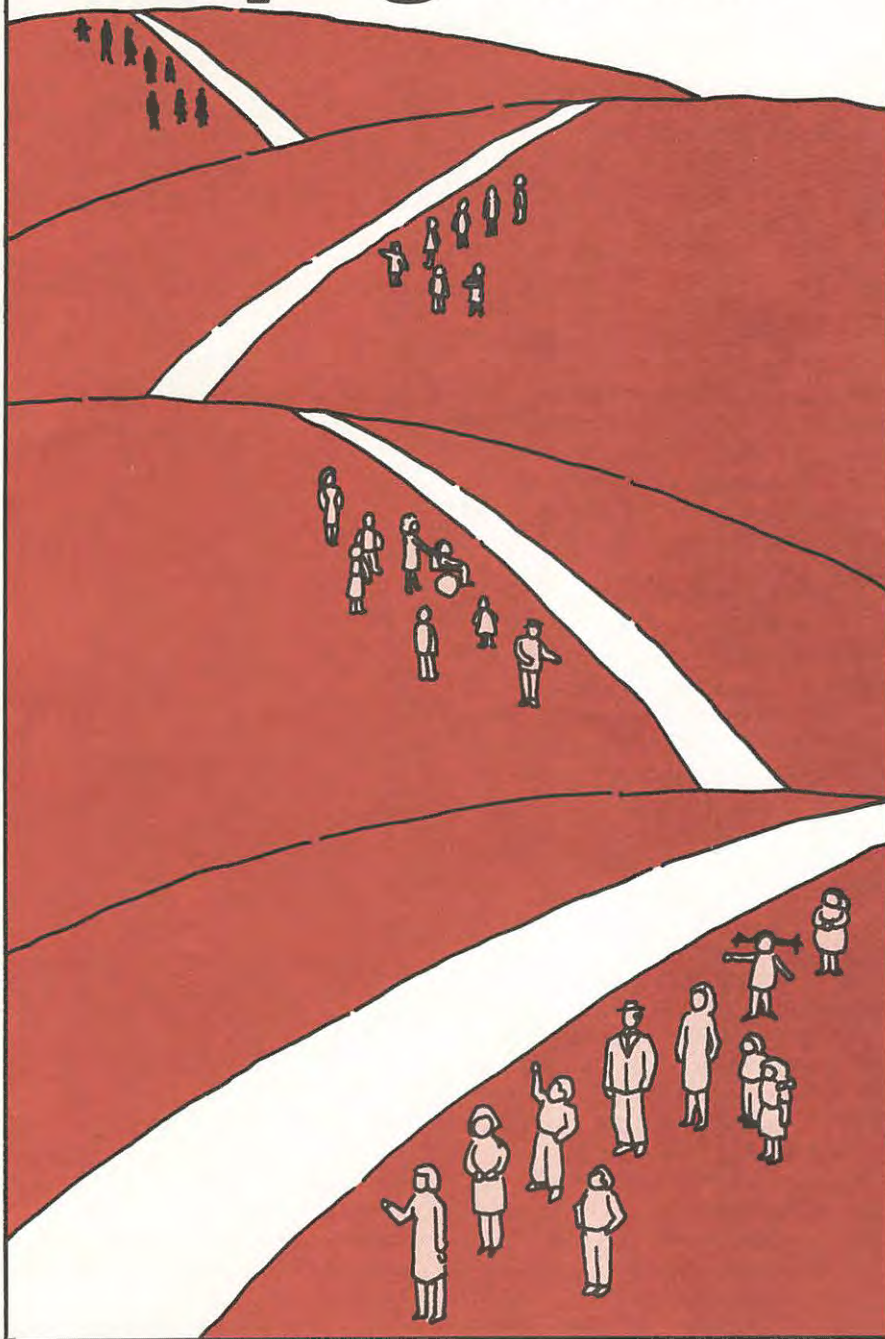# Preparing An Effective Recruitment Campaign

By Richard Lynch

I N THEORY, THE PROCESS OF RE-cruiting is an easy one. Recruiting is simply a matter of showing a person that he or she can do the things he or she wants to do. As such, it is a helpful, mutually beneficial process.

In practice, however, recruitment often causes volunteer coordinators a lot of anxiety and frustration. The questions of what methods to use, how we alone can possibly reach so many people, and how to find the time given our other responsibilities often seem overwhelming. One way of reducing that anxiety is to prepare for the recruitment effort in a systematic way.

If you ask a person, "What would it take to get you to volunteer some of your time for an agency in the community?" the answers you get tend to be not about the recruitment technique employed but about the design of the job you're recruiting them to do. Nearly all will say something like, "It would have to be a challenging job," or "It would have to be a job that enabled me to meet and be with other people," or "It would have to be a job that I felt was worthwhile," or "It would have to be a job that gave me the opportunity to improve my skills."

The point is that unless we have done some other things before we start our recruiting campaign, we will have a harder time getting volunteers than is necessary. If we start by making sure that we do the kind of planning that leads to the kinds of jobs that attract the kinds of people we want to recruit, we not only will make recruitment easier but also will avoid problems of volunteer motivation later on. The chart shows how the process of recruiting flows naturally out of the process of designing jobs and developing a case for the organization. We need to have jobs that people are attracted to, and we need to have a powerful message as to why our program is important. Recruitment then leads naturally into the process of interviewing and screening in which the volunteer's own interests and abilities are compared to the jobs available and a mutual agreement is reached on what the volunteer will do for the agency. Often, this process leads us to

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modify the jobs that we initially have designed.

A recruitment effort depends on the hard work of a lot of dedicated people, not just the volunteer coordinator. These people include staff, volunteers, board members and people recruited to help with the effort. The volunteer coordinator's job is to prepare these people. They must have a systematic and uniform understanding of what they are trying to do and of how best to do it. In preparing for the campaign, the volunteer coordinator should consider the following six major tasks:

1. Who are we trying to recruit?

Are we targeting a particular group, or will any member of the community do? This is a question most of us don't ask because we have had experience with successful volunteers from a variety of backgrounds. It is easier, however, to recruit if we have some particular types of people in mind because it is easier to target our message to the needs of that particular group. Messages sent to the general community have to apply to everyone, and often wind up speaking to no one.

So ask, is there a certain type of person we want? Do we want someone from a particular age group? Do we want someone of a particular sex or ethnic background? Do we want someone with certain professional skills? The answers to these questions may be multiple—we may want young, old and middle-aged people, for example. But if we have reached this conclusion in a thoughtful way (rather than merely saying, "We'll take any age group"), we can then begin to target a recruitment campaign on each of these groups, with a slightly different message to each.

2. Where will we find them?

Once we have determined who we are trying to recruit, we can ask, "Where will we find them?" If we are after a certain type of professional, are there professional societies or clubs where such people might be found? If we are after members of a given age group or a certain minority group, are there places where groups of such people gather? Again, if we simply begin trying to recruit anyone in the general community, the answer to this second question is "everywhere." This answer makes our job a little more difficult because it will be harder to focus our recruitment efforts. People who are everywhere are also nowhere in particular.

Communities tend to be made up of circles of people—social groups, groups of employees, clubs, professional organizations and other types. In identifying who we are after and where they are to be found, we move toward identifying the circles of people we want to reach to present our recruiting message.

People also belong to readership, listening and viewing groups. If you are going to use the media in your campaign, you need to select which media to use based on the profile of its listeners/viewers/readers. Any newspaper, radio station or television station can supply you with such information.

3. How should we go about communicating with them?

After we have listed some locations where people can be found, the third step is to ask, "How will we communicate our recruiting message to them?" In general, the most effective means of recruiting a volunteer are those in which two-way communication is possible. The best form is communication from a current volunteer or board member, since they are attributed with purer motives than paid staff. (There is always the possible, subconscious suspicion that the paid person is trying to get the potential volunteer to do some of the work she gets paid to do.)

One of the weaknesses of having no particular target group in mind is that it is difficult to use methods that involve two-way communication when you are trying to communicate with the general populace. If we are trying to recruit "members of the general community" who are "everywhere," we have to fall back on one-way communication such as direct mail, press releases, posters, public service announcements, grocery bag messages, newspaper ads, handbills or talk-show appearances. Such efforts do succeed in recruiting volunteers, but they are less efficient in recruiting effective, dedicated volunteers than those methods in which a potential volunteer can ask questions and in which we can speak directly to the candidate's own needs and skills.

People volunteer only because they *want* to. Helping a person see that she can do something that she *wants* to do is easiest when a two-way conversation can take place. Therefore, while I would include easy and inexpensive methods

of recruiting volunteers in my recruitment drive, I would concentrate on one-to-one conversations and on talking to groups small enough to get a good two-way conversation going.

Recruiting through such methods is a more labor-intensive way of going about it than the one-way communication type of campaign. Again, this means involving other people in the recruitment process. It means the volunteer coordinator needs to *manage* the recruiting effort, not do it all herself.

4. What will we say to them?

The fourth major step is to develop an effective recruitment message. Often, no thought is given to this at all—we just send people out to talk about what the agency does and about the kinds of volunteer jobs we want people to do. By doing this, we needlessly reduce the number of people who will respond to us.

An effective recruiting message has three parts, the first of which is **the need.** Most recruiting messages seldom talk about why we want the person to do a particular job. They only talk about the activities the person will be performing. This leaves it up to the person being recruited to figure out what the need for those activities is.

The need usually refers to something that exists in the community, not something that exists inside the agency. "Our senior center needs volunteers to help cook hot meals for seniors one day a week" is not the kind of statement I'm referring to. The problem with such a statement is that it conjures up only the picture of sweating over a hot stove, and it is too easy for a person to say, "Who cares?" By including a statement of need in the recruitment message, we show people how they can help solve a problem rather than merely do some activities.

Oftentimes, for volunteers involved in direct service, the need will be the need of the clients to be served. A few such statements of need are listed in an abbreviated form below:

● Nutrition center volunteer: "Many elderly in our community cannot afford to get a balanced diet and are suffering from malnutrition."
● Hospital volunteer: "Many patients in the hospital for long stays are lonely and depressed."
● Crisis clinic volunteer: "Some people

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

PLANNING
The process of deciding what the program is supposed to accomplish and determining the objectives that will accomplish those purposes.

JOB DESIGN
The process of developing jobs that will accomplish the objectives of the plan and that, at the same time, are jobs volunteers will *want* to do.

PREPARING THE CASE FOR THE PROGRAM
The process of preparing a powerful statement of why the program is needed, what we are doing to meet that need, and the benefits to the community of our doing so.

RECRUITMENT

FUND RAISING

PUBLIC RELATIONS

INTERVIEWING/SCREENING
The process of determining the suitability, strengths and interests of the potential volunteers and of matching them to the jobs that need to be done.

TRAINING
The process of providing volunteers with the skills and information they do not already have, which are necessary to carry out their responsibilities.

ENABLING
The motivating, delegating, counseling, coordinating, encouraging, recognizing, working out of volunteer-staff conflicts, and other supportive, daily acts of managing an effective volunteer program.

EVALUATING
The monitoring of the program to see if it is achieving its aims, and the identifying of problems and opportunities that form the basis for subsequent planning.

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in our community suffer from mental fear and anguish so intense that they do harm to themselves and to other people."

● Literacy volunteer: "Many people from all walks of life are unable to take advantage of the full benefits of our society because they are unable to read or write."

● Girl Scout leader: "Many girls grow up without the self-confidence and other skills to become competent, successful adults."

● Fire department volunteer: "People in outlying areas who have heart attacks cannot be reached from the main station in time to save their lives."

● Mental health receptionist: "Clients

coming into the center are often embarrassed, confused and uneasy."

● Art museum docent: "Many people who visit the museum would like to know more about the exhibits. Sometimes their lack of knowledge causes them to miss a great deal of the meaning and beauty of the exhibits, and their interest in returning to the museum wanes."

In accepting such a job, the volunteer is directly answering the needs that the agency itself exists to address.

On the other hand, some volunteers are recruited to do things that do not directly affect the agency's main work. Some clerical types of volunteer jobs, for

example, exist to meet the needs of staff or of the agency more than they do the needs of the clients or the community.

In talking about the need in such circumstances, it is important to talk about the needs of the staff in the context of their work in meeting the needs of the community. A few examples are listed below:

● Voluntary Action Center clerk/typist: "When people call up wondering what they can do to help make the community a better place, staff are sometimes limited in their responses because the information we have is not filed systematically and not typed."

● United Way envelope stuffer: "A key part of our being able to support agencies who are working to solve the problems of our community is a direct mail appeal, which is hindered by lack of staff time to stuff and address the envelopes."

● Public television phone worker: "Citizens who enjoy the programming provided only on public television depend on pledge drives to keep us on the air, yet we have far too few staff to mount such drives."

● Community action agency bookkeeper: "In order to continue our efforts to improve the lives of the poor, we must account for our grants properly, a skill none of our staff have."

The **statement of need** should lead the potential volunteer naturally to the conclusion that something ought to be done about it. In one-to-one or small group situations, the recruiter can stop at this point to check to see if the potential volunteers agree that this is a need worth doing something about. Often, in such situations, the potential volunteer may stop to remark on the seriousness of this situation.

Returning to our example of the senior center, the recruiter might ask the potential volunteer if he was aware that many seniors in the community were unable to afford nutritionally balanced meals and were suffering from malnutrition. She might include some anecdotal evidence or some statistics, though these are often less compelling in conversation than stories about actual people. If he doesn't say anything, she might ask what he thinks about it. A normal response would be something like, "That's terrible," or "I had no idea," or "Somebody ought to do something about that."

Such responses then lead naturally to

the second element of an effective recruitment message, which is to show the volunteer how he or she can help solve this problem. In other words, *now* is the time to talk about **the job description** or what we want the volunteer to *do.* By describing these activities in the context of the need, we make our recruitment message more powerful. If we merely jump in and talk about the activities without also defining the need, some people will be able to figure out why such activities are important, but others won't. By making the assumption that people will see why the work is worth doing, we needlessly screen out people who would like to give their time to a worthwhile effort but aren't able to see why this job is important. Using our example, the potential volunteer might be quite eager to help out in the kitchen to help overcome the problem of malnutrition, while he may be totally uninterested in the job if it is merely described as cooking, busing dishes and serving meals.

Of course, doing something worthwhile isn't the only reason people volunteer. Our recruitment message therefore needs to show how they can meet other needs they might have. This third part of the message, **the benefits,** helps people see how they can help themselves by doing activities that help the agency serve the community.

People volunteer for all manner of reasons besides helping other people, some of which are listed below:
● To "get out of the house"
● To get to know important people in the community
● To establish a "track record" to help them get a job
● To make a transition from prison, mental illness or other situation to "the real world"
● To "test the water" before making a career change
● To make new friends
● To be with old friends who volunteer at the agency
● To develop new skills
● To gain knowledge about the problems of the community
● To maintain skills they no longer use otherwise
● To impress their present employer
● To spend "quality time" with some members of the family by volunteering together
● To gain status
● To escape boredom
● To feel a part of a group

To be as effective as possible, the recruitment message needs to show the potential volunteer that whatever combination of needs she has can be met by doing an important job at the agency. This section of the message is particularly important in recruiting volunteers for clerical or staff support jobs, such as the legendary envelope stuffer. People don't volunteer to stuff envelopes because of the sheer joy of it or for the satisfaction of creating mountains of mail. They do it for some other reason, the most common one being the pleasure of socializing with a group of other people while they do this important but not very exciting task.

If the recruitment message is presented in a one-way format, it should list some benefits the volunteer coordinator thinks will appeal to the target group. If it is being presented in a two-way format, where the recruiter has an opportunity to talk to potential volunteers about their needs, skills and desires, the benefits can be tailored specifically to the audience.

Because each volunteer has a different combination of motivations for volunteering, the recruiter needs to know something about the person in order to do the most effective job of encouraging him to volunteer. If the person wants to meet new people, we want to make sure we stress jobs that allow him to do that, for example.

If the recruiter doesn't know the person she is trying to recruit, and if she is able to arrange the circumstances to allow for it, she should spend some time with the person to find out what kind of benefits might appeal to him, perhaps suggesting a few from the list above. This situation also provides the opportunity to identify some things the potential volunteer is concerned about and enjoys doing, and other clues to what it is he *wants* to do. This may lead to the establishment of new volunteer job opportunities.

For example, a person who wants to help the aforementioned senior center might have a hobby of photography. As the recruiter talks to the person about helping out in the kitchen (which is what the agency wants him to do), she may notice that he is only mildly interested in that particular job. When she talks to him about photography, however, his interest perks up. She might then ask if he would be interested in using his photographic skills to help the center.

If the recruiter learns what kinds of

benefits are important to the volunteer, it is important that these be communicated to the volunteer coordinator so she can make sure the volunteer's experience fulfills his expectations. One cause of volunteer turnover is that volunteers don't get the things they volunteered to get. They volunteered to be with friends and got assigned to different shifts; they volunteered to escape boredom and were given a boring job to do; they volunteered to get involved in a regular, soothing, non-stressful activity and were given a high-risk task; they volunteered to learn new skills and never got the chance to do anything beyond what they already knew; they volunteered to impress their employer and never got a letter of thanks sent to the employer; and so on. The information obtained from effective recruiting is the same information that can be used in successful volunteer retention.

The statement of benefits, like the statement of need, is often omitted by recruiters, perhaps because they would like to ascribe purer motives to volunteers or because it is so obvious to them.
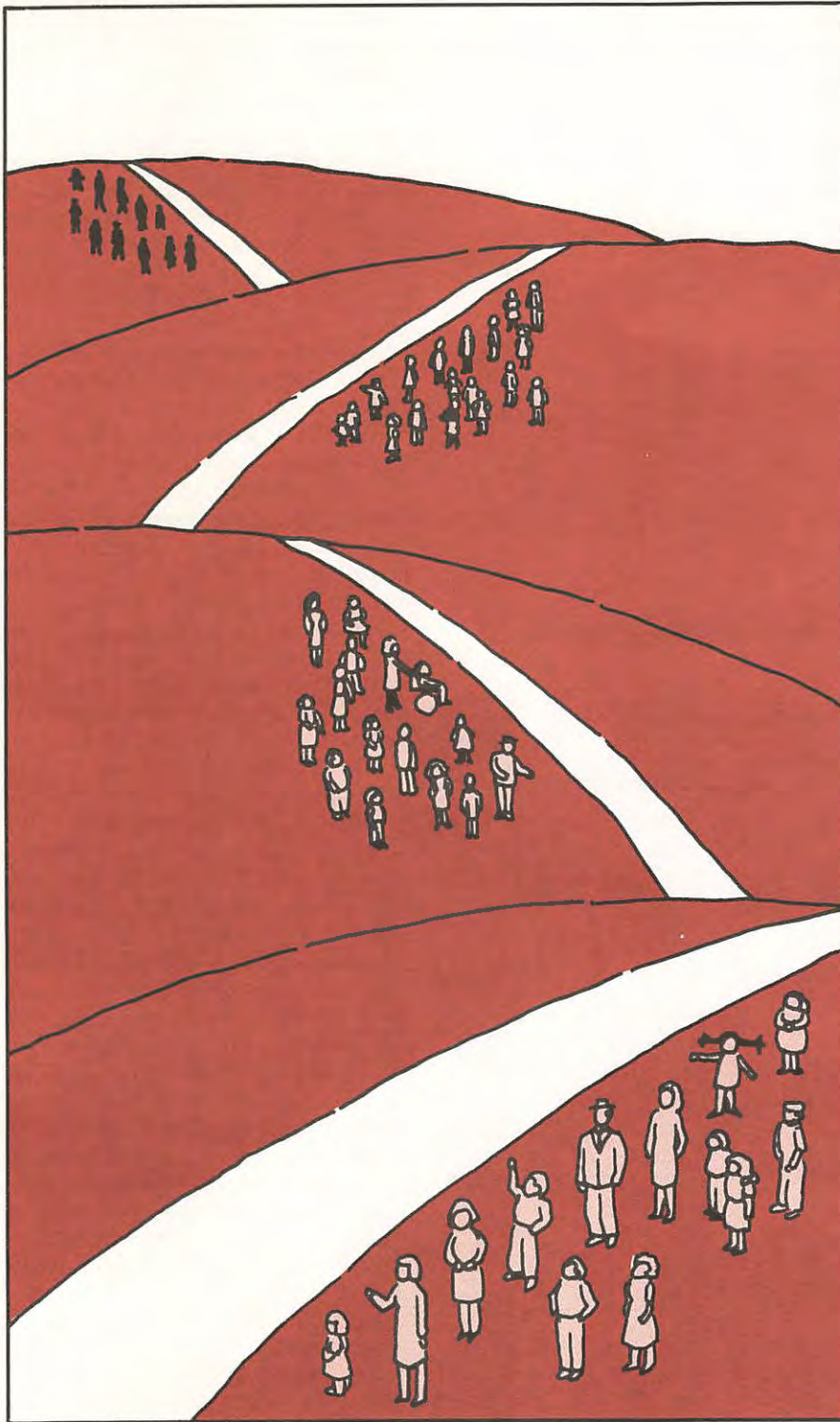
Stating the need, the job and the benefits is essential if we are to have the best chance of recruiting as many effective people as possible. Regardless of the types of recruitment methods you use, tell the people what the problem is (the need); show them how they can help solve it (the job); and tell them what they will gain (the benefits) in the process.

5. Who will do it?

The fifth step in preparing an effective recruitment campaign is to consider, "Who will do the recruiting?" This is where we decide how to get more two-way communication into our recruiting effort and who will take the responsibility for creating posters, contacting radio stations and other forms of one-way communication.

As indicated above, the most effective people are often those who are volunteers or board members of the agency. In order to insure their effectiveness, however, we need to be sure they know that this is their responsibility, and who they are supposed to recruit, where to find those people, how they are supposed to do it, and what they are supposed to say. In short, they need to be well-equipped by staff to do the most effective job possible.

An often over-looked and extremely effective resource is a person who is re-

lished, enables the volunteer coordinator to use the most effective form of recruitment—face-to-face contact with someone you know—in a systematic and easy way. A good way of setting up such a system is to have staff, board members and other volunteers think about people they know in the various community groups who might be willing to volunteer their time in this way. These people can then be brought together for a training session.

Although a lot of effective, person-to-person recruiting "just happens," we can make a lot more of it happens by systematically encouraging it. Everyone involved in the organization, both volunteers and staff, should understand what their recruiting responsibilities are within the framework of the overall plan. Each time a need for a new volunteer arises, the volunteer coordinator can prepare a job description, and a rough statement of the need and possible benefits. This can be communicated to all staff, board members and present volunteers (especially those recruited for this purpose) so that they might begin looking, among the people they know, for good candidates.

6. How will they know what to do?

The last step in preparing for the recruitment effort is to train those who will be delivering the recruitment message. If you follow the principles described above, this means training everyone involved with the agency. Everybody knows potential volunteers; it's just a matter of getting them to think about asking people they know to make a commitment to solving agency needs and of equipping them to make a coherent case for doing so.

In general, training should cover the participants' role in the recruitment process and provide adequate opportunity for them to role-play their presentation of the recruitment message.

To sum up, keep these questions in mind as you prepare for your next recruitment campaign:

● Who are we trying to recruit?
● Where will we find them?
● How should we go about communicating with them?
● What will we say to them?
● Who will do it?
● How will they know what to do?

Taking the care to answer them thoughtfully will help you to manage a more effective recruitment campaign.

cruited specifically to recruit volunteers. If you are looking for volunteers from the workplace, for example, an effective first step is to recruit an employee whose volunteer job is to identify potential volunteers within the company and recruit them for jobs they would want to do. Such a person can play this role year-round, thus providing more flexibility than other means of recruitment. Every time a need for a volunteer arises, the volunteer coordinator can put the word out through the volunteer recruiters. Those people can then approach people they know who might be interested in the new opportunity to volunteer.

An effective volunteer program might have volunteer recruiters in a variety of the groups that make up the community at large. Such a network, once estab-