



TRAINING PROGRAM LOGIN

[News and Hot Topics](#) » The Great Divide: Leaders Who Are Paid and Leaders Who Are Volunteers

The Great Divide: Leaders Who Are Paid and Leaders Who Are Volunteers

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

October
2002

I just returned from Mexico City where a conference about museum volunteering brought me face to face with one of the recurring issues in our field: the disconnect between those who are paid to be coordinators of volunteers and those who, as volunteers themselves, lead other volunteers. Present were full-time volunteer program managers who recruit and place volunteers in their museums and presidents of volunteer councils (or other names), self-governing groups of volunteers who operate inside and outside their museums in a wide variety of activities.

All-volunteer groups and leaders exist in settings other than the cultural arts, of course, notably hospital auxiliary officers; service club and fraternal association presidents; leaders of “friends” groups assisting libraries, parks, and other programs; heads of volunteer emergency response teams; etc. Frequently there are also paid coordinators of volunteers operating in the same environment. So the issues I’m about to discuss affect many people.

Intellectually, everyone at the conference could agree on the common denominators of our roles. Whether paid or unpaid, we all share such mutual tasks and concerns as recruiting volunteers (even if some of us call them “members”), designing work for volunteers to do, keeping them motivated, recognizing their efforts, etc. We also sensed that we all belong to that vague territory we call the “volunteer community.” Yet, despite all we have in common, often we found ourselves operating from quite different perspectives.

What concerns me is the too-frequent underlying tension that exists between the two “sides.” I have heard volunteers disdain the “need” for a paid coordinator and I have heard paid managers bemoan the “problems” of dealing with volunteer leaders. Just as we have long recognized the critical issue of volunteer/employee relationships within our organizations, it’s time to acknowledge our own inability to work together as colleagues in this field as successfully as we might.

The Roots of Tension

With due acknowledgment that what I am about to say does NOT apply universally, the traditional all-volunteer association is in trouble. Even if some groups are presently viable, their long-range future outlook is not rosy. Many are “aging in place” without attracting new or younger members, let alone any type of diversity. They are recycling officers because few members want to take leadership roles. Their projects and amount of money raised are in a downward spiral. Understandably, volunteer leaders are defensive about this situation, especially if they cannot see alternatives to future survival.

It often happens that a paid coordinator of volunteers position is developed by the institution long after the all-volunteer support group has been active – sometimes in reaction to the diminishing returns of the old system. A disproportionate number of these paid management positions are filled by people who honestly don't have much in common personally with the leadership volunteers they inherit.

I have to admit that, in my experience, the volunteers who lead all-volunteer groups (at least, those groups most connected to institutions, such as auxiliaries, friends, or docent councils) tend to fit many of the stereotypes about volunteers that most of us have been fighting forever. These volunteers tend to be women, middle-aged and older, married, well-to-do, and often proud of not being career oriented. Historically, it was exactly this sort of volunteer who was the powerhouse of social change, using her prestige and contacts to influence key (male) decision-makers and raise large amounts of money. And some still do just that. However, the world has changed around many of these volunteers, who do not necessarily feel inclined to change along with it. So, the paid volunteer program manager and volunteer leader are out of sync with each other.

The seeds of discontent are sown by unwitting executives who add the new staff position without any clear explanation of what will be expected in terms of coordination and cooperation between the new employee and the pre-existing volunteer leaders. In some cases the new in-house volunteer office is given no authority (or direction) to deal with the all-volunteer group. The two programs are left to their own devices to work out a relationship and bump against each other trying to co-exist. And if it's an ex-volunteer association officer who is hired as the new employee, all sorts of additional friction emerges (especially if no additional training is offered to help the ex-volunteer learn the scope of the new role).

Consequences

What are some of the consequences of not working together? Here are a few I've observed:

- The volunteer program manager is seen as competition, siphoning off younger, more diverse people from membership in the volunteer association. Of course, it is also felt that such “temporary” volunteers aren't the sort of folks the association wants anyway!

- The volunteer association officer assumes a hierarchy in which s/he is on the top and views the volunteer program manager as administrative (largely clerical) staff. Because the volunteer program is structured so radically different from the volunteer association, the officer does not see ways the program manager might be a resource to the association.
- The volunteer program manager assumes a hierarchy in which s/he is on the top and views the volunteer association as an irrelevant (or irritating) appendage. Because the volunteer program is structured so radically different from the volunteer association, the program manager does not see ways the volunteer association officer might be a resource to the in-house program.
- The division between what are essentially all institution supporters confuses the community. Debate ensues over whether or not all “volunteers” should be required to “join” the all-volunteer association or be automatically considered members.

I'm sure you can describe other scenarios – and hope you'll share your experiences by posting a response.

What Can We Do?

Very few forums have been able (or even try) to address the needs of both “halves” of our world. Officers of all-volunteer groups rarely join local associations of directors of volunteers. Volunteerism books tend to take one or the other perspective. Once in a while an article from the “other side” turns up in a journal and occasionally a conference workshop presentation is offered that hints at the broader picture. There are practical reasons for this lack of connection, including how hard it is to find and market to volunteers who rotate out of office regularly, have other priorities in their lives – including other careers - beyond their volunteer leadership identity, and whose availability to network is predominantly evenings and weekends – the opposite of the schedule preferred by full-time volunteer program managers.

But I am convinced that we must make the effort. What we share in common is more critical than what separates us. We are all devoted to the success of our causes and we all know a lot about leadership styles. It drains time and energy to be fighting each other, especially as we would be so much stronger together. I have been tilting at this windmill for a long time and still haven't found the key, even in terms of how to make this website truly useful to every leader of volunteers, paid or not.

How have you educated yourself about “the other side”? What resources would you like to see to help collaboration? What has worked in your organization to connect paid and volunteer leadership?

Related Topics: [Museums and Historical Societies](#) | [Leadership](#) | [Volunteer Resources Manager, Role of](#) | [Profession of Volunteer Management](#) | [Salary Ranges in the Field](#)

Submitted on 3Jan03 by Pamela Rout, Wild Canid Center, Eureka Missouri

I completely agree with Susan. I am a new education/volunteer coordinator at an organization that has about 100 volunteers. My predecessor let the volunteers do whatever they wanted and now I have to

lay down authority because they dislike being "managed" and the President is constantly disobeying me. thanks for writing the article, its good to know that I am not alone.

Submitted on 30Oct02 by Betty Stallings, Trainer/Consultant, Pleasanton, CA

In my experience, I would note 5 commonalities in groups that successfully combine an overall salaried leader of volunteer programs and an existing membership group giving service to the institution:

1. Prior to hiring the salaried leader of the overall volunteer program, a task force made up of leadership of the membership group and other voices such as someone in administration, staff who are champions of volunteer engagement in the institution and others give input as to the nature of the position. Thus there is clarity of expectation understood throughout the institution prior to the hire.
2. The current membership group agrees to do an assessment (with the aide of an outside facilitator) to determine current member satisfaction and impact on the institution. The results are given back to the group in a retreat format where the focus is to determine their vision for the future, any barriers they perceive in reaching it and plans to diminish those barriers. They explore many options and decide if they wish to continue to operate as they have been or make any changes. This gives them a chance to decide on their future, while acknowledging implications of the decision.
3. The salaried Manager of Volunteer Resources sees the membership group as one means of serving the organization and supports them in reaching their vision and goals while simultaneously developing numerous additional options for folks to serve the institution in other capacities, not requiring membership.
4. Specific tasks and assignments of service to be provided by the membership group are initially defined as the work they contribute to the institution. If there comes a time when the group can not provide volunteers in these capacities, other non-members can fill the positions.
5. A volunteer advisory council is developed with representation of the variety of volunteers serving the institution (membership, interns, groups, individual service, etc.) the purpose being to enhance the over-all volunteer service to the institution and to determine ways to join together in training, orientation, etc., to better utilize resources and time of volunteers and staff.

Submitted on 24Oct02 by Heidi Walker, Coordinator of Volunteer Resources, Natrona County Public Library, Wyoming, USA

I'm the new Coordinator of Volunteer Resources at the same public library where I was on the Friends board for about 10 years. The Friends have become almost solely devoted to doing a booksale, generating \$30,000/yr, but taking a tremendous amount of year-long work. This leaves out other members who would love to help in the actual library, and that is where my new (paid) position came into being. It's actually a different function, trying to involve the general community in "their" library. I heard from some Friends' board members that there was opposition to my new position since it could "steal" people from their group! I've been trying to overcome this fear in many ways,

including being open and helpful with them, even sending volunteers to them if that is their interest! We've made progress, I think, and now I even have used "my" volunteers to help with a large mailing for the Friends. I think that some of the opposition comes from a misunderstanding of the role of a true "coordinator of volunteers" vs. working with an all volunteers group with one purpose, such as fundraising. I hope that ours will end up a model of cooperation in the library setting, but it will take time to evaluate that!

Submitted on 7Oct02 by Mary Ryan, Manager, Community Resources, Southlake Regional Health Centre, Ontario, Canada

Oh Susan you have definitely struck a cord! I have wrestled with this issue for the past 4 years in my role as a manager of community resources in a hospital. Sometimes it has been good, sometimes bad, depending on who was the auxiliary president and/or membership of the Executive. I believe the root of this issue is related to boundaries and the strategic planning sessions we have held with a facilitator have been helpful. However, I am still dealing with a group who once had a great deal of power and are finding change extremely difficult. Even though a primary focus and "areas of excellence" were clearly identified both for the auxiliary and our department at the strategic planning session, it is difficult to make this a reality. I am continuing to focus on the mission of the organization and encourage our auxiliary to do the same so that time and energy is not spent on negativity or "push/pull" behavior. However, even with the support of our administration it is a difficult road to hoe and I am interested in other detailed responses of how change occurred to create a "win-win" situation.

Submitted on 5Oct02 by Evelyn Ewing, Lakeview Village, Lenexa, Kansas

Although I am now a Volunteer Manager Consultant, for the last ten years I was the Volunteer Director for a large retirement community that had a Volunteer Program run by a 20 person Volunteer Committee. There was a very small number of active volunteers outside of this committee. When I was hired, the administration wanted a strong Volunteer Coordinator to guide the Volunteer Committee, take the very damaging control away from the committee, and yet keep the 20 member committee as volunteers and create a Volunteer Department that would allow everyone to volunteer from the resident population.

The barriers of resistance to a hired Volunteer Director took a total of three years to overcome. However, by the end of this 1994, everyone on the committee was a strong supporter of the Director and the change that was occurring. At the end of 2002, there are over 109 volunteer positions, 400 resident volunteers, 1500 youth volunteers in a strong national award winning Intergenerational Volunteer Program, and an ever increasing community volunteer program with approximately 70 community volunteers per year.

Breaking down the walls and barriers were accomplished by the golden rule of giving unconditional love to each and every potential volunteer and specially to those of the 20 member committee.

Submitted on 5Oct02 by Wendy Moluf, Director of Servant Development, First Presbyterian Church, Mount Holly NJ, USA

You didn't mention churches as all-volunteer organizations, but I think generally they are. I am an anomaly of sorts in the church world since I am paid (a little!) as a director of volunteers for our Presbyterian church. I myself started as a volunteer. We also have many unpaid leaders of volunteers on our ministry teams. I have had mixed success with fulfilling my role - which I see as providing support to these volunteer leaders in the areas of recruitment, training, evaluation, recognition, etc. Some welcome my help and others basically do things as they always have. My sense is that one thing that makes volunteer leaders different from paid ones is that they have less time to give to this work and so doing things the "right" way often simply looks to be more time-consuming.

What I have done to counteract any negative interaction is to make sure I communicate regularly with my leaders. I try to provide lots of recognition for their efforts and trainings to help them with skills needed for their work with volunteers. I am about to implement a new team of "Connectors" who will serve as liaisons between my team and these leaders and am hoping this will improve communication even further. I can't do my job effectively without their support - and vice versa!

Submitted on 5Oct02 by Hortense Casillas, Los Angeles County, California

I have been volunteering in a variety of activities for the past 35 years without pay and many times as a leader. I have been very fortunate to work under the direction of paid volunteers and have truly enjoyed every minute of it. It was very rewarding since I was learning from the paid volunteers. I do recall several instances where some of the other volunteers were uncomfortable with this situation, however, once we focused on the project and overall mission of our effort it all became doable and satisfying.

Submitted on 4Oct02 by Mary B. O'Brien, Director, Volunteer Services, Lowell General Hospital, Lowell MA

I comment only about my own 22 years of experience as a Director of Volunteer Services in two different hospitals. From the very beginning, back in 1980, the roles of the paid DVS and the unpaid Auxiliary President have been separate but cooperative. We have helped and learned from each other. Both positions have been evolving over many years to the point where the dividing line here seems to be that the DVS manages all in-service volunteers and the Auxiliary President manages events involving the community or being run by the hospital's development/philanthropy staffs.

As a DVS who gives 100% I am impressed and inspired by the Auxiliary President and Board who put their hearts and souls into "their" hospital, and all gratis. If, as you say, the "seeds of discontent are sown by unwitting executives who add the new staff position without any clear explanation of what will be expected....." then I would suggest that the new employee make haste to join an organization of peers. In my case that would be the American Society of Directors of Volunteer Services. These organizations have much to offer the new as well as the seasoned professional -- including a network of people who care. Call 312-422-3939 and let ASDVS help you!

Submitted on 02Oct3 by Donna W. Koons, Director of Volunteer Services, North Mountain Campus - John C. Lincoln Health Network, Arizona, USA

I am the paid Director of Volunteers for one of two hospital campuses in our John C. Lincoln Health Network. On this campus we have a thriving Auxiliary! Our network is celebrating 75 years of service to the community and our Auxiliary is celebrating 50 years of service. And yes, our Auxiliary pre-dates our official Volunteer Services Department. We are blessed with several full and part-time paid staff members of this department who are passionate about what they do, but even more valuable are the many officers and chairmen of our Auxiliary who allow us to extend our services far beyond what we could do alone. While it is usually a challenge to recruit Auxiliary leaders, we all work hard to ensure this symbiotic relationship is a success.

Here are some of the ways we make sure we collaborate:

- We have monthly meetings with the Director of Volunteers, the Auxiliary President and the President-Elect where daily operations and future planning are discussed.
- Our Auxiliary President meets quarterly with the Director of Volunteers and the VP to whom the Director reports.
- The Auxiliary President is included as a member of the Leadership Council which meets quarterly. This body consists of all department directors and some area supervisors.
- The Auxiliary President also sits on the Foundation Board of Directors, ex officio, and as a voting member of the Network Board of Directors.

Submitted on 01Oct02 by Susan LaPat, Volunteer Coordinator, Contra Costa County Library, California, USA

I am the paid Volunteer Coordinator for a library system comprised of twenty-three branches. All but one of these library branches has a Friends of the Library or Library Foundation group of volunteers. In addition, two of the libraries have paid, part-time Volunteer Coordinators and two have volunteer Volunteer Coordinators. I am pleased to say that I have developed a very positive relationship with all of these individuals and groups.

I believe the reason we work together so well is that we each have different functions and responsibilities: the branch Volunteer Coordinators are the experts on their communities and volunteer needs; the Friends of the Library groups have fundraising and financial support functions. My role is to provide the groups and individuals with information and assistance in program planning, developing training materials and volunteer job descriptions; assist with recruitment and recognition; and, maintain statistical information. We meet quarterly to share information and ideas and to receive training on topics of interest to all. The individuals and groups involved feel supported and respected for their contributions to our organization.

Comments from Readers

Submitted on April 15th, 2016

Melissa Betts, Director of Children's Ministries, Cullman FUMC, Cullman, AL, United States

I am the Director of Children's Ministries at a medium/large church. I have been in this church for 6 1/2 years. I thank you for this article and the responses posted. I inherited two weekday programs with paid directors and staff, hired a nursery coordinator with paid staff for the church, a Children's music director. I supervise all of these directors. I also have a leader of preteens who is a unpaid "staff/volunteer", preschool music leaders who are volunteers, a county wide weekend feeding program (which I started) runs with only volunteers, and the volunteers who work on Sunday and weekday service times and special event volunteers.

I feel my department is so "fragmented". We are not working as one body, one department. I am working on setting up a quarterly staff and volunteer staff meeting once a quarter. I need ideas to bring unity to our department.

PRIVACY STATEMENT

Energize, a program of Adisa <https://adisagroup.com/>

Follow us   

Copyright © 1997-2025