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Why the Board Should Consider Volunteer Issues

Volunteers are a legitimate subject of concern to a board of directors because of the following basic principles:

1. Volunteers are a valuable resource for the organization and should be included in any discussion of resource development. If cash is obtained by "fund-raising," volunteers result from "people-raising."

Volunteers do not "save" money but involving them effectively can stretch the budget beyond what it might otherwise cover. Volunteers should therefore be considered as one of the options available to support your organization's efforts

2. It is possible and desirable to take a proactive stance in planning for volunteer involvement.

The ways volunteers can help your organization are limited only by your vision for that involvement. The volunteer world is changing and evolving. The organization that can tap into emerging sources of community involvement will find support of many kinds, but it won't be "business as usual". Is your organization poised to take advantage of today's volunteer force? Have you articulated what you want to achieve through volunteers?

3. Volunteers are influential agents of the organization.

Volunteers have credibility in the community because they are perceived as supporting an organization without personal vested interest. They therefore can play key roles in public relations, fund-raising, public education, legislative advocacy, and other community outreach functions.

Excerpted from *The Nonprofit Board's Role in Maximizing Volunteer Resources*, pp. 2-3, by Susan J. Ellis, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, copyright 1999. Excerpted from. Found in the Energize, Inc. website library at <http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html>.

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4. Volunteers are a source of valuable information for planning and evaluation.

Volunteers are "insider/outsideers" - they are familiar with the organization but not fully integrated into its daily activities. They are knowledgeable, but they have a unique perspective. They may also have access to consumer or client opinions in a different way than employees do.

5. Volunteers are your "unsalaried personnel"

The board discusses policies that affect paid personnel, even though implementation is the role of the chief executive: new project areas that require funding, major personnel policies, affirmative action statements, and ethical considerations. In some organizations, volunteers far outnumber employees. Wouldn't the volunteer staff benefit from the same types of guidelines?

6. Because volunteers are agents of the organization, their work poses potential risk management questions and insurance needs.

Anyone acting on behalf of an organization can put others at risk or can be at risk. Volunteers are not inherently more or less likely to have accidents or make mistakes. However, the board should make sure that the organization has taken all the necessary steps to protect the client, the volunteer, and the paid staff.

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