

# STRENGTHENING VOLUNTARISM IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

By Harriet H. Naylor

Just as it seems contradictory to have *government strengthening voluntarism*, probably no field of human endeavor has more ambiguity of definitions and confusion about meanings than voluntarism.

In 1969 I had published a small pamphlet which muddled the waters considerably because I thought I was coining the word *volunteerism* to add to *voluntarism* and *voluntary*, which are legitimate words. The double "ee" was meant to stress the importance of the individual's experience when he or she freely chooses to offer time and talents to help someone. That person - the volunteer - has remained the center of my interest consistently, whether I happen to be working in the private sector, as when I was with the National Center for Voluntary Action, or in the largest governmental department in the world, the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, where I am presently a bureaucrat.

## TREND TOWARD COOPERATION & COLLABORATION

First I would like to point out that there is considerable communication and collaboration between the private and public sectors, and the trend is toward more

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cooperating effort. A good deal of overlap occurs when a voluntary sector agency becomes supported by grants or purchase of service contracts using taxpayers' dollars. I applaud this "adhocracy" and only plead for more and better coordination and open communication.

Another area of ambiguity exists within the public sector in the varying concepts of the words *volunteers* and *voluntary services* sometimes within the same law, such as the Social Security Act as amended in 1974. Left over from the Harris Amendments of 1967 is the mandate to the states for the "use and training" of subprofessionals and "nonpaid or partially paid volunteers" in social services and assisting advisory committees for Title I (Social Services for Aging and Medical Assistance for the Aging); Title V (Maternal and Child Health and Crippled Children's Services); Title X (Services to the Blind); Title XIV (Services to the Permanently and Totally Disabled); Title XVI (Supplemental Security Income for those Blind, Aged or Disabled); and Title XIX (Medical Assistance). However, Title XX, signed last January, removed the mandate from Title IV A and repealed Title VI, substituting an organization structure requirement that a state's social service plan must show how "public and private agencies and volunteers" will participate in the delivery of services.

The Voluntary Service Act of 1973 legitimizing ACTION was the coalescence of a variety of governmental efforts to promote voluntarism which was promised in the Presidential Inaugural Address of January 20, 1969. The first step was the Cabinet Committee on Voluntary Action which George Romney headed, and which was appropriately housed in the Office of Voluntary Action in HUD. In February 1970, a voluntary sector wing, the National Center for Voluntary Action was formed.

The evaluation of governmental efforts included some support from HEW, exemplified by a pamphlet entitled "Small, Splendid Efforts in Voluntary Action" which brought me quickly to Washington to protest that voluntarism deserved more credit than that! Small, Splendid Efforts, indeed!

Actually there were Citizens Participation units in the Office of Education and in the National Institute of Mental Health, and a staff advisor in Social and Rehabilitation Services for brief periods. Now my office (the Office of Volunteer Development, HEW), is located in the Center for Advocacy for Vulnerable Persons, the Office of Human Development in the Office of the Secretary. In good company, I share information and support the efforts of my staff neighbors who deal with Consumer Involvement and Manpower and Office of Veterans Affairs as well as the larger units for children, youth, aging and rehabilitation services. We often note that their clientele and mine overlap in those instances when volunteering is used as an avenue toward employment; or as experiential learning and self testing; or as access to program planning and evaluation for those who have experienced the difficulties which our programs are being designed to alleviate.

#### GOVERNMENT CAN NOT DO THE JOB ALONE

As George Romney has so often said, *government cannot do the job alone*. A democratic society needs voluntarism in order to be healthy, just as the individual needs a chance to give as well as to receive. And, most importantly, all of us need a voice in what happens to us, whether we participate as a provider of services or as a recipient. No one knows what I want and need better than I do myself; and my neighbors, who know me, know what our community offers and have some very good ideas about how it could be improved. Unfortunately, money in the private sector is raised the easiest way, from people finding it hardest to pay, through payroll deductions. Decisions are not made on what the beneficiary wants, but the

wishes of the powerful people who control payrolls. The payers carry the heaviest tax load, proportionately, too.

This brought on the rationale underlying the New Federalism. This has been an accelerating expression of congressional determination to decentralize decision-making to the state and local governing bodies. The epitome of New Federalism is General Revenue Sharing which was renewed in the fall of 1976. Actually, in the first few years of operation, very little federal revenue shared with states and 38,000 smaller governments went to human services: less than 3% in the first year ending in 1973. But gradually the proportion for services rather than for things has been rising, partly because citizens have become involved in setting priorities.

During the same period, the Congress was increasingly disenchanted with assistance by categorical grants with all of the red tape and centralized accountability which categories require. The consumers were dissatisfied too because no one program format fits all situations. *We are seeing a reversal in accountability in this country from a p:ward to the federal government to outward to the voters*. Not all of us as private citizens are prepared for the decision-making opportunities that are ours. Volunteering is one of the best ways to develop the knowledge and skill required to make these difficult decisions. Where are the gaps and duplication, and what are the emerging needs in a shifting economy where services are becoming more usual occupations than manufacturing or farming?

In addition to General Revenue Sharing, New Federalism means support for urban development, rural development, manpower development (now under CETA, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act). Several counties and at least one Governor's Office have used these CETA funds to pay for volunteer administration through local Voluntary Action Centers.

Other "users" of volunteers include government departments of welfare, law enforcement systems, school systems, museums, civic, drama, music and arts groups. These developments have highlighted the importance of sound volunteer administration. Varied as these work settings may be, there are ideal basic practices for analyzing what needs to be done and dividing the responsibility between paid staff and volunteers.

Similarly we must divide the larger assignments between public and private

agencies under Title XX (otherwise known as the Social Services Act of 1974), Congress set a 2.5 billion ceiling on moneys for social services, but carefully excluded training for service providers, both staff and volunteer, from that limit. Training is a crucial part of keeping volunteers involved. And it is keeping volunteers, not recruiting them, which is the hard part of volunteer administration.

#### VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The HEW Office of Volunteer Development has designed a generic Volunteer Development System, applicable in all kinds of settings, in order to strengthen voluntarism. Not too different from employee turnover figures, volunteers do most of their dropping out early, usually in their first year. Much volunteer dropout could be avoided. When a volunteer drops out-or, what is even more likely, he is dropped inadvertently by an unprepared agency, he is a walking, talking witness to the failure of that agency to deserve support.

One of the large national users of volunteers has acknowledged losing 40,000 volunteers every year. Think of it! Forty thousand negative press agents loose in communities across the land! No wonder those who are concerned with philanthropy and fundraising are having a hard time. Fortunately, that agency is exceptionally forthright in facing and doing something to correct this problem. Their first step is to improve the paid staffing leadership for volunteers. We hope that our HEW Volunteer Development System will help them and all kinds of agencies to examine their volunteer experiences and to employ competent full time professional level leadership. (To obtain a copy of this system, write to the Office of Volunteer Development, HEW, South Portal Building, Washington, D. C. 20201).

The first task, more realistically, is to create a new climate of warmth and mutually satisfying respect for the time and effort of both volunteers and staff, so people will stay around long enough to progress to important leadership positions. Leadership of the highest calibre, constantly refreshed by continuing learning opportunities, is needed to face the complexities and scope of problems today as contrasted with our beginnings. A volunteer development system must become an integral part of the total service system, from the inception of new ideas, to changing policies and practices while operating a program, evaluating realistically all along the way.

Volunteers are free of job risk, unlike the paid staff, and free from jeopardizing their access to services they need, unlike the consumers. So they become a major resource for the planning process, too. In fact, much new legislation mandates citizen participation and a government voluntary partnership in support of local effort is typical of today's trends in voluntarism.

I would like to make a few comments about ACTION. This is one volunteer organization which is not taxing but is reinforcing philanthropic resources and I feel an imperative to clarify the agency's relationship to HEW, and to the voluntary sector. Firstly, and perhaps too simplistically, may I say I regard ACTION as I do the National Center for Voluntary Action (NCVA), as co-workers in the vineyard of supporting volunteering. In that sense, those two agencies, governmental and voluntary respectively, are producers of volunteers. In addition to Peace Corps, VISTA, Older Americans, and the student programs, ACTION has fostered the development of mini-projects with mini-grants, for local services on a project basis, and statewide programs through seed money for Governors' Offices of Voluntary Action. All have generated a great deal of volunteering for all human services. HEW generates some volunteers too, because we are stressing the importance of being a volunteer for human development. We are also urging programs which ameliorate serious problems to involve victims of those problems as volunteers in designing effective services and delivery systems.

As HEW, however, we are constrained by law from having any volunteers working within our offices by federal law (U.S. Code 31, Sec. 665b). But most of the programs we implement can use volunteer talents to extend and reinforce the paid staff at state and local levels. So, in that light, we are consumers of volunteers - not only the ones ACTION recruits and trains, or NCVA and its local affiliated Voluntary Action Centers refer, but also the ones we generate ourselves.

#### THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERISM

Nothing helps the self-image of a person more than being a successful volunteer, sure that what he is doing is important and needed. Social scientists tell us that low self esteem is the root of many social problems as well as individual and anti-social and self-destructive behavior at socio-economic levels. Volunteering as self-transcendence is an antidote. We are convinced it is right, not a privilege, because it meets a universal human need.

Much legislation has been proposed to encourage volunteering through tax benefits, both deductions and credits, but none has become law. The volunteers have not given these priority. The laws we have encourage service volunteering in health planning and resource development, public health facilities, public school parent advisory committees, rehabilitation, community development, veteran's administration hospitals, community services, Native-American programs, Head Start, Child Abuse Protection and Prevention, and Runaway programs. Even the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act, and all of the nutrition and planning services for the aged encourage volunteer involvement. The list is a long one!

Volunteering is encouraged by Civil Service as qualifying persons for admission to examination, if it is well documented as relevant and authentic. Citizens are urged to serve on dozens of kinds of advisory committees. Out-of-pocket expenses reimbursement is authorized for most of these and staff and administrative support is increasing. The Department of Labor has recognized volunteer administration as professional, not merely clerical work.

The volunteer, who gives his time for free, costs an investment in staff time for orientation, training, advice and support. That staff time is key to volunteer retention. Government volunteering offers a training ground for an informed citizenry, and positions of considerable influence for public policy as rewards. But the investment in staff support pays off as a multiplier of services rendered which no budget could provide. It also mobilizes community sympathy and support for good services, and creates ambassadors of good will which facilitate receiving systems for services to complement the delivery systems devised by the experts. *The individual volunteer becomes a leader for organized voluntarism - moved by compassion, educated by experience and capable of preserving the life blood of a pluralistic democratic society.* And government is finally beginning to realize how valuable he is!

The government is firmly committed to strengthening voluntarism through stipending volunteers in ACTION and by providing out-of-pocket and administrative costs in the Social Security Act as amended last year. The major difference at HEW is the perception of volunteering as a step into the mainstream - toward employment - as well as being an expression of natural human compassion. We are now charged with a system-

atic progression of volunteers into public policy making positions to plan for more effective services, freely mobile back and forth from governmental to voluntary organizations.