ABSTRACT

This article is an overview of the history and current use of the Internet in the development of resources in the field of volunteer management. It traces the roots of today's Internet resources on volunteer management to discussion groups on philanthropy and non-profit organization development and contains comprehensive histories and summaries of major Internet resources available today. Included are general definitions of applicable Internet terminology.

The History and Development of Internet Resources for Volunteer Programs

Nan Hawthorne

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other medium can boast the rapid expansion of practical resources for volunteer managers than the Internet. In six short years it has seen the development of dozens of on-line discussion groups, Web pages, and even chats ranging from general, non-profit management information to resources designed specifically and entirely for volunteer programs. Since early 1996, on-line resources for volunteer programs have grown from no more than four or five to more than two dozen. Professional volunteer managers have been quick to make use of the many Websites and discussion groups, drawing upon the information available through this highly democratic publishing medium and its attendant world-wide networking ability. The Internet is fast becoming a global DOVIA, a meeting place for directors of volunteers in agencies, and a library for useful research and instructional opportunities.

This brief history will endeavor to mark just a few of the milestones in what has been a short but eventful trip. To start, a brief glossary of terms for those unfamiliar with, or just making acquaintance of the Internet, follows.

TERMS

E-Mail

E-mail is the means by which two individuals or a selected group of individuals correspond in writing. E-mail can be internal to an organization or connected to the Internet. For the cost of a local phone call, E-mail users can write to anyone in the world. It exists as a one-time communication vehicle rather than being available to a general or public audience.

Mailing List or Listserv

Of the two means by which an individual may discuss any topic with a group of others, mailing lists are the most easily utilized, since all exchanges are accomplished via E-mail. E-mails, called "posts,"are sent to an automated distribution point to be delivered to all members, or "subscribers," to the discussion. An example of a mailing list is ARNOVA-L (see Resources).

Newsgroup

You need software called a "news reader" to subscribe to, obtain, read and respond to newsgroup postings, which have as their chief advantage the ability to be organized by topic. An example is soc.org.nonprofit (see Resources).

A useful comparison between a mailing list and newsgroup is a print magazine: a mailing list is a magazine subscription that comes to your home; a newsgroup is a magazine you must go to a newsstand to purchase.

Web Pages

A Web page is a publication stored in a

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remote computer that can be viewed by anyone who has a Web browser such as Netscape Navigator™ or Microsoft Internet Explorer™[1]. It often contains text, graphics, and even interactive forms. An example is *Volunteer Today!* (see Resources).

Chat

Chatting is a conversation or conference conducted on-line, seen as a series of scrolling lines of text with each individual's typed comments appearing on separate lines.

For a further description of Internet terms, see "Tools" from A Virtual Travelogue: Volunteer Program Resources on the Internet.[2]

RESOURCES

Soc.org.nonprofit and Usnonprofit-l

The forerunner of many general Internet resources for non-profit organizations is the newsgroup soc.org.nonprofit, and its associated mailing list, usnonprofit-l.[3] Susan J. Ellis of Energize, Inc. reports that, "Putnam Barber was running the soc.org.nonprofit newsgroup from at least 1994... it did not focus on volunteering, but it did accommodate questions on this subject."[4]

The combined history and archives of soc.org.nonprofit and usnonprofit-l have since resulted in the creation of The Nonprofit Files[5], a comprehensive and easy-to-use FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) reference that includes a section on volunteerism and service learning.

ARNOVA-L

This Internet resource was created to focus a significant amount of attention on voluntary action and was the forerunner of soc.org.nonprofit and usnonprofit-l. ARNOVA-L, the Nonprofit Organization, Voluntary Action and Philanthropy Discussion List, was developed by Roger A. Lohmann, professor of social work and director of the Nonprofit Management

Academy at West Virginia University. Dr. Lohmann operates the list for the benefit of the Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA). Lohmann states on ARNOVA-L's Web page: "This list was established as an international electronic forum for anyone using or interested in non-profit organizations, voluntary action, or philanthropy, to facilitate the rapid sharing of concerns, interests, problems, and solutions among interested scholars and practitioners."[6] Over the years, the discussion has remained carefully learned and erudite thanks, no doubt, to Lohmann's careful "moderating" (editing).

Lohmann told this writer that "ARNOVA-L is probably the oldest list 'in the sector.' I started it and have continued to operate it all the way. It was actually created in the Fall of 1990 after I got a favorable response to the idea at the ARNOVA meeting in London. It really got a shot in the arm at the 1991 meeting in Chicago and has been growing consistently ever since. We just topped 600 subscribers in 20 countries, and feed to over 2,000 people on other lists."[7]

ARNOVA-L's archives date back to January 31, 1996, and may be searched sending the message "search ARNOVA-L for <keyword(s)>" to listserv@WVNVM.WVNET.EDU.

America Online's Volunteerism Offerings

The on-line service America Online has had a "special interest area" dedicated to volunteerism and, to a lesser degree, volunteer program management for several years. The area has gone through a few changes of hands over that period of time. Susan Ellis, who for some time was responsible for one of the sponsoring organization's offerings on volunteerism, recounts that "POLF [The Points of Light Foundation] continued the site that was started within AOL by POLF's predecessor, The National Volunteer Center. It was (and still is) VolNet, but was always a closed bulletin board area, meaning that you had to register with POLF to get

access. So even though it was on AOL, it was not a public site *per se* [italics added]."

She continues, describing another AOL special interest area, Access.point: "The Access.point area was called 'Civic Involvement System' when it opened, then 'Civic Involvement Network.' It opened in April of 1995 and Energize had the sub-contract to do the volunteer-related section, which was originally called 'Volunteer Central' and then became 'Volunteer.Point.' The site closed in December 1996. AOL has now opened 'Community Matters.'"[8]

Whether maintained by The National Volunteer Center, POLF, Access.point, or now as Community Matters, AOL's volunteerism special interest areas have been oriented primarily or entirely to volunteers themselves, offering advice and referrals. The sites have been a tool for recruitment that have increased in value as more and more non-profit organizations have posted volunteer opportunities on their databases.

The Points of Light Foundation provides the VolNet area with a few resources of limited usefulness for volunteer programs. It includes articles on volunteerism, message boards (similar to newsgroups) frequented by professionals in the field, and a chat room where conferences may be held.[9]

Recently Sound Volunteer Management has contributed to AOL's offerings for volunteers, supplying a Web page directing individuals and organizations to special interest areas such as Community Matters, SERVENET, Who Cares?, and others, and via a course on AOL's Online Campus called Get The Most Out of Volunteering.[10]

Impact Online

While information on volunteer matters on the Internet remained primarily in the hands of ARNOVA and academia for several years, Impact Online has dedicated its Web pages to information and a searchable database for volunteers similar in concept to AOL's endeavors. According to Jayne Cravens, manager of Impact Online's Virtual Volunteering Program, "Impact Online was founded in 1994 because of a market need. There are many individuals who want to get involved with their community but need an easier way. A survey by *Seattle Volunteer* showed that more than 75 percent of those on-line said they would do more community service if volunteer information was available on-line. Using Internet technology to facilitate and increase community involvement was the idea behind Impact Online."[11]

Impact Online is currently developing Volunteer America, a Website that is focusing on key cities in an attempt to get volunteer opportunities on-line.

While meant to be a resource primarily for volunteers, articles by Susan Ellis providing advice on how to select and secure rewarding volunteer work were added more recently. Impact Online now offers volunteer mangers more than just a place to list volunteer opportunities. Its page, "Links and Other Online Resources for Volunteer Managers," provides a concise list of active links to other Web pages offering volunteer management advice. Its Web address is http://www.impactonline.org/vv/home.html.

IdeaLIST

IdeaLIST is one of the services provided by the Contact Center Network, a New York-based organization founded in 1994. It is located at http://www.contact.org. Similarly to Impact Online, IdeaLIST provides a database of volunteer opportunities. Its Tools For Nonprofits and Community Organizations offers links to specific articles on other organizations' Web pages as "useful resources we have found for non-profit and community-based organizations" on topics ranging from volunteer personnel issues to public relations.[12]

As Impact Online's and IdeaLIST's sponsoring organizations increased their own awareness of the organizational side of effective voluntary action, assistance to

volunteer programs became an adjunct to providing referrals and advice for volunteers.

CyberVPM

The first on-line discussion group for the volunteer resource management practitioner was CyberVPM, an outgrowth of a smaller "manually distributed" mailing list developed by the author's Sound Volunteer Management for a coalition of DOVIAs in Washington State. Unlike ARNOVA-L, CyberVPM is neither moderated nor oriented to research and academics but, instead, is an informal discussion between volunteer resource mangers working in a wide variety of organizations worldwide. Instructions for joining CyberVPM may be found at http:// www.halcyon.com/penguin/svm/cyberv pm.htm. Its archives date back to its adoption by America Online and may be searched by sending the command "search CyberVPM for <keyword(s)>" to LIST-SERV@LISTSERV.AOL. COM.

CASANet

The first true on-line effort to collect resources, instruction, and links entirely for volunteer program managers appeared on the Web as a "chapter" in the Court-Appointed Special Advocates' (CASA) general resource Web pages. Selections form Steve McCurley's and Rick Lynch's recent book, *Volunteer Program Management: Mobilizing all the Resources of Your Community* (Heritage Arts Publishing, Downer's Grove, IL, 1996), and other McCurley/Lynch publications were added in 1996 to the CASA program's Nuts & Bolts Volunteer Management Web pages. Several articles appear in sections headed Recruitment and Screening, Retention, and Supervision, including Characteristics of a Good Recruitment Message, and Conflict Between Paid Staff and Volunteers. The site also boasts McCurley and Lynch's comprehensive bibliography on volunteer management.[13] You can find this Website at http://www.casanet.org.

Volunteer Program Management Mini-University

Growing out of CyberVPM and unknowingly concurrent with CASA's pages on volunteer management, the Volunteer Program Management Mini-University was developed by the author's Sound Volunteer Management and became a series of Web pages meant to mimic an academic system of admissions, registration, departments, and a library. The Volunteer Program Management Mini-University departments provide "lectures" (articles on volunteer program management) and a "syllabus" (links to other articles and resources on the Web) on virtually every aspect of managing a volunteer program: recruitment, screening, recognition, networking, and career development. The author has been told the site has been 'mistaken for a *bona fide* educational institution. CyberVPM broadcast "a point of clarification, since someone recently told me that they thought the Volunteer Program Management Mini-University was a real school; it exists only in cyberspace!"[14]

Volunteer Today!

Journalistic endeavor on behalf of volunteer management arrived on the Internet in 1996 with the first monthly issue of *Volunteer Today!* by Nancy Macduff of MBA Publishing. Subtitled *The Electronic Gazette of Volunteerism*, each issue contains news, articles on re-cruitment, retention, and training of volunteers, and links to recommended Websites. *Volunteer Today!* can be found at http://www.bmi.net/mba/.

Products for Volunteer Programs

Volunteer Today! pioneered catalogues for volunteer programs on the Web. It has since been joined by many companies that provide products for volunteer programs such as Red Ridge Software and Energize's Volunteer Energy Resource Catalog.[15]

DOVIAs

The term DOVIA (directors of volunteers in agencies) covers a wide variety of local networking organizations for volunteer resource managers. While there are undoubtedly dozens of such groups, few have made it into cyberspace. The DOVIA of King County (Seattle and environs)[16] was the first, with a site that provides membership, event, and contact information, as well as links to a comprehensive resource page and other DOVIAs.

The Denver DOVIA site[17] may not have been the first, but it is the most attractive and thorough, boasting a lengthy booklist with publisher information.

Washington State has created a consortium of DOVIAs. Its meeting minutes and activities are featured on its Web page[18] which, like the DOVIA of King County is sponsored by the author's Sound Volunteer Management.

Energize

Susan Ellis' company, Energize, is the most recent addition among volunteer management resources to the Internet and clearly benefitted from watching the rest develop. It is sophisticated, attractive, and interactive.[19] One of volunteer management's entrepreneurs, Energize has its catalogue on-line, linked from its Web page. But like *Volunteer Today!*, Energize also offers updated news on the field and links to other useful resources. It also provides visitors with the opportunity to develop the page via favorite quotes and other input. Two new features are an expanded library of articles, including classic, hard-to-find articles published in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* and a DOVIA directory. The address is http://www.energizeinc.com.

Are You Online?

Two years ago a search on the word "volunteer" would not have resulted in a very long list of individual volunteer programs with their own Websites. But as Web page design software has become simpler to use and non-profits have got-

ten on-line, these same searches now reap a harvest of literally hundreds of very informative and attractive sites.

Anecdotal observation has it that recruitment on the Web is quite effective. Andrew Stewart of *Seattle Volunteer*[20] reports, "Our recent marketing survey shows that prospective volunteers who use our Web version are more likely to go through with replying to one of our classifieds than someone who finds the newsletter at the library. Perhaps this is because they went out *looking for* a volunteer opportunity rather than just picking up the print newsletter in passing" (italics added).[21]

In addition to local on-line publications like *Seattle Volunteer*, recruiting volunteers via the Internet has taken several forms, from local volunteer centers with searchable databases to electronic applications on agency Web pages. Many volunteer programs are expanding the use of the Internet to provide their current volunteers with on-line resources. Volunteer newsletters and even volunteer policy manuals have been posted on the Web. Small grassroots organizations have used the Internet effectively to provide their members with ready access to by-laws, policies, procedures, and other reference materials.

Among the quickly developing offerings for volunteer programs are the many varied Internet resources on topics such as national service programs, service learning, and the recent national emphasis on expanded mentoring programs for youth as championed by the Presidents' Summit for America's Future held in Philadelphia in April 1997.

Whether your interest is in recruiting volunteers, providing an on-line newsletter for your program, or sharing with and learning from your peers, the Internet is fast becoming a global DOVIA. Will the Internet erase the continuing isolation volunteer resource managers often feel? I believe it will. The Internet has its critics. As with any other medium, the Internet is fraught with frustrations and limitations.

But its history and development reveal it to be a rich soil to cultivate for the very serious business of effective community service through volunteerism and volunteer resource management.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

As is the case with all Web pages, it is impossible to predict if those referenced here will be available when this article is published.

The author's E-mail address is penguin@halcyon.com. Her Web address is http://www.halcyon.com/penguin/svm.htm.

ENDNOTES

[1]Netscape Navigator is a trademark of Netscape Communications Corporation. Internet Explorer is a trademark of Microsoft Corporation.

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