

Paper Presentation

Topic: Mobilization and Management of Volunteers

Professional Trends and Issues: An Ongoing Dialogue

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As formalized volunteering becomes more global there are potential positive and negative affects. Based on trainings with managers of volunteers in 137 countries, the authors have listened to what people are saying, have observed what is happening and have identified questions and concerns that are being raised in many countries and in numerous settings. As we increase our connections and communications among profession managers of volunteers, there is a need to question, challenge and define the impact of global forces that are pushing and shaping the development of formalized volunteer efforts. This paper is designed to stimulate critical thinking by raising questions about the implications of seven trends identified by the authors. Our original intention was to engage in an open face-to-face dialogue about these trends and the implications for the growth and management of volunteerism.

We do not have definitive answers to these questions. Like you, we have opinions, ideas and insights based on our international work. We are very interested in your opinions and insights based on your experiences and observations. Our hope is that these questions will challenge you to think critically about what is happening to volunteerism in our global society. Do we have an opportunity or responsibility to shape it, nurture it, and even protect it for future generations?

We hope our questions will encourage you to engage your colleagues in an open dialogue and that you will also share your reflections, opinions and ideas with us through a virtual, email, conversation. Perhaps you will even identify new questions for consideration.

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TRENDS

- tremendous awareness, interest and growth worldwide in volunteerism
- interest in volunteerism by other than volunteer groups; government, corporations, UN, etc
- focus on the “civil society” and the role of citizen participation in government
- recognition of diversity, new groups, issues and benefits of inclusion
- professionalization of the leadership of volunteers and volunteer programs
- mandates and regulations from outside of the volunteer community that directly affect volunteers and organizations dependent on volunteers (EU)

-expectations by the general public relative to the role of volunteers beyond the mission of the organization for which they volunteer (response to disaster, rapid mobilization of the community)

What are the implications of--- the necessity for---consequence of

1. Having, **or not having**, a common, accepted definition of volunteerism
 - What if there is no “social benefit” to the “volunteer” activity?
 - Can a volunteer be a recipient of his own service?
 - Is choice to “volunteer” in lieu of “punishment” volunteering?
 - When is independent, unaffiliated action volunteering, being “just” a good person, a responsible citizen?
2. **Mandated** work with no financial gain to fulfill some requirement or obligation
 - Service-learning
 - Community Service
 - University credentialing
 - Religious duty or obligation
3. Enabling fund and/or stipends
 - What, if any, is the difference between the two?
 - Reimbursement of what expenses are appropriate (transportation, uniform, child care)?
 - What are the factors to be considered when determining the appropriate stipend for volunteers with one level of living standard assigned to areas with an obvious and significantly lower living requirement? How does a significant variance affect the understanding of volunteerism, the perceived contribution of the volunteer?
4. Adoption of the business Human Resource model of management
 - Short term volunteers – are all the procedural requirements necessary?
 - What is the actual danger of liability in any specific country and when are records essential?
 - Is there a negative consequence to standard HR registration procedures?
 - What is the impact of HR on short-term/episodic volunteerism?
 - Does “needs assessment” stifle diminish creative use of volunteers who spontaneously and as individuals offer unique skills and talents?
 - Is there inappropriate transfer of one society’s personnel requirements to another society? (Is a “background check” a universal requirement for all societies?)
5. International Accreditation
 - Is it possible – is a manager a manager everywhere?

- Can there be a “universal” volunteer language in which “common” terms are indeed “common” and universally understood as being the same (manager, CEO, Director, NGO, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3), screening?)
- What would be the effect of accreditation by individual countries for their own volunteer management expectations and requirements?

6. Informal vs. institutional volunteerism

- Does it matter that we can't ever know the true statistics of volunteerism?
- Is leadership myopic seeing only its own field and activity therein and thinking this to be the totality of volunteerism?
- Are there specific benefits in a “volunteer community” working as a countable group of individuals?
- Is volunteerism first for the individual or first for the society?
- What is the real benefit of volunteer service beyond the financial calculation?
- Are there dangers of translating volunteer service into financial worth?
- Can “informal volunteerism” be equally recognized and rewarded? Should it be?

7. The changing face of volunteerism

- Is recognizing diversity a form of “mainstream” with its concomitant problems?
- Do programs exist for volunteers or do volunteers exist to support programs?
- Is there a consequence to “institutionalizing” diversity?
- Do “targeted” management practices create new stereotypic groups?
- Do groups have the right to maintain an “exclusive” position by deliberately denying some individuals participation rights? (Gender-specific scouts)

8. Increased role of government

- What is “citizen’s work” and what is legitimate government responsibility?
- What is the consequence of policies made by non-volunteer entities that effect volunteerism? (Romania: Paid Accountants)
- How do, or should, regulations affecting paid personnel affect volunteers as well?
- Are “benefits” (health, insurance, work hours, etc) legitimate considerations for volunteers?

9. Technology

- Is it helping or encouraging the creations of “non-communities”?
- Does it help/hinder/complicate/facilitate communication?
- Does it result in segregation, and subsequent discrimination against certain groups (aged, minimally educated, low-income)?

10. Motivation

- Are there more predictable techniques for attracting and keeping volunteers?
- Are the same assumptions about motivation of volunteers applicable everywhere?
- Does knowing an individual’s motivation matter?
- Is faith-based motivation different than other forms of motivation?
- Does it matter anyway, anywhere?

11. Specialty Groups (by age; by skills, by ethnicity...)

- How do these affect the concept of “creating community”?

- Do “special groups” splinter the larger group? Does it matter if they do?
- Do “special groups” deny others of cross learning, increased understanding of each other?
- Is there a legitimate place for “exclusivity”?

12. Professional Managers

- Professional by behavior or training?
- What kinds of training, learning, experiences are really necessary?
- Is there a body of “universal” information?
- Are the “required” skills and experiences the same everywhere?
- Does the increased mobility of managers from one country to another require a common base for evaluation of qualification?

13. Cross-fertilization

- Are international trainers contaminators and “germ-carriers”?
- How is “appropriateness” of information, procedures, practices, etc. determined?
- What is the place of “caveats” in training/writing?
- Are there positive outcomes from “credentialing” international trainers?
- Is there a role for “watch-dogging” trends that distort, undermine, confuse, hinder the growth and impact of volunteerism as a legitimate and recognized profession?