

## **THE NEW CONCEPT OF A VOLUNTEER BUREAU\***

by

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The new concept of the role of a volunteer bureau in today's changing world grew out of the Central Volunteer Service's national study of volunteer bureaus, and is based on recommendations of the 1968 joint CVS-SWPC committee, composed of members of the CVS Advisory Committee and the Social Work Planning Council Board. This committee, having reviewed the findings of the national study, was cognizant of the growing awareness all over the nation of the value and potential of the human resources of volunteer services. They felt future expansion in the field of voluntarism was a reality for which our communities must prepare themselves. Therefore, in conducting their study, they gave careful consideration to the role of a volunteer bureau in this rapidly changing world and what direction the structure and function of a bureau should take to meet the challenges ahead. The committee concluded its work with the following statement: Recognizing the expanding field of voluntarism and the growing demands for leadership in planning, coordinating, standard setting and demonstrating of volunteer programs relating to agencies, groups, and individuals, it is recommended that effective and efficient volunteer participation in sound agency programs can best be achieved through the leadership and planning given the community by a central volunteer bureau.

I propose the concept that today's volunteer bureau must be the community agent which assumes leadership for planning with and coordinating of citizens and agencies in the effective use of volunteer services. This concept is not adverse to the traditional principle that a volunteer bureau gives community service. Rather, it builds on this concept of community service but moves beyond the image of a bureau sponsoring and operating volunteer programs into the realm of planning and coordinating of community volunteer activities. This new concept broadens the image of the volunteer bureau from that of an agent established to "recruit and refer volunteers" to that of a central planning agent, whose primary responsibility is planning for and coordinating of individuals and groups with agencies for effective volunteer participation in sound agency programs to meet community needs.

In order for a bureau to assume this leadership role and involve itself exclusively in total community planning and coordinating of volunteer activities, there are certain thought processes, procedures and methodology which the bureau must exercise. First . . . the bureau must accept the premise that volunteers belong to the agency to whom they are committed for service. Second . . . the agency is responsible for the success or failure of its own volunteer program, which includes the recruitment, orientation, training, supervision, evaluation, nurturing and recognition of its volunteers. With these two concepts well established, bureaus can then move toward reconceptualizing and redesigning the functions and structures of their own offices, differentiating between broad community responsibilities, such as planning and coordinating which a bureau should carry, and the responsibilities of an individual program which should be carried by an agency. This is not always easy to do for in many cases the bureaus have traditionally carried responsibility for both, but with thought and effort bureaus can make the changes necessary to operationalize this concept. They can then involve themselves in the four activities which are key to establishing and maintaining an effective network of volunteer programs in the community. These activities are, in the order of their importance: *planning, coordinating, standard setting, and demonstrating* new volunteer practices.

If we as members of the Association of Volunteer Bureaus of America, are committed to the thesis that volunteer bureaus must give leadership to the total community in the growing field of voluntarism, then it follows that volunteer bureaus have a responsibility to do broad community planning if the volunteer resources are to be used effectively and if community volunteer needs are to be met efficiently. It is the central bureau who knows the total community picture regarding volunteer needs and resources; and which has the know-how and expertise to bring the two together. Volunteer bureaus which are members of AVBA have the advantage of drawing on the knowledge and experience of the association and its affiliate members for additional information to share with agencies. Even new bureaus, in communities whose experience with volunteers is of long standing, can assume the role of leadership without difficulty. Establishing standards for membership in the association and spelling out the function of a bureau is an important step in support of this leadership role, for it not only strengthens the association but also strengthens the community image of each member bureau.

In order to plan effectively for the total community, the bureau must constantly stay in the mainstream of volunteer

activities. Citizens and agencies alike, must know what the bureau is . . . what the bureau does . . . and where the bureau can be found. But bureaus must not wait to be found. They must become the hub of all community volunteer activities by being aggressive and moving out into the community and becoming involved in all the volunteer action. They must be alert to new volunteer programs and community agencies; confer with agency administration or directors of volunteer services. Through consultation they can show how a bureau can help an agency have an effective volunteer program, the responsibilities of the agency, the standards of good practice and how they are maintained; as well as the preparation and development of staff for the effective use of volunteer services. Throughout all of these activities, the role of the bureau is that of "planner" not "doer." Planning with agencies for sound volunteer programs; planning with volunteers for more effective service.

*Coordinating* of naturally follows *planning for* and in the role of coordinator the bureau functions as an "enabler" or catalyst which brings together community volunteer resources into an effective network of volunteer programs to meet community needs. In order to carry out this coordinating process, bureaus must be attuned to and keep abreast of the volunteer interests and needs of the total community. They must be prepared to stimulate additional interests when the need arises. When volunteer interest exceeds known needs it is the role of the bureau to stimulate agencies to expand existing programs or to develop new volunteer projects which will effectively use the available resources. When agencies indicate reluctance to use volunteer services in new ways, bureaus may have to sponsor projects or demonstrations to show the value of the volunteer service. Bureaus should welcome the opportunity to be the pace setters in volunteer services for the community and to demonstrate new and different ways in which volunteer services may enrich agency programs. However, such demonstrations should be designed for a limited period of time, to be integrated into the general operation of an existing agency should the demonstration prove fruitful.

Successful coordination of community volunteer programs does not just happen. It requires effort and time. The bureau must exert effort and spend time in planning and consultation with both the agencies and the volunteers, but the results will be a high dividend of better service to the community and a less expenditure of bureau staff time in the long run.

I would like to give you an example of how this coordination can be done. In 1968, CVS felt the need to move out of the

business of sponsoring programs and into the role of community planner and coordinator for volunteer activities. Following is a brief description of how CVS streamlined one of its most traditional programs . . . the teenage program . . . using the concepts and principles we have just established.

*CVS Teenage Program:*

Under the old design, CVS was responsible for the total program, which included broad community publicity, determination of community needs, recruitment, orientation, training, interviewing, referral, follow-up and recognition of the teens. Innumerable staff hours were spent between February and August in clerical and committee work, not to mention the hours spent during May, June and July in orientation, interviewing and referral of teens and in planning and operationalizing the recognition program in August.

Under the new plan, CVS moved out of the area of "doer" into the role of community planner and coordinator . . . CVS became the agent which brought together community needs for teen-volunteers with the available teens. To accomplish this, a teen fair was planned with the assistance of adult volunteers. CVS continued to be responsible for general publicity and broad stimulation of volunteer interest as well as general orientation to the responsibilities of volunteering. This is the appropriate role for a central bureau under the new concept as these activities are related to the total community needs. Agencies were invited to staff an exhibit at the fair and to be available for conferences with interested teens, thus assuming the appropriate responsibility of recruitment, screening, interviewing, training and supervising. Following the general orientation, the teens were invited to visit each exhibit, talk with the directors of volunteer services and make an appointment for an interview with the agency of their choice. CVS was available, through adult volunteers, for questions or problems, of which there were only 10 out of over 200 teens. The fair was evaluated by the agencies as highly successful because it offered the teens a broader knowledge of community agencies and their extensive need for volunteer services. It also confronted the agencies with the volunteer needs of other agencies and stimulated them to do their best in presenting their agency's needs and in interpreting their volunteer program. The amount of staff time devoted by CVS to the effort was cut to one third, yet community needs were met more effectively. This is but one example but it helps to illustrate how we can redesign our bureau activities to do the most effective job in the amount of time and staff we have available.

What I am really saying is that the key to the successful establishment and maintenance of an effective net-work of community volunteer programs lies in sound planning and coordinating of volunteer activities at the total community level and in soundly planned and executed agency volunteer programs, based on proven standards of practice when agency volunteer programs have been well planned and there is a knowledgeable director of the program who exercises sound principles of practice, when the individual or group volunteers understand their responsibility and have a firm commitment to their role; the work of the general bureau in planning for and coordinating the agency's needs with the volunteer resources is smooth and successful and the results are mutual satisfaction for both the agency and the volunteer. When this is not the case, the coordination can result in dissatisfaction for one or both parties. The central bureau must take leadership in this process and be the standard setter for the total community in planning and coordinating volunteer activities.

It must be the central bureau to which both agencies and volunteers turn for direction in developing and operating volunteer programs. The bureau must assume leadership in setting standards for working with volunteers and in setting standards for agencies in their efforts to establish, maintain and strengthen their volunteer programs.

To carry out this leadership role, the bureau must become involved in and give leadership to the following activities:

- Sponsor community wide workshops and institutes for agency personnel and volunteers.

- Form committees or forums of directors of volunteer services.

- Plan through consultation with agency administration and effective volunteer programs based on sound standards.

- Plan and coordinate through consultation with directors of volunteer services for the maintenance and strengthening of agency programs.

The need for training directors of volunteer services was not only revealed in the national study, but has been further brought to light by the AVBA committee on curriculum, under the very adept leadership of Nancy Nordhoff. We are scheduled to hear a full report from that committee later. However, until such time as a formal training course for directors of volunteer services becomes a reality, the bureaus will have to continue to try and fill the gap as best they can if they are to survive

as community leaders because as a chain is as strong as its weakest link . . . so a net-work of community volunteer programs is as effective as the weakest agency program and the director of volunteer services is the key to an effective agency volunteer program.

From my own experience, I have found that some type of group training session is highly beneficial in training directors of volunteer services as it offers the bureau an opportunity to disseminate large amounts of information to a number of persons and at the same time gives the directors an opportunity to discuss mutual problems and concerns with other directors. Committees and forums of directors which meet on a regular basis also contribute to strengthen the agency's volunteer program. It is the role of the central bureau to give leadership to all of these various training methods . . . again assuming the role of planner and encouraging the agencies and volunteers to participate and become the doers.

In closing I would like to quickly recap the activities of a bureau under this new leadership role. Bureaus must be aggressive in all of their activities and see that they relate to the needs of the total community. When segments of the community cannot or do not come to the bureau . . . the bureau must go to them. Bureaus need to move away from the idea of total recruitment and referral toward encouraging agencies to strengthen their own program and taking responsibility for recruitment, orientation, training, supervision and recognition of their volunteers. Bureaus must make extensive use of volunteers in both service and administrative activities of their bureaus. This valuable community resource must not be allowed to pass the door of the bureau. If volunteer bureaus are to assume their rightful role of leadership in the field of voluntarism, they must put on a new face. They must be willing to go to new places, do new things, involve new people and meet the challenge of increased voluntarism by giving leadership in planning for and coordinating of volunteer resources to meet total community needs.

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