Resources possess a great wealth of information about the organizations they serve. Their volunteers tend to be involved in all aspects of the organization and this gives them an insight into the organization that can be rather unique. Volunteer fundraisers often find themselves needing more information than they ever dreamed would be necessary to secure a donation. Few people are better qualified than the Managers of Volunteer Resources to help familiarize the fund development volunteer with the organization and its needs.

CONCLUSION

These three areas of collaboration are by no means exhaustive; rather they represent just a beginning of a whole new way of working together. By removing old barriers and opening new doors of communication and collaboration, it is possible that a new trend will emerge within not-for-profit organizations as the Managers of Volunteer Resources and fund development staff find natural synergies that benefit both their separate areas and the overall organizations they serve.

ENDNOTES

¹Front and Centre, Voice of Canada's Charitable Voluntary Community (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Vol. 6, No. 6, November, 1999), p. 6.

²Sandra Bozzo, Fact Sheet #6: Motivations for Giving and Volunteering (NSGVP On-Line, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, August, 1998).