



Value of volunteers is remarkable

By Barry VanderKelen

Volunteers have always been an important part of any nonprofit's work. Any board member or employee of an organization knows that from experience. A recent report, "Volunteering in America," uses statistics to document the value of volunteers (www.volunteeringinamerica.gov):

- In 2008, 61.8 million Americans, or 26.4 percent of adults, contributed 8 billion hours of volunteer service worth \$162 billion.
- In California, residents volunteered 908.5 million hours in 2008, or 32.7 hours per resident.
- Between September 2008 and March 2009, more than a third (37 percent) of nonprofits reported an increase in the number of volunteers, and almost half expect an increase in the coming year.
- Volunteers were much more likely to donate to charitable causes in 2008, with 78.2 percent contributing \$25 or more compared to 38.5 percent of non-volunteers.

Volunteers are essential to a nonprofit's success. The remarkable number of hours contributed is impossible to replace with paid staff. The top four volunteer activities are: fundraising, collection

and distribution of food, general labor, and tutoring and teaching.

Even more remarkable, however, is the estimate that nonprofits could realize an additional \$38 billion in service if the attrition of volunteers could be stemmed. This estimate is based on the number of people who stop volunteering. Common complaints about negative experiences included:

- Disorganized volunteer experiences;
- Unprepared and untrained leaders;
- Lack of recognition;
- Mismatching skills and interests with tasks; and
- Lack of proper training, especially when facing critical situations.

Here are few reactions to the above:

- An important investment for nonprofits is in volunteer recruitment and management. More people want to get involved and more people would stay involved if nonprofits had stronger recruitment and retention programs.
- People who are engaged in the mission of the organization will support it with donations of both time and money.
- Once the economy recovers, I wonder how many volunteers will stay engaged. People may be active now either because of a sense of urgency to help their neighbors get through

these challenging times or because they have time to do so due to unemployment or reduced work hours. As more people find employment, the number of requests for services may decrease, thus reducing the need for volunteers.

- The elimination of programs and services by state and local governments is creating gaps that volunteers can partially fill.
- The value of a volunteer's time is estimated to be \$20.25 per hour. The full-time equivalent is \$42,120 a year. I wonder how many local nonprofits pay staff \$20.25 per hour or the equivalent if benefits are offered. And if not many, why? Why is a volunteer's time worth more than a nonprofit employee's time, the person who is on the front lines of providing services?

In addition to the report, www.volunteeringinamerica.gov contains a wealth of information on recruiting and managing volunteers. Individuals can get involved locally through www.volunteerslo.org.

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Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

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