

Paper Presentation

Topic: Volunteering of Youth

Creating a National Infrastructure to Sustain Volunteerism

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Introduction

Four critical factors for shaping national advancement of volunteerism are: establishing a common understanding of volunteerism and its value within local context; creating an enabling environment to promote and foster volunteer actions; designing volunteer programs to encourage pluralistic mobilization of volunteers and their effective management; and, developing sustainable resources for long-term financial viability. When combined, these factors contribute to and assist in the creation of an infrastructure to mobilize and facilitate volunteerism for building civil society, caring communities and social capital.

The four factors are presented sequentially, but they rarely develop in a sequential manner. There are often simultaneous developments across all factors as awareness increases and interest grows. Government, civil society organizations, and the private sector have both the potential and responsibility to make meaningful contributions for creating the environment that will facilitate growth and development of volunteerism.

1) Develop a Common Understanding of Volunteerism

A common understanding of volunteerism impacts the extent to and manner in which it is supported and valued. Basic beliefs about the value of volunteering effect policies and procedures relative to promoting, engaging, managing and recognizing volunteers. Understandably, when stakeholders have differing views and opinions about the nature and value of volunteers, both vision of the scope and contributions of volunteers are confused and actions counterproductive.

A common understanding evolves from discussions about

- The national traditions and history that shape volunteering,
- the value of volunteer work in terms of its contribution to human, social and community development, and
- the ways in which volunteerism is recognized and promoted.

Challenges:

- Countries where mandated work without financial remuneration was imposed and wrongly called “volunteerism” will need to develop innovative approaches to re-establish the concept and legitimacy of volunteer work and counter the misperceptions of former state directives.
- Private sector initiatives that stimulate employee volunteerism may need to stress the voluntary action of personnel and dispel perceptions of employer coercion.
- Initiatives that prescribe community service as an educational requirement are valuable programs but must be understood as just that – a requirement for teaching

civic responsibility, building an ethic of service and providing a learning experience within a community of volunteers.

- Measurements of volunteerism must consider not only the economic value of volunteerism but the social impact as well. Volunteerism has the capacity to change human behavior both in the giver and the recipient, it creates social solidarity and builds human capital that will enrich communities.

2) Create a Supportive Environment

Citizens are encouraged and inspired to be involved in volunteerism for development when public policies and legal frameworks facilitate participation and reduce potential barriers. A favorable environment respects and supports traditional forms of volunteering while enhancing opportunities for volunteerism to be a valuable partner for national development priorities.

Volunteerism is nurtured and supported in an environment that

- protects existing practices and traditions of community and individual cooperation,
- assesses the impact of government policies, regulations, and guidelines on voluntary action,
- develops partnerships across all sectors of government and society to create shared goals and an understanding of the roles and contributions of each sector, and
- acknowledges and promotes leadership from all sectors to advance volunteerism

Challenges:

- The role of government is a delicate balance between the freedom of choice and intrusion by government. A government seeking a partnership with citizens must safeguard the right of individuals to be involved, it must ensure freedom of choice and encourage spontaneity from persons and communities..
- Volunteers participate on all sides of social and political issues assuming advocacy relationships with government on fiscal, social and environmental policies. Government must respect the rights of volunteers to be engaged in advocacy work, including monitoring political and government actions.

3) Promote Pluralism and Effective Facilitation

Volunteer mobilization promotes pluralism and social integration by creating opportunities for all segments of society to participate in volunteerism for development. Effective facilitation of volunteer actions strengthens the work of volunteers, increases its effectiveness and helps ensure good experiences for individuals.

A volunteer infrastructure that promotes pluralism and effective facilitation:

- Offers a variety of opportunities for citizen involvement, including formal and informal activities, short and long-term assignments, common and diverse activities,
- develops intentional recruitment objectives to engage marginalized or socially excluded groups specifically addressing social/physical barriers and special needs, and

- develops specialized training for the management of volunteer resources.

Challenges

- Stakeholders often go directly to implementation strategies neglecting the critical planning and preparation required for long-term success. Organizations desiring to increase the diversity of their volunteer community need to plan for the creation of appropriate structures, policies and opportunities.
- The spontaneous action of citizens in informal, unstructured settings is the heart of civic engagement. It should continue to be respected and encouraged.
- Resources for large-scale recruitment campaigns must be matched with resources to develop the capacity of organizations to manage the increased number and variety of volunteers.
- Different management skills are required for different groups and different situations. Managing a corporate employee program is different than managing older adults; managing a 10K Walk is different than managing an on-going hospice care program.

4) Developing Sustainable Resources

The overall development of an infrastructure cannot happen without adequate financial resources. Promotion raises awareness, government creates the environment, mobilization efforts engage the volunteers, management systems increase effectiveness, and financial resources make it all happen

A volunteer infrastructure supports the development of sustainable resources by

- securing long-term funding
- documenting results and outcomes
- managing resources effectively, and

Challenges

- Allocating large sums of money to create public-awareness and leadership structures without ensuring adequate program funding and effective management serves only to create frustration as citizens respond to media campaigns and discover only limited opportunities for participation.
- Short-term funding seldom produces the positive long-term outcomes necessary to create public and private support. Creating the infrastructure that will sustain volunteer efforts requires consistent, committed fiscal resources.

Recommendations for Action

Having identified the four factors and associated challenges for building a volunteer infrastructure, we recommend the following action strategies for engaging all sectors of society in the creation and on-going support of these four critical factors for shaping an infrastructure to sustain volunteerism. Government, civil society organizations (NGOs) and the private sector all have a role to play.

In the **Development of a Common Understanding of Volunteerism** they can

1. Promote Public Dialogue and Discussion on Volunteerism

- a. Government can work with government ministries, civil society organizations and the private sector to align volunteerism with national priorities. It can promote dialogue about the distinctions between paid work and volunteer activities and create a legal definition of volunteerism; sponsor public dialogues among political parties about volunteerism as a national policy initiative.
- b. Volunteer-involving organizations can inform volunteers about issues and create experiences to raise awareness of economic and social issues. They can educate individuals about the role of volunteerism in the democratic process.
- c. The private sector can explore opportunities and incentives for employees to engage in volunteer activities; encourage participation in public forums to discuss the value of employee volunteerism as an expression of corporate social responsibility

2. Disseminate Information on Volunteerism for Development

- a. Government can use public media to offer forums and present research; feature the contributions of volunteers; and promote volunteerism at all levels..
- b. Volunteer-involving organizations can share stories of the contributions of volunteers; provide information about volunteer opportunities; engage leaders from sports, business, political parties, faith-communities, educational institutions, and the entertainment industry to promote volunteerism.
- c. Private-sector media can provide access to information about volunteer opportunities; feature public-service announcements and human-interest stories; provide coverage of events such as International Volunteer Day and national and local volunteer recognition events; and disseminate briefing papers, national studies and research findings.
- d. Government, NGOs, and corporate websites can feature volunteer activities and recognition events.

3. Document and Research Local Volunteerism

- a. Government, working with the public and private sector, can promote the economic and social value of volunteering; relate volunteer contributions to the gross national product; work with the educational community, public policy research institutions, and private researchers to engage in and support research relative to volunteerism.
- b. Educational institutions can work with civil society organizations to identify and carry out needed research assisted by research faculty and advanced students.
- c. Civil society organizations can contribute through engaging in self-evaluations and sharing successful volunteer effectiveness and management practices.
- d. The private sector can research the benefits of employee volunteering and provide financial and other resources to support research across all sectors.

The **Creation of a Supportive Environment**, in which citizens are encouraged and inspired to volunteer, requires at least three essential actions

1. Promote a National Understanding of the Value and Contribution of Volunteerism

- a. Civil society organizations can work with government to ensure respect for and protection of existing forms of volunteerism.
- b. Government can develop enabling legislation in the areas of fundamental rights and freedoms and legislation dealing with labor, tax, social-welfare, immigration and regulatory laws for non-profits and charitable organizations.
- c. Volunteer-involving organizations can address impediments that limit full participation in volunteer activities such as transportation, effective communication systems, adequate meeting space, technology, and monetary resources.
- d. Educational institutions can provide data on the impact of public policy initiatives. They can cooperate with public officials and leaders in the research of policies and initiatives relative to volunteerism.

2. Promote and Recognize Volunteerism

- a. Government can articulate a national vision for volunteerism; establish national targets for volunteer participation; create funding priorities within government budgets; facilitate volunteer actions by government employees; promote volunteering through national marketing campaigns; encourage private/public partnerships; and support national service programs that promote citizenship and community service.
- b. The private sector can partner with civil society organizations to provide meeting space, technology and other human and material resources. It can encourage and facilitate employee volunteering.
- c. Educational institutions can develop programs to encourage civic engagement through internships and service-learning projects at all levels of the educational system.
- d. Volunteer-involving organizations can create opportunities for participation; develop effective systems to manage and support volunteers; and engage in meaningful recognition.
- e. Media, in all forms and under either private and public management, can provide information about community needs and the impact of volunteer contribution to the community and ways to become involved.

3. Provide Leadership

- a. Government can expand its support of volunteerism and create a focal point to support and implement volunteer actions.
- b. Civil society organizations can, as advocates, advance public policy, promote volunteering and its contributions; recognize volunteers; train leaders of volunteers and build partnerships across sectors.

All segments of the volunteer community ---government, civil society organizations (NGOs) and the private sector --- have a responsibility to **Promote Pluralism and Effective Facilitation**. All segments can

1. Expand Opportunities for Volunteerism

- a. Government can provide enabling funds and educational credits; promote skill-building and networking options; support national service-programs; develop short-term emersion programs; and international service options;
- b. Civil society organizations can develop meaningful volunteer experiences by creating a wide range of opportunities; promote the value of pluralism and inclusion; and facilitate volunteerism via the Internet to decrease boundaries of space, time and borders.
- c. Educational institutions can develop programs to encourage youth volunteering; give academic credit or accreditation for participation in youth service-programs; train educators to manage and facilitate service-learning programs..
- d. The private sector can support employee-volunteering programs; designate staff to coordinate employee-volunteer opportunities; strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to provide material and access to community volunteers.

2. Develop Programs that Facilitate Diversity and Pluralism

- a. Government can promote reciprocity, citizenship, skill-building, and leadership development for different groups within the society; and invest resources to promote social integration.
- b. Volunteer-involving organizations can create opportunities for the various groups in society focusing efforts towards those groups commonly excluded; and provide information about volunteering in multiple formats and multiple languages.
- c. The private sector can encourage employees to be active in the community; and create promotional materials and resources that promote pluralism.

3. Create Partnerships to Facilitate Pluralism

- a. Government and volunteer-involving organizations can work as partners to develop local and regional volunteer centers; establish national goals for the engagement of marginalized groups; and address issues relative to barriers to participation.
- b. Corporate volunteer initiatives can encourage private/non-profit partnerships to promote corporate citizenship and employee skill-building through volunteer activities.
- c. Educational institutions and volunteer-involving organizations can support hands-on learning opportunities that link classroom learning with practical experience to promote active citizenship, career exploration, and issue awareness.

4. Facilitate The Effective Management and Coordination Of Volunteers

- a. Governments can encourage education institutions and volunteer-involving organizations to develop educational opportunities for leaders of volunteers, including university and professional credentialing programs with consistent standards for the management of volunteers

- b. Volunteer-involving organizations can have dedicated staff to facilitate the actions of volunteers; incorporate volunteerism into organizational planning; allocate resources to support the work of staff who manage volunteers; define best practices; create local networks of managers of volunteers to provide peer training or peer mentoring; and promote national and international forums, chat rooms, and online discussions.
- c. Corporate and private foundations can sponsor management of volunteers training programs
- d. Governments, foundations, and educational institutions can sponsor conferences, and encourage practitioners, academics and researchers to share information, techniques, models and resources

In the **Developing of Sustainable Resources**, activities undertaken can include

1. Securing Long-term Funding

- a. Government can work across political ideologies to create long-term funding commitments through financial commitments in the national budget. The costs to mobilize, orient, train, monitor and recognize volunteers can be included in ministry or department budgets.
- b. International, private and corporate foundations can fund multi-year projects to develop volunteer structures and support systems.
- c. Volunteer-involving organizations can plan multi-year projects with provisions for annual measurements to track progress and make adjustments to increase effectiveness.

2. Documenting Results

- a. Government and funding bodies can establish realistic criteria for ongoing or expanded funding.
- b. Civil society organizations can work closely with funding sources to determine expected and required outcomes.
- c. Volunteer-involving organizations can document the benefits, effectiveness, and reciprocity of volunteerism for the community and for the volunteers.
- d. The private sector can help civil society organizations measure outcomes and increase documentation both for transparency and efficiency.

3. Managing Resources For Volunteerism Effectively

- a. Government can provide additional resources through private/public partnerships, and by creating incentives and promotions to generate new resources for volunteering efforts.
- b. The corporate community can invest through partnerships, in-kind donations and sponsorship of training and educational opportunities for volunteers and for facilitators of volunteers
- c. Funders can strengthen the capacity of volunteer-involving organizations with funding for technical assistance, needs assessments, program planning and outcome measurements.

Reference:

www.volunteerlink.net

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