

Jeffrey L. Brudney

**FOSTERING
VOLUNTEER
PROGRAMS
IN THE
PUBLIC
SECTOR**





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Volunteer Programs
in the Public Sector**

FOSTERING VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR
Planning, Initiating, and Managing Voluntary Activities
by Jeffrey L. Brudney

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Preface

It would be easier to do it myself. Anonymous

How much could it be worth if it is free?
Anonymous

I had heard the preceding opinions expressed about volunteers long before I started this book. I had also heard that volunteers consume valuable staff time that could be better applied to other pursuits. Other common views are that public organizations have no quality control over volunteers, but an agency, especially one mired in fiscal stringency, can hardly turn down citizens who want to help out, regardless of their qualifications. Without the leverage of a paycheck, volunteers cannot be managed: They are unreliable, balk at paperwork, and resist supervision. Since volunteers give their time, an organization would be ungrateful to evaluate them or to hold them accountable for performance, much less to “fire” them for not meeting standards of conduct or quality.

As with most aphorisms, opposing ones seemed equally plausible. Volunteers can stretch public budgets. They can add a new dimension of “sharing and caring” to government services. They possess important linkages to the community. People volunteer for disparate reasons, but improvement—of themselves, public agencies, clients—is a salient motivation.

To meet their goals, volunteers expect, and will accept, direction. Volunteers are not selfless, but they do want to make a difference in some way. Perhaps the worst fate that could befall them would be to learn that their time has been wasted because an agency lacks a commitment to managing all of its human resources.

Based on original survey research and extensive fieldwork, as well as literature from several disciplines, this book evaluates competing claims regarding volunteers. Specifically, it examines how volunteers are involved in the delivery of government services and how volunteer programs can be initiated, bolstered, and sustained in the public sector.

Scope and Features

Most of the research on volunteers is not concerned with programs sponsored by government. Nonprofit organizations are the chief employers of voluntary assistance, and to the degree that public agencies have received attention, the coverage has been secondary. Even within the field of public administration, treatment has been rare. This book adopts a different perspective.

Here, government is the focus of inquiry. Volunteers have a lengthy and distinguished record of assistance to the public sector, and their participation continues to grow. Governments are turning away from the direct delivery of public goods and services toward reliance on third parties. Many public administrators already have responsibilities in volunteer management, and the trend is accelerating. This obligation is too important and too widespread to be left to past habit and convention.

Fostering Volunteer Programs in the Public Sector shows how volunteer involvement can be a coherent approach for providing and enhancing services, and for aiding government organizations in achieving policy goals. To that end, it explores methods for planning and designing the volunteer program, attracting and retaining capable volunteers, coordinating the efforts of paid staff and volunteers, and managing

the program and strengthening accountability. It addresses attendant issues, including: possible resistance from paid staff, evaluation of volunteer performance, insurance coverage for volunteers, the monetary costs of a program, the need for support from the top of the organization, and steps that practitioners and scholars can take to encourage the approach in the public sector.

In addition to the focus on volunteer programs within government, other features make this book distinctive. First, it draws on a rich store of information from a public agency whose experience with volunteers spans a quarter of a century. Since 1964, volunteers from the Service Corps of Retired Executives, or the SCORE Association, have assisted the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in counseling and training agency clients in techniques of business management. From the beginning, the SBA has played a very active role in organizing the volunteers and developing the association. SCORE receives all funding from the SBA and has no other functions or purpose than service to the agency. The volunteers might be considered "gratuitous employees" of the Office of Business Development. Extensive fieldwork and interviews conducted at SBA offices and at the SCORE national headquarters and chapters in the field illustrate the dynamics of a long-standing partnership.

Second, results from surveys administered to officials of the two groups add empirical grounding to the discussion. In 1985 and 1986, I mailed questionnaires to chairpersons of all SCORE chapters and to SBA business development personnel who work with the volunteers. Completed questionnaires are available from 333 chairpersons (85 percent response rate) and 103 of the business development officers (51 percent). Thus, the study combines systematic information from both principals to the volunteer-agency relationship.

Third, the text takes advantage of the broad literature on volunteerism, much of it the product of scholars outside the field of public administration. While examination of the SBA-SCORE collaboration in the delivery of government services lends depth and empirical assurance to the inquiry, the

book is not a case study of a single organization or program. Instead, this example is used for purposes of supporting and amplifying general themes regarding volunteer involvement. The SBA and SCORE assume a greater role to the degree that the literature is ambivalent, or even silent, on matters crucial to volunteer programs in government.

Audience

This book is intended for two main groups. The first consists of public administrators at all levels of government whose jobs encompass working with volunteers in the provision of services. Although managers of volunteer programs in the public sector should find this book most useful, it will also help line employees who collaborate with volunteers to do so more constructively. In addition, the book can assist elected and appointed officials in agencies that do not have volunteers to assess the challenges and potential of the method. Should they decide to introduce volunteers, the book elaborates the measures and support necessary to establish and maintain a successful program.

The second major audience consists of students and academics with an abiding interest in the participation of volunteers in government services. As proposals for national public service and other volunteer-based initiatives gain visibility and momentum, this group is on the rise. It includes students and their mentors in graduate programs in public administration and related fields who want to learn more about volunteerism. It also embraces researchers studying alternative means to the direct production of services by government employees, particularly greater involvement by citizens.

Another group who should find this book useful are executives and managers of nonprofit organizations that have volunteers or contemplate their participation. Although the work environment differs from the public sector, volunteer programs sponsored by these organizations share basic concerns with government programs, such as satisfactory rela-

tions with paid staff and adequate control over performance. To a lesser degree, the book could also help managers of employee volunteer programs underwritten by civic-minded business firms. Although the context and thrust of these efforts are quite distinct from government, the managers face similar problems of volunteer program design, organization, recognition, and funding.

Overview of the Contents

Chapter One elaborates the scope of volunteer activity in the public sector that is intended to aid government organizations in producing goods and services and reaching other agency goals. It explains why volunteer involvement has increased in government and how this change affects public employees and managers. The chapter reviews research on volunteerism in public administration and suggests a reorientation toward greater attention to volunteer programs organized and sponsored by government.

The remainder of the book is organized into three major sections. Part One examines the effects of volunteers on the delivery of public services. Chapter Two shows that well-designed and well-managed volunteer programs are not "free," but that they more than justify expenditures in terms of service to clients and the organization. The chapter presents an inventory for costing volunteer programs and uses SCORE to illustrate a methodology for estimating the dollar value of volunteer efforts and calculating a ratio of cost-effectiveness for the program. The chapter exposes the legal, ethical, and practical dilemmas of displacing employees with volunteers.

Dollars alone are not an adequate standard for evaluating the burdens and benefits of a volunteer program. Chapter Three turns to the criterion of effectiveness. The chapter describes three ways in which volunteers can improve the quality and impact of government services. These dimensions consist of (1) the performance of volunteers in the jobs

assigned to them, (2) their facilitation of the work of paid staff, and (3) their unique contributions and insights as citizens beyond simply filling job requirements.

Chapter Four examines the involvement of service volunteers in the public sector as part of a growing trend among jurisdictions in this country toward "government by proxy": the delivery of publicly funded goods and services by non-governmental organizations and personnel. The chapter elaborates the challenges to public administrators arising from volunteer participation. It calls for appropriate methods to foster effective performance and ensure accountability when the producers of government services are not employees.

Part Two addresses issues of planning, design, and management of the volunteer program. Chapter Five shows how to design the volunteer operation to realize the full benefits of the approach. The chapter elucidates a framework for this purpose, consisting of five general elements: (1) organizing the program, (2) matching volunteers and organizational needs, (3) educating citizens for volunteer service in the public sector, (4) training employees in volunteer management and supervision, and (5) evaluating and recognizing the volunteer effort.

Experts concur that the most enduring obstacle to the implementation and operation of a productive volunteer program is the often antagonistic reaction from employees. Chapter Six presents a strategy to overcome this barrier. The strategy centers on the formulation of goals for the program; review and possible amendment of agency policy and pertinent legislation; support from top management; involvement of agency leadership, staff, and volunteers in program planning and decision making; and incentives to staff members for effective collaboration with volunteers.

All the advantages (and difficulties) of volunteer programs discussed thus far presume the willing availability of citizen participants to public agencies. As Chapter Seven shows, this truism should not obscure the reality that attracting and retaining volunteers has become an increasingly demanding task for government as well as for other organiza-

tions. The chapter assesses the size of the volunteering public potentially available to government, analyzes societal and economic trends that will affect its magnitude, and elaborates methods to meet the essential challenges of recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Part Three is concerned with fostering greater volunteer involvement in the public sector. Because this book is written for practitioners and scholars in public administration, Chapter Eight discusses actions that each group should consider to encourage a volunteer approach. For elected and appointed officials and public employees, priorities include appropriate legislation and organizational policies, insurance coverage for volunteers, volunteer demonstration projects, and measures to promote acquisition and sharing of knowledge on volunteerism. For academics, the research agenda should encompass firmer estimates of the magnitude and nature of volunteer involvement in public agencies, alternative techniques for sharing the workplace between employees and volunteers, improved methods for evaluating the volunteer program, and examination of volunteer activity outside of government-sponsored efforts.

The concluding chapter presents recommendations for strengthening existing government volunteer programs and guiding new voluntary initiatives. The recommendations focus on adequate funding for the volunteer program, arrangements for power sharing, orientation and training for employees and volunteers, increased access to volunteer opportunities, and promotion of feedback from the program.

A "Resource" section at the end of the book describes the procedures and details of the surveys administered to chapter chairpersons of the Service Corps of Retired Executives and the business development officers of the Small Business Administration. This section displays both questionnaires.

Athens, Georgia
March 1990

Jeffrey L. Brudney

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J.L.B.

The Author

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