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THE CHANGING ROLE OF VOLUNTEERISM

BY JEAN W. LARKIN

**NCIV Board of Directors and
Pittsburgh Council for International Visitors**



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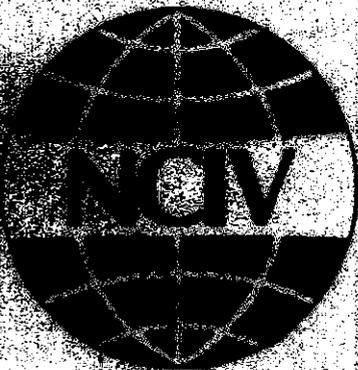
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INTRODUCTION

The justification and value of my assignment - to examine the changing role of volunteerism in the American society within the context of volunteerism in the (COSERV) NCIV constituency - became clear to me when I learned of significant pending volunteer legislation.

In late June the U.S. Senate voted on the passage of S.239, the legislation to re-authorize the ACTION agency. During floor debate an amendment to create a Congressional Commission on Volunteerism was introduced by Sen. David Durenberger of Minnesota, a member of the NCVA (National Center for Voluntary Action) Board of Directors and long-time supporter of volunteering. The amendment was modified slightly and supported by Sen. Alan Cranston of California, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Child and Human Development, which is responsible for the ACTION legislation. The Senate accepted the amendment and passed S.239.

As introduced the Commission would consist of 15 members appointed by the President and Congress. It would have 18 months to study volunteerism in America and issue a report with recommendations. It is specifically directed to address the following areas:

1. Appropriate volunteer roles for individuals of all ages;
2. Appropriate volunteer roles for individuals of all income levels;
3. Incentives, rewards and recognition systems for volunteers, including possible changes in tax laws;
4. The role of the Federal government in supporting private volunteer organizations, including such functions as establishing an information clearinghouse, providing technical assistance, offering research and development grants, evaluation programs of private, non-profit volunteer organizations, and disseminating information about successful projects;
5. Alternative Federal organization structures, including an evaluation of the ACTION agency.

The Commission's report will be of vital importance in shaping future governmental policy concerning volunteers. Plans are now underway to introduce the Commission as an amendment to the ACTION legislation HR 2859, when it reaches the floor of the House.

Meantime, the National Council on Philanthropy and the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations have entered into a collaboration for current operations and future planning. It is their hope that this will lead to the creation of a new organization, which will concern itself with virtually the whole non-profit segment of the private sector.

So, without the help of a 15 member commission and 18 months of study, but with much knowledge and insight I gained from outstanding leaders in the field, I present herewith my report.

Jean W. Larkin

August 24, 1979

The word volunteer is synonymous with NCIV. Through their local organizations volunteers have been helping to convey some of the unique and extraordinary features of our country to visitors from abroad for the past 17 years.

HISTORY

Landrum Bolling, Chief Executive and Chairman of the Council on Foundations, has said: "There are many ways to explain how Americans, through our history, have been able to achieve what we have achieved and to describe what our life is like today. Yet there is one outstanding theme for our national experience, past and present, that defines us as a people: The United States, more than any other country, is the land of private, volunteer initiative for the public good."

It is a fact that ever since our colonial days, foreign visitors have commented on the extraordinary impulse of Americans to form voluntary groups and invent non-governmental institutions to serve community purposes. This philosophy inherent in our nation since the pilgrims, has brought about the development of thousands of non-profit, non-governmental groups and organizations over the years. Since they are neither business or government, they are referred to in terms such as the voluntary sector, the third sector, the independent sector.

The turbulent 1960's brought a tremendous surge in citizen involvement and with it, the beginning of a dramatic transition in volunteering. Volunteers were actively participating in all areas of the nation's social progress and welfare. Movements grew up around critical issues and exploded to every part of the community and country.

The Peace Corps channeled the idealism of young Americans into productive activities abroad and initiated large-scale governmental volunteer programs. In 1974 more than 24,000 full and part-time volunteers of 6 existing programs were brought together to form ACTION, the federal umbrella for volunteerism which includes the Peace Corps, VISTA, and RSVP (The Retired Senior Volunteer Program).

At this time, the National Center for Voluntary Action (NCVA) an independent, private sector agency was created. It supports the development of local volunteer programs and the professional education of directors of volunteers. It also recruits volunteers for more than 36,000 agencies and has sponsored over 10,000 workshops and training sessions at local centers supported by public and private funds.

Then, too, in the past three years, at least 30 states have set up offices to study and encourage volunteer efforts.

The salaried position of "director of volunteers" is a rather recent development in the history of volunteerism.

STATUS OF VOLUNTEERISM TODAY

Today, in numbers as well as in proportion of population, far more people are involved in volunteerism than ever before, including members of all economic classes, from the Lady Bountiful of yesteryears, down through people of middle and low income. The spirit of helping others is thriving nationwide.

"Anybody who thinks volunteerism is dying hasn't looked at the statistics," says Winifred L. Brown, administrative director of the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center, New York City. More than 37 million people in this country - a new record -

now are engaged in volunteer work, according to a Census Bureau survey. 24% of the total U.S. population above age 13 performed such unpaid jobs at latest count.

CHANGES

But volunteerism is changing and the new ranks of volunteers are, by and large, more diverse in background than in the past, when middle-aged housewives did most of the volunteer work. More women are working at full-time and part-time jobs, and are no longer available for charitable activities. But hosts of others have stepped in to fill the gaps. Newcomers include teen-agers, college students, retirees, corporate and union executives. 40% are men. 70% of the volunteers are in the labor market. These new individuals view volunteerism in a new way.

Because the volunteer world has gone into an enormous change, many have been led to believe that it is on the decline. This major difference is in the distinct shift from the role of service as a volunteer to one of activism. Viewing it from the older perspective, this can be bad news for traditional organizations, such as the church, hospital, museum. Volunteers today want to fight for something, contribute to the quality of life, stand up to be counted. This motivation has been called "enlightened self-interest."

Kenn Allen, executive director of the National Center for Voluntary Action, says: "There's a large pool of people out there who truly want to help someone, who care enough to not just sit around and gripe about problems but to get out and do something about them."

YOUTH

This new image and spirit helps to explain the increase in numbers of volunteers despite the loss of millions of women to the job market. The young are an outstanding source. It is estimated that at least 500,000 high school and college students are taking part in volunteer activities. Students from more than 2,000 colleges and 600 high schools are serving as part-time volunteers in local communities this year, in some cases receiving academic credit. Volunteering affords them a chance to gain skills, develop leadership potential and look forward toward a career while helping.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Another segment more involved in volunteering today than ever before is senior citizens. The average age of volunteers is increasing. The growing numbers of retired people, with many years of productivity ahead of them, are using skills built up over the years in order to do something about issues that concern them. At the same time, volunteering is offering many retirees an opportunity for a second career. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has 3,000 community chapters across the country with more than a million participating members. Their motto is "To serve, not to be served."

The federal government has been a forerunner in supporting older American volunteer efforts through ACTION's Foster Grandparent and RSVP programs. Last year 250,000 men and women were working in the Retired Senior Volunteer Program in 692 projects across the country.

MEN

Working men are slowly becoming involved in direct service volunteer activities, where their skills and expertise are being utilized productively. Too, many men welcome the opportunity to have an identity apart from their work, and with the one-to-one service, have the feeling that they are lighting a candle in the dark.

CORPORATE INTERESTS

Businesses have created new community roles for themselves as companies and for their employees as individuals. Their financial and in-kind donations are made to a greater diversity of groups and agencies. Increasingly employees are encouraged to volunteer for company-sponsored community projects or for projects in which they have a personal interest. In New York City alone, 40 corporations have directors of volunteers. 333 companies nationally offer time-release plans and other incentives, 44 of which even allow company executives to work "on loan" for worthwhile community causes.

HANDICAPPED AND ETHNICS

Many people who were considered to be clients of volunteer agencies, such as the handicapped, the rehabilitated, are looking for ways to become part of the mainstream of society, and they are finding it in volunteerism. Then, too, racial and ethnic minorities and low income people are now specifically recruited for programs to provide the best service appropriate to an area.

Today women expect pay for their toil and intellectual rewards for their time. There is a growing need for second incomes in many families. If they are to make a commitment, they want programs without "mechanisms." "Committees take minutes and waste hours."

However, the National Organization for Women has charged that traditional social service volunteering can be exploitive, and that volunteer work reinforces the economic dependence of women by occupying them with unpaid service rather than gainful employment. NOW's position has recently been somewhat modified, by their statement that any volunteering that has to do with social change is considered acceptable. The women must have a goal they understand and be working toward that goal by volunteering.

JUNIOR LEAGUE

The Junior League, which considered itself a training organization for volunteers, finds that today nearly one-third of its active members are either employed or in school, and that in New York City such members make up two-thirds of the enrollment. The League has begun differentiating between its employed and non-employed members by calling them "day actives" and "evening actives."

Since so many volunteers today, male and female, also hold paying jobs, the act of volunteering cannot be viewed in economic terms solely. Feminists can choose volunteering as a means of involvement in the very essence of society. Inherent in all types of volunteer work is the potential for affecting change, for the very reason that a volunteer is not compromised by a salary.

PREPARATION FOR A CAREER

More and more, volunteer work is serving as a stepping-stone to paying jobs - not only in non-profit agencies but in business as well. Capable women now can look

forward to respectable careers in business and industry, with volunteer work providing a major channel for transfer of skills. They view volunteerism in a new way. They are there for their own personal growth and development and to expand their skills. At least 100 major corporations are known to have revised their application forms to include volunteer experience as part of employment history. The U.S. Civil Service Commission recognizes volunteer experience in its hiring practices.

IMPORTANT WORK

To silence accusations that volunteer women are taking jobs from the unemployed, paid staff are being hired by organizations to perform the routine but essential tasks. It is helping to dim the image of volunteer work as trivial. For example, in the Junior League "Volunteers Intervening for Equity" project, members in nine cities train elderly people to work in health care, legal care, legal assistance, foster care and juvenile justice. Paid professionals administer the program in each area.

EXPENSES, DEDUCTIONS, BENEFITS

The volunteer community also is tackling the financial barriers to volunteerism. For many, volunteering is an expensive luxury which they can't afford. Volunteering costs money in terms of baby-sitters, gas, uniforms in some cases, lunches, parking. Advocates for volunteerism are recommending reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, tax deduction for service and an IRS deduction for mileage on a par with business; also insurance, pensions, Social Security and retirement benefits.

All these voluntary activities depend on another powerful American tradition - the tradition of private giving for public purposes. As well as billions they volunteered in non-monetary services, Americans gave close to \$40 billion dollars to philanthropy last year. 5% of this came from corporations; 5% from foundations. Corporations are permitted by law to contribute up to 5% of their pre-tax profits, and take the appropriate tax deduction. In fact, they gave a total of only 1%.

TAX FORMS

The increased uses of the standard deduction (available whether the taxpayer has in fact given nothing, a little or a lot, and attractive because of the short form) has caused many people to reduce or eliminate altogether their contributions to the non-public sector. Americans gave 1.98% of our Gross National Product to non-profit organizations in 1969; five years later this figure had fallen to 1.80% of the GNP. This drop, coupled with the fact that about 80% of individual giving comes from families with incomes of less than \$20,000 a year, is creating serious financial trouble for many non-profit institutions.

In addition, state and local cutbacks of many human services are threatened as a result of developments symbolized by the passage last year of Proposition 13 in California. Increasingly, therefore, delivering services will fall on the private sector - those who contribute to non-profit agencies. In San Diego alone, \$900,000 was lost in government contracts for services.

It is estimated that pending legislation would produce an additional \$4.1 billion in annual charitable giving, by allowing itemization of contributions. The FISHER-CONABLE bill will, if it is to pass, have an uphill fight. More than 60% of the taxpayers, 34 million, used the simplified 1040A form in 1978. The IRS

hopes that over a period of time this number will increase to 90%. The House Ways and Means Committee estimates that the loss in revenue to the government, should the bill pass, would be approximately \$2 billion. That's the catch. The bill will come up on the agenda of the House Ways and Means Committee in February, 1980.

NCIV VOLUNTEERS

What, now, are some of the issues that are affecting volunteerism, and which, turn, may be affecting NCIV?

VOLUNTEERISM'S IMPACT

The mass media tells us we are an apathetic society; people feel anonymous. Yet volunteerism belies all that. Every time someone volunteers, he or she is standing up to be counted.

Our society is increasingly mobile and as people move around they can feel isolated and unconnected. Volunteering can be a form of community outreach, and often is a way people enter into neighborhoods.

Our economic structure leaves out both ends of the age spectrum; the young and the old are shut out of many productive roles. Volunteer work can tap these human resources - young and old.

Volunteerism is gaining an international scope. While much of American volunteerism is unique to this country, all nations have some forms of charitable or self-help volunteering. The new trend, though, is for international conferencing. This global sharing has tremendous potential for nonpolitical cooperative efforts toward mutual goals.

Volunteerism by "mandate" is coming to the fore in two different forms. One is the trend of government to legislate the inclusion of volunteer programs in government functions and in funding plans. The other is corporate pressures on people to "volunteer."

IMPACTS ON VOLUNTEERISM

The economy has a large impact on citizen participation. Gas lines, inflation, the need for women to work and the costs of volunteering are all issues.

Societal trends, such as changes in family structure, female role, etc., are making it imperative that more creative volunteer assignments be developed. This includes the need for short term projects, and for more assignments that can be accepted by couples or even whole families.

ASSETS OF VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteering's greatest assets are its versatility, flexibility and adaptability. We know that people volunteer for all sorts of reasons. Many do so out of a desire to serve others and better the quality of life. Others volunteer to get out of the house, to meet people, to while away time. They may be satisfied to do "busy work." Still others volunteer to learn, to better themselves, to acquire skills, preparatory to entering or re-entering a career, paid or unpaid.

Being flexible, volunteering allows these objectives to be accomplished on a part-time basis, or on an intermittent basis, and in many kinds of surroundings.

It is adaptable to the changing needs of society, can be used for experimentation with new ideas, and can accommodate to economic and social cycles.

WHAT NCIV VOLUNTEERS DO

Our NCIV receiving organizations possess all these qualities of volunteerism. Who, then, are these volunteers?

NCIV volunteers fill a great variety of roles. There are the board members, who volunteer time and assume the responsibility of providing financial, legal and other resources. They are held accountable and personally liable for the organization. Ideally, the board has broad community involvement, and represents a cross-section of the community - individuals, corporations, corporate and personal foundations, labor, civic groups and professional societies. Host families volunteer time for hospitality and home stays. Business men, educators, governmental officials, and others volunteer time to talk with visitors on a professional basis. Others volunteer time and autos to provide tours of the city, escort visitors to industrial plants, farms and government facilities, or to offer driver services to appointments or sightseeing. Many volunteer time and talent, serving as desk volunteers and working in the local offices or at home carrying out the work of the organization in the planning of the visitors' programs. Volunteerism has many roles in a COSERV organization.

WHY THEY DO IT

NCIV's purpose, to increase international understanding among all people, continues to have great appeal throughout the United States. Partly, it seems to be the recognition of our global responsibilities and the need for world-wide collaboration. It appeals to those who travel, intend to travel, have lived abroad, want to use their other languages. The international scene also has glamorous attraction to those who are unable to leave home.

CHANGES

All the aforementioned issues of volunteerism are subtly changing the way foreign visitors are being received in a community. The gas shortage has led to a revamping of some programs, with more careful planning of itineraries, car pools, use of public transportation or rental cars, and in a few cases, elimination of driving of the unsponsored visitors. The shortage has been felt mostly in the organizations that encompass great distances, where even a desk volunteer must travel miles to get to the office. Several organizations do pay volunteers' costs or are considering paying a stipend for incurred mileage costs.

Inflation, of course, is being felt by all NCIV volunteers, some of whom can no longer afford to entertain visitors at home for dinner. But they are continuing to entertain, only with something less expensive, such as coffee and dessert, or a tea and cookie interlude.

With so many women rejoining the work force, it takes more effort to find volunteers to work on the programs. Our NCIV organizations are already prepared or are revamping their programs and schedules to meet these changing needs. They are presenting different kinds of service opportunities, enticing more able and capable volunteers with assignments of higher quality that demand professionalism. Many are using retirees as volunteer programmers. One organization that is

busiest in the summer finds its summer workers by advertising for help in teachers' newsletters. Another states very positively that it wants to be used as a training ground to learn skills. One organization that uses a large number of volunteers, especially during the summer, offers internships to college students. They work 35 hours a week, receive housing but no stipend or compensation other than the responsibility and experience.

All have become scientific in their recruitment, employing many tactics. The most successful method continues to be that of one enthusiastic volunteer telling another. It still is considered an honor to work with an NCIV organization that has recognition and prominence in its city, and to work with foreign visitors. Community radio and TV public service advertising are helpful in getting new host families. Recruiting through women's groups, giving them job descriptions, time frame and other specifics brings in desk volunteers. The Welcome Wagon introduces the new resident to the organization. Short span specific jobs with an end in view attract capable workers. Booths at local volunteer fairs bring more recognition of opportunities to serve. But it is clear that to be successful, all organizations have to be innovative and must work on recruiting all the time. People are still eager to welcome and entertain, and the more exotic, the better.

CHALLENGES

Change, challenge and choice describe the volunteer experience today. But one fact remains unchanged and unchallenged: recognition and reward must be provided for successful performance. It is true that there is a sense of satisfaction and a perceived benefit from a program that is well carried out, and that the time spent with a foreign visitor provides immediate one-to-one joy and satisfaction.

But even though a volunteer has this sense of accomplishment for a job well done or the pleasure of making a new international friend, it doesn't hurt to hear a "thank you" once in a while.

Volunteerism is both the legacy and the future of participatory democracy.