

Have You Ever Considered . . . Five Alternative Ways to Build a Volunteer Project

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INTRODUCTION

In 1991 the Bar Ilan Brookdale Program of the University of Bar Ilan in Ramat Gan, Israel, and the Jerusalem-based JDC-Brookdale Institute of Gerontology and Human Development commissioned Norman Steigman and this author to write a manual for professional managers of volunteer services on how to best involve volunteers aged 60 and over. As part of the research for this project the researchers spent a year traveling the length and breadth of Israel, visiting close to 80 volunteer projects and interviewing some 300 coordinators of volunteer services, users of those services (e.g., senior hospital nurses and army base commanders), and volunteers themselves.

Upon evaluation, the researchers began to discover patterns in the way volunteer managers tended to build projects, and realized that there were five models, appropriate in different circumstances according to client, volunteer and institutional needs, that could be identified.

Five Ways to Build a Volunteer Project

- Do-It-Yourself
- One-Plus-Ten
- One-Plus-One
- Activist Cadre
- The Agent Runner

Though these models reflect experience emanating from field work in Israel, the researchers believe that they are widely applicable in other settings and that experienced coordinators will be able to adapt them to their own management styles,

once they understand each model's basic components.

DO-IT-YOURSELF

The most common model is what we have called the Do-It-Yourself, in which the volunteer manager takes a hands-on role in managing the volunteers and is responsible for all their affairs—recruiting, training, ongoing supervision, rewards. There is little, if any, direct interaction between the volunteers and other professionals or employees within the institution (nurses, orderlies), who tend to see the volunteers as just another element in the manpower available to them, one with little status and generally no input into their working conditions.

In the Do-It-Yourself model, the volunteer coordinator him- or herself is the user of the volunteer services. In its most common version the coordinator's focus is on representing the mission of the institution or organization by providing services to clients, and much time is spent mediating problems that arise, either between the volunteers and the clients or between the volunteers and other professionals and employees within the institution. Training and supervision are informal and irregular, and the coordinator generally functions as an administrator, even though he or she may have a social work or teaching background.

A good example of this was in a well-known old age home in Jerusalem, where volunteers mainly help in patient feeding and escort. Because of its location and rep-

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utation, there is no shortage of potential volunteer candidates and the coordinator does not need to worry about recruitment. Nor does the institution plan for the use of volunteers as an integrated part of the services it provides and none of its departments are dependent on them (though there would be a serious loss of manpower if they did not arrive). Instead, volunteers are perceived as a welcome "windfall," who need no training for what is generally unskilled and repetitious work, a form of cheap labor who need have little choice in how they are deployed. Emphasis is placed on retaining the volunteers and tying them to the Home—by making them feel welcome, by thanking them, by giving them small gifts and holding celebrations at festival times, by providing bus fare, by allowing them to participate in activities of the home.

In a second version of Do-It-Yourself, the volunteer manager understands that, in fact, he or she has a dual clientele—the volunteers themselves as well as the nominal clients. The manager, therefore, expands the services and rewards available to the volunteers by providing training and some form of ongoing and formal supervision and by taking the volunteer's needs and interests into account before placement—even, on occasion, designing a job to suit the volunteer's skills (assuming it fits, also, the needs of the institution). For example, one manager asked a volunteer who had a special interest in physical fitness to help improve the coordination of stroke damaged patients in a geriatric institution by using a large ball to "play catch" with them on a regular basis.

Pros and Cons

Volunteer coordinators often seem to use the Do-It-Yourself model because this is what the workplace has been conditioned to expect, because they haven't been trained to do otherwise, and because they don't realize there may be alternative ways to use volunteer services and build volunteer projects.

Both versions of the Do-It-Yourself model build on the low expectations of all parties—the volunteer manager, the institution and its employees, and the volunteers themselves. It is assumed that the institution's need for minimal investment in an alternative form of inexpensive labor comes first. It is also assumed that the need to volunteer is so strong (particularly after retirement) that volunteers will be willing to accept less than ideal conditions and fewer satisfactions than might be available if more effort was invested in their needs. And, indeed, in many cases these assumptions are valid.

But often they are not. Not infrequently, without stating the real reasons for doing so, volunteers act on their frustrations or dissatisfactions by dropping out. The "physical fitness" volunteer mentioned above was on the verge of doing so, mainly because the volunteer coordinator had never explained his role to the ward personnel who, therefore, related to him with hostility when he disrupted their routines. In other cases, volunteers react to low expectations and to their understanding of little potential for future personal development by doing less, with less enthusiasm, than otherwise would be so. The organization expends relatively little thought on its volunteer program—but the return is commensurately low. Are there alternatives?

ONE-PLUS-ONE MODEL

In the One-Plus-One model the volunteer manager pairs one professional with one volunteer, so that they form a team working together to meet the client need. The researchers found instances of this model in the *Sav-Gan* (grandparent-kindergarten) project, where older volunteers help kindergarten teachers by performing a range of mutually-defined "grandparental" roles within the classroom and playground setting; within the Volunteer Unit of the City of Tel Aviv, where volunteer teacher's aides work directly under

the supervision of a teacher who has requested help; in the Social Services Department of the Jerusalem Municipality, where volunteer case aides are paired with social workers who welcome their paraprofessional contribution towards lightening case loads; and as part of a nationwide police project, where one volunteer teams with one policeman on patrol car duty, thus freeing up police time and allowing overworked police personnel to take advantage of accrued leave and vacation time.

Appropriate Use

The One-Plus-One model is most appropriately used when the volunteer manager can identify a professional who needs some sort of assistance and when that need is one that a volunteer, albeit often after extensive training, can fill. The heart of the model is the chemistry that develops between the volunteer and the professional with whom he is paired; though, in general, it is a good idea for volunteers to have clear and defined job descriptions, in this model the relationship tends to develop as it goes along. Both the volunteer and the professional need to feel confident that the extra dimension the volunteer can add (building shelves for the kindergarten; calming the neighbors as the policeman investigates the complaint; playing word games with the unruly pupil while the teacher gets on with the lesson) will be of ultimate benefit to the professional, even as it provides job enrichment and enhanced status to the volunteer.

Only rarely in the One-Plus-One model does the volunteer manager personally arrange the pairings. Instead, the manager works closely with a professional within the framework in which the volunteer is to be placed, or chooses an appropriate "senior" volunteer, either of whom take on the role of matchmaker and provide ongoing follow-up. In each district within the police department, for example, the officer in charge of the pa-

trol car force has been delegated to make the volunteer-patrolman pairings, since his experience, status and professional understanding are crucial in order to bring together two personalities who can work with the needed sense of trust and mutual respect. On the other hand, the professional coordinator responsible for the *Sav-Gan* project in the town of Raanana identified a volunteer who could be her matchmaker, in this instance a recently-retired kindergarten teacher who was looking for an opportunity to use well-developed career skills and her knowledge of the kindergarten system in a new and different way.

Of course, as in any ongoing relationship, the expectations of both parties of the professional-volunteer team need to be clarified and coordinated on a periodic basis. As trust and mutual respect develop, the partners are often anxious to work together to renegotiate the volunteer's responsibilities. Central to this renegotiation, as well as to the model's success in general, are the personality and role of the matchmaker, who must continue to keep in touch with and maintain the confidence of both parties, to ensure that their needs are being met and to smooth out whatever misunderstandings may develop.

Pros and Cons

How does this model help the professional volunteer manager? Because one-on-one pairing is so labor-intensive, very few professionals have the time to build and maintain ongoing contact with projects of this type. By using someone who has professional insight into the needs of the professional partner as a matchmaker, and by working with and through him, the manager is able to get a bigger return for the investment of time, in terms of the numbers of projects that can be built, the range of jobs that can be offered and, ultimately, in the numbers of volunteers who can be placed. However, because the model is also highly skill- and trust-inten-

sive, if something goes wrong (the matchmaker proves inadequate or unreliable, the professional has trouble delegating to the matchmaker), the project may be difficult to initiate and/or can fail to develop.

In its use of the matchmaker-deputy, the One-Plus-One model can be considered a variation of another model encountered in a range of settings.

THE AGENT RUNNER MODEL

Often professional volunteer managers are charged with the responsibility of setting up a number of projects to meet the needs of different clients, but find that they do not have the time for necessary follow-up and supervision on a day-to-day basis. In the Agent Runner model, the professional finds a deputy—an agent—who is trained and then relied upon to take on the ongoing management of one discrete project. The agent can be either a volunteer who is looking for management responsibilities or a paid employee within a particular institution where the volunteer project has been set up. In both instances, however, the role of the professional is to support the agent by supplying whatever is needed to make the project successful, for example, training and rewards for the volunteers, or crisis intervention when appropriate.

Here are two examples of the Agent Runner model:

1. For the past decade a group of 15–20 elderly volunteers has been providing a light mid-morning meal to some 150 outpatients who come daily to Israel's largest rehabilitative facility. The project began after the volunteer manager, a local employee of Israel's national Department of Welfare Services, identified a well-known neighborhood leadership personality willing to coordinate the project and to recruit additional volunteers from her acquaintances at the local pensioners' club. Today this same leader continues to act as liaison between the group, the hospital and the Welfare Services. In fact, motivated both by her personal satisfaction and the community recognition she has received, she has expanded

her role (negotiating extra food for the rehabilitees; soliciting funding from the local Rotary Club to subsidize trips for the volunteer group) so that the professional needs to have only minimal contact with the other volunteers.

2. At a large army base in the center of Israel, about 90 volunteers, 10–20 per day, repack food, which the army receives in bulk, into smaller quantities for distribution to temporary army quarters and front-line positions. Volunteer recruitment and placement are done via the professional in the nearest town's Department of Welfare Services. But the project itself is managed on an ongoing basis by an army officer, who is responsible for providing transportation to and from the base, making available to the volunteers a mid-morning meal in the army canteen, giving on-the-job training in the use of specialized machines—as well as occasionally bringing in the base commander to give the volunteers a special sense of being needed and appreciated. The professional volunteer coordinator keeps in touch with her army officer "agent" and sees to it that the volunteers are invited to special events sponsored by the Department of Welfare Services—but the use of this model frees her from involvement in the day-to-day details of project management.

Important Elements

What are the elements that make for successful use of the Agent Runner model? In the first place, the professional volunteer manager needs to be able to let go, to delegate to someone else and trust that he will be able to do his work in an acceptable fashion. This means, of course, that the manager has the skills and contacts to make a careful selection of someone who, in essence, will be acting as a proxy, someone who will be enthusiastic enough about the project to give it proper time and attention, with whom he or she can get along and who will respect the manager's professional skills as well as commitment to voluntarism.

Once the agent is chosen, the professional has to be willing to energize and support him; to provide a sense that his project is part of a greater whole (for ex-

ample, part of the Welfare Services system, or part of the hospital volunteer unit); to help providing rewards to the volunteers; to provide training, if needed; to be available in times of crisis. Lest control be lost, the professional also needs to maintain an ongoing interest in the project, to be certain that standards are maintained and that the volunteers' needs are continuing to be appropriately met.

Pros and Cons

A factor inherent in the smooth operation of the Agent Runner model is the willingness on the part of the volunteers to accept a proxy in place of the professional manager. This can sometimes be tricky, for it requires that the professional give the volunteers the sense that they can have direct access, even though he or she knows that the plan is, via use of an "agent," to have less ongoing contact with them. The key is to choose an agent who will know how to win the support and trust of the volunteers, in much the same way that the professional and the agent need to win the support and trust of each other.

Though the Agent Runner model is a tempting one to use, particularly when there is pressure to build a great number of projects, the manager of volunteer services should be aware of potential pitfalls. Some include:

- The agent gets sick (not infrequent among older volunteers) or leaves his job (always a possibility with professionals like army officers) or moves, and it is hard to find an appropriate replacement;
- Situations similar to those described above in which a replacement is found—but the group cannot adjust to the new personality;
- The agent does something unacceptable to the professional and refuses to accept her authority in the matter;
- The professional becomes aware of the fact that there is a large volunteer dropout and feels that the agent may be responsible (e.g., by putting unfair pressure on the volunteers);

- The professional would like to "fire" the agent, whose work she no longer feels is acceptable, but the volunteer group supports its leader;
- Competition develops and a member of the volunteer group challenges the leader-agent's position.

Each of these instances calls for a re-evaluation of the use of this model for the specific project involved, in terms of its cost-benefit to the professional coordinator. Perhaps the coordinator has built an adequate number of projects and would like, at least for the time being, to resume direct contact with volunteers by taking on the hands-on management of the project. Perhaps additional training, or more close supervision, can help the agent to do a better job. Perhaps an honorary position for the agent can be created, encouraging him or her to "retire" in a way that satisfies the group's need to respect their leader. Perhaps another project for the competitor/challenger to manage can be found. Or perhaps the professional has to look at an alternative way to restructure the project.

THE ONE-PLUS-TEN MODEL

In the One-Plus-Ten model, which often seems to work best in a professional setting, the volunteer manager analyzes a task occupying many paid workers into the components that must be done by a certified professional and the components that, perhaps with some training, could be done by volunteers under professional supervision only. The manager then locates an appropriate professional (the One) who is willing to work with a team of volunteers (the Ten) and sets up a volunteer project which provides the same service to the client that was previously provided by the group of paid workers.

This model was first identified when the researchers visited a large Jerusalem hospital and were told about the way patients were processed on entering the hospital for elective procedures. Fifteen vol-

unteers (3–4 a day), under the supervision of one senior nurse, take care of all non-financial hospital intake procedures in one self-contained unit. Volunteers open patient files, weigh patients, do EKGs, assist the nurse in performing other tests, register results, and then serve a light breakfast before accompanying the patient to his ward. A technician explains the use of the EKG machine in two simple lessons; other procedures are learned on the job.

A less technical example of the One-Plus-Ten model was in the seaside town of Netanya, where a group of some twenty volunteers, under the supervision of a retired geriatric social worker, ran a weekly lunch club for 60–70 isolated/depressed people who otherwise would hardly leave their homes. The retired professional initiated the project by negotiating the source of meals and a place to meet; now she serves as coordinator/troubleshooter. A group that she recruited (many of them acquaintances from the same synagogue) heat and serve the lunch and a hot drink, wash dishes and clean the kitchen, plan and direct entertainment (bingo, live music).

Pros and Cons

It is relatively easy to market the One-Plus-Ten model to an institution which can appreciate the savings inherent in maximizing the time and effectiveness of its professional by using a volunteer support staff. The model also is an easy one in which to place volunteers who want to do something special within a larger institutional setting. Experience suggests, however, that many volunteer managers have difficulty conceptualizing and recognizing the opportunity for implementing it. Perhaps it would be helpful to note that it works most effectively when the professional can do the things he or she considers most professional and yet can keep control over the simpler work that the volunteers are doing. It is also best if the project's activities all can be performed in one place.

Once the volunteer manager has identified a project in which the model can be effective, and has broken it down into its component parts, the One-Plus-Ten model will be found to have many advantages. In an institutional setting:

- It takes paraprofessional jobs away from possibly over-qualified professionals and gives them to volunteers who are happy to have relatively skilled and responsible work;
- It uses the skills of the professional in a wide-ranging way, while at the same time it gives the volunteers more status and teaches them new skills;
- It encourages a positive relationship between the professional and the volunteers, since both are investing efforts by working together to achieve the same goal;
- It stimulates the formation of a mutual support and friendship group among the volunteers by giving them work in a project that has a distinct identity.

If there are several such projects within the same institution both the professionals and the volunteers can have contact with others like themselves, useful for idea sharing and problem solving. And even in a non-institutional setting some of the same advantages, like group support and project identity, are relatively easy to achieve with the One-Plus-Ten model.

Yet it is also important to be aware of this model's potential difficulties. The volunteer manager may be frustrated in efforts to find a professional who is willing to work primarily with volunteers, something that may isolate that professional from colleagues. The professional must be willing to learn how to deal with volunteers and the volunteer manager must find the time, and have the ability, to do the teaching. Unions may object to giving paraprofessional roles to volunteers. Administrators of institutions, despite the model's money-saving potential, might object to the volunteer manager's proposal that long-standing procedures could be conducted in a different way.

It is preferable, therefore, that this model be introduced gradually within any one institutional setting, and that the volunteer manager monitor it carefully to ensure a reasonable chance of success and subsequent replication. A good way to implement the One-Plus-Ten model outside a professional setting is to be on the lookout for a volunteer entrepreneur, one who wishes to set up a project of her own (as in the second example above), to suggest it in appropriate instances, and then be available to help in the early stages.

In fact, identifying a volunteer entrepreneur and suggesting a model for project building is often the most efficient way for a volunteer manager to conserve time and energy. Depending on the service the volunteer group wishes to provide and the needs, skills, and potential time commitment of the volunteer entrepreneur, the One-Plus-Ten model may be the most appropriate. But there is another option, one which we have seen successfully implemented in a range of volunteer frameworks.

THE ACTIVIST CADRE MODEL

The Activist Cadre model is particularly appropriate for a project that mainly requires a great deal of routine chore work in order to serve the needs of a great many clients. Structurally it is based on the concept of two concentric circles. In the inner circle is a small group, the Activist Cadre, consisting of the volunteer entrepreneur and a few people with whom he feels comfortable and who are willing to devote to him, and to his project, a great deal of time and energy. The outer circle consists of many more people, who want the opportunity for some volunteer activity, but who wish to invest only a limited amount of their time/brains/skills/commitment.

A project with which many volunteer managers are familiar is "Meals on Wheels." Here is the way the researchers found one such project, using the Activist

Cadre model in a widespread rural area, to be organized:

Ninety volunteers, who work one or two three-hour shifts per week, are divided into ten delivery routes. These volunteers pack into portable containers meals that already have been prepared at a school kitchen; then, in volunteer-owned and driven cars, they deliver two meals on each of two days in the week to some 100 clients referred by the municipality's Social Welfare Department. A core group of about ten people takes care of all the more time-consuming administrative tasks, such as drawing up the car routes, preparing special meal requests, maintaining a work rota, keeping accurate records, liaison with the school and the Social Welfare Department.

This is a good example of how the Activist Cadre model permits the building of a large-scale project, providing a service to many clients, even as it meets the needs of two groups of volunteers: those who can do only minimal work but want to feel part of a larger enterprise, and those who are looking for serious work and a more full-time involvement.

The Activist Cadre structure has shown itself to be flexible. In an urban setting (Jerusalem) the retired director of the ambulance services built a volunteer project which monitors daily, via the telephone, the condition of some 1,200 elderly chronically sick people who, for the most part, live alone—and he is still adding subscribers to this free service. This volunteer entrepreneur has succeeded by relying on a group of long-time professional and army contacts, who work with him on an almost full-time basis, handling administration and documentation details and recruiting and supporting the more than 100 "line" volunteers, who work one morning or afternoon shift each week answering the client phone-in calls.

Pros and Cons

There are two ways the Activist Cadre model can be built. The volunteer man-

ager can first identify the entrepreneurial figure who is looking for a project to found and manage and who is willing to recruit the group that will become the cadre. Alternatively, the volunteer manager can recruit the cadre as a group (from a pensioners' club, a church or synagogue, a service organization) and encourage the development of one or more leadership personalities. In both instances, however, the leader must have the energy and charisma to motivate other people and the cadre must be composed of people with administrative skills who are looking for something useful to do.

Generally, in this model, the cadre has the additional reward of becoming a strong friendship and support group. Sometimes this can cause problems, for example when the friendship group ages and the volunteer manager is called upon to reinforce it with new and younger members. Too, the cadre as a friendship group may be adequate up to a certain level of expansion, but then may be faced with the issue of formalizing what until then had been a relatively casual style of operation. One volunteer organization with which the researchers have worked, dedicated to helping absorb the flow of new Russian immigrants into Israel, responded to this situation by consciously deciding to limit its activities so that the spontaneity of interaction among the core group members might be preserved. Thus, though the Activist Cadre model tends to demand little of the volunteer

manager when things are going well, he or she must maintain enough contact with the project to detect, or even anticipate, potential strains and move to counteract them.

CONCLUSION

Building a volunteer project can be a demanding and time-consuming task. It is only natural that day-to-day calls on the volunteer manager's energies can make it difficult to think through the ways in which client services can be maintained, and enhanced, by the use of alternative project designs.

This article has suggested a number of models that have worked well, often for ten or more years, with an indication of the components that make each one's success more likely. Though they are derived from the Israeli setting, it appears that their application can be universal, for all over the world there exist the possibilities inherent in mobilizing volunteer energies to address human needs.

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