



# What would the Perfect Volunteer-Involving Organization Look Like?

By Susan Ellis

In the way you treat volunteers, how close are you to the ideal?

Someone asked me recently what the perfect volunteer-involving organization would look like. No one had ever asked me that before, but I appreciated the point. After all, if we can't picture the results of our efforts, we won't be motivated to do the work necessary.

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So, here's what I think an organization would look like if it practiced everything we preach about creative, welcoming, and effective volunteer management, led by a skilled director of volunteer involvement with the full participation of top management and all frontline staff.

- **The organization is a busy place**, because all sorts of people are energetically focused on projects and services. It feels welcoming to clients and visitors because of the positive atmosphere and because the special needs of each individual are being addressed.
- **Everyone coming into contact with the organization is treated as a prospective long-term friend of the organization**, regardless of the initial relationship.
- **Money donors are cultivated** not only for more cash, but also for their time, skills, and contacts.
- **Time donors are valued** for their volunteer work and as potential financial contributors, as well as for the many spheres of influence they open in the community.

- **Volunteers with a predetermined time frame, such as students interning for a semester or corporate employees giving a day of service, don't disengage** when their volunteering is done. They continue to receive updates from the organization and future invitations to reconnect.
- **Clients are seen as partners in service delivery**, not just as recipients of service. Once successfully assisted, they continue to be kept informed about the organization and invited to participate in helping others.
- **On a regular basis, executives meet with volunteer office and development office staff**, exchanging leads and planning community outreach to identify as many potential friends as possible. The lists of names of all donors — money and time — are compared, and people are invited to become involved in both ways. They're also encouraged to extend that invitation to their family and friends.
- **Discussions about resources are never limited to “where can we find money?”** Any new initiative is analyzed for what

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will assure the greatest success. Then a plan is developed to generate a mix of resources. These resources might include, for example:

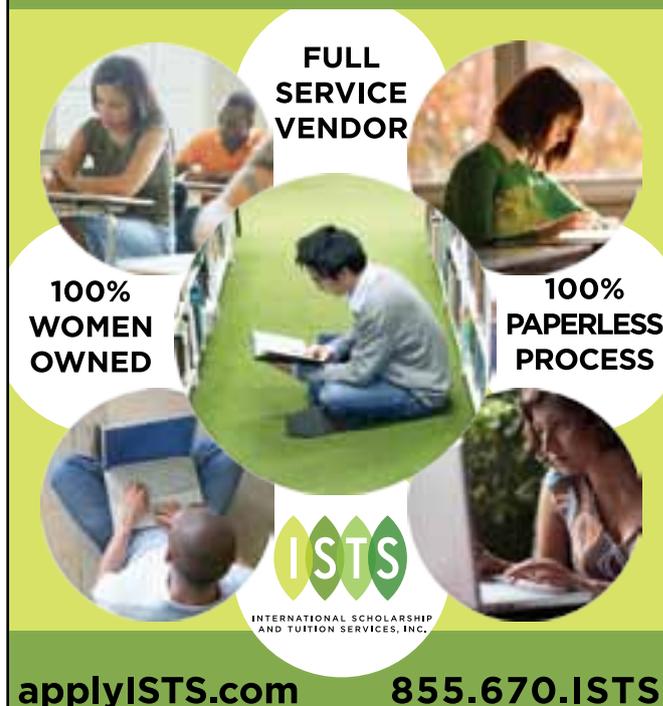
- **recruiting** skilled volunteers
  - **seeking** donated goods and services
  - **hiring** new staff
  - **engaging** consultants
  - **redeploying** current staff.
- **Paid staff see themselves as responsible for assuring the best service possible** for clients and the public. This means doing the work directly when the employee is best qualified and able. But it also means welcoming volunteers to provide different and additional skills.
  - **Staff members are recognized as much for their success as facilitators and connectors to resources** as for what they do on their own. (And labor unions understand that volunteers don't displace paid workers but, rather, expand the staff's ability to serve clients.)
  - **Board members ask as many questions about volunteer involvement** as about fundraising. They actively recruit their friends and contacts to donate skills as well as money. Further, board members are required to spend a certain number of hours each year in frontline volunteer roles so that they can see for themselves what they're governing.
  - **Rather than appreciating volunteers** mainly as *hands* (with a *heart*), everyone realizes that the availability of so many more people with different skills and perspectives enlarges the organization's *brain*. Challenges faced by the organization are routinely shared with volunteers who, as representatives of the community, ask good questions, give suggestions, and brainstorm possible solutions. Any "staff survey" naturally includes volunteer responses.
  - **Volunteers represent the organization** when paid staff can't — or when paid staff wouldn't be as effective. As private citizens, for example, volunteers might testify at government hearings, cross geographical and other jurisdiction boundaries to find other resources, and form collaborations with other organizations (possibly through *their* volunteers).

Ah, it's lovely to dream. This bright future is pretty far away in too many organizations. But it's not impossible. All we need to do, as leaders of volunteers, is believe in it ourselves. 

Susan J. Ellis is president of Energize, Inc., an international training, consulting, and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism. Based in Philadelphia since 1977, the firm has helped a wide diversity of clients across North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia, Israel, and Australasia to start or expand volunteer efforts. Ellis has written 12 books on volunteerism and dozens of articles. She is co-publisher of the international online journal, e-Volunteerism ([e-volunteerism.com](http://e-volunteerism.com)), and dean of faculty for the online volunteer management training program, Everyone Ready®. Browse the 1200+ pages of free volunteer management information on the Energize Web site: [energizeinc.com](http://energizeinc.com).



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## GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Johnson & Johnson Community Health Care Program (J&J CHC), in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, is pleased to announce a grant funding opportunity for non-profit, community based health care organizations implementing evidence-based, community education programs that promote wellness and healthy lifestyle choices to prevent and reduce the impact of obesity in children 8–12 years of age.

Successful applicants will receive a \$200,000 grant to fund activities over a 2 ½ year period. A total of eight grants will be awarded in the fall of 2013 to non-profit, community-based health care organizations in these five locations:

- Lexington, Kentucky (Jefferson County)
- Chicago, Illinois (Cook County)
- Las Vegas, Nevada (Clark County)
- Charlotte, North Carolina (Mecklenburg County)
- Washington, DC (District of Columbia)

The RFP will be released in early February, 2013 – application submission deadline is May 15, 2013. For information on the application process and the J&J CHC Program, go to [www.jhsph.edu/johnsonandjohnson](http://www.jhsph.edu/johnsonandjohnson) and click on Community Health Care Organizations, or contact Sierra Veale at 443-287-5138 or via e-mail at [jandj@jhsph.edu](mailto:jandj@jhsph.edu).

