

Equal Access to Volunteer Participation

Paula Beugen for the

Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services

Volunteering is an American tradition and an historical right of all citizens. Everyone deserves an opportunity to contribute voluntarily to the community. It has long been recognized that individuals derive personal benefits from their volunteer experiences, while at the same time serving their communities. Ethnic, racial, religious, and other factors ideally should not affect access to volunteerism.

To assure greater access to volunteer participation it is necessary to examine these questions.

- * Why is it important to provide access to volunteer participation for all people? What are the benefits to individuals and organizations?
- * Do the principles of affirmative action and equal opportunity apply to volunteer positions?
- * What are some of the barriers that limit volunteer participation? What steps can be taken to minimize these barriers?

Equal opportunity and affirmative action are intended to assure that everyone has a fair chance to compete for and participate in paid and unpaid activities. Equal opportunity

means that an organization makes known its intent to provide open access to participation and follows through on this intent. Affirmative Action is a carefully thought through remedial obligation to implement a specific plan for improving opportunities for groups which have been deprived of opportunities in the past. An affirmative action plan includes policies, procedures and action steps which will result in participation by members of a range of minorities and special groups.

Many organizations are forbidden by law to discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, or age. Persons wanting information or clarification about the Human Rights Act or Civil Rights Laws should contact the department in their state responsible for Civil Rights.

When considering access to participation in the voluntary sector, it is worthwhile to examine implications of volunteering for individuals. Many people believe that volunteer work contributes significantly to one's skills and self-esteem. Day-to-day learning which occurs "on the volunteer job" advances the volunteer's personal development, expands

This article is a monograph developed by and reprinted by permission of the Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services as part of VOLUNTEER FOR MINNESOTA: A Project for Developing Public/Private Partnerships in Communities. The purpose of these monographs is to surface issues which impact the volunteer community, in hope of initiating dialogue which will result in solutions. The Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services (M.O.V.S.), Department of Administration, provides statewide leadership and supportive services to volunteer leaders to initiate, expand, and improve the contributions of volunteers. It works with public and private organizations, which either provide or utilize volunteers in areas such as human services, environmental and cultural affairs and civic government.

his/her network of contacts and makes possible experiences which can be documented for future paid employment and academic credit. In addition, participation in volunteer activities is a significant way to exercise one's constitutional rights through participation in actions and decision-making which affect their own lives. These opportunities enhance a person's capability for self-help and can greatly strengthen one's ability to be self-sufficient and independent.

Since access to volunteer participation leads to positive benefits, individuals who are unable to access volunteer positions will be deprived of these potential benefits. Without equal access to volunteering, the possibility exists that the gaps will widen between those who are currently able to volunteer and those who are not.

The impact of accessibility to volunteering is profound, not only for the volunteer, but also for organizations which depend upon volunteers for the delivery of services. By tapping into the full range of human resources from all segments of society, an organization will secure more volunteers. Open participation will develop a cadre of volunteers with diverse skills, backgrounds, and perspectives. These volunteers will fulfill unique needs that could not be addressed as effectively through other means. For example, a volunteer who has recovered from a serious accident and has learned to adapt to resulting disabilities, could offer a positive role model for a person in a like situation. In addition, the resources of a mix of volunteers will provide valuable insights into the needs, feelings, and desires of the organization's clientele.

Many impediments exist which make it difficult for certain people to volunteer. Examples of these impediments include volunteer-related expenses such as costs for transportation, child care, meals, parking, training, materials, and so forth.

People with physical disabilities may find that there are inadequate accommodations, which make it hard or impossible to volunteer. Also, inability to coordinate one's volunteer and work schedules may limit access to volunteering.

Beyond these more obvious roadblocks, there is a range of subtle barriers to volunteering. People may not be aware of opportunities to volunteer; or, the benefits of volunteering. They might not know that the organization sincerely welcomes and needs their participation. Some individuals may feel that they are not qualified or competent to do a job for which they could be trained. Others may fear being rejected from a volunteer position.

There are a number of steps which can be taken to help minimize barriers to volunteering. One of these steps is to defray prohibitive expenses of volunteers. (For organizations with limited budgets, it may be necessary to raise or seek funds for this specific purpose.) Physical barriers might be overcome, for example, by reserving parking for the handicapped, moving volunteer work sites from upper floors to the main floor of a building, and/or structuring volunteer positions so that work may be carried out at the volunteer's home or residential facility. Mentally handicapped volunteers may require more extensive training and closer supervision. Creative scheduling of volunteer work hours, or flexibility in the time and place for volunteering may encourage potential volunteers to make a commitment.

An examination of an organization's promotional pieces and recruitment methods could reveal the need to redesign appeals geared toward various segments of the community. Is the literature of the organization worded in a way that is clear and understandable for the specific audience? Does the feeling of the literature take into consideration cultural differences? Do photographs illustrate people from a variety of racial,

age, and other special groups, as well as both sexes? Does the potential volunteer want to "volunteer"; or, would he/she prefer to "lend a hand" or "help out"? In cases of in-person (rather than written) appeals, is the recruiter of a similar background or circumstance as that of the potential volunteer? Is the recruiter someone who can reassure the volunteer of his/her capabilities, acceptance by the organization, and self-interest in volunteering? Also, are all of the "requirements" for the position absolutely essential, or do they create artificial barriers for some potential volunteers? Remember, not everyone reads the newspaper, therefore, serious outreach requires a variety of approaches.

To be sure that the volunteer experience is mutually beneficial and that there are incentives for people to volunteer, an organization should explore the possibility of providing the following support services for its volunteers:

- * Reimbursement for expenses
- * Child care
- * Appropriate placement
- * Orientation and on-going training (with college or continuing education credit where possible)
- * Supervision and evaluation
- * Documentation of volunteer experience
- * References for employment or academic credit
- * Recognition for achievements
- * Opportunities for advancement

To effectively reach out to all segments of the potential volunteer community, organizations will invest time, energy and often money. Policies and procedures will be implemented to stimulate active recruitment and successful retention of a range of volunteers. Organizations will actively work toward volunteer participation which is reflective of the composition of the community. Leaders and members of organizations will strive to become better

educated about cultural differences and the needs of special populations. A serious effort will be made to build positive attitudes and ensure sensitive behavior throughout all levels of the organization.

Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services
Department of Administration

Equal Access To Volunteer Participation
Bibliography
(5/8/84)

BY GIVING A LITTLE YOU GET A LOT. Transitional Volunteer Program, Minneapolis, 1981, 4 p.

Describes how mental health clients, workers, and community agencies can help to meet each other's goals through a systematic use of referral, appropriate volunteer assignment, job description, orientation, training and evaluation.

COUNCIL ON BLACK MINNESOTANS: LOBBY, TESTIMONY AND RESEARCH. Council on Black Minnesotans (CBM). St. Paul, MN 6 p.

Data on blacks in the state of Minnesota including poverty rate, unemployment rate and average income are featured in this brochure. It also describes CBM's strategy to ensure participation of black Minnesotans in government.

DEAR EMPLOYER. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 1979, 9 p.

Written from a handicapped employer's point of view, this pamphlet describes some of the simple accommodations and adaptations sometimes necessary and advantageous when handicapped workers are hired.

GUIDELINES FOR RECRUITING AMERICAN INDIAN, BLACK, AND CHICANO-LATINO VOLUNTEERS IN THE MINNEAPOLIS AREA. Minneapolis Voluntary Action Center, Minneapolis, MN, 14 p.

Practical guidelines for deciding ability and qualifications needed when accepting a minority volunteer are listed. Topic areas include positive approaches to minority recruitment, cultural background characteristics, and media and recruitment resources.

HOW TO ACCOMMODATE WORKERS IN WHEELCHAIRS. Asher, Janet; Asher, Jules. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 1976, 8 p.

The removal of architectural barriers, as well as parking and entrance/exit accommodations are addressed in this publication. The economic advantages of accommodations (including lower insurance rates, fewer accidents, and employee productivity) are discussed.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE TO AND ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAPPEN TO BE HANDICAPPED. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 9 p. These are the highlights of a one-day seminar on how one can best communicate with handicapped people in order to recruit them. Seminar participants included representatives from industry, government, universities and mental health professionals.

IF YOU WENT BLIND TODAY COULD YOU DO THE SAME JOB TOMORROW? Blinded Veterans Association, Washington, D.C., 6 p. The answer to the question contained in the title is "yes"! This brochure describes how proper rehabilitation training can develop or improve existing skills after visual impairment.

INCLUDING EVERYONE: A CONFERENCE PLANNER'S GUIDE TO INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH HANDICAPS. Hines, Gary A. Multi Resource Centers, Inc., Minneapolis, MN, 1979, 25 p.

Advertising, marketing, audience identification, site selection, accessibility, and travel considerations are all taken into account in this pam-

phlet on planning for full conference participation by all those attending.

LEGAL ISSUES: A NCSL RESOURCE PACKAGE. National Center for Service-Learning.

This resource package is one of a series developed by the National Center for Service-Learning (NCSL) to provide up to date information on topics of particular interest to student volunteers, coordinators, school administrators, and staff who work with student volunteers.

LOOK WHO'S MINDING THE STORE: Supervising Disabled Employees. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, 1978, 14 p. This pamphlet explains how a handicapped individual's own experiences and familiarity with his/her personal needs and capabilities can help a supervisor adapt a work environment with a minimum of effort.

MINNESOTA COALITION FOR DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS (MCDH). Minnesota Coalition for Displaced Homemakers. St. Paul, brochure 8 p. This brochure describes MCDH's role in finding employment and training opportunities for women who have lost financial security because of a spouse's death, divorce or disability. It also explains the Coalition's efforts in education, advocacy, and networking.

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS. Minnesota Department of Human Rights (DHR). St. Paul, MN, 6 p.

This brochure offers examples of illegal discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations and services, education, and credit. It includes information on how to file a charge of discrimination or find answers to other questions about your rights.

MINNESOTA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT AS IT APPLIES TO PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS. Department of Human Rights (DHR), St. Paul, MN, 8 p.

A basic guide to how the Minnesota Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination against disabled persons. Lists definitions, examples of unfair practices, exceptions to the law and what can be done when discrimination is encountered.

OLDER VOLUNTEERS: A VALUABLE RESOURCE. Warrick, Pamela. American Association of Retired Persons, 1983, 32 p.

This booklet describes the skills, motivation, and dependability which older people bring when they volunteer. It also goes into recruitment, job suitability, training and insurance considerations and includes a list of printed resources for organizers of older volunteer programs.

RESPOND TO: MENTALLY RESTORED WORKERS. Mental Health Association, Arlington, VA, and President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 1982, 6 p.

This brochure attempts to define and make distinctions between those who have had mental illnesses, been treated, and are ready to work and those who are not ready. It also includes discussion on insurance, productivity, morale and an individual's decision on whether to disclose his/her background of mental illness or not.

RESPOND TO: WORKERS WITH BLINDNESS. American Council of the Blind and President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 6 p.

This brochure looks at the number of blind Americans, what they are like, what they can do and fears generally expressed by prospective employers. It also explains how new technology can, in some cases, dramatically increase the productivity of blind workers and other advantages to employers who hire the visually impaired.

RESPONDING TO DISABILITY: A QUESTION OF ATTITUDE. Hague, Patricia, Minnesota State Council for

the Handicapped, 1982, 38 p., \$1.50 for 2 or more.

This publication is designed around a questionnaire which examines encounters in everyday situations with people who are disabled. It provides an opportunity to think about or reconsider responses in such situations.

SO YOU'VE HIRED SOMEONE WITH A HEARING IMPAIRMENT. The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., 8 p.

This pamphlet covers the basics of how to improve communication with a deaf employee, including initial interviewing and introductions to others on the job.

TO SERVE, NOT TO BE SERVED: A GUIDE FOR OLDER VOLUNTEERS. Warrick, Pamela, American Association of Retired Persons, 1983, 24 p.

This publication is aimed directly at the older person considering the merits of volunteering. It covers the advantages, expectations, rights, and responsibilities of older volunteers.

TRANSITIONAL VOLUNTEER SERVICE. Voluntary Action Center, St. Paul, MN, 6 p. The Transitional Volunteer Service's referral, interview, placement and follow-up process provided for individuals recovering from emotional problems is described in this publication.

VOLUNTEER GUIDE. President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C. 1983, 16 p.

This publication gives tips on how to work with disabled volunteers; how volunteers can use their experience in jobseeking; suggestions on recruitment through media; and a list of resource material.

WHEN YOU MEET A PERSON IN A WHEELCHAIR. Sister Kenny Institute, Minneapolis, MN, 1981, 8 p.

This brochure contains a list of suggestions on the most appropriate behavior and etiquette for making an encounter with a wheelchair user as comfortable as possible.

YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS IN ST. PAUL.
St. Paul Department of Human Rights, St. Paul, MN, 6 p.
This brochure describes St. Paul's Human Rights Ordinance, which prohibits discriminatory treatment in employment, housing, education, public accommodations, and services. Also included is access information for speakers, consultants, and advice.

The Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services loans these materials free of charge to Minnesota residents and can provide additional ordering information to others. Contact: MOVS, 500 Rice Street, St. Paul, MN 55155.