LEADING TODAY'S VOLUNTEERS

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1
THE NEW VOLUNTARISM

a. A HERITAGE OF OPTIMISM AND ENERGY

People have always come together to get jobs done. Sharing equipment and labor at barn raisings or harvest, or combining resources in banking, housing, or retail cooperatives are traditional ways people help each other and achieve mutual goals. By sharing not only tools and time but also ideas and interests, people have a voice in choosing which job they do and how they do it.

Many of our social institutions had similar origins. Some were designed to care for children, for the sick, aged, or otherwise disadvantaged. They evolved from religious or community-based charities into today’s hospitals, settlement houses, or social service agencies. Others, like universities, were planned to meet educational needs or to help members deal with mutually held concerns in fellowships, fraternities, leagues, and alliances such as guilds, trade and business associations, and labor unions.

Reasons why people get together vary, but there are some important common characteristics. A group of people —

- identify a need,
- agree on a way to meet that need,
- invest time and probably money with no expectation of pay, and
- work together to alter the status quo.
These people are volunteers: they believe in their collective ability to change their community; they exemplify an attitude and style of action basic to the democratic process. They are the people who change our world.

b. TODAY'S VOLUNTEERS

1. Giving freely

Dictionaries define a volunteer as one who offers a service or duty of his or her own free will. Voluntary work is given freely, without compulsion: it is intentional and, in most interpretations, unpaid. It is, in fact, a form of philanthropy involving time and talent instead of money. But volunteer time does have a measurable dollar value in terms of service performed. And it does contribute substantially to the gross national product via services rendered, paid work generated, and jobs created.

Most people have to work to make a living. When they offer their free time and unpaid labor, their choices tell us what matters most in their communities. Professional service providers and planners in government and the social service sector should take note.

When is work volunteer work? The variety of volunteer activities make it hard to categorize. Points of view vary; the term “volunteer” is anathema to some, carrying class-related or economic connotations. For others, the word evokes a long and honorable tradition. In either case, the meaning of voluntarism in the modern world is changing.

Informal volunteer work goes on every day as people occasionally help out neighbors, friends, or others in a personal and spontaneous manner. Advocacy and other forms of social action may also have an informal, unstructured aspect. Spontaneous protests or short-term, ad hoc groups form around a single issue and attract highly motivated people for periods of intense, focused action. This includes volunteers who walk in to a response center to offer assistance in the course of a public emergency such as a flood, a forest fire, an earthquake, or a search for a lost child.
However, most “volunteer work” as it is usually understood is carried out within an organization or agency and is scheduled or planned in advance.

Some volunteering traditionally goes hand-in-glove with charity, which is itself defined as giving voluntarily to those in need. But charity has lost its biblical significance as an expression of love and instead can mark recipients with the stigma of dependency and loss of choice. People have an acknowledged right to government programs and services for which they qualify, but not to charity.

Not all people who work without pay think of themselves as volunteers. They tend to do work that is not focused on individuals, but considered of benefit to the community as a whole; for example, managing a local school board or being a member of a board of directors of a facility or public service agency.

Some people volunteer but are paid for their time from another source such as a corporation, a local business, or a school, or they receive some other form of credit for their volunteer time.

Who volunteers and where they direct their time and energy seems to be a reflection of the times; what needs to be done as well as who is deemed the appropriate person to do it.

Some forms of volunteering carry more status than others. The volunteer work traditionally carried out by women (e.g., bake sales, child care, or personal service) is not high status. Such work does not have the prestige of board membership, for instance, with its connection to policy and management.

2. Who volunteers? And why?

North Americans are increasingly involved in volunteer activities. Almost half of adult Americans and one third of Canadians are active volunteers. Most volunteers are between 30 and 50 years of age and they contribute an average of five hours per week, but voluntary action by young people is on the rise. Over one third of Americans between the ages of 15 and 29 volunteer regularly.
Women still volunteer more often than men, but more men volunteer than you might suppose, given that conventional wisdom tells us they have more interest in business than in volunteer activity. When men do volunteer, they are more likely than women to be employed full-time. Young people who volunteer are likely to also work part-time. An increasing percentage of people who volunteer do not speak English as a first language.

Contrary to what you might expect, people who are employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force volunteer at about the same rate. The fastest growing category of people who volunteer are those who are employed part- or full-time; they make up almost two-thirds of the total number of volunteers. Fully three-quarters of volunteers hold full-time paid jobs. Women who work outside the home are more likely to volunteer than those who do not.

Why do people volunteer? Whether male or female, and whatever age, most volunteers give similar reasons. They say they like to —

- Help others
- Help a cause they believe in
- Do something they like to do
- Develop their ability to relate to and care for others
- Do work that benefits their children, family, or themselves
- Give something back to the community
- Feel they accomplish something
- Achieve personal growth
- Meet people and find new friends
- Use their skills in a new setting
- Learn new skills
- Find challenge in new experiences
- Gain work experience
• Network
• Demonstrate commitment to and further their career goals

People want new experiences, new friends and colleagues, challenges, personal development, career contacts, and especially new skills. But people also have a range of reasons for volunteering that relate closely to personally held goals and values. They are concerned about the quality of life in their community. They want to participate in a meaningful way, give something back, improve the community by identifying new social issues and gaps in services, and they feel they can have a direct and personal impact on their world. Volunteering provides a channel for skills, aspirations, interests, and concerns that may not have an outlet in their work or home life.

3. Which organizations use volunteers? And why?

For years, volunteers have been a mainstay of social, recreational, and health services. They supplement the efforts of paid staff in schools, child care, family and women’s centers, recreation and rehabilitation centers, halfway houses, prisons, hospitals, and a myriad of programs and projects. With increasing public debt and decreasing government funds at both the national and local level, volunteers will continue to fill the gap and meet the demand for health, housing, educational, and other social services.

These types of organizations use volunteers for different kinds of work:

(a) Religious — volunteers take responsibility for services, music, teaching, summer camps, food, and shelter

(b) Leisure, recreation, and sports — volunteers maintain parks, playgrounds, and arenas; work at festivals, fairs, and exhibitions, help with gardening, photography, and community events like rodeos and marathons; volunteers also referee, coach, or manage local sports
(c) Education and youth development — volunteers organize Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Cadets, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, home and school associations, serve on university and college boards, and help with nursery schools, libraries, school trips, and tutoring programs.

(d) Health and wellness — volunteers work with major health-related organizations concerned with diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer’s, cystic fibrosis, and heart disease; work in hospitals, residential centers, drug or alcohol addiction, first aid and ambulance service, and assist seniors in the community.

(e) Social services — volunteers plan, fundraise, and set up facilities and services for the homeless, adolescent mothers, abused women, troubled youth, immigrants and refugees, single parents, the terminally ill, and victims of sexual assault.

(f) Societal and public benefit/human rights groups — volunteers work with organizations such as the Junior League, volunteer bureaus, social planning council groups to advance human rights and justice issues for women, youth, people with disabilities, language and other minorities, or fire fighters and other emergency measures groups.

(g) Employment or economy — volunteers work with business interest groups such as boards of trade, employment counseling, job finding, consumer protection, credit unions and consumer cooperatives, tenant associations, and labor unions.

(h) Arts, culture, and humanities — volunteers work to establish and run historical preservation societies, museums, galleries, libraries, theaters, music and dance studios, photography and film groups, community newspapers, community television and radio stations, boards of art and literary councils, and ethnic organizations.
(i) *Environment and wildlife* — volunteers set up and work within projects involving conservation of resources, pollution issues, wilderness and wildlife protection, animal care and protection, and recycling

(j) *Law and justice* — volunteers organize victim support, crime prevention, offender and ex-offender services, and provide legal services and education

(k) *International* — volunteers organize and support projects to aid prisoners of conscience, distribute food, provide disaster relief, and work toward nuclear disarmament and peace

Clearly, many organizations have good reason to appreciate the work of volunteers in their ranks. Whether they are board members acting at the policy level or providing direct services to clients, patients, participants, students, members, or others, volunteers are essential to the continued operation of established agencies and associations and for the development and fostering of new ones.

Effective volunteer involvement is also a dramatic statement about the level of commitment and support the program has in its community. This type of demonstrated support increases the organization’s credibility and is increasingly important to funders. Volunteering also increases personal giving. In these ways, volunteer programs can further the work of the organization in ways that go well beyond the tasks performed by the volunteers.

Why do organizations use volunteers? Because volunteers are vital to the achievement of organizational goals. Volunteers —

- serve as policymakers, advisers, advocates, fundraisers and managers, and service and support providers

- take initiative in the development of “leading edge” services
• enhance the ability of agencies and associations to provide personalized help, especially in terms of labor-intensive services such as personal care, counseling, or transportation

• take responsibility for or assist with a range of administrative and planning tasks such as office work, training, or fundraising

• act as a link to the community served for purposes of feedback and other support including lending legitimacy to the organization

• donate money as well as time and energy

• attract other volunteers, for example, friends and neighbors, to the organization

c. TRENDS AFFECTING VOLUNTARISM

1. Changes in the population profile

Nothing is more fundamental to anticipating numbers and types of volunteers as knowing the population from which they are drawn. A number of shifts in the make-up of our population base have already begun; other significant changes are still on the horizon.

(a) The "baby boomers"

The most conspicuous feature of the North American population is the number of people born between 1946 and 1966. These are the "baby boomers," born after the end of World War II. Their lifestyles and other preferences helped establish the catchwords by which we identify each of the decades since they came of age in the "radical" or "swinging" sixties and moved on to become the "me" generation of the 1970s.

The economic impact of this group was notable, particularly as they began to marry and raise families in the consumer-driven "yuppie" 1980s. They affected housing and automobile markets and demanded services such as schools, then university places,
for their children. The baby boomers are, on average, better off than the generation before them and probably better off than the generation following them.

They also are active citizens who are accustomed to political expression; they have economic clout and they represent the core of the tax base. Because of their numbers, the economic and employment choices they make, and the attitudes and values they espouse, they will continue to have a major impact on North American society.

Studies show that volunteer interest and commitment increases with age, peaks in the middle years, and declines toward old age. Given that the majority of the baby boomer generation is about to reach middle age, it is probable that the rate of volunteer involvement will continue to climb over the next decade.

(b) An aging population
Since the post-war baby boom the birth rate has fallen. At the same time that people are having fewer babies, they are also expecting to live longer. The number of middle age people will continue to increase over the next decade. In 20 years, the number of people between 50 and 65 will be 80% greater than it is today.

What impact will this shift have on the voluntary sector? We can assume there will be active, educated, and motivated older people interested in volunteering. Because women have longer life expectancies, a high percentage of the retired population will be female. We can also be sure there will be greater demand for health services, financial pressure on pension plans as more people draw on them and fewer people pay into them, and shifts in employment and retirement policies to accommodate an older working population.

(c) An increasingly diverse population
Consider the following:

- Currently in Canada, nearly one third of population growth is accounted for by immigration. In major urban
areas, more than half of school children speak a language other than English at home.

- In 1990, 25% of people in the United States were people of color. It is projected that by 2030 people of European origin will be a minority.

Clearly, service and advocacy organizations must incorporate increasing numbers of the cross-cultural community, both as staff and volunteers, in order to remain relevant in our society. Diversity on this scale is not only a challenge, it is an opportunity. The cultural, religious, and educational priorities of members of these minority communities will affect the volunteer choices they make. Their presence will influence what volunteer services are required and how they are delivered. These people will also provide a new and growing volunteer base to assist with the development and maintenance of such services.

Another major demographic trend is the increase in the number of women in the workforce — presently about 45% of employed people. Both parents work in more than half of two-parent families. And two-thirds of working mothers have preschool-age children. Women, whose values and concerns have achieved new definition in the voluntary sector, tend to support a slate of social issues that include child care, personal safety, poverty, and equity issues such as equal pay and access to promotion. Increasing numbers of women in the workforce, combined with the impact of immigration and increasing numbers of cross-cultural groups, makes the involvement of women in culturally appropriate ways even more vital to the success of volunteer services in our communities.

Methods of recruitment need to be adjusted to attract people who reflect the make-up of the community served. But the first step has to do with a declaration of values and commitment on the part of the organization. Policy needs to be clearly articulated by volunteer and management leadership; it must be put into practice so that diversity is achieved in staff, volunteer, and organizational structures as well as client base.
2. Economic stress

Beginning in the early 1980s, governments began to cut back social service and health expenditures and coincidentally, financial support to agencies and communities alike. Growing national debt has become an election issue at the national level and public spending is being limited, decreased, or reallocated at all levels of government. At the same time, poverty, unemployment, and homelessness are on the increase.

The impact on the voluntary sector is twofold: money to fund services has diminished and demand for services has increased. When funding is available, it tends to be short-term or project-specific. For the non-profit sector, restraint is the “new reality.” So is pressure to increase the volunteer base of services for which additional funding is hard to find.

Fundraising is more essential than ever and a recurring item on the agenda of agency boards. Directors, staff, and volunteers alike participate; professional fundraisers are being hired by larger agencies with the financial base to support such a plan. For more information about fundraising, see Fundraising for Non-Profit Groups, another title in the Self-Counsel Series. In the U.S., visit a Foundation Center Library or one of its Cooperating Collections for free information on funders and fundraising. In Canada, contact the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy. (See the Bibliography and Resources sections at the back of this book for more information.)

3. Volunteer organizations as corporate entities

The increase in economic pressures and the will to “pick up the slack” of services cut by government or divested to the private sector has applied intolerable pressure to the traditional non-profit organization. Not only has demand increased and resources declined, but the pace and dimension of change has escalated markedly in the past decade.

In order to survive, voluntary organizations have had to look to their internal structures. Organizations must now update, redesign,
and strengthen themselves in response to changes in service delivery. The pattern for this change has been the business and corporate model. More and more, non-profit agencies and organizations look to the private sector for models of organizational structure and operational style. Even titles are changing to match the business world as agency “directors” become “presidents.” For better or worse, the move was prompted by serious deficits in non-profit sector leadership, management skill, financial and decision-making accountability, and appropriate employment practices.

Structural and functional changes are more than cosmetic; voluntary organizations are coping by taking some, if not all, of the following steps:

(a) **Honing fundraising skills.** The ability to raise funds to support the organization’s work is key to survival. Non-profits are now diversifying their funding sources and employing a sophisticated range of money-raising campaigns, strategies, and techniques that reach individuals, professional and charitable organizations, businesses, corporations, levels of government, and foundations.

(b) **Becoming more entrepreneurial.** Organizations are rethinking options, identifying marketing opportunities, forming partnerships and joint ventures, and challenging conventional wisdom with innovative ideas on ways to support the organization by marketing products, services, and skills and selectively charging for services.

(c) **Emphasizing planning, both strategic and operational.** Organizations are creating or making use of existing environmental scans and watching for elementary shifts and trends in population, government policy, and the economy that may have an impact on their services. There is an increased emphasis on evaluation, not only of services provided, but of individual performance.
(d) **Using new technologies effectively.** Non-profits are installing software tailored to program needs, using email and the World Wide Web, and developing customized management information systems to support their operations.

(e) **Developing human resources.** Organizations are employers as well as service providers. The economic significance of the voluntary sector as an employer of paid staff continues to grow as does the economic value of the unpaid work of volunteers. Non-profits have responsibilities related to fair wages, benefits, and employment equity related to gender, ethnic, and cultural background and disability.

(f) **Training staff and volunteers.** In order to improve service delivery and organizational management, there is a new emphasis on learning in the workplace. Organizations are facilitating the acquisition of specific skills, from computer use to conflict resolution; they now endorse a broader concept of individual professional development.

(g) **Developing basic management skills.** Organizations are emphasizing efficiency and accountability via financial management, program evaluation, marketing and public relations, fundraising, supervision, planning, and accounting. New areas requiring creative leadership include the management of endowments and investment income, negotiating contracts, working effectively with a unionized employee base, and acting as a liaison with the community, professional and other groups, funders, and government.

(h) **Acknowledging the value of both policy and direct service volunteers.** Recruitment, selection, placement, training, appreciation, and volunteer satisfaction are high on the agenda of organizations that will thrive in the next decade.
4. New stakeholders in voluntarism: government, business, and labor

The voluntary sector is now recognized as a major participant in today's society. Non-profit organizations large and small, rank fourth behind government, business, and labor in terms of number of people employed. New relationships are developing among these confederates, each with its separate culture, constituents, and goals.

(a) Government

The voluntary sector and government at its various levels share goals related to the public good and operate on the basis of public, not individual, gain. In the pursuit of joint goals, government funds a range of fundamental services administered by non-profit organizations. During the 1980s and 1990s, in Canada and the United States, government continued the privatization of many social and health services it formerly administered.

Governments also modified their relationship with the voluntary sector in several important ways. First, it involved volunteers, both at the organizational and community level, in the examination of social problems, using consultation to test social and economic policies.

Second, it increased the direct involvement of volunteers in programs delivered by government. Some examples of volunteer-intensive programs are victims' assistance programs, crime prevention initiatives such as Neighborhood Watch or Block Parents, and disaster response involving fire, earthquake, flood, and air/sea rescue.

Third, government adopted policies and set up departments for the purpose of promoting and encouraging volunteering. In April 1997, the Points of Light Foundation and the Corporation for National Service co-sponsored the Presidents' Summit for America's Future. This event brought together Bill Clinton and several former US presidents in order to publicize and promote voluntarism. It was a clear signal that government wants to
encourage the trend towards thinking of social welfare as the responsibility of the voluntary sector, and less that of government.

Increasingly, government acknowledges the autonomy of the organized voluntary sector, its positive contribution to the public interest, and its value as an "early warning" mechanism to identify new issues as they emerge at the local level. At the same time, government at its various levels becomes the target of much of the advocacy undertaken by non-profit groups and agencies on behalf of their declared interests or that of their clients. Agencies, in turn, may be vulnerable because they depend on their status as a charity to attract donors to contribute funding for programs. Government controls and guards the charity designation because it has implications for income tax and the declaration of charitable income.

The volunteer groups that have the best opportunity for good relations with government are those that are not active on advocacy issues, fit into the corporate style of operation, and make themselves more available for consultation. Groups or agencies that criticize or oppose current government policy have a more volatile relationship. They are labeled "single-interest" groups, accused of representing the interests of only small minorities, and designated as troublemakers rather than civic-minded.

People are still likely to practice free expression and assembly in the pursuit of their goals. But the quandary is real: agencies jeopardize charity status at their peril, risking income required to keep the operation functional, pay staff, meet contracts, and provide service to clients.

(b) Business

The business world increasingly is involved with the voluntary sector and voluntarism by allowing and even encouraging employees to pursue charitable or community activities via adjusted work schedules or time off with pay, including "release time" and loaned personnel programs. These practices originated with "loaned executive" programs; now, middle management, line and
clerical workers, and hourly wage earners are involved. Recipients of such volunteer labor include the United Way, professional associations, business and trade associations, service clubs, and community athletic associations.

Businesses also provide free use of company facilities, meeting rooms, vehicles or other equipment, computing time, or photocopying, and they involve volunteers directly in business or corporation programs.

Some businesses perform a brokering role to facilitate voluntarism via "corporate volunteer councils" with the goal of matching non-profit organizational needs with available corporate skills and resources volunteered by employees or retired employees. Support is also provided through grants, donations, and gifts of money.

For a business or corporation, credibility is an important by-product of voluntarism. Such activities are good public relations and help raise the profile of the business locally. They are a statement of corporate citizenship and a way to build useful ties to the community. Some businesses have specific volunteer-related programs and policies to guide them; many are ad hoc, simply responding to requests.

(c) Labor

Labor unions have a long tradition of volunteer involvement within the ranks in executive and other committees and in such roles as union counselors. Union locals provide funding and support in kind to community projects such as sports leagues and voluntary services. They encourage members to give time to support the voluntary sector in the community and to donate personal money via workplace giving. Many non-profit agencies are themselves organized workplaces with active union membership among staff.

But organized labor keeps a watchful eye on the increasingly complex relationships and partnerships among volunteers, voluntary sector agencies, business, and government. The principle that
volunteers will not replace paid employees in the workplace, especially during strikes and lockouts, must be respected if union support is to continue for both workplace giving and for support of voluntarism in general.

5. Reformulating the volunteer role

The work volunteers do and their reasons for doing it have changed. In the past, volunteer work was characterized as low level and therefore not requiring training ("joe jobs"). It was unskilled ("anybody can do this job"), repetitious (stuffing envelopes), exempt from responsibility ("I'm only a volunteer"), often gender-linked ("Let's have a big hand for the ladies in the kitchen"), and unimportant because the work was unpaid ("Just a volunteer!").

Many volunteers still do routine jobs, but they are aware of the value of their work. They are selective in what they choose to do and they understand that the agency, in turn, has obligations to fulfill regarding their volunteer participation.

Volunteer roles are often of real personal importance to individual volunteers. The work and the relationship to the organization may be the most challenging, interesting, and involving aspect of their lives. Again, baby boomers are an example. As they progress through their work life, many will reach a ceiling or plateau because competition is fierce for fewer top jobs. Looking for change, more people will transfer to jobs at the same level; others will make career changes not prompted by economic necessity. In the search for challenge, diversity, and a new self-image, people will look to voluntary work as a means of exploring new interests and learning and practising skills that may not fit their workplace responsibilities.

Volunteers want challenging and meaningful work (whether in a direct service role or at the management or policy level), orientation to the agency of which they will be a part, and training for work to which they devote time and energy. Flexibility of work
assignment timing is also an important factor; they want short-
term projects to which they can guarantee commitment and work
at after hours or on weekends.

Finally, today’s volunteers want a new vision of what needs
doing and who is appropriate to do it including non-traditional
jobs for both men and women, more women in volunteer manage-
ment, increased involvement of people with disabilities, the eld-
erly, youth, and an ethnic mix reflective of the make-up of the
community.

There are a number of indicators that the role of the volunteer
has changed — rapidly:

- Volunteer training and experience is now recognized as
  legitimate in the job market or when applying for training
  or advanced education.

- Many colleges require volunteer participation for entry
  into programs as a measure of commitment and opportu-
nity for practical experience.

- The manager’s role has become professionalized.

- Secondary education opportunities continue to grow, pro-
  viding job training for volunteer coordinators and non-
  profit managers, as well as graduate level programs in
  research and policy analysis related to the non-profit
  sector.

6. Passionate citizenship: local and global social issues

Volunteering is an expression of personal values. Increasingly,
volunteers want to do something significant, something that will
“make a difference.” Their choice of issues is an indicator of the
direction of social change. Some of these issues are —

- Personal safety for people in the streets, at home, and at
  work including major movements related to sexual and
  personal assault and sexual harassment
The environmental movement with all its ramifications (including the impact on business, consumer purchasing, and waste disposal practices)

- Food distribution to the hungry, especially children
- Homelessness and issues related to housing
- Third world hunger, homelessness, and disease
- World peace and safe nuclear disarmament
- Individual freedom and liberty including fighting abuse of governmental and police powers

An indicator of the direction of change (for staff and volunteers alike) is "lifelong learning" as a primary value in our society. This means that learning can continue not only throughout a person's work career, but throughout his or her adult life and on into retirement. It also means that learning, whether in the workplace or the community, can move beyond skill-specific training to a broader view of personal growth and creativity. This book is an effort to capture this broader view, incorporating the principles and values of adult education in all aspects of dealing with volunteers in the management of volunteer programs.