

# RECRUITMENT: A SUPERMARKET of VOLUNTEERS

By Carol L. Barbeito, Ph.D.  
and Robert Hoel, Ph.D.

**R**ECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS — the right kind and the right number — is invariably a problem. Agencies tend to issue general appeals for volunteers, usually resulting in a less than satisfactory response. Often the only people who respond are “traditional” volunteers who would have signed up anyway.

The traditional volunteer has been the white, middle class, married woman between the ages of 25 and 44 whose available time is often limited by family demands, including the need to be at home after school or to accompany her husband on trips. She is usually from the middle to upper income bracket and has a college degree. Her volunteering is often with church groups or other organizations which help her attain social status and recognition for herself or to assist her husband or children. Her male counterpart is the volunteer who works in upper or mid-level management or other professional positions whose voluntary activity often serves to enhance his employment situation.

Traditional volunteers continue to make contributions of great value. There is an increasing demand, however, for greater numbers of volunteers and a perceived need for a greater variety of volunteer skills and backgrounds. In addition, there is a growing public recognition of the spirit of volunteerism as a unique aspect of American life. With that recognition comes the realization that many segments of American society have been left

*Dr. Barbeito is executive director of the Mental Health Association of Colorado. Dr. Hoel is an associate professor of marketing at the College of Business, Colorado State University.*

out of the volunteer movement. Therefore, it is essential to reach out to *all* population segments to extend and develop the volunteer movement. To do this, we need to employ more sophisticated recruitment techniques.

Marketing experts claim that nonprofit organizations, such as volunteer agencies, should adopt marketing techniques and fundamentals now employed by commercial firms. They argue that both commercial and nonprofit agencies are basically in the business of persuasion, but that commercial firms have developed their persuasive skills more fully than nonprofit groups. Nonprofit organizations should examine the commercial sector to gain insights into how they may become more effective and efficient.

## What is Marketing?

According to Phillip Kotler, a leading marketing authority, “marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives.” Seasoned volunteer leaders examining this definition may judge it to

be compatible with their concept of an effective volunteer recruiting effort. Many agencies, after all, devote much attention to the careful development of recruiting programs.

Solid program development is superior to earlier efforts of “digging up volunteers wherever we find them” or “waiting for potential volunteers to fall through the door.” Many volunteer programs, however, should not be labeled effective marketing programs because they do not incorporate basic marketing principles.

## Target Markets

Commercial marketers realize that appealing to “the average consumer” is usually ineffective in today’s economy. There are too many competitors aiming at this consumer, who is inundated with commercial and noncommercial messages. Furthermore, the needs, wants, and income and time limitations of consumers vary greatly.

Marketers are often better off dividing the mass market into specific population subgroups called market segments. They study each market segment carefully and select key segments or target markets on which to focus their appeal.

**“... there is a growing public recognition of the spirit of volunteerism as a unique aspect of American life. With that recognition comes the realization that many segments of American society have been left out of the volunteer movement.”**



Then they develop products, services, advertising and store locations to appeal to their target markets.

If the marketer effectively pursues a target market approach, consumers in the target group realize that the product or service offered better suits their needs than does a marketer's appeal to the typical consumer. The result is customer patronage. Many retail clothing merchants, for example, have become highly successful by specializing in large sizes and appealing to "full-figured" women. And the success of jeans stores across the country is another example of the profitability of offering products designed for a target market — the 15 to 28-year-old.

These fundamental principles of market segmentation and target marketing should be built into the recruiting plans of volunteer agencies. Potential volunteers — like consumers — are a diverse lot. Their needs, interests and talents vary so that specialized appeals to get markets will produce better results than general appeals.

### **Nontraditional Volunteers: Neglected Market Segments**

The ACTION survey, "Americans Volunteer, 1974," reveals that the largest potential volunteer group is among the 72 percent of the population over 13 years of age who have neither volunteered nor ever considered volunteering. To reach these people, we must know how to appeal to their motivations and develop special supports to overcome the prob-

lems which may prevent them from volunteering.

The survey showed, for example, that more young adults than any other age group volunteered because they hoped it would lead to a paying job. More teenage volunteers cited high transportation costs as a reason why they did *not* volunteer. Financial reasons may also account for the fact that the volunteer rate for nonwhites is almost half of the volunteer rate for whites. The pattern indicates that volunteerism goes down as income goes down.

Nontraditional volunteers make up a vast neglected market target for recruitment. As possible market segments, they include men who wish to become involved in a more direct service experience, patients, handicapped, low-income and minority people, singles, students, young married couples, teens, the elderly, the unemployed and probationers.

### **No Charity, Please**

Central to contemporary views of marketing is the notion that marketing involves an exchange of value among all parties. A disabled client gives her or his time and effort because of the benefits derived from the experience, such as possible employment, a higher sense of self-worth, or greater physical competence. The volunteer coordinator also gains in the transaction. He or she may receive a salary and deep personal satisfaction in exchange for his or her efforts.

But why do people volunteer? Is it a sense of duty to their fellow man or com-

munity? Or is it a desire to express religious or philosophical traditions?

Marketers are prone to scoff at charity as a reason or motivation. The word implies that people give up something in return for nothing — a rare occurrence in the commercial and social market place. Nonprofit organizations must recognize that the volunteer experience is a way of fulfilling basic human needs. And it is this fulfillment that draws people into volunteer experiences and keeps them there.

Human needs can be classified in a variety of ways. The following list is one of many which may be used by marketers:

**Survival** — the need for nourishment, shelter, warmth, etc.

**Emotional security** — insulation from basic fears of not being accepted by peers and from affronts to one's self concept.

**Sense of self-worth** — the need to feel of value to one's self and others.

**Creative outlets** — the need to express one's self in unique ways.

**Love objects** — the need to experience intimacy with human beings and nonhuman beings.

**Power** — the need to control one's environment and to avoid a feeling of helplessness.

**Sense of roots** — the need to identify with one's history, tradition, family, or other stable factors in his or her environment.

**Immortality** — the need to avoid eternal oblivion, to live longer, or to be young.

**Sex** — the need to perpetuate the race and find expressions of deep sexual feelings and needs.

The products and services people buy at least partially satisfy one or more of these needs. A consumer does *not* simply buy baking products to "bake a cake." Baking products help satisfy needs for survival, a sense of self-worth as one becomes "a good cook," emotional security in the perceived role as a "good homemaker," creativity, and a sense of roots as this product contributes to happy family gatherings around the dinner table.

The marketer needs to look below the level of everyday consciousness and discover the real reasons a purchase is made. After perceiving the relationship between basic human needs and a product, he or she can use this knowledge in creatively advertising the product, displays, packaging, and personal selling. The marketer knows he or she is not selling a product as much as demonstrating need fulfillment.



**“Nontraditional volunteers make up a vast neglected market target for recruitment.”**

An organization that recruits volunteers must recognize its role in meeting basic human needs. The popularity of volunteerism is not simply a fallout from religious tradition nor is it an accident of nature. The appeal of volunteerism is powerful. For example, volunteers may enhance their sense of self-worth as they assist others. Volunteers may be provided with creative outlets as they search for methods to solve client problems. Volunteers may form close personal relationships with clients, such as the young boy who becomes a love object for his foster grandparent.

Solving people's problems and showing ways out of useless modes of behavior provide the volunteer with a sense of power. Finally, "making the world a better place to live" gives the volunteer a modest opportunity for immortality as the products of his or her actions may stretch beyond his or her lifetime.

The role of volunteerism in meeting the volunteer's basic human needs should be stressed to all people in volunteer organizations. These needs should be constantly in mind when talking to prospective volunteers. The positive personal benefits of donating one's time to the task at hand should be emphasized. If the volunteer job is well designed, there is no need to approach potential volunteers apologetically or to play the role of beggar.

### The Volunteer Calls the Tune

During the last 25 years marketing in general has shifted in emphasis from a "selling" concept to a "marketing" concept. The selling concept largely involves pushing the specific products that the factory builds. If a factory produces purple refrigerators with small freezing compartments, the marketer sells that item even if the consumer is not keen on buying a refrigerator with these features.

The marketing concept rejects the notion that the factory should determine what the consumer buys. Instead, firms are now intensively studying consumer needs and desires. From these analyses come ideas for new products, services, advertising programs, distribution outlets, etc. Full implementation of the marketing concept results in the consumer shaping all the activities of the supplier. Factories produce what the consumer wants and is willing to buy. Shipping departments transport goods on the basis of consumer needs. As Marshall Field often said, "Give the lady what she wants," or

as others have said, "The consumer calls the tune."

Volunteer organizations should adopt the marketing concept. Administrators should carefully analyze consumer needs and design their programs with the volunteer in mind. They should tailor job descriptions to reflect consumer desires. They should base their publicity programs on an analysis of potential volunteers.

The organization should neither merely *sell* volunteer opportunities nor communicate these opportunities the way *it* thinks best. Marketing, at its core, is democratic—not elitist or dictatorial. The potential volunteer should call the tune, and the organization should respond to the volunteer on the basis of his or her wants and needs as they relate to the organization's total objectives.

### Developing The Marketing Plan

The starting point in developing a marketing plan is to review marketing principles and techniques. A few central issues have been explored here—a definition of marketing, market segmentation, need fulfillment, and the marketing concept. Additional information about marketing principles can be found in Phillip Kotler's book, *Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations* (Prentice-Hall).

Second, the volunteer organization should assess its current marketing efforts. It should review recruitment objectives, and organizational strengths, weaknesses, and resources. Other organizations competing for volunteers should also be examined. A major part of the assessment involves the study of present volunteers in the system—who they are, how they became volunteers, why they volunteer, and their impressions of the organizations.

Third, sound marketing planning requires a study of potential market segments to which the organization may appeal. The organization might consider

factors such as age, sex, socio-economic status, occupation, race, life-styles, geographical location and attitudes toward volunteering.

As the organization identifies various marketing segments that exist in their community, it should estimate the numbers of people and the percentage which might realistically be expected to volunteer if an effective marketing program is developed. Also, it should ask such questions as: Why might they volunteer—what's in it for them? What do they now do with their potential volunteer time? How do they decide to volunteer, find alternatives and make commitments? Who influences their decisions?

These questions are best answered by actually talking to members of the target markets. Full scale formal interviews with statistical analysis might appear desirable, but they certainly *aren't* necessary. Indeed, simply knocking on doors, visiting with members of organizations, and chatting with target members during their lunch breaks can provide valuable insights. Denver area high school students, for example, were informally interviewed recently. Video tapes of these discussions were shared with volunteer leaders who subsequently concluded that conventional recruiting techniques would not be very effective in reaching this target market. The students indicated

**“Nonprofit organizations must recognize that the volunteer experience is a way of fulfilling basic human needs. And it is this fulfillment that draws people into volunteer experiences and keeps them there.”**



that they would respond best to appeals from their own leaders, especially athletes, and almost all said that general appeals through the media were dismissed as relating to someone else. Recruitment would have to take place in the school.

After careful review of promising target markets, the volunteer organization must select the segment it wishes to pursue and tailor specific marketing programs to attract volunteers from these segments. Program decisions may be divided into four major groups: product, communication, price and logistics.

Product decisions involve the types of volunteer tasks or jobs to be presented to a target market. Consideration should be given to the variety of jobs offered, the name of the organization sponsoring the program, the quality of volunteer experiences offered, and the back-up support services provided to the volunteer.

Communication includes advertising, personal contact with potential volunteers, publicity, booklets, mailers, seminars, and speeches to organizations. Communication should be evaluated in terms of its ability to reach and persuade target markets. In a rush to attain publicity coverage, it is all too easy to forget that daytime television public service announcements rarely reach white collar workers, and articles in the morning newspapers are not read by many teenagers.

Pricing includes monetary outlays expected of the volunteers. For many these expenditures are inconsequential. But for some target markets, such as teenagers and seniors, transportation costs and the purchase of uniforms, equipment and supplies are of considerable significance. Other pricing variables are the amount of time and energy required.

Logistics include locational proximity of the volunteer jobs, the location of volunteer recruiting offices, the territorial boundaries of coordinators, and the agencies and organizations cooperating in volunteer recruitment.

The final marketing plan should reflect a careful blending of product, communication, price and logistics factors which will appeal to the target market. This integrated plan should be designed to achieve specific objectives. A schedule for implementation is necessary, and program execution must be monitored and evaluated to assure satisfactory achievement of the objective. The end result will be greater effectiveness in attracting both traditional and nontraditional volunteers.

# A SELECTED READING LIST ON RECRUITMENT

**Basic Tools for Recruitment.** Council For Community Services, 64 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604. 1975. unpagged portfolio. \$2.70 (includes book rate postage).

*Includes general tools for recruitment, a bibliography and special materials on the Black volunteer, the American Indian and the previously uninvolved.*

"How to Get a Man," **Voluntary Action Leadership**, Fall 1975. National Center for Voluntary Action, 1214 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 5 pp. \$1.00.

*A step-by-step outline of a successful drive by a Voluntary Action Center to recruit male volunteers from local business and industry.*

**Increasing Volunteer Participation: Innovative Projects In Two Communities.** National Center for Voluntary Action, 1214 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 1976. 27 pp. Single copy free, additional copies \$1.00.

*A description of the efforts of two Voluntary Action Centers to recruit previously uninvolved people as volunteers, with particular emphasis on minority and low-income people.*

**Manual for Volunteer Coordinators.** Los Angeles Voluntary Action Center, 621 S. Virgil Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90005. 1969. Third printing, 1976. 24 pp. \$2.50.

*Fifty volunteer directors combine their thoughts on volunteer administration. Includes information on recruiting nontraditional volunteers and on involving men.*

**Recruiting Low-Income Volunteers: Experiences of Five Voluntary Action Centers.** National Center for Voluntary Action, 1214 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 1973. 23 pp. \$5.00.

*Reports of programs in five cities designed to encourage the recruitment and placement of volunteers from poverty neighborhoods.*

**Recruitment, Training and Motivating Volunteer Workers.** Arthur A. Pell. Pilot Books, 347 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10016. 1972. 62 pp. \$2.50.

*Discusses recruiting techniques with particular attention to special groups, such as men, teenagers and retired people.*

**Recruiting Volunteers: Views, Techniques and Comments.** National Center for Voluntary Action, 1214 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. 1976. 24 pp. \$1.50.

*A manual focusing on various points of view on recruitment campaigns. Includes an array of recruiting techniques.*

**The Volunteer and Community Agencies.** Thomas A. Routh. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 301-327 E. Lawrence Ave., Springfield, IL 62717. 1973. 85 pp. \$6.50.

*This book provides guidelines for the formation of a relationship between a client, an agency and a volunteer. The chapter on recruitment lists over 100 sources of potential volunteers.*

**Volunteer Coordinator's Guide.** Center of Leisure Study and Community Service. Univ. of Oregon, Dept. of Recreation and Park Management, Room 180 Esslinger Hall, Eugene, OR 97403. 1970. 61 pp. \$2.00 plus \$.50 postage and handling.

*Covers the major areas of volunteer coordination and administration with a section on recruitment.*

**Volunteer Training and Development: A Manual.** Anne K. Stengel and Helen M. Feeney. 1976. 216 pp. \$12.95. Order from: Volunteer, PO Box 1807, Boulder, Colo. 80306.

*A guide to planning and conducting learning and development programs for and with volunteers. The chapter on recruitment includes a discussion on various recruitment methods and checklists and charts to aid the recruiter.*

**Volunteers Today: Finding, Training, and Working With Them.** Harriet H. Naylor. 1973. 198 pp. \$5.00. Order from: Volunteer, PO Box 1807, Boulder, Colo. 80306.

*A comprehensive treatment of volunteerism which includes chapters on recruitment and motivation.*