

TROPMAN REPORT

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LEVERAGING HUMAN CAPITAL: *How Nonprofits in Pittsburgh Recruit and Manage Volunteers*

America's nonprofit sector has become increasingly "professionalized," but it still depends heavily on volunteer service. In fact, recent statistics from Independent Sector show that more adults are volunteering than ever before. In 1999, 109 million people (56 percent of adults) volunteered almost 20 billion hours of service to nonprofit organizations of all types. This translates into 9 million FTE employees whose contributions are estimated at \$225 billion. Moreover, volunteers give more than just their time. Research has consistently shown that people who volunteer for nonprofits also are more generous than non-volunteers with their financial contributions.

So it is obvious that volunteers provide a significant resource to nonprofit organizations. But are these valuable volunteer resources being used to their full advantage by nonprofits in the Pittsburgh region? There is a growing body of national research on "best practices" in volunteer management, but we know very little about how nonprofits in the Pittsburgh area are recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers. The following questions are especially relevant:

- What social and economic trends have an impact on volunteerism?
- How are volunteers being utilized by nonprofits in Pittsburgh?
- What are the "best practices" in volunteer management?
- What actions can nonprofit organizations in Pittsburgh take to enhance their volunteer programs from the perspectives of recruitment, retention and utilization?

The Forbes Funds commissioned the Pittsburgh-based consulting firm First Side Partners to examine these and other questions concerning volunteerism in Pittsburgh. The research team of Matthew Dooley and Maryann LaCroix Lindberg, CFRE and office support gathered survey data from 103 nonprofit organizations of all types and sizes and conducted in-depth interviews with 39 individuals directly involved in supervising volunteers. The researchers surveyed those who manage volunteers, not the volunteers themselves. The study focused on volunteers who are directly engaged in service delivery or event management, not volunteer trustees.

Volunteer programs that enjoy the greatest success are found within organizations that regard volunteers as a central component of their ability to fulfill their mission. Volunteers in these agencies are involved in virtually every aspect of the nonprofit's work and are viewed as unpaid staff and important members of a dedicated team.

THE FORBES FUNDS

Envisioning Pittsburgh's nonprofit sector as innovative, informed, and engaged, The Forbes Funds advance capacity-building within and among the region's nonprofit organizations.

THE COPELAND FUND FOR NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

The mission of The Copeland Fund for Nonprofit Management is to strengthen the management and policymaking capacity of nonprofit human service organizations to serve better the needs of their communities.

- Management Enhancement Grants
- Emergency Grants
- Cohort (Professional Development) Grants

THE TROPMAN FUND FOR NONPROFIT RESEARCH

The mission of The Tropman Fund for Nonprofit Research is to support applied research on strategic issues that are likely to have profound effects on nonprofit management and governance, especially among human service and community development organizations.

- Applied Research Projects
- Annual Research Conference

THE WISHART FUND FOR NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

The mission of The Wishart Fund for Nonprofit Leadership is to encourage pioneering nonprofit leadership by promoting public learning and discussion about issues critical to ethical and effective management, as well as by celebrating exemplary practices.

- Leadership Roundtables
- The Frieda Shapira Medal
- Alfred W. Wishart, Jr., Award for Excellence in Nonprofit Management

Figure 1

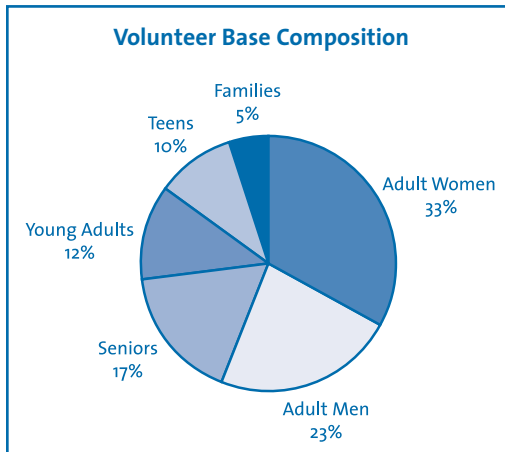
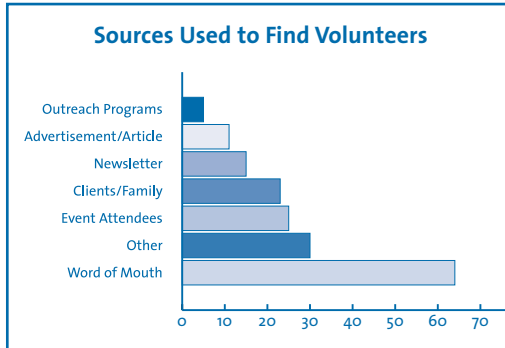


Figure 2



SOME SOCIAL TRENDS AFFECTING VOLUNTEERISM

A variety of contemporary social and economic forces affect volunteerism, some in negative ways and some in positive ways. Among the forces that constrain volunteerism are:

- **Time constraints:** Several recent studies suggest that time constraints pose the greatest challenge to volunteerism. Dual career families, greater demands for parental involvement with children's activities, single parent households and the economic downturn all have combined to place severe time constraints on individuals and families. Thus, volunteers are not necessarily available during times when nonprofits want them.
- **Perceived meaning of work:** People are increasingly dissatisfied with tedious, menial tasks. They want their work, including their volunteer work, to be intellectually challenging and meaningful. Thus, volunteers are not necessarily interested in the types of tedious tasks (e.g., stuffing envelopes) to which volunteers often are assigned.
- **Corporate downsizing:** The economic downturn has made corporations less generous with respect to their corporate philanthropy, including their volunteer programs. This source of volunteers is therefore less reliable during difficult economic circumstances.

On the other hand, there are many trends that nonprofits can leverage to enhance their pool of talented and committed volunteers:

- **Life expectancy:** People are living longer and more active lives. Retirees are looking for opportunities to continue to share their skills and knowledge.
- **Youth volunteering:** Schools at all levels, including colleges and universities, are exploring the concept of "service learning," which incorporates community service into the educational experience and makes available a cadre of young talent for special projects.
- **Young professionals:** A growing number of organizations in the Pittsburgh area provide social and volunteer opportunities for young professionals in their 20s and 30s. Many of these young people are looking for leadership opportunities and view civic engagement as part of their total professional development strategy.
- **Diversity:** Prior research has shown that minorities, especially African Americans, volunteer extensively (but not necessarily formally) in their communities. Often they undertake ad hoc tasks for individuals or families in need, not through a formal volunteer program with a nonprofit organization. Organizations in this study report difficulty in recruiting minorities for volunteer work, but they represent a valuable resource.

On the whole, these social and economic trends present a favorable environment for recruiting and retaining volunteers, but only if the nonprofit organization is prepared to make a sustained investment in a volunteer management program.

HOW DO VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE?

The research team found that volunteers represent a diverse population, as indicated by Figure 1 (see side bar). Organizations in the study say that they have difficulty recruiting men (other than seniors), African Americans and Hispanics for volunteer positions. The study did not specifically pursue this issue by, for example, assessing the appropriateness of the recruitment and retention strategies used for these groups of potential volunteers.

Volunteers assist nonprofits with a variety of tasks. The most frequent assignments for volunteers are staffing special events and handling routine office work. Volunteers are also frequently used for gift solicitation (especially telemarketing), strategic planning and working directly in program delivery. Some agencies have volunteers who are extensively engaged in services such as mentoring, tutoring, meal delivery, home visitation, neighborhood advocacy, and meeting management. It appears, however, that the norm in Pittsburgh is to assign volunteers to relatively routine support tasks such as office work and event staffing.

To read the full text of this study, log onto The Forbes Funds' web site at (www.forbesfunds.org).

The majority of organizations responding to the survey have not made a significant professional commitment to recruiting and supporting volunteers. Nearly 25 percent of the organizations have no staff person who is directly responsible for managing the volunteer program. Many organizations have made only the minimal staff commitment to volunteer management. While some nonprofits provide extensive initial training for volunteers, especially those engaged in program delivery, most of the organizations surveyed provide no continuing professional development opportunities for volunteers. The researchers found that turnover among volunteers was lower in organizations that provide extensive training, perhaps reflecting the high level of reciprocal commitment between the volunteer and the organization.

While most organizations surveyed claim to have formal job descriptions for most of their volunteers, a very small percentage actually provide some type of performance review or assessment of their volunteers. All of the organizations surveyed said that they had some type of formal recognition ceremony or program for volunteers.

WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT?

This study found three critical strategies that enhance the quality of volunteer programs:

1. Organizational Commitment

- Treat volunteers as an integral part of the organization, not an afterthought.
- Integrate volunteer work throughout the organization, not just in the menial routine tasks.
- Match the tasks to the skills of the volunteer. Just like paid staff, not all volunteers have the same skills and interests.
- If there is substantial volunteer activity, dedicate a paid staff person to manage the volunteer program.
- Provide a structure in which the volunteers can work including appropriate training, space, resources, and support services.
- Provide a wide variety of volunteer opportunities, some short-term and finite for people with limited time to donate and others involving long-term and more substantial commitment.
- Vary the times and locations of volunteer activity to allow for more flexibility in involving a diverse population of volunteers.
- Engage the CEO directly with volunteers. The commitment of the top leadership sends an important message to volunteers.

2. Communication

- Communicate with volunteers individually and collectively on a regular basis. Keep them informed of important developments in the organization, not just the issues that affect them directly.
- Listen to the suggestions that volunteers offer. Often, they have a refreshing and objective perspective on organizational processes and policies.
- Clearly outline expectations both through job descriptions and formal feedback on performance.

- Train staff to work effectively with volunteers, embracing them as part of a team.
- Show your volunteers what their work accomplishes and how the organization depends on their contributions.
- Conduct formal exit interviews when volunteers leave the organization and listen to their feedback on their experience.
- Monitor changes in volunteer interests, aspirations, and needs.
- Nationally, the more progressive organizations are using a password protected portion of their web sites for volunteers that includes targeted information, scheduling and communication.

3. Intelligent Recruitment

- Have a recruitment strategy. Understand the demographics of your community and actively seek out people who are likely to be attracted to your mission and be effective in working with your clients. Research has shown that congregations of all types are a good source of reliable and committed volunteers.
- Explore the possibility and desirability of non-traditional volunteers such as people with special needs or even persons carrying out court-ordered community service.
- Building ties with churches, synagogues or other religious institutions can be a valuable source of volunteers for any type of organization, not only a faith-based one.
- Many times former clients or members of the organizations want to give back to the organization and can be inspiring volunteers.
- If your need for volunteers is modest or sporadic, consider collaborating with other organizations to recruit and manage volunteers, perhaps a small organization that cannot justify its own full time volunteer manager.
- Use volunteer connections to build ties to corporations. Volunteers could open the door to more extensive strategic alliances with their employer.
- Ask people to volunteer. As simple as it sounds, surveys show that people would volunteer more if they were asked. The results of this survey, underscored by the individual interviews, showed that the overwhelming reason people were in their current volunteer position was because they were invited by a friend.

IMPLICATIONS

Harvard sociologist, Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* argued that Americans no longer are engaged in their communities with the same level of intimacy and intensity as before. He suggests that American civil society is breaking down as we become more disconnected from our families, our neighbors, and our communities. Television, the Internet, generational differences, demographic trends, increased mobility, suburban sprawl and other changes have led us away from engagement with organizations like the League of Women Voters, the United Way, the Red Cross, the monthly bridge club, and even organized bowling leagues.

Many people have criticized Putnam's work for its methodology and its findings. Indeed, the recent trends on volunteering do

seem somewhat in contradiction to his conclusions. Americans still volunteer in remarkably high numbers and their engagement with the nonprofit sector is still strong.

But we cannot deny the fact that social and economic forces are having an impact on the way citizens relate to their communities and to the nonprofit institutions that serve those communities. Nonprofits must respond strategically to retain a corps of dedicated, talented and reliable volunteers. The old methods of recruitment and management may not work in today's more complex environment. We are seeing more and more research suggesting that volunteers must be incorporated fully into the human resource strategy and support systems of the organization.

The Forbes Funds remains committed to helping organizations manage their human resources more effectively, including their volunteer resources. Our web site (www.forbesfunds.org) contains not only the full report from this study, but many other links and resources related to volunteer management.

This TROPMAN REPORT is one of a series of briefing papers generated by The Tropman Fund for Nonprofit Research. TROPMAN REPORTS in this 2002 series are:

1. Capacity-building in the Nonprofit Sector: *A Comparison of Resources and Practices in Pittsburgh and Denver*
2. How Do Nonprofits Compare with For-profit Providers? *An Application of Customer Value Analysis*
3. **Leveraging Human Capital: *How Nonprofits in Pittsburgh Recruit and Manage Volunteers***
4. New Economy Entrepreneurs: *Their Attitudes on Philanthropy*
5. Profit Making in Nonprofits: *An Assessment of Entrepreneurial Ventures in Nonprofit Organizations*
6. Recruitment and Retention of Managerial Talent: *Current Practices and Prospects for Nonprofits in Pittsburgh*
7. Social Services in Faith-Based Organizations: *Pittsburgh Congregations and the Services They Provide*
8. Staying Ahead of the Curve: *An Assessment of Executive Training Needs and Resources in Pittsburgh*
9. Strategic Planning: *Positioning Identity, Values and Aspirations*

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