VOLUNTEERISM

The decline of the full-time homemaker—and government budget cuts—have meant the end of business-as-usual in the voluntary sector. How are groups coping? With new schedules, new work options and an emphasis on enlightened self-interest

BY JULIA M. KLEIN

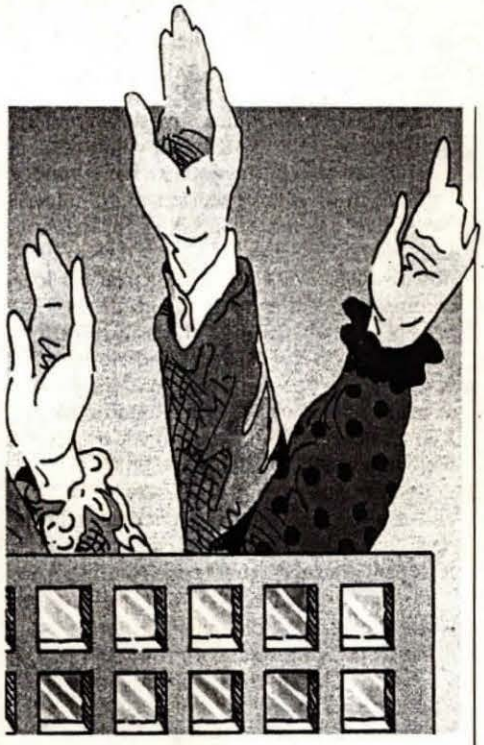
Volunteering once was something women did instead of "real" work. It was unpaid, undervalued and frequently menial. In political campaigns, women stuffed envelopes; in hospitals, they wheeled around the flower cart or served coffee and doughnuts.

No more. The women's movement and the accompanying influx of women into the labor market have altered the very nature and definition of volunteerism. Traditional social-service organizations have adjusted their work schedules to hang on to members with outside jobs. Women have demanded—and attained—leadership positions on boards of voluntary organizations that once were largely or entirely male. New kinds of volunteer groups (some, outgrowths of the women's movement) have added advocacy, self-help and cooperative activities to the traditional philanthropic and religious functions that volunteers have performed. In fact, altruism seems almost out of fashion in some circles. The new watchword in the volunteer community is "enlightened self-interest."

Meanwhile, the new government watchword is volunteerism. In his effort to encourage private citizens—and private industry—to assume some of the functions traditionally funded by government, President Reagan formed a blue-ribbon Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives last fall. The stage is set for an expansion and upgrading of volunteer work. On the other hand, the Reagan budget cuts have hit nonprofit groups as well the public sector, making their programs more difficult to carry out. And with increasing numbers of organizations competing for volunteer labor, volunteer administrators worry whether they will be able to recruit enough people.

THE NEW VOLUNTEER

Proponents of volunteerism can take heart in the latest statistics—volunteering in America seems to be on the rise. In 1974, a poll sponsored by ACTION (the federal agency in charge of such volunteer programs as Foster Grandparents and Young Volunteers in Action) and conducted by the Census Bureau found that 24 percent of Americans over age 13 volunteered. The comparable figure for 1981, according to a Gallup Poll sponsored by the Independent Sector (a Washington, DC, coalition of private and nonprofit groups), was 31 percent. That figure reflects the number of people who were "regular or active volunteers"—devoting two or more hours a week to volunteering. But since 1974, a broader definition of volunteering—"working in some way to help others without monetary pay"—has gained sway, and the poll found that when informal volunteer activities, such as helping an elderly neighbor, were included, the percentage of volunteers in America rose to 52 percent.



BERNARD BONHOMME

The kind of person who volunteers also has changed. According to the 1974 ACTION report, the typical American volunteer was "a married, white woman between the ages of 25 and 44 who held a college degree and was in the upper-income bracket." Now that same volunteer is just as likely to be a working woman. In fact, the Gallup Poll found that 55 percent of full-time employed people, male and female, also are volunteers. But jobholders who volunteer are likely to choose more carefully the activities in which they participate. "Women working 40 hours a week are not going to do any rinky-dink work," says Ivan Scheier, president emeritus of the now defunct National Information Center for Volunteerism.

It was in the early 1970s, as women were beginning to pour into the job market and demand their rights, that the traditional "Lady Bountiful" style of volunteering, the woman of leisure who cheered hospital patients and slum dwellers alike, first came under fire from the women's movement. Historians of volunteerism such as Susan J. Ellis, coauthor of *By the People,* now prefer to identify volunteering with citizen involvement. Ellis then argues that, historically, employees—both male and female—have always provided the bulk of volunteers. "Men have always been volunteers," she points out. "They worked as coaches, trustees and firemen."

Still, women have predominated in social-services volunteering, Ellis concedes. It was to this point that the National Organization for Women addressed itself. In 1971, the NOW national conference resolved "that NOW distinguish between voluntary activities which serve to maintain women's dependent and secondary status, on the one hand, and . . . change-directed activities which lead to more active participation in the decision-making process." The distinction obviously was an important one for a women's organization to make. "It's the difference between volunteering as a candystriper in a hospital and volunteering that's directed at social change—like NOW," explains Judy Goldsmith, the group's vice-president.

In its 1973 national-conference resolution, NOW made its opposition even stronger. While recognizing that volunteering could be a useful entrée into paid employment, NOW attacked volunteering on three fronts: First, volunteering "reinforced the low regard in which women's work was generally held" because it was unpaid. Second, it was "also classist, since volunteering was really limited to those women who could afford to volunteer." And third, the hierarchy of volunteer-

ing "paralleled the hierarchy in the employment world," with men serving on prestigious boards and women relegated to the lowest organizational rungs.

Since 1973, the volunteer community has moved to address these complaints, largely by expanding its definition of the role of volunteers and opening up more positions of authority to women. "The women's movement has had a powerful effect on volunteerism — on the whole, a very positive effect," says Scheier. "Many of the things the women's movement has been saying, some of us inside the volunteer movement were saying, too." The fallout from the NOW resolutions, he says, "forced us into a more imaginative, creative conception of who can volunteer, what volunteers can do and how they can go about doing it."

These ideological pressures, and the reality of fewer bodies available during daylight hours, affected every organization that traditionally drew its labor from homemakers. They also gave rise to entirely new organizations.

FACING UP TO FEMINISM

One classic case of the former is the League of Women Voters, whose membership fell from 155,000 in 1970 to 115,000 a decade later. "We were afflicted by our own success in moving the women's movement forward, so women have a greater choice of roles," says Ruth Hinerfeld, president of the National League of Women Voters. "There's no such thing as a superwoman, and there are only so many hours in the day. That had to take its toll on women." By January 1981, 44 percent of the League's members held paying jobs (no comparable figures exist for a decade ago). Many women move in and out of the League, often moving on to law school or politics. Cornelia Toole, president of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, says the organization has compensated in part by holding more frequent orientation sessions to ensure continuity. In addition, local leagues are more likely to schedule meetings in the evening or at lunchtime. In 1981, for the first time, the Pennsylvania state convention was held on a weekend, with families invited.

Not only the hours have changed. So has the work itself. "We always think much harder in terms of what's a satisfying thing to do," Hinerfeld says. "You still may find a few souls willing to sit three hours and stuff envelopes, but they're becoming rare."

The Association of Junior Leagues, whose membership—like that of the League of Women Voters—is predominantly female and relatively affluent—provides an interesting comparative study. The Association's membership has risen from 109,000 to 140,000 since 1974, according to Liz Quinlan, director of communications. At the same time, the percentage of incoming members who work outside the home has jumped from 28 to 50 percent. (For the total of active members, the comparable figures are 16 and 36 percent respectively.) And the age at which women are joining Junior Leagues also has risen—from 21 or 22 in 1974 to 31 in 1980.

Volunteer administrators agree that the Junior League has been a pioneer in meeting the needs of employed volunteers, by moving quickly to institute flexible hours, shorter conferences and what Quinlan calls "an effort to free board members from doing busy work." Furthermore, she says, "as an accompaniment to direct service work and an outgrowth of it, there's been an increased emphasis on advocacy." In addition to aiding runaway children, a Junior Leaguer may well become an advocate for juvenile justice.

Groups such as the League of Women Voters and the Association of Junior Leagues rightfully lay claim to producing workers with skills transferable to other organizations. Lynn Yeakel, president of Women's Way, the fund-raising arm of six Philadelphia-area women's service agencies, says she gained her fund-raising skills as a League volunteer.

And some professionals have banded together to offer their services as volunteers. New York's Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Inc., founded by a group of attorneys in 1969, now handles over 3,800 cases a year for low-income artists and arts organizations. The group has an annual budget of about $200,000, two staff lawyers and close to 700 lawyers who volunteer their time. Administrator Barbara Taylor estimates that the free services they provide (for a $15 referral fee) were worth $3 million in 1981.

Even in such traditional areas as religion and health, the women's movement and the new volunteerism have had an impact. Religion attracts the largest number of volunteers of any field—19 percent—according to the Gallup Poll. Janet Richards, coordinator of volunteers at the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, who has written widely on the subject, says that religious groups have been among the most conservative in their unwillingness to accord responsibility to volunteers. Even this is changing, she notes, as churches make a greater effort to match volunteer jobs with the abilities and interests of volunteers. "People are becoming aware that we've been exploiting volunteers in the church, and we've got to look at what we're doing with them if we want to strengthen their faith."

The same transformation is taking place in hospital volunteering. At Abington Memorial Hospital outside of Philadelphia, mothers volunteer as breast-feeding counselors, and former mastectomy patients work with more recent breast-cancer patients. And, in a program that combines health and religion, lay people of all faiths join with clergy to serve as "pastoral associates" at the hospital. The lay volunteers minister to the spiritual needs of both patients and staff so effectively that, according to the hospital's chaplain, many of those they comfort call them "reverend."

Beyond assuming a variety of roles as volunteers, women now are more likely to be found on boards administering such powerful voluntary organizations as United Way. According to Jerry Bergman, director of public relations for United Way of America, a survey the organization made in May 1980 found that women form 21.5 percent of the membership of United Way governing boards. No comparative figures exist at the national level, but United Way of San Francisco reports that representation of women on its governing boards more than doubled between 1971 and 1981, from 19 to 45 percent.

The counterpart of this development is the increased movement of men into direct service activities. Winifred Brown, executive director of the Mayor's Voluntary Action Center in New York, which serves both public and private voluntary sectors as a clearinghouse and catalyst for new programs, says that almost half the people she refers are men.

This is not to say that men and women now are ranged equally throughout the hierarchy of voluntary organizations. Laura Lee M. Geraghty, director of the Minnesota Office of Volunteer Services, notes that high-level female representation is "hardly 50–50." And Kris Rees, a staff member of VOLUNTEER: The National Center for Citizen Involvement (a private clearinghouse for volunteer groups, in Arlington, Virginia), says: "Nationwide, men still outnumber women on boards of directors. Our full board of directors is about two-to-one male to female, but our executive committee is 50–50. [Voluntary organizations] are better off than we were, and not as far along as we can be."

Meantime, Betty Friedan, one of the founders of NOW, exhorts women to "a new passionate volunteerism" in her latest book, *The Second Stage*. And passionate volunteerism seems to be in the air.

One recent trend is the proliferation of advocacy and self-help groups across the political spectrum. Traditional organizations now must compete for volunteers with groups as diverse as the National Abortion Rights Action League, Parents without Partners and the Coalition for Better Television.

A 1981 Gallup Poll confirms that the strongest motivation for volunteering remains the desire to help others. But the second most popular motivation is "interest in work." Says VOLUNTEER's Rees: "The altruistic reasons for volunteering still are prevalent. But, in addition, people are looking at 'what can I get out of this?' They're looking to develop skills, or they're looking in an area and saying, 'If I have only three hours a week to give, I want to put three hours into something I really care about.' "

At its most practical, this concern with job content is based in the desire to use volunteer jobs to enhance one's value in the labor market. Mary Ann Mahoney, 35, a recent volunteer in Abington Hospital's Department of Education and Staff Development, says she hopes to use her volunteer experience to make a career change from elementary education to training and development. Now, she explains, "I can say, 'Yes, I have done it,' which I think comes off a lot better than saying, 'Will you give me a chance?' "

On the other hand, the Gallup Poll indicates that many people stick with volunteering even when its practical purpose has bee

achieved. And, once established in the job market, many working women return to volunteering. "Women entering the labor market found it wasn't a panacea," says Brown. "They found volunteering still offered an opportunity to pursue personal goals and delve into areas of personal interest."

Corporations increasingly are recognizing the value of volunteer work. According to Shirley Keller, director of corporate services for VOLUNTEER, a 1979 study (see page 7ℓ found that more than 350 companies—including 30 percent of the Fortune 500—encourage their employees to volunteer in the community. Of these, 333 have formal programs.

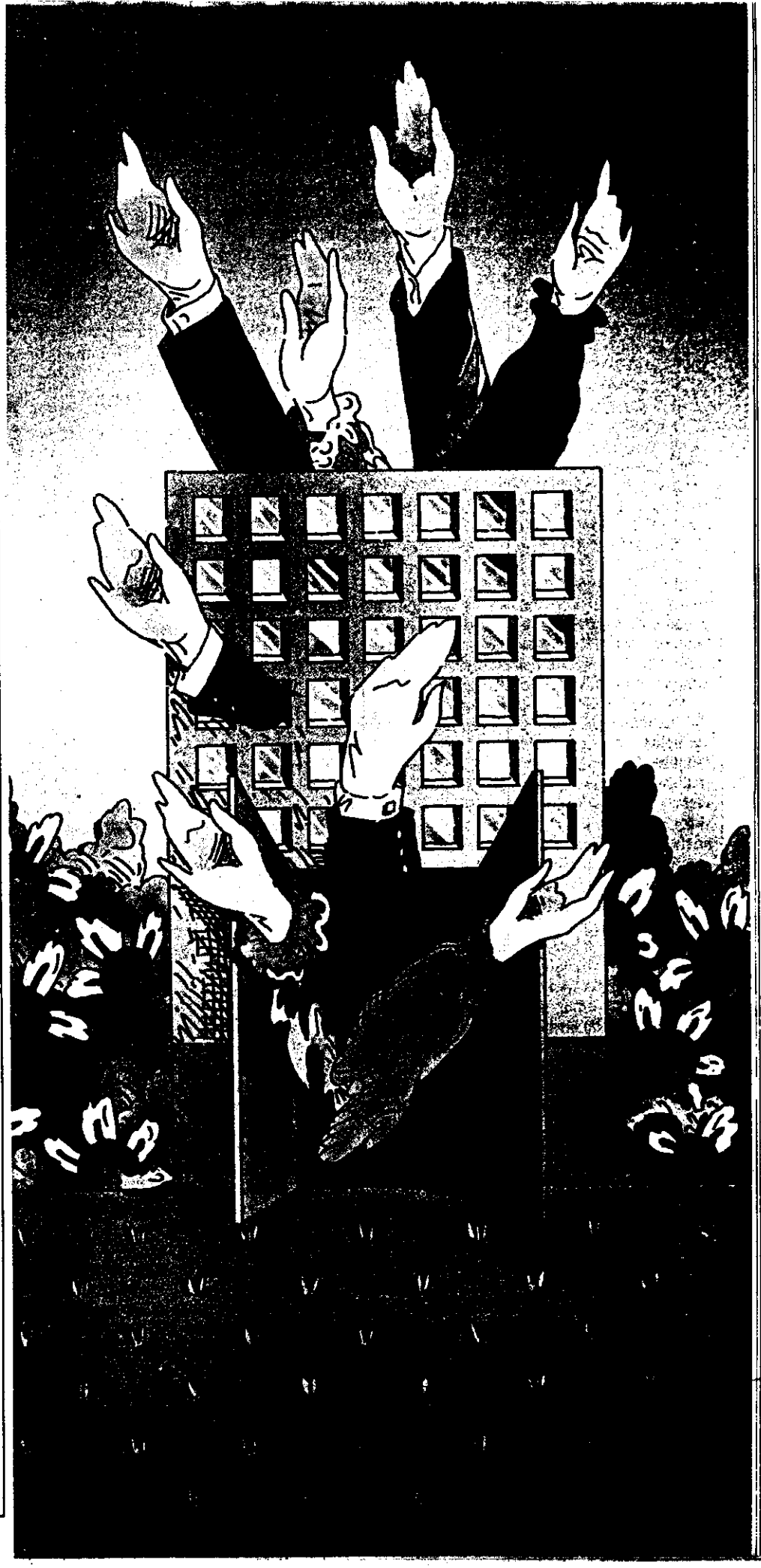
These efforts, Keller says, help companies express their sense of social responsibility. They also raise employee morale, expose employees to the community and help them improve their skills. In some cases, employee volunteers can apply for grants from their company to contribute to the budget of the organization for which they're volunteering. Miriam Fisher, a senior auditor in the international division of Avon Products, Inc., also is a member of the board of directors of the Rebecca Kelly Dance Company in New York. Through the Avon Volunteer Support Program, she arranged for the troupe to receive an $800 grant that funded a color videotape of one of the company's new dances. The tape subsequently was shown on cable television and used as an audition tool.

Keller notes that top people in corporations always have been board members of volunteer organizations. "But the expansion of involvement from only this level to opening it up to all people in the corporation with something to offer is the key difference we've seen in the past ten years."

BUSINESS TO THE RESCUE?

As the Reagan administration cuts funding for both government programs and voluntary agencies, corporations are being asked to do still more. According to a 1981 report issued by the Urban Institute, the nonprofit sector stands to lose $27.3 billion in government funding in fiscal years 1981–84—representing a cut of 13.1 percent from the outlays projected in the final Carter budget. For the same time period, cuts in what the report calls "programs in service areas of interest to nonprofit organizations" will total $128.2 billion — thus increasing the demand for nonprofit services at the same time that resources to provide such services are being slashed.

Spokespeople for the business community already have begun warning, however, that they cannot be expected to bear the full brunt of the financial burden. In a speech last fall, Kenneth N. Dayton, chairman of the executive committee of the Dayton-Hudson Corporation, which owns department stores, cautioned that "business can't be expected to replace government in fulfilling the needs of society." While urging increased business philanthropy, Dayton stressed that the "dis-



tance between what's needed and what's available is simply too vast to be leaped in a single bound, by a single segment of our society."

And a survey of more than 400 large companies released this January by the Conference Board, a business-research organization in New York, revealed that only 6 percent planned to increase their philanthropic contributions in response to government budget cuts—60 percent do plan "normal increases" in their contributions budgets, though. Few plan to redirect the flow of corporate gifts from such traditional areas as the arts and education to programs in areas such as job training and urban economic development that have lost federal funding.

Why is "free" labor so expensive? The chairs volunteers sit on and the phones they use are not free, points out Susan Ellis, who runs Energize, a Philadelphia-based volunteer consulting firm. What's more, most large groups need at least some paid staffers, particularly because some social-service jobs require professional training. In fiscal year 1980/81, for example, the League of Women Voters Education Fund spent $2 million—of which $577,000 was federal funds. In fiscal year 1981/82, of anticipated expenditures of $1.8 million, only $50,000 will come from the federal government. The result, a League spokesperson says, will be the elimination of a variety of programs.

It's no wonder that the announcement of the Reagan cutbacks has prompted what Geraghty calls "a great deal of anxiety" in the volunteer community. "The vague feeling is that as government steps out of providing services, volunteers will step in to fill the gap," she said last summer. "No one is taking a look at the mechanisms for making that happen, or at the saturation point of volunteerism."

Scheier agrees. "There just aren't that many people out there. It can take 20 part-time volunteers to replace one full-time worker. We already have a shortage of volunteers," he says. "I don't think volunteerism is a snake medicine to solve all our problems — nor is anything else. I also don't believe the Reagan administration accepts the idea that with the programs and efforts, we require trained, skilled leadership that will be paid leadership. People who haven't paid any attention to volunteers for a long time, or ever, suddenly are expecting volunteers to ride to the rescue."

The Reagan administration's response to this voiced concern was the appointment last fall of a Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, headed by C. William Verity, Jr., chairman of Armco Inc., a diversified steel company. Verity, former chairman of the US Chamber of Commerce, has said that the 44-member task force, divided into 11 committees, will try to encourage private groups —businesses, unions, and religious and philanthropic organizations—to take on increased responsibility for meeting public needs. Its primary goal, according to a spokesperson, is to foster greater partnership between the public and private sectors on a community level. Members of the task force have begun to launch partnerships both locally and nationwide. In Verity's hometown of Middletown, Ohio, for example, he and other community leaders responded to a cut in Ohio state unemployment compensation by fixing up an old, vacant building and decreasing the rent that the local unemployment office had to pay by roughly 25 percent of its cost at the former location. According to Dale Helsel, the city manager, the labor for the renovation was provided by high-school vocational students, and paint, lumber and electrical supplies were donated by local businesses.

The task force also plans to tackle unemployment by urging the private sector to create new jobs and develop job-training programs, and by establishing a "project bank" of samples of successful partnerships.

One issue that may fall within the purview of the task force is the feasibility of using volunteers to replace salaried workers—a practice long frowned upon by both volunteer administrators and labor unions. "For a long time, one of the catechisms of the field was: 'Volunteers supplement, they don't supplant,' " says Ellis. "In times of prosperity for social services, that's been true. There's a role for the salaried worker and a role for the volunteer. All of a sudden we're forced to question that. Now the issue is, either we have volunteers in the library on Saturday or we won't have Saturday services."

The transition may require "benefits and incentives" for volunteers, says Geraghty. Last fall, Congress started the process by enacting legislation that, for the first time, allows those who take the standard deduction on their tax form to begin to deduct their charitable contributions (see "Consumer: A Guide to Giving," WORKING WOMAN, November 1981). And Barbara Mikulski (D, MD) is sponsoring legislation to increase the mileage deduction for volunteers who use their cars from 9 cents to 20 cents, the same amount allowed for regular business travel. Currently this bill is mired in the House Ways and Means Committee. Steve McCurley, legislative coordinator for VOLUNTEER, says the measure has little chance of passage unless it receives a "ground swell of support" from volunteers and volunteer organizations.

Ellis focuses on the practical implications. The lack of government funding may force organizations to change the way they use volunteers, she says. It will become more economical to hire clerical staff to perform routine tasks once performed by volunteers, and instead involve volunteers in "more substantive projects," thus saving on higher-salaried workers. This would give more interesting options to volunteers.

"It's going to take some time for agencies to learn to do that appropriately," Ellis cautions. "Not every agency that's going to lose money is worth saving. An organization that absolutely cannot attract volunteers should read the writing on the wall. If you can't interest anyone in helping out, it could be that what you're doing isn't of value." On the other hand, as working women swell the pool of available volunteers, groups that can provide activities that interest them will gain an important new resource. ■