THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

A preview of the report on the National Forum on Volunteerism, sponsored by VOLUNTEER: The National Center for Citizen Involvement and Aid Association for Lutherans.

VOLUNTEERING HAS BEEN part of the American heritage ever since Paul Revere took his famous midnight ride more than 200 years ago. Today, forty million Americans volunteer a portion of their time and energy to help others each year, but that figure may be dwindling in the next ten years unless specific steps are taken to counter several economic and social challenges. To wit:

- Changing attitudes, values and lifestyles have affected the willingness of citizens to volunteer.
- Inflation, the energy crisis and the growth of litigation have the same devastating impact on volunteer-involving organizations and agencies as they do on other institutions.
- The resistance of paid helpers and of policy-makers to the full involvement of citizens creates barriers that may drive volunteers away.
- Critical shifts in the balance of our three-sector society lessens the impact citizens have on decision-making.

Such issues and problems facing the volunteer movement were the basis for ten hours of in-depth discussions by a panel of distinguished Americans participating in the National Forum on Volunteerism on April 18-19 in Appleton, Wisconsin.

The National Forum is an ongoing effort to identify and examine those factors in society that will have a critical impact on the ability and willingness of citizens to volunteer in the coming decade. It applies a corporate planning model to consideration of the volunteer community's future. It seeks to focus public attention on the critical role volunteers play in our society and to stimulate thoughtful consideration of the future of citizen involvement in the America of the 1980s.

The National Forum is cosponsored by VOLUNTEER: The National Center for Citizen Involvement and Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL). VOLUNTEER is a national resource organization for the volunteer community, providing a wide variety of training, technical assistance and information services for citizen groups, private and public agencies, organizations and corporations. It is a strong, visible advocate for effective citizen involvement in problem-solving and policy-making.

AAL is the nation's largest fraternal benefit society, with over 1.2 million members in more than 5,200 local branches. These branches, led by volunteer officers, conduct over 66,000 community activities annually to help AAL members, their neighbors, families and community-at-large.

The convening of the panel of distinguished Americans was the third in a four-step, interrelated process that began in early 1979 when two distinguished practitioners, researchers and authors in the volunteer field—Gordon Manser of the Academy for Educational Development and Harleigh Trecker, professor emeritus of the University of Connecticut School of Social Work—were asked to identify factors they believed would have the most significant impact on volunteering in the '80s. Together they produced a tentative list of eleven priority factors.

The National Forum's second step consisted of analyzing each factor and researching them to determine proba-

(The ultimate product of the National Forum on Volunteerism is what VOLUNTEER Executive Vice President Ken Allen calls "an environmental impact statement" on volunteerism. This report features highlights of the Forum process, which combined scholarly study with informed observations of recognized leaders in the volunteer community. Here we present excerpts from the report. A complete copy will be available after October 1 for $3.00 from Volunteer Readership, PO Box 1807, Boulder, CO 80306).

ble future developments and to suggest possible impacts of these alternative futures on the volunteer community. This work was done by Jon Van Til, associate professor of urban studies and community development at Camden College of Rutgers University, and Ivan Scheier, founder and president emeritus of the National Information Center on Volunteerism (now VOLUNTEER). It was Scheier who came up with a definition of "volunteering" to serve as a common base of understanding among participants. He wrote: "Volunteering is any relatively uncoerced work intended to help and done without primary or immediate thought of financial gain."

The panel of distinguished Americans participated in a think-tank session focusing on the future of volunteering in America. It reviewed the results of the first two steps and discussed how the volunteer community could prepare for the future to insure the continued effective involvement of citizens in problem-solving activities. The panelists were:

- Raul Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza
- Jean Childs Young, chairperson of the U.S. National Commission on the International Year of the Child
- Marlene Wilson, volunteer management consultant and author of *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*
- George Romney, board chairman of VOLUNTEER, and former governor of Michigan, secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and chairman of American Motors
- Doug Mosel, human relations and organization development consultant
- Martin Koehneke, AAL's senior vice president of fraternal operations
- Sydney Harris, syndicated columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*
- John Dutton, AAL's assistant vice president of branch development
- David Durenberger, U.S. Senator from Minnesota
- Joyce Black, volunteer activist and board member of more than 35 local, state and national private and public agencies
- Arnold Barach, retired editor of *Changing Times* and immediate past president of the National Mental Health Association
- Kerry Kenn Allen, executive vice president of VOLUNTEER

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The panel's remarks were videotaped so that excerpts can be made available for the Forum's fourth step: to report the conclusions of the panel to other local, state and national organizations—including government, business, organized labor, media, philanthropy as well as the voluntary sector—so that they may join in the search for a better understanding of ways to involve Americans effectively in the solution of public problems.

There was no effort during the first three stages of the National Forum to create a firm consensus on more than the issues to be discussed. Indeed, participants recognized from the start that the primary result of the process might simply be to raise critical questions for others' consideration. Nevertheless, several broad themes and general conclusions did emerge:

First, volunteering remains a critically important element in society; the effective involvement of citizens is critical to the solution of problems that plague our citizens, our institutions and our government.

Second, the ability and willingness of citizens to volunteer is critically influenced by other factors in society, including inflation, energy shortages, the resistance to volunteers by paid helpers, the growing role of government in service delivery, actions by employers that either encourage or hinder participation, and a whole range of personal factors caused by changing values, expectations and lifestyles.

Third, the volunteer community—that combination of volunteers, concerned citizens, volunteer-involving organizations, resource organizations and volunteer managers committed to increasing the level of citizen involvement—is a critical factor in society and, if properly organized, can exert a counter-influence on the critical involvement factors.

Fourth, institutional barriers to effective volunteer involvement exist. Such barriers may reflect an inherent conflict in the concept of unpaid work in partnership with paid workers and/or reflect an unwillingness on the part of those in power to allow citizens to assume full responsibility for and control over their own lives.

Fifth, volunteering by definition is a means through which citizens gain power; as such, it plays a critical role in preparing citizens to assume broad decision-making roles in the community.

Sixth, the volunteer community must seek to build positive working relationships with and among the other institutions of society, including business, organized labor and government. It must offer a viable alternative to the increasing power of those institutions.

Seventh, the public must be better educated about the importance of volunteering to a free society, to its impact on problem-solving and to the individual and communal values implicit in citizen involvement.

Eighth, volunteer leaders and administrators must actively prepare for the future, must create appropriate planning strategies and must seek to create and maintain coalitions and collaborative activities that will increase the strength and effectiveness of the volunteer community.

On Planning for the Future

Writing of his own biases, Jon Van Til sounded an appropriate word of warning for those who seek to apply the work of futurists to their own lives: "I seek to be as objective as possible in describing [alternative] futures, but the values that underlie my conceptions of future goods and evils surely provide an element of subjectivity, to which the reader might choose to respond by clarifying his or her own preferences about the American

future."

Sensitivity to these issues permeated the whole National Forum process. The purpose was clear: to create a body of data and opinion about the volunteer community, its relationship to the rest of society and those critical factors in the environment which markedly will affect volunteering and citizen involvement in the 1980s. Forum planners and participants viewed their work as being the first step in a continuing process of study, planning and maturation of the volunteer community.

In the rationale for his selection of critical environmental factors in the next decade, Harleigh Trecker established the following framework for planning by volunteer leaders and administrators by asking, "What must I know and understand about the environment of the 1980s to function at my optimum as an administrator of volunteer services?"

1. I must understand *how many people* we will be serving. This crucial factor is essentially demographic and sketches out population trends and projections.
2. I must understand what is happening in the places *where people live.* Thus, factor number two is essentially a discussion of urban, suburban, exurban, rural and regional patterns of life and change in lifestyles.
3. I must understand what people *do,* how they earn their livings under great inflationary pressures, the stress of rapidly changing workforce and shifting work patterns. In academic terms, this is probably economics.
4. I must understand what is happening to the *feelings, attitudes, and values* of many people as *conservatism* and *tax revolt* forces gather momentum. I must confess that I worry about this, because I am fearful that we will lose essential life support services—services that must be paid for in some way.
5. I must understand the way we *govern* ourselves, and the changing roles and responsibilities of local, state, regional and federal levels of government. Are we to be governed by the unequal weight and clout of pressure groups, and if so, what about the redistribution of power?
6. I must understand what is happening on *education,* for as Jefferson pointed out long ago, education is essential to the success of democracy. Yet education is in trouble today. Unless I know what and how people are learning, I am unable to grasp their conception of the community and their place in it.
7. I must understand the long neglected millions of *minority* people in our country, the discouraging slowness of providing equal opportunities for all, and the potential explosiveness of neglect.
8. I must understand the essential importance of *volunteerism* in our society. There are important changes taking place in volunteerism. They are a part of the changes that are occurring in every phase of life. Volunteerism, as we know it now, will face new challenges and competition in the years ahead.
9. I must understand that many of the *human and social problems* of today, and certainly of tomorrow, are new and much more complex. Solutions to them are sadly lacking in terms of basic research into causes. The human sciences, while progressing somewhat, have a long way to go.
10. I must understand the *societal, organizational and technological changes* that are taking place and will continue to take place even faster. These changes have had and will have an enormous influence on everyone. While this factor is last on my list, it is only because the effect of these changes often is not felt for some time. But it is best to be prepared.

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Demographics and Lifestyles

In the 1980s the United States will experience a continued decline in the birthrate ... a decrease in the proportion of youth ... an absolute and proportional increase in the number of elders ... increasing life spans ... more rapid growth in nonwhite populations ... growth in the South and West that will be roughly twice as fast as that in the Northeast and North Central states ... increase in the number of elders in the workforce ... continued growth of metropolitan areas but continued decline in the populations of central cities. On these kinds of demographic factors, there was virtual agreement among participants in the National Forum process.

Similarly, there was virtual agreement on the implications of such changes for the volunteer community: less emphasis on programs for youth and a potential serious decline in the number of youth volunteers, greater efforts to create preretirement volunteer experiences, the need for rapid growth of volunteer support structures in the "Sun Belt," potentially harmful fragmentation of volunteer efforts between the central city and the suburbs, greater attention to self-help volunteer opportunities.

But when these demographic trends were translated into projections of changes in lifestyle, agreement ended. Each forum participant had a unique perspective in viewing the future world.

Manser and Scheier, for example, focused on the growth in the number of elders and the potential accompanying problems. Manser noted, "Because of its programs of health care and education, the United States has generated the largest population of able, educated elders of any nation on earth. At present, our youth-oriented society has been able to provide few opportunities for retired people to contribute constructively."

Scheier echoed this view, expressing concern that the ultimate result will be an increase in the segregation of elders from the balance of society. "Minorities and the elderly are the most prominent increasing groups," he wrote. "Minorities have been subject to segregation, some imposed and some self-chosen. Older people have begun to cluster into subcommunities of their

own. Other groups—ethnic, youth and women—have in the past shown a tendency toward separation."

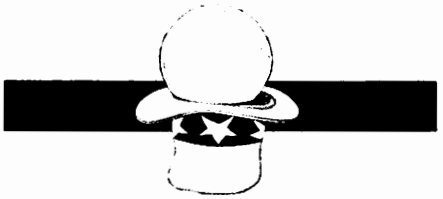
Scheier also related the growth in the elder population to the increasing pressures of inflation and the inability of elders to maintain an acceptable lifestyle. Will the result, he asked, be a demand for expanded public employment opportunities for those on fixed incomes or some version of a "national service" program that will offer both youth and elders the opportunity to participate in community service activities while supplementing their inadequate retirement income? If so, where will the concept of unpaid work fit into this mix? Will these new forms of paid work substitute for volunteering or be seen as an extension of it?

Fred Kile, describing the potential for social stability in the decade ahead, viewed elders as a key stabilizing force. Other such forces, in his view, include the reduction of the "youth bulge" in the population and the attendant increase in those who fill roles as "social managers," reduction in mobility caused by rising energy costs, and the continued expansion of telecommunications and computer technology into everyday life.

Of the several participants who believed that the 1980s could be a time of growing neighborliness and positive human interaction, Kile perhaps best described the possibilities:

> Environmental concerns and the do-it-yourself movement are keys to a new vision for the '80s. Deterioration of the environment, toxic chemical problems and uncertainties about nuclear power all contribute to new lifestyles in which people "go back to the old ways." As people occupy themselves with these concerns, they are less likely to be part of more frantic mass activities which tend to destabilize, rather than to integrate, society. Close-to-home activities have the potential to build community at lower levels of society and to forestall some of the destabilizing alienation characteristic of mass society.

Inherent in the discussion of demographic and lifestyle changes were the concerns voiced repeatedly throughout the forum process that there will be an increasing fragmentation of society, a growth in self-interest among groups with essentially "single-issue" agendas and a decline in the broader concept of citizenship in the public or community interest. Volunteering can become a prime integrating force, drawing citizens from diverse interest areas together around common concerns, or it can simply be defined as those activities pursued by citizens searching for their own ends with few common or complementary goals.



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Obstacles to Effective Involvement

The act of volunteering is the result of a relatively complex set of interactions of needs and resources. On the one hand there is the community and its problems. Each problem is addressed by a variety of institutions, agencies, organizations and ad hoc efforts. Each of those structures then has an attendant set of needs, for financial resources, for professionally skilled personnel, for community support, etc. These needs may be filled by full-time paid professionals, by members of boards of directors, by citizens who volunteer their time and energy.

On the other side of the "volunteering transaction" is the volunteer. He or she presumably is desirous of providing needed assistance, filling one or more of the broad community needs or specific organizational needs. But the volunteer also has needs. Some are common to all people—the need to be valued, the need to feel that they are performing a needed act, the need to be recognized. Other needs may be highly personalized—the need of the recently divorced or widowed to reenter the social life of the community, the need of youth to test career alternatives, the need of the elderly to remain in the mainstream.

The most positive, effective volunteering happens when these two sets of needs overlap, when both the community/organizational needs and the volunteer needs are being met at least in part. Such a situation is difficult to create. It requires sensitive volunteer management, the full empowerment of volunteers in defining their own skills and requirements, the willingness of paid helping professionals to accept volunteers as valuable, skilled participants in the helping process. Such a situation should be the goal of every organization or agency that seeks to involve volunteers in its work.

Unfortunately, barriers to such a mutually beneficial relationship between volunteer and organization remain. The result is that volunteer energies are too often underutilized and volunteers too often drift away from jobs that they find frustrating and meaningless. During the National Forum process, three primary obstacles to effective volunteer involvement were discussed: the resistance of paid helping professionals to volunteers, the concern of organized labor with the role of volunteers and institutional barriers within the volunteer community itself.

The most critical problem is the first. In field after field of volunteer endeavor, the refrain from volunteers and volunteer managers is the same: the major barrier to effective volunteer involvement lies in the inability or unwillingness of paid helping professionals to accept volunteers as legitimate partners in the helping process. Such resistance is so pervasive that generally it is unquestioned by the vast majority of volunteer leaders and administrators in the United States.

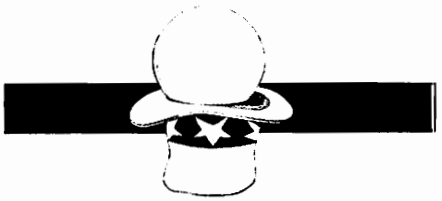
There has been, up to now, the blanket assumption that such resistance is the product of the personal attitudes of helping professionals. These attitudes include the ill-defined professionalism that dictates that only those who are specially trained can provide human services, an insecurity about their own jobs or capabilities, fear that volunteers will act as monitors and evaluators of their efforts,

fear that in times of budget reductions they may be replaced by volunteers, and ignorance about the capabilities and commitment of volunteers. A landmark study in Great Britain suggests that the resistance may be the result of organizational factors as well. Thus, such factors as structure of the agency, the function or workload of the professional and the status of the professional relative to his or her working environment may be as meaningful as basic attitudes about either the helping process or volunteers.

Ivan Scheier suggests that this issue will escalate dramatically in the 1980s in response to three stimuli: First, reductions in public expenditures will focus "threatening attention" on volunteer replacements for staff or as substitutes for additional needed staff; second, volunteering will be linked more closely to paid employment; third, highly effective staff support for volunteers will be even more critical as such factors as inflation and the energy crisis force "volunteer dropout."

Scheier goes on to explore five potential future outcomes as this issue is dealt with either through benign neglect or an active attempt to address it:

- Some agencies will be successful in applying relatively short-term strategies to offset lack of staff support for volunteers and to recruit and retain volunteers. These might include better staff training and/or the development of a concrete reward system for those staff who work well with volunteers.
- With the encouragement of the volunteer community, the educational system will increasingly incorporate material on volunteerism at all levels, thus better preparing helping professionals to work with volunteers.
- The inflationary squeeze on dollars available for human services will prompt public and private funding sources to institute policies of "matching citizen participation;" that is, the requirement that donees match financial contributions with volunteer hours and demonstrate widespread community support through the involvement of volunteers.
- There will be a significant exodus of volunteers from programs primarily devoted to the delivery of human and social services. Simply put, fewer and fewer volunteers will be willing to accept staff indifference.
- Some parts of the helping establishment will move to a position of active critique of volunteerism as a means of rationalizing and defending both their resistance and the inevitable loss of volunteers.



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A second obstacle to effective involvement is the resistance of organized labor to volunteers. It is, in many ways, a direct outgrowth of paid staff concerns and of the natural desire of unions to act to protect the interests of their members. As Senator Durenberger pointed out, issues of "economic security" are particularly important during difficult times of inflation and the threat of serious recession. There is the inevitable pressure of those seeking to enter the workplace, the concern of those who are employed that they will either be unemployed or find themselves severely underemployed, and the outrage of those who are forced out of work at the idea that they can or should be replaced by unpaid help.

Members of the panel were virtually unanimous in their agreement that the replacement of paid workers by volunteers is a reasonable, legitimate concern of organized labor. At the same time, they expressed their belief that there must be expanded exploration of alternative delivery systems for human and social services, whether it be through nonprofit organizations or through the profit sector.

Central to the resolution of this problem, they felt, was the acceptance of the idea that volunteers ideally should not replace paid workers; rather, as Jean Young put it, "Volunteers should supplement and enhance basic services." While this has been a commonly held belief in the volunteer community and has been accepted as an operating principle, it is clear that the changing nature of human services is calling it into question. When funds are cut back, when services are reduced, Marlene Wilson asked, "What happens to the clients? Do the volunteers just walk away, refusing to be replacements?"

Most importantly, it was agreed that the whole matter of the relationship between the volunteer community and organized labor had been left in limbo for too long. Any priority agenda for the coming decade must include active discussions, relationship-building and collaboration with organized labor to bring resolution to this difficult problem.

Finally, the panel examined the institutional barriers that exist within the volunteer community itself. One of these, certainly, is the very existence of structures through which people are expected to volunteer. Through much of American history, volunteerism was characterized by spontaneity, quick reaction to new needs and a certain laissez-faire attitude on the part of program leaders and administrators. Has the emergence of volunteer management as a career and the development of sophisticated structures and systems stifled the creative energies of citizens who wish to volunteer? Are volunteer coordinators as much an inhibitor as a facilitator of volunteering? These questions remain open.

The panel identified a series of related obstacles which may frustrate volunteers and deprive the community of their full talents—questions of liability, insurance, inability to provide reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, confidentiality and accountability; demands for credentials to perform certain functions; limits to the types and levels of jobs available to volunteers; a lack of recognition of the capabilities and experiences volunteers may bring to the job.