

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR COORDINATORS OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

JOHN C. ANDERSON

Program Director, Volunteer Bureau of Greater Vancouver

and

University of British Columbia

and

ROBERT B. DOUGANS

University of British Columbia

As our society continually increases in complexity and becomes ever more pluralistic, organizations develop to act as a mediator between the individual and his society. The voluntary organization is one such mediator and participation in these associations is one way for individuals to relate more meaningfully to society. Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1971) state that "most volunteer activity not only represents a significant contribution of energy and skill and individual resources to the functioning of democracy, but also makes a significant contribution to the volunteer's own psychological health and self-actualization" (p. 15). Volunteers play an important part in our modern world.

Naylor (1967) emphasizes the importance of considering the volunteer as an individual. She states:

the people who direct volunteers can ensure that their decisions are relevant to today's volunteers if they validate their habits and assumptions anew against today's realities. Volunteers are made or broken by the practices of executives, program and service staff, volunteer officers, nominating committees, recruiters, and trainers" (p. 8).

This statement implores the coordinator of volunteer programs to get the necessary training to enable the effective use of the volunteers under his/her direction, providing both satisfaction of the volunteer's needs and attainment of the organization's goals.

The present study has two main objectives:

- (a) to determine the perceived training needs of the volunteer coordinators, and
- (b) to develop a training program from that information.

METHOD

Interviews were held with a sample of paid administrators of volunteer programs (N=13). Those individuals interviewed were asked in what

areas they required further training or conversely in what areas should all coordinators be trained. The same questions were asked of participants of an Institute of Volunteers (1972) who were either in this administrative position or in some way connected with an agency using volunteers

Two other sources were consulted (MacDonald, 1972; and Twidle, 1971) which had assessed training needs for volunteer coordinators.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of the writer's two primary sources of information. These results indicate that there are two major need areas which require improvement. On the one hand, many coordinators appear to be lacking in administrative skills—particularly training, recruiting, and selection techniques, report preparation, and budgetary procedures. On the other hand, the coordinators expressed a need for training in human relations skills enabling them to deal more effectively with problems of the volunteers, facilitating better communication with superiors, other agencies, and the public.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Response to Training Needs

Perceived Needs	Institute N=34		Interviews N=13	
	# responses	%	# responses	%
Human relations skills	15	44.1	5	38.4
Actual training techniques	13	38.2	4	30.8
Publicity and use of media	2	5.9	-	-
Recruiting and selection techniques	5	14.7	5	38.4
Fund raising	3	8.8	-	-
Writing and presenting briefs	5	14.7	3	23.0
Budgeting and record keeping	2	5.9	6	46.1
Effective listening	2	5.9	-	-
Organization and its structure	2	5.9	1	7.7
Problem sessions	11	32.3	8	61.5

Although the volunteer coordinator may be a highly trained individual who understands what must be done to meet certain objectives, their lack of training in either elementary or advanced office skills limits their effectiveness in performing their job. In the selection of volunteers, for example, many coordinators would be better able to maximize the benefit of the volunteer to the agency and the community if their own skill in selection and evaluation techniques was more comprehensive. The development of administrative skills would free the volunteer coor-

dinator to deal more fully with the primary occupational areas in which he is trained, rather than becoming excessively involved with less important and time consuming procedures.

In many cases, the leadership style of the coordinator may also determine whether the success of a volunteer program is either mediocre or outstanding. Moreover, only if the coordinator is made fully aware of this fact will he be able to take corrective action. The coordinator is, by definition a communicator and must be able to relate to a large and diverse group of individuals, ranging from the new volunteer to the knowledgeable board of directors who head many of the community agencies. By implication, then, the coordinator should benefit from small group sessions, training in interpersonal relations, and increased understanding of their own impact upon others.

Table 2 depicts the perceived training needs across all four sources of data. This table again emphasizes the dichotomy between the human relations and administrative skills. In all cases, it was continually stated that a "how to" approach must be taken in offering any course.

TABLE 2
Training Needs Across Four Studies

Perceived Need	Twidle	MacDonald	Institute	Interviews
Human relations skills		x	x	x
—communication				
—motivation				
—leadership, etc.				
Actual training techniques	x		x	x
Publicity and use of media		x	x	
Recruiting and selection techniques	x		x	x
Fund raising			x	
Writing and presenting briefs			x	x
Budgeting and record keeping		x	x	x
Planning and use of volunteers	x			x
Organization and its structure	x	x	x	x

RECOMMENDED TRAINING PROGRAM

The purpose of this study is to provide additional training for employed coordinators. A range of alternatives are available which offer the type of training program that could be operated to meet the aforementioned needs of the coordinator. A full-time day program was considered in several forms but rejected because of the time constraints of the potential participants. Another alternative was to tap into extension and night school courses. This was rejected as although these courses may meet the upgrading requirements of one individual, it was doubtful that it

would be true of all coordinators. It was therefore decided that a course would be developed to be offered under the auspices of Community Education Services, a branch of the Vancouver School Board. This approach will, in a minimal amount of time, develop the desired "how to" skills in the individuals. The program would also only commit the participants to one night per week. One main advantage is that it allows the course to be run once, evaluated, and then run again in a modified form or dropped either because of lack of demand or enthusiasm. On the basis of the information available, a curriculum has been devised.

The training program should attempt to provide new and improved techniques for the volunteer coordinators, to enable them to function effectively in the agency position. The emphasis of the program will be on getting the student actively involved in the classroom situation. Discussion and questions will, at all times, be welcome. Volunteers will be encouraged to recount personal experiences in voluntarism, as a way of illustrating and relating classroom theory with real life situations.

The training program should be presented in an environment which is conducive to small group discussion and comfort. For example, the faculty lounge or seminar rooms would be the most likely rooms to be used in a high school. Chairs should be comfortable and moveable. At the same time, an auxiliary room should be available for certain class exercises (for instance, video taping).

Each three hour session should be broken up by at least one twenty minute break. Coffee should be made available at all times for course participants.

All student exercises should be evaluated quickly and in some detail. The marking of assignments should include constructive criticism at all times. Where gross errors have been made, the student should be encouraged to meet with the course coordinator for help.

At the completion of the course, each student will receive a Certificate of Achievement for completing the program. First class and second class designations on the certificate will indicate where the student stands on the basis of completed assignments and classroom participation.

The course must be evaluated by the students who will participate in it. A questionnaire would appear to make the most sense as the method of soliciting opinions about the program. A great deal of care must, however, be taken in the designing of the instrument so that biased responses would be minimized. A separate comment sheet should also be included with the evaluation so that members could describe their perceptions of the course in their own words.

It is recommended that the course coordinator meet with individual course participants for an informal discussion and interview at least once during the training period. Not only will the course coordinator get

feedback about the course, but he will be able to assess the students' progress and capabilities as well.

Finally, students do not have to attend all classes if they feel that certain topics are not of importance to them. However, everyone must register for the program in the first week.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The information gathered from responses of participants in the Centre for Continuing Education's Institute on Volunteers and through personal interviews with volunteers indicates that certain needs must be fulfilled by the proposed training program. Chief among these topics for study are: human relations skills, actual training methods, recruitment and selection techniques, writing and presentation of briefs, budgeting and record keeping, and problem sessions. (Refer to Tables 1 and 2.)

The training program that has been designed, attempts to provide the present or potential volunteer coordinator with the basic skills to enable him to function effectively in his position. Initially, the recruitment process is examined with emphasis being placed on the definition and presentation of a job description¹, as well as certain recruiting methods. The following week continues to pursue this topic with a discussion of interviewing as the evening's main topic. A simulated interview situation has been included to confront the students with an experience much like that which occurs in real life. Inasmuch as a great deal of a volunteer coordinator's time is spent in recruiting, interviewing and placing a volunteer, the two weeks allocated to this subject are necessary.

After the volunteer has been recruited and interviewed, the coordinator will become responsible for the orientation of the individual within the agency and the job. Week 4, then, attempts to show the student how to place the individual in the job, as well as indicating specific problems that may be encountered. The need to continually review and to be prepared to re-assign the volunteer to an alternate position is also stressed.

Every volunteer coordinator will either supervise or actually participate in the training of volunteers. Actual training techniques are, therefore, examined in the two class weeks following the orientation topic. In particular, assessment of training needs as a way of planning actual training methods is emphasized. A discussion of the various techniques, their advantages and disadvantages, and timing is then initiated. Week 6 concentrates on one particular training method—role-playing—and allows students to actually experience its use. Under the supervision of a skilled human relations trainer, the students will be encouraged to participate in the episode and to describe their reactions to their involvement and the role-play.

¹While investigating the Volunteer Bureau and agencies the researchers found that job descriptions did not in fact exist for a great number of volunteer coordinators and staff personnel.

TABLE 3
The Training Program

Week Number	Topic	Subject Matter	Handout	Assignment	Resource Person
1.	Registration	Introduction and overview of the course	Binder to hold all distributed materials and orientation to course handout	Read material for next session	Program Coordinator
2.	Recruiting Process	Objectives, manpower requirements, job descriptions, how and where to recruit	Two or three pages on major topic, with a "how to" approach	Each class member will be expected to write up a job description	Person skilled in recruiting at the professional or volunteer level with ability to relate theory with practical examples
3.	Interviewing	Techniques, what the interview should accomplish; video tape of simulated interview; interview role play with use of video tape feedback; discussion of selection and placement	A paper on the do's and don'ts of the interview	From experience, each member will relate faults and biases inherent in interviewing	Specialist on interviewing procedures and use of video tape feedback
4.	Orientation	Methods of orientation, problems encountered with new volunteers, reviewing and re-assigning the volunteer	Explanation of basic aims and methods of orientation	Develop a training program for the volunteers in your own agency	An individual who is involved in orienting and directing new volunteers
5.	Actual Training Methods	How to assess training needs, an overview and discussion of advantages and disadvantages of the use of various training methods	Outline and description of each method with advantages and disadvantages	Concentrated research on one method	Training director or supervisor; teacher or professor

6. Human Relations I	Role playing episode developed from a case related to voluntarism; use of video tape feedback; tie in what this technique offers vis-a-vis communications within the organization and between people	Two or three pages on role playing; use, advantages and disadvantages	Each participant will be expected to submit their personal feelings about the role play, what they learned and how it can be applied to their organization	Skilled human relations trainer
7. Motivation	Basic motivational theory and how it relates to the volunteer, the problems of maintaining motivation without money as an incentive; the need for recognition	Two or three pages on motivational theory related to voluntarism	Rewrite a poorly presented brief for oral class presentation	College professor
8. Writing and Presentation of Briefs	Review of assignment; a "how to" approach to writing briefs; the need for salesmanship; effective listening	Notes on briefs	Prepare two press releases concerning their agencies current activities	Teacher of business English
9. Public Relations	How to use the media; how to prepare press releases; relations with the Board	A "how to" approach to contacting and using the media	No assignment	Public relations officer or news representative
10. Bookkeeping and Managerial Skills	Basic budgeting; keeping personnel and financial records; office supervision; delegation	Overview of budgeting techniques, and two pages on managerial skill and behavior in offices	Students are given a fixed amount of funds to budget and plan	An experienced office manager with a background in management information systems
11. Human Relations II	Communication, leadership, conflict and cooperation	Recommended reading list	Read in the area	College professor
12. Final Session	Evaluation, questions and discussion, social evening	Certificates of completion	Work effectively	Program coordinator

Up to this point in the program, the recruitment and selection techniques and the actual training techniques have been examined. The emphasis in following weeks will centre on human relations skills and a practical "how to" approach to presentation and writing of briefs, public relations, and managerial skills.

Every organization that exists through human interaction rests on its ability to motivate individuals to pursue the objectives and plans of the organization. The topic of motivation and, in particular, the way motivation and the volunteer must be approached is important. Week 7 examines some motivational theories and techniques as they relate to the volunteer's environment.

Weeks 8 and 9 have been planned around the objective of providing the volunteer coordinator with the skill to communicate effectively with other agencies, the Board of Directors of the agency, and the community. The writing and presentation of briefs is followed by a night on public relations. The way the media can be used to the agency's advantage is discussed, as is the correct form of presenting press or news releases. Inasmuch as the volunteer movement depends on good relations with the community, the need for effective communication techniques cannot be underestimated.

Each agency must also learn to operate within a specified budget allotted to it. The volunteer coordinator must function as an accountant and financier in spreading out the allotted funds over the agency's fiscal year. The ability to maintain proper books, to plan and estimate expenditures and other operating costs is also important. Also, the coordinator must know certain operating skills and be able to control the office staff of the agency. With respect to this latter requirement, delegation of responsibility and approaches to discipline are skills that should be acquired, if the coordinator is to be effective.

The final training week, Week 11, attempts to re-focus the student's attention on the human relations environment which encompasses the volunteer organization. The volunteer agency relies, for its existence, on people; people who are willing to donate their time and resources to helping others. The importance of human relations skills must be re-emphasized to the students as a way of sensitizing them to their organization's needs, aspirations and complexities.

CONCLUSION

A training program has been developed which is based upon the actual perceived needs of administrators of volunteer programs. For the most part individuals now filling these positions have moved from the professions—social work, nursing, teaching—to an administrative role. This program will provide them with the necessary "how to" skills in a minimum of time, and with a minimum cost. Hopefully, with better

educated coordinators, the quality of volunteer programs will increase and the volunteer will be more effectively used and receive the satisfaction from his/her volunteer work that is expected.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- MacDonald, B., *Report to the Information Services Joint Committee: Examination and Survey of Training Needs for Coordinators and Volunteers at Information Centers*, Vancouver, 1972.
- Naylor, H., *Volunteers Today*, New York: Association Press, 1967.
- Schindler-Rainman, E., *Proceedings of New Approaches to Working with Volunteers*, Vancouver, Sponsored by Center for Continuing Education, University of British Columbia and the Volunteer Bureau of Greater Vancouver, November 28-30, 1972.
- Schindler-Rainman, E. and Lippitt, R., *The Volunteer Community*, Washington, D.C.: NTL Learning Resources, Inc., 1971.
- Twidle, D., *Organizational Development of the Volunteer Bureau of Greater Vancouver*, Unpublished Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1971.