

Volunteer Bureaus – Priority Solutions

By Charles B. Spencer

During 1976, The Association of Volunteer Bureaus, (AVB), developed a comprehensive plan for its second twenty-five years of service. A core element of the plan is the strengthening and expansion of central services to member-organizations, and to the field. The precise form these services were to take was to be determined by member perception of service needs, this to be established, in part, by survey.

Last year's preliminary survey was designed to identify and prioritize issues affecting members in their conduct of community-based volunteer mobilization programs. As reported in Volunteer Administration, (Fall, 1977, "Volunteer Bureaus - The Critical Issues"), the top-priority issues proved to be: training needs; relations with public; United Way and community power structure; tax deductions and insurance for volunteers; volunteer experience on job applications; and increased citizen participation in government decision-making.

The question of how best to deal with the identified priorities was addressed in a follow-up survey conducted in Spring, 1978. The results are summarized in this article.

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Methodology - The AVB questionnaire provided (vertically) three alternative "solutions" for each of the priority-issues identified in the preliminary survey, plus additional space for a write-in solution of choice, (see Appendix). Members were asked to rank these solutions numerically in order of potential effectiveness. Solutions receiving 50% of the number-one choice vote were considered significant preferences.

Secondly, in order to determine constituency's views as to the direction AVB support-service should take, respondents were asked to rank, for all solutions, four "support possibilities", with additional space again provided for an alternate write-in of choice. The support possibilities were provided horizontally, and here, those receiving 35% of the number-one choice vote were considered significant.

The dual intent of the survey necessitated a relatively complex format. Accordingly, to minimize misconception as to the manner in which the questionnaire was to be filled out, an annotated sample answer was included in the instructions, (see Appendix). Subsequent examination of returned questionnaires indicated that the instructions had been understood and correctly interpreted.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although this survey required considerably more time and effort to complete than the 1977 "Issues" survey, 65% of membership responded - 84 Volunteer Bureaus (VBs) and Voluntary Action Centers (VACs). Results, as summarized below, were considered statistically significant.

Seventy-four percent of respondents wrote in a total of 169 alternate solutions and 81 AVB alternate support possibilities. In view of both the quantity and quality of response, AVB has concluded that respondents recognized the practical intent and applicability of the survey and expected practical use to be made of the conclusions.

Training. As practitioners of community volunteer mobilization, Volunteer Bureaus and Voluntary Action Centers (VACs) accept primary responsibility for self-training. With regard to the training of volunteers, they see their primary role as indirect, via helping agency staff working with volunteers to better perform the training function. In all areas of training, and in relations with public and community power structure as well, they believe that the most potentially effective form of Association support would be in the development, or improvement, of special instructional materials.

Tax Deductions for Volunteers; Insurance for Volunteers; and, Increased Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making. These three priority-issues are seen by VB/VACs as being resolvable only on the national level, and as requiring concerted, inter-organizational collaboration. Here, AVB's strongly-favored support role is in the promotion of and participation in such collaborative effort.

Volunteer Experience on Job Applications. To accomplish this objective, the direct approach ("sell local corporations, public & private agencies:), is favored over either legislative advocacy or development of community support for the concept. However, despite the fact that this issue is seen as requiring local initiative, the form of

support felt to be the most productive is helping to secure a national mandate through advocacy.

Survey Use. AVB is constituency-based. It considers that its practitioner-constituency, collectively, is the ultimate authority on its own problems, (and by extension, the problems of all VB/VACs). AVB believes that the 1977 and 1978 surveys have correctly identified the critical issues, developed workable solutions and provided clear-cut direction as to the central support most needed to bring about these solutions. Accordingly, the Association plans to devise appropriate responsive measures and include them in its central services provision.

SUMMARY DETAIL

Training Needs. In an introductory question, training needs were identified and prioritized. Considered most important is "training for agency staff using volunteers", (50%). Training for board members was rated most important by 11% of respondents, which as a write-in, was considered significant. Regarding training of agency staff, the most effective method, according to 58% of respondents, is by group seminars conducted by local VB/VACs.

Relations with Public. Four out of five members feel that regular media announcements of volunteer job opportunities is their most essential public relations vehicle. 50% of all respondents feel that assistance in this area should take the form of special instructional materials.

Relations with United Way. With most Bureaus and VACs funded in part or totally by local United Ways, development of this relationship is considered critical. The best way to bring this about, according to 50% of respondents, is by encouraging United Way of America to endorse this development, and communicate the endorsement to its member-organizations.

Relations with Community Power Structure. While obtaining partnership in community

planning and establishment of corporate relationships are also considered important, half of AVB members believe the best solution lies in getting community leaders to serve on VB/VAC boards and advisory committees. There is no clear-cut AVB support preference.

Tax Deductions for Volunteers, Insurance for Volunteers. Both of these issues, while clearly vital to increasing local volunteer recruitment, are considered incapable of resolution except nationally, and only by collaborative, inter-organizational legislative advocacy. AVB members want the Association to help bring about the necessary collaboration.

Volunteer Experience on Job Applications. While a third of member-organizations think legislative solutions would be most effective, more than half believe that the issue must be addressed directly, by "selling" corporations and other private and public agencies on the idea that it is in their own self-interest to recognize the professional relevance and applicability of pertinent volunteer experience. While assumption of an advocative role is viewed as the most helpful form of central support, analysis of comments suggests that the advocacy referred to is not legislative but rather a matter of consciousness-raising in all segments of the community, including that of volunteers themselves.

Increased Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making. Though again a local as well as national concern, three out of five members believe that the place to begin is on the national level--via advocacy of consumer representation on governmental committees. Comments on this issue reveal that whether viewed as a national or local priority, a collaborative effort is considered necessary to secure results.

AVB SURVEY # 2 - PRIORITY SOLUTIONS

Instructions for Completing the Questionnaire

(The circled numbers in these instructions correspond to the numbers in the sample form below)

A. Each form below deals with a specific PRIORITY which was identified by AVB members in the 1977 AVB Priorities Survey. "Training for Volunteers" ① is the Priority in the sample form below. For each Priority three solutions ② are offered, plus a space for you to write in an "other" ③ solution that you think would apply to the Priority need.

RANK EACH OF THE SOLUTIONS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE. Use 1 as the most important and 4 as least important. WRITE IN THE NUMBERS IN THE BOXES TO THE LEFT OF THE SOLUTIONS. ④

B. Methods which AVB can adopt to assist you in achieving the solutions are listed across the page under AVB SUPPORT POSSIBILITIES ⑤ (Individual Consultation, Regional/National Workshops, Special Instruction Materials, National Advocacy, Other).

FOR EACH SOLUTION, RANK THE AVB SUPPORT POSSIBILITIES IN THE ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE TO YOU. If you feel that AVB should use a method other than the four possibilities given, please specify the "Other" support possibility in the space provided on the right. ⑥

① TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS		⑤ AVB SUPPORT POSSIBILITIES (Rank for Each Solution Horizontally)					⑥ Specify "other" Below on Correct Line
2 SOLUTIONS (Rank "Solutions" in Boxes Below)	Individual Consultation	Regional/ National Workshops	Special Instruction Materials	National Advocacy	Other		
3 In Curriculum - Schools, Colleges, Graduate Schools	2	3	1	4	-		
4 Seminars by State Volunteer Commissions	-	-	-	2	1	AVB Direct Approach to State Volunteer Commissions	
1 Workshops by Local VBs/VACs	3	1	2	-	-		
2 Other (specify): Better Training by Agency Volunteer Supervisors	3	1	2	4	-		

APPENDIX
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