VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT
a socialization process

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Volunteer workers are the lifeblood of many cultural institutions, particularly in the lower entry levels of an organization. They function as extra staff, working alongside the museum professional in many critical areas: membership and publicity drives, fund-raising events, gift shops, information and reception desks. Some volunteers offer unique skills to departments which otherwise would be unable to locate and/or pay for them. Many are also trained as docents or guides. For volunteers the training is just one benefit received. In this article we will discuss the benefits and potential costs of volunteerism for museums and volunteers. Previous ideas in administering these programs will be reviewed and an integrated system for managing them will be offered.

Organizations' View

Museums reap a number of important benefits through the employment of volunteer workers (see Table 1). Much of a museum's annual budget goes toward wages and salaries of its personnel. Working in the various areas mentioned above, volunteers represent dollars "saved" in salaries and hourly wages. Consequently, a museum may reallocate part of its funds to other areas within the budget such as exhibitions or conservation. Additional benefits museums receive include a direct link with the community (positive public relations), and initial sources through which to develop networks for raising capital and acquiring new members.

Yet, volunteer service does not come without costs. Many museum professionals have reported major problems between volunteers and professional staff due to issues concerning the role of the volunteer and the staff's expectation of them.

A major source of tension, from the professional staff point of view, is a volunteer's casual attitude, i.e., a lack of responsibility and professionalism. Often this problem stems from conflicting messages (role ambiguity) and mismatched expectations between the museum professional and the volunteer worker. Further complicating the situation is the unpaid status of volunteers, which removes them from management's controls and sanctions of pay loss or reduced increments. As one professional lamented, "whenever you complain that something wasn't done properly, they say, 'take it out of my salary' " (Fertig and Berril, 1977).

Another problem area involves the volunteers who exploit their position, using their access to the trustees and administrators to undermine staff activities and authority. Several museum professionals have observed that volunteers can be the most powerful group in a museum. Their access to power has been deemed a large enough problem that many museums have created bylaws for volunteer groups (Selby, 1977). Thus, the attitudes and behavior of volunteers can have considerable effect on the operation of museums.

Volunteers' View

In return for their services, museum volunteers receive a number of important benefits (see Table 1). They receive training in several areas of museum work. Some volunteers are students who want to acquire experience which can be applied to later career endeavors. Others are members of the community who are interested in art, anthropology, or local history. Some volunteers want to learn more about some aspect of the museum's collection. Other, less tangible benefits include a social reward — the chance to get out and meet people, and the intrinsic satisfaction of service to the organization and community. In addition, some museums "hold out the lure of eventual pay for their best

...teers" (Fertig & Berril, 1977, p. ...although the literature ...owledges that the frequency of ...nteers acquiring professional ...sons is quite low.
...olunteer advocates have noted ... volunteers have several ...mate complaints against ...eums (see Table 1). Referring ...ifically to docents, Deborah ...klin, former director of ...cation at the Art Museum of the ...versity of Texas, notes that they ... "neither ersatz art historians nor ... teachers and that museum staff ...pts to mold them into one or ... other accounts for much of the ...ration among volunteers and ...fessionals alike" (Fertig and ...rril, 19--, p. 20). A similar, and ...ed, problem involves the fact ... volunteers are often placed in ...ent programs, even if their talents ...ld be more useful in other ...ctics.
...Many volunteers state that they are ...y much aware of their low, ...erior status; they are not treated as ...fessionals, and therefore feel no ...entives to behave as professionals. ...ereas museum staff receive pay, ...s, seniority, formal evaluations, ...d promotions, the recognition of ...wards to volunteers are few and ...gely ceremonial (Fertig and Berril, ...7).

...or Solutions

...Whether the use of volunteer ...rkers in a museum is a positive or ...tive experience for the ...lunteers and professional staff, ...gely depends on how the ...lunteers are managed. Several ...fessionals in the field believe that ...ain elements are critical to the ...nagement of this valuable ...ource. Mildred S. Compton ...65), executive director of the ...ldren's Museum of Indianapolis, ...eves that a careful selection ...cess for new volunteers; an ...nsive training program designed ... weed out the half-hearted, the ...l-meaning but inefficient, and the ...dependable; and opportunities for ...reased responsibility are the ...damental building blocks which ...e made the volunteer work force ... of the museum's biggest assets. ...es E. Seidelman (1965), former ...ector of education at the Nelson ...llery of Art-Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, asserts that volunteers can function effectively if proper attention is given to placement. He advocates initial interviews prior to placement, a comprehensive training program, regular rather than sporadic service, and the development of "a feeling of belonging to the museum" as important elements in a volunteer program.

Ellen Straus (1977), volunteer advocate and president of WMCA Radio, New York, argues that organizations which use the services of volunteers have denied society the benefits which could be derived from full recognition of the volunteer as a professional. She believes that "[a] volunteer professional must be expected to work at a specific job, over a period of time, on a regular schedule. He or she must work alongside paid employees to reach the museum's goals. In return, the volunteer professional should be able to count on certain things from the museum: a clear explanation of its goals; some basic information about its plans and projects; training; regular supervision; frequent evaluation leading to promotions; working conditions equal to those enjoyed by paid employees doing similar work; and job references at the time of departure (Straus, 1977, p. 24)."

Table 1: Benefits and Costs of Volunteers from the Museum Volunteers' Perspective

Museum	Volunteers
Benefits:	**Benefits:**
Inexpensive labor	Training
Reallocation of funds	Experience
Community Involvement (PR)	Social Ties
Sources for Fundraising (network)	Contribution to Institution
Sources for future members	Societal contribution
Costs:	**Costs:**
Tension	Low Status
Irresponsibility	Confused Expectations
Absenteeism	Limited "jobs"
	Limited growth

Integrated Approach

Although these suggestions have helped in the management of volunteers, they constitute an ad hoc, trial and error approach with little theoretical rationale. The purpose of this article is to present a program designed to attract volunteers, train them to perform various duties in a professional manner, and to develop a sense of commitment to the activities and goals of the museum. The proposed program is based on two theoretical concepts from the field of Management and Organizational Behavior: commitment and socialization.

Commitment is best viewed as a bond formed between the individual and organization based on evaluation of that relationship. This evaluation is a kind of attitude toward the organization. Two processes seem to influence the nature and strength of this bond (Ogilvie, 1983). One process is an *exchange evaluation.* The individual assesses the costs and benefits of maintaining membership in this organization. If the overall balance is positive, a sense of reciprocity emerges and that individual feels some commitment to

that organization. The more favorable the balance, the stronger the bond. However, slight shifts in either benefits or costs can affect commitment. Due to the sensitivity of this form, it is generally viewed as a weak positive bond.

Another process which results in commitment is *psychological identification*. If an individual believes in the goals of an organization, those goals become part of the individual's personal identity. This form of commitment also leads to a general sense of belonging. Individuals who identify with and feel a part of the organization are often willing to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and wish to remain with it (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). The psychological bond is stronger and more resistant to change than the exchange form.

While these approaches have been discussed as separate, they often work together in a complementary fashion (Ogilvie, 1983). A person may become a volunteer because they believe in what a museum does. Thus, they experience some initial bond, based on identification. However, if their experiences with that museum are unfavorable (high cost relative to benefits), their commitment will be reduced. Conversely, someone may become a volunteer to learn about art or to develop some experience for later career applications. They may form a weak initial bond, based on a favorable exchange. If they have positive work experiences over their first few months, they may come to identify with the museum, forging stronger bonds.

The socialization and early experiences of the volunteer are very important in developing commitment and in rendering quality service to the public. Socialization is adapting the individual volunteer to the organization. This involves acquiring skills and abilities, learning what is expected of one in a role, adjusting to the informal norms of a work group, and learning the values of the organization (Feldman, 1980). Socialization can be managed to provide a sequence of steps and initiation rites so that volunteers progress to value their association with the museum and radiate this positive attitude toward the professional staff and public with which they interact.

Table 2: Socialization Stages and Activities (adapted from Feldman, 1976)

Stage	Gallery Activities
Getting In	Clarifying perceptions of museums Initial screening of volunteers desires & talents Orienting volunteers to museum policies Allowing a choice of projects
Breaking In	Training of skills needed for projects (building on existing skills) Providing performance feedback Recognizing and rewarding good performance Assigning new projects with increased responsibility
Settling In	Rotating assignments if desired (further skill building) Developing a volunteer hierarchy Advancing through the hierarchy Providing opportunities to lead and direct other volunteers

Socialization can be viewed as covering three stages or periods of time in an individual's tenure with an organization (Feldman, 1976). The different experiences that an individual has in these stages will influence the strength of their commitment.

The first stage is called "Getting In" or anticipatory socialization (Feldman, 1976). The knowledge and impressions that a volunteer has about the museum prior to offering their services influences their subsequent attitudes and commitment. Having accurate, realistic information leads to a better matching of the volunteer with the assignment and professional staff. Allowing some degree of choice also increases the sense of responsibility that the individual experiences, resulting in greater commitment to that institution.

The early experiences of the "Breaking In" stage are one of the most important elements of socialization and the development of commitment. The volunteer must be able to utilize their skills and abilities. They should receive training so that they are able to perform their tasks well. The sense of accomplishment is a benefit and provides an initial basis for identification with the museum. Volunteers should receive feedback about their performance to clarify what is expected of them, enhancing performance. The role of a supervisor, whether a staff professional or another volunteer, in providing direction and structure for employees has been shown to influence commitment (Ogilvie, 1983). The social opportunities that a volunteer has during their early experiences can also create a more favorable exchange and provide a sense of belonging and identification through the group.

While the early experiences of individuals have important effects on commitment and performance, the third stage of "Settling In" is important to maintaining commitment over time. A continued sense of reciprocity and satisfaction helps to assure high commitment levels. For some volunteers this may mean a rotation of assignments; for others, it may involve a kind of promotion. Research in organizations (Kanter, 1977) has shown that the prospects for upward mobility have positive effects on commitment and performance. The benefits must continue and further opportunities

for responsibility must be made available. A greater sense of inclusion and belonging must also occur.

Socialization at the University Gallery

Experiences at the University Gallery of the University of Delaware, summarized in Table 2, support these findings from organizational research. The University Gallery has a small staff consisting of one full-time curator, a part-time student registrar, five to seven part-time student Gallery attendants, and the director, who is also the associate director of the University's Museum Studies Program. To supplement its small staff, the Gallery staff developed a formal student volunteer program in 1982, designed to take place during each semester and summer. This program, entitled the Student Curatorial Apprentice Program, required each student to volunteer 40 hours. In return for their work, each student would receive structured "hands-on" training in some basic aspects of museum work: research, cataloging, registration, and marking objects. After completing 40 hours, the student would receive a certificate of service.

Eleven students from several University departments enrolled in the program during the first year, many volunteering more than 40 hours. Several of the students expressed interest in additional areas of museum work such as exhibition development and education, thereby creating the need for a multi-level, hierarchical program. Since the Museum Studies Program is only open to graduate students, these undergraduate students viewed the Curatorial Apprentice Program as their sole means of gaining experience in museum work.

The following program at the University Gallery describes specific activities at each of the three socialization stages. As part of the "Getting In" stage, prospective student volunteers are interviewed to determine their individual skills, what they want or expect from the experience, and to clarify what the Gallery expects of the volunteer. A

kind of psychological contact (Schein, 1978) is established, detailing a mutually agreeable agenda or curriculum which the volunteer will follow and which will serve as the basis for evaluation.

The staff of the University Gallery has found that a group orientation process is more effective in the early stages of volunteer work than an individual, apprentice-like approach. Although scheduling can become a problem, collective orientation allows for the efficient use of staff hours, the uniformity of training and the explicit review of the Gallery's goals. This approach creates an environment which is similar to the student's classroom setting, which in turn leads to a reduction in anxiety and a sense of camaraderie or cohesiveness. Experience has shown that the clarification of each volunteer's assignment, and an explanation of its relevance or importance to the museum influences their attitudes and performance. Constant verbal feedback and a formal written evaluation at the completion of each level is also essential.

The third stage of "Settling In" is still in the experimental stage. However, recommendations can be made by relying on previous solutions and behavioral research. The goal of this stage is to maintain the favorable cost/benefit exchange and basis for identification with the institution. As such, it is important to consider the individuality of the volunteer's skills and career goals. At this stage, a volunteer at the University Gallery is asked to define their career objective. A set of projects are then designed to train the student in various areas which specifically relate to their career plans. The student is promoted from one project to the next until they graduate from the University. Since leadership is important in many museum jobs, volunteers at this level are given an opportunity to develop this skill via active participation in the orientation and training of new volunteers in the Program.

The application of principles from socialization and organizational commitment has already proved beneficial to the University Gallery. While not yet realized, the prospects for further benefits in the third stage of socialization activities are very good.

We are currently exploring a more detailed study of these principles in other settings. We believe that these principles are generic and can be applied to senior citizens in a museum, to hospital volunteers, and to a wide range of other volunteer groups. Specific activities at each socialization stage will differ, but the process will be similar to the socialization activities of the University Gallery. For example, senior citizens bring many skills developed over the course of their lives, and may need different types of training. Nonetheless, they still need to have their perceptions of the museum clarified and be oriented to feel a part of the institution. Many want to continue learning and growing. Some welcome the opportunity to direct and train others as suggested in the third stage of "Settling In." By socializing these different groups of volunteers to identify with the institution that they are serving, museums, hospitals and other types of organizations can develop a valuable pool of committed, involved individuals to supplement the activities of their paid staffs.

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