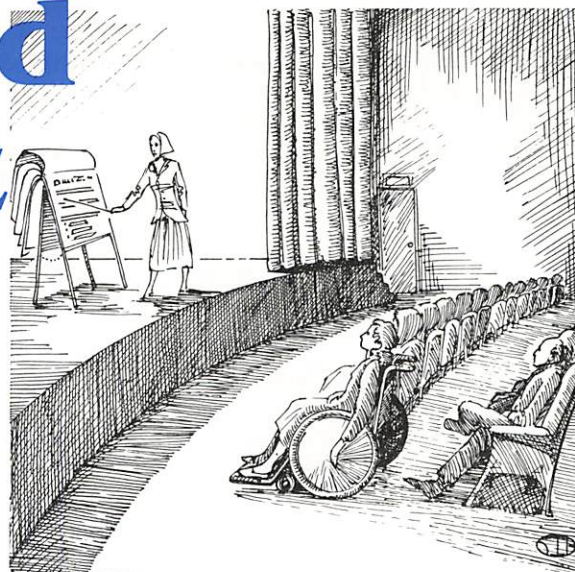


# Research and Recruitment Strategies

## What the American Red Cross Discovered



By Loretta Gutierrez Nestor and Carl Fillichio

In 1990, the American Red Cross completed targeted research on volunteer recruitment as a follow-up to its landmark Volunteer 2000 study (1987). Focus groups were conducted throughout the U.S. to discover what would motivate non-volunteers to volunteer. The following are some generalizations derived from the research, which may prove useful in your recruitment efforts.

### Research Findings

The careful research and extensive planning that the National Office of Volunteers invested in preparing for the volunteer recruitment campaign reflect how important volunteers are to the Red Cross. The campaign was designed with the goal of having a large, diverse volunteer work force by the year 2000.

The focus-group testing and mall intercept testing provided a number of valuable insights that were used to create the volunteer recruitment communications

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strategies. Some of the most useful insights are listed below:

- Nearly all respondents believed that volunteering is a good thing to do, but some had specific reasons for not volunteering. The reason most commonly given was lack of time, especially when respondents had jobs. Teenagers felt that they would rather get salaries and job experience than volunteer.

- Typically, respondents were not sympathetic to the above excuse when judging others, and felt that some people who did not volunteer may be afraid of volunteering or may not be dedicated enough to make the time for it. Respondents speculated that people who say they don't have enough time have not yet found a cause that motivates them or don't understand how their skills could be put to the best use. Respondents also believed that some people are simply too lazy, too selfish, or too materialistic to volunteer.

- Church, school and hospital organizations were named most often as places where respondents volunteered.

- Respondents liked the theme "Together, We'll Make a Difference" because people volunteer to make a difference. Respondents did not want to "join" an organization, because the word "join" implied long-term commitment. However, the appeal "Lend Us Your Time" was received more favorably, since it gave people the

feeling that they could control how much time they could contribute. And respondents rejected the phrase "We'll Pay You Back...With Interest" because they found it misleading and repugnant.

- Most respondents said that working with HIV/AIDS patients would not affect the likelihood of their volunteering (38 percent); the likelihood would depend on the type of volunteer activity (16 percent). Many said they did not know how working with HIV/AIDS patients would affect the likelihood of their volunteering. In general, black/African-American and white working-age and older men are more reluctant to volunteer for HIV/AIDS-related work. However, Hispanic/Latino and Asian-Pacific Islander high school girls expressed a stronger desire to volunteer for work with HIV/AIDS patients.

- A sense of obligation is particularly strong among people of color. People of color often believe that their neighbors and local organizations have been especially helpful to them. They therefore feel an obligation to reciprocate this support so that others will have the same opportunities they had.

- People of color are especially likely to be active in volunteer activities that are community-centered. Quite often these activities are church-related. Cross-cultural people need to be assured that their service will make a difference not only in



their own communities but also in other communities.

### Recruitment Recommendations

Based on results from the focus groups and the mall interviews, the Red Cross chose the "Close Encounters...of the Best Kind" creative concept for the volunteer recruitment materials. In addition, findings from both research stages contributed to the development of the communications plan. Here are some recommendations from the study:

**1. Recognize and take advantage of the "era of volunteerism."** President George Bush has said, "From now on, any definition of a successful life must include service to others." Volunteerism is growing more popular every day. Volunteerism—as well as new social commitment—has replaced networking and materialism as the vogue.

**2. Invest the greatest effort in attracting new populations of volunteers.** You must reach out to working women and strengthen your commitment to valuing diversity. The growing numbers and influence of racial and ethnic groups—especially blacks/Africans-Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans—make this commitment imperative. As a new "ethnic consciousness" emerges, agencies need to make special efforts to involve community leaders from racial and ethnic groups in recruiting.

**3. Multicultural volunteers are important.** Recruit mentally and physically disabled persons as volunteers.

**4. The best method of recruiting volunteers is simply to ask one-on-one.** Asking someone to volunteer one-on-one is still the best way to recruit volunteers. Yet many people have never been asked individually to volunteer. The research reaffirmed that a primary motivation for initially volunteering is being asked. Although posters, flyers and ads do increase awareness of volunteer needs, skill requirements and activities, the strongest appeal is still the personal one.

**5. Use "hands-on" volunteer opportunities as a major recruitment theme.** The new breed of volunteers in the U.S.—regardless of age—is choosing hands-on projects in which there is contact with people in need. People want to "really do

something" when they volunteer, and activities such as telephone solicitation and fund-raising activities do not provide the "meatier" and more interesting activities that are so important to them.

**6. Use materials that emphasize altruistic reasons rather than personal reasons for volunteering.** Test respondents did recognize that personal gains were possible from volunteering—work experience, building of self-confidence, and recognition from their community. However, such personal benefits are strongly perceived to be the wrong reasons for volunteering by those tested. Efforts to promote personal benefits as the most important ones are viewed negatively.

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**7. Develop the image of your organization as an organization to which people feel a strong "personal attachment," in order to position it as an organization worthy of personal commitment.** Many people do not develop a personal bond to an organization until they are affected personally by its services. Most volunteers need to feel a bond to the organization they support. This bond has usually been achieved because an organization directly addressed a problem or concern experienced by the volunteer, or because the organization provided a direct benefit to someone the volunteer knew.

**8. Show that volunteers will use their skills, whatever their level, and directly affect the quality of life of others.** An organization's ability to use the skills of its volunteers effectively is critical. People want to know how well their skills match the needs of the organization.

**9. Promote the most "attractive" activities available to volunteers.** Research indicated that people were less interested in blood drives than in other volunteer activities—such as driving elderly people to doctors' appointments; teaching CPR, first aid, or water safety; helping in a veterans hospital; or teaching the community how to deal with people living with HIV/AIDS. Volunteer activities of greatest interest to people vary according to demographics. A variety of options for volunteer work should be presented.

**10. Take advantage of new, "cutting edge" communications techniques.** Traditional forms of communication, such as posters, brochures and print ads, are effective in recruiting volunteers. However, nontraditional forms, such as video technology in supermarkets, cable televisions and computer bulletin boards, may also attract new volunteers.

**11. Establish your image as a community-based organization that benefits people at the local level and national level.** Many people choose to work in a community-based organization rather than a national or international one. This fact is true because volunteers are often more motivated to help within their own communities where they can more easily see the results of their work and where their work benefits their neighbors.

**12. Dispel the belief that your organization needs only volunteers with special skills (such as medical or disaster relief experience).** Let your target audience know you can provide training to many persons who can provide valuable help in many situations.

**13. Demonstrate that your organization needs volunteers from all racial and ethnic groups and values diversity.** "Mainstream" organizations are perceived to be primarily white and middle class—especially by people of color. Recruitment materials should portray persons from a variety of racial and ethnic groups, and copy should be written with sensitivity to different cultures. ■