

## TYPES OF VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTARISM

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Voluntarism represents a category of human activity that is so varied it defies adequate description. The situation is not much better when we try to classify into broad categories various related types of voluntary activity. Yet we can only hope to deal rationally with this great variety of activities if we can devise some shorthand ways of referring to major sub-types of volunteers and voluntarism. This paper attempts to sketch briefly one possible classification scheme.

The types of volunteers and voluntarism presented here do not comprise the *only* possible classification scheme by any means.<sup>1</sup> These types simply represent an attempt to classify volunteer activities largely in terms of broad types of goals involved (both individual and social). Any value the scheme may have is likely to be due to the fact that it is not only simple and comprehensive but is very close to common sense empirical categories that are in current use.

We shall emphasize here the various types of *volunteers* indicated by our scheme, although we could as well apply the typology to the *voluntary organizations or groups* involved.<sup>2</sup> By volunteers we mean individuals who are engaging in an activity for primarily non-remunerative, non-coercive reasons (though partial, subsistence remuneration or reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses may be involved). The focus is on other (often idealistic) goals and various kinds of psychic benefits and rewards, not mainly direct payment or the threat of sanctions.<sup>3</sup>

1. *Service Volunteers* are volunteers who are attempting to help others directly (or, in some cases, themselves) in the realms of health, welfare, housing, education, rehabilitation, religion, etc. This is the traditional "people helping people" area of voluntarism that most people think of when they hear the word "volunteer." There are several major subtypes of Service Volunteers that need to be spelled out, according to the organizational context in which they are contributing their services.

(a) *Institutional program linked volunteers:* This kind of Service Volunteer is serving in a volunteer program that is linked to a larger institution — a church, prison, school, hospital, welfare agency, corporation, government agency, etc. The large majority of these volunteers are white, middle class women in the 30 to 60 age range who work a few hours a week at their role. However, some volunteer programs of the present kind have been successful in involving youth (as in student volunteer programs), the aged (as in the U.S. government's Foster Grandparents Program), and men (as in the court volunteer programs and environmental cleanup campaigns). Nevertheless, relatively few lower income or deprived minority group individuals are involved in this form of volunteering.

(b) *Autonomous Service group volunteers:* This kind of Service Volunteer is a member of, or affiliated with, an autonomous voluntary association with direct service goals of some kind — the Red Cross, a voluntary recycling center, Call for Action, etc. The member composition of these kinds of groups is similar to that of the previous category. Emphasis again is on helping others directly in various ways, but without direct service group linkage to and control by some existing institution.

(c) *Self-help group volunteers:* This special kind of Service Volunteer is becoming increasingly important in our society and elsewhere in the world (especially developing countries). Many people — especially people who are poor, discriminated against, ill, disabled, etc. — are beginning to rebel against the traditional "charity approach" implicit or explicit in the two foregoing types of service voluntarism. As a result, there have arisen increasing numbers of volunteer self-help groups, often following the lead of the well-established Alcoholics Anonymous. For instance, there are now self-help volunteer groups for drug addicts (or ex-addicts), ex-convicts, ex-mental patients, welfare recipients, divorced or widowed parents, ethnic minority groups, overweight people, the handicapped, diabetics, etc. The members of such groups are generally quite different from the usual Service Volunteer, as well as differing markedly among various types of self-help groups themselves. These self-help group volunteers are usually representative of a *problem* population, but problems can strike anyone and cut across the many usual social categories (all ages, both sexes, all socioeconomic groups, etc.).

2. *Public Issue/Advocacy Volunteers* stand in marked contrast to most kinds of Service Volunteers. When Service Volunteers tend to focus on the problems of the people as symptoms and to try to alleviate these problems directly for specific individuals, Public Issue/Advocacy Volunteers focus more on the social, economic, and political roots of problems for large groups of people. As such, these volunteers and groups are the principal innovators and change initiators in society as a whole. In some cases they are neutral with regard to an issue and are merely trying to raise the issue for wider public concern. More frequently, they are deeply committed to one side or the other of an issue, and eager either to bring about or resist social, economic, and political change with regard to the issue. Some major subtypes include the following:

(a) *Public information volunteers*: This kind of Issue Volunteer is relatively neutral about an issue or issues, being primarily interested in raising the level of public information and public concern regarding some issue(s) — war, population, the political system and political candidates, the environment, consumer problems, civil rights, etc. Because of the relatively *neutral* stance taken, members of this kind of volunteer organization tend to be more highly educated, white middle class women in the middle years of life (30-55). The League of Women Voters is a good example.

(b) *Political campaign workers*: This kind of Issue Volunteer tends to work for a particular candidate, party, or issue being put to a public vote. More than other types of Issue/Advocacy Volunteers, political campaign workers play a highly cyclical volunteer role. They are extremely active every 2 or 4 years for a few months, and then largely inactive in *this* kind of role the rest of the time (although they may be engaging in other forms of volunteer activity in these long intervals between intensive political activity). Political campaign workers tend to run the gamut of age, ethnicity, sex and geographic distribution. They also represent a fairly broad socioeconomic status range, yet more educated and higher status individuals tend to have *proportionately* greater participation. Naturally, they are highly involved with their issue, party or candidate when they are active.

(c) *Public issue volunteers*: This kind of Issue Volunteer is highly committed to *one* side or viewpoint on some

public issue or problem. He or she is an activist about the issue on a relatively continuing basis — not just periodically at election times. A wide range of issues can be the focus of public issue volunteers. Some voluntary organizations, like Common Cause, focus on several different kinds of public issues at once, while others, like Zero Population Growth, focus more narrowly on a single kind of issue or problem. The public issue volunteer tends in general to be younger, more educated, and to have fewer “vested interests” than Service Volunteers or even the foregoing two kinds of Issue/Advocacy Volunteers. Still, public issue volunteers are mainly white, middle class in composition, with substantial participation by both men and women.

(d) *Rights advocacy volunteers*: This is the most radically change-oriented form of voluntarism, by and large. The volunteers of this type are not only deeply committed to socio-political changes, but usually have a personal interest in the matter as it affects them. These rights advocacy volunteers are generally quite different in background from the average Issue Volunteer of the other three types noted above. Instead of being white, middle-class volunteers, with a preponderance of women, the present type of volunteer is usually a minority group member, often poor, and may be male or female, depending on the group. Black power, the Chicano movement, the welfare rights movement, women’s liberation and similar “liberation” groups are examples.

3. *Consummatory/Self-Expressive Volunteers* constitute a third major class of volunteers. Unlike the previous two broad categories, this category of volunteer does not generally appeal to altruistic motivation or ideology. Consummatory/Self-Expressive Voluntarism is usually an end in itself, rather than an attempt to do something for or to others or the society. This is the area of voluntarism that emphasizes fun, fellowship, enjoyment, and entertainment, rather than the more “serious” social and human problems that are the focus of the two prior broad categories of volunteers. Major subtypes here include the following:

(a) *Cultural/aesthetics volunteers*: This kind of Consummatory Volunteer is concerned primarily with music, art, dance, theatre, discussion, learning, and other “cultural/aesthetic” topics (eg., Little Theatre groups, Square Dance Clubs, Great Books Discussion Groups, Adult Education Groups, etc.). Because of the subject matter involved, cul-

tural/esthetic volunteers tend primarily to be more educated higher socioeconomic status individuals, with a higher proportion of women than men.

(b) *Social Club Members*: This kind of volunteer is primarily concerned with enjoying the fellowship of similar persons, often in the context of other informal social activities such as eating, drinking, chatting, rituals, etc. Social Club Members include volunteer participants in Country Clubs, men's clubs, women's clubs, high school social clubs, fraternities and sororities, veterans' groups, ethnic clubs, etc. Although the *members of a given social club* are likely to be quite homogeneous in background, *social club members in general* (across all groups) tend to come from *all walks of life and all backgrounds*. As with the other kinds of voluntarism, however, social club members are proportionately more prevalent in the middle and especially the upper class.

(c) *Recreational Club Members*: This kind of volunteer role is primarily oriented toward some enjoyable physical recreational activity, performed as a part of a club or voluntary association. Examples of this kind of voluntarism include Little Leagues, Bowling Teams and Leagues, Raquet Clubs, Power Boat Clubs, Skating Clubs, etc. The typical volunteer is an average U.S. citizen, since there are recreational clubs that appeal to both sexes, all ages, all socioeconomic levels, all ethnic backgrounds, etc. The main kinds of people who do *not* tend to participate proportionately as much in this kind of volunteer role are the aged, the infirm, and the physically handicapped.

(d) *Hobby and Games Club Members*: This kind of volunteer activity, though similar to the preceding category, places less emphasis on physical recreation/outdoor activities, and more emphasis on enjoyment of indoor games and hobby activities in an organized club context. Primary examples include Chess Clubs, Bridge Clubs, Gardening Clubs, Dog Breeding Clubs, Numismatic Clubs, Philatelic Clubs, etc. The members of such voluntary organizations are primarily middle class or higher in socioeconomic status, although they include both sexes, all ages, all geographic areas, etc.

4. *Occupational/Economic Self-Interest Volunteers* comprise a large segment of voluntarism that is also, like the

preceding category, self-oriented rather than other-oriented (altruistic). However, instead of seeking primarily enjoyment, the present category of volunteers are primarily seeking to protect and enhance their occupational and/or economic interests. In historical terms, such groups have perhaps the most ancient roots of all areas of voluntarism, tracing their origins to guilds and "collegia" of thousands of years ago. Some major modern day subtypes are the following:

(a) *Professional Association Members*: This kind of volunteer is usually dedicated to maintaining the standards of his profession while at the same time advancing the state of skill, knowledge and practice in his field. Typical examples are the American Medical Association, the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars, the American Psychological Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, etc. Not surprisingly, the typical active member of a professional association tends to be an upper middle or upper socioeconomic status male with a very high level of education. With the increasing entry of women into the professions, more and more professional associations previously dominated by men are coming to have increasing membership, participation and leadership from women. Low income, poorly educated, and minority group persons tend to be relatively infrequent in this form of voluntarism (largely based upon occupational discrimination), although the bias against minority groups is changing gradually.

(b) *Businessmen's and Civic Association Members*: This kind of volunteer is dedicated primarily to the enhancement of his business or commercial interests, although a local businessmen's club still often engages in civic service activities as well as economic interest activities. Local Chambers of Commerce, Jaycees, national trade associations, associations of business executives of various kinds, and even clubs like Rotary, Kiwanis, etc., may be given as examples of the present form of voluntarism. The typical member is a male small businessman, "retail" professional, or business executive (from a bank, industrial plant, etc.) hence favoring lower middle to upper socioeconomic status males, usually not of minority group background.

(c) *Labor Union Members*: This kind of volunteer may at times be only a quasi-volunteer, if membership and certain minimal participation in a given union are legally man-

datory. However, for many kinds of activities (business meetings, parties, discussion sessions), union members can participate or not as they choose. In these situations union members are volunteers, as in the general case of "open shop" unionism. The typical union member is male (though female union membership rates are increasing), of modest education, and of working class socioeconomic status. Most skilled craft unions have very few, if any, minority group members. Industrial unions, however, tend to include a larger (if still disproportionately small) representation of minority group members and leaders.

5. *Fund Raising Volunteers* comprise a final important type of volunteer. They are distinguished from other volunteers by being largely involved in the task or process of raising money, but relatively uninvolved in more substantive activities focused around the various other goals we have considered. There are only two analytical subtypes worth distinguishing here:

(a) *General Fund Raising Volunteers*: This kind of volunteer plays a role in some rather general volunteer fund raising when the funds are collected for a wide variety of goals. Two prime examples here would be the United Fund Drive (or equivalent) and the United Jewish Appeal (or equivalent). Most participants are similar to members of institutional program linked or autonomous service group volunteers.

(b) *Specific Fund Raising Volunteers*: This kind of volunteer is involved in a fund raising effort for a more specific goal or purpose, such as in working with the Easter Seal Society, Heart Fund, UNICEF, March of Dimes, etc. Although most participants are similar to General Fund Raising Volunteers, volunteers for a specific kind of fund raising effort can include males, youth or the aged, lower socioeconomic status persons, etc. — unlike the usual situation for General Fund Raising Volunteers.

## CONCLUSION

When a broad view of voluntarism is taken, the major kinds of volunteers that can be identified are much more varied than usually considered under the heading of "volunteer." Some people wedded to an older and more traditional view of voluntarism, will find this broader view to be unsettling. Yet all of the foregoing kinds of volunteers can be clearly

demonstrated to fit into the voluntary, independent, non-governmental, noncommercial sector of society. Hence, a full and complete picture of volunteers and voluntarism in our society cannot ignore all of the facets discussed briefly above.

When people speak of "voluntarism", they often have in mind only one subtype of the typology presented here. They say "voluntarism" but *really mean only* "Service oriented voluntarism", or they really mean only "Issue/Advocacy voluntarism." Although these latter two types of voluntarism are probably the most *crucial* types of voluntarism in terms of unique functions for society, they are not *all* that is worth considering in the realm of voluntarism.

## REFERENCES

1. See, for instance, David Horton Smith with Allon Fisher, "Toward a Comparative Theory of the Incidence-Prevalence of Voluntary Associations in Territorial Social Systems," mimeo paper. Center for a Voluntary Society, 1971.
2. See David Horton Smith, "A Parsimonious Definition of 'Group': Toward Conceptual Clarity and Scientific Utility," *Sociological Inquiry* 37 (Spring 1967): 141-68; also, David Horton Smith, "Organizational Boundaries and Organizational Affiliates," *Sociology and Social Research* (July 1972).
3. See David Horton Smith, et al., "Types of Voluntary Action: A Definitional Essay," in David Horton Smith et al., eds., *Voluntary Action Research: 1972* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Co., 1972.)

