



Bring the World to Your Door: Tapping International Volunteers

Here's a unique way to find volunteers and add an exciting new dimension to your organization.

Looking for creative sources for recruiting new volunteers? Consider the large number of foreign nationals who are in this country without work permits, says Susan Ellis, internationally acclaimed volunteerism consultant, author, and publisher. Ellis notes that such people may be students, spouses of people employed by a multi-national company on assignment for six months or longer, or “au pairs” who come over in exchange for room, board, and a small stipend. The terms of their residential status usually restrict such people from full-time paid employment.

“Foreign nationals are quite well-educated, with a wide range of skills,” says Ellis. “These long-term visitors are often lonely and bored, but don’t know enough about American culture to seek volunteer work.”

There are many opportunities for these potential volunteers to help your organization. Consider, for example, how you might expand your activities if your clients or their extended families have trouble speaking English. If you work with young people, could you include grandparents in more activities if interpreters were available? Do you work with Alzheimer’s patients who have reverted to their mother tongues?

Ellis also suggests inviting foreign nationals to speak about their country to groups of students, older people, or other clients. Becoming one-to-one friends with peers and later continuing with a pen-pal or e-mail relationship is another creative possibility. To minimize the risk for the volunteer and provide built-in support and friendship, it might work best to recruit foreign spouses or students in small groups.

Here are five effective ways Ellis suggests to find this talent pool:

- Assess which corporations in your community have foreign branches and may bring in foreign workers and their families. Contact their personnel departments and enlist their help in spreading the word about volunteer opportunities in your organization.
- Ask the admissions offices of local colleges and universities which organizations on campus reach out to foreign students and which staff offer counseling or other guidance. They may be willing to help identify or provide access to potential volunteers.
- Identify local programs for immigrants, as well as organizations that sponsor recreational programs for visitors of their cultural heritage, such as the German-American Club or the Japanese-American Association.
- Contact local foreign language newspapers or newsletters and see if they will run a story about your volunteer opportunities.
- Collaborate with foreign exchange programs, either for students or for diplomatic visitors.

“Before spreading a recruitment message,” Ellis recommends, “take the time to develop volunteer assignments most like-

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Downlink Update

Susan Ellis shares other insights in distance-education courses she teaches for the Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations. On April 15, 1999, she will be teaching the course

VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT: ATTRACTING AND KEEPING THE BEST

Other Learning Institute courses, delivered to downlink sites across the United States, Canada, Mexico, and South America, include:

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The Learning Institute is a program of the Society for Nonprofit Organizations (6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719). For more information, please call PBS Adult Learning Services at 800-257-2578.

ly to use these foreign nationals' skills and to pique their interest." Emphasize these benefits of volunteering:

- Make new friends and learn first-hand about new areas of American culture.
- Keep your skills fresh so that when you return home you'll still be in practice.
- Learn new skills that will provide references for your resume and help you get a good job when you return home.
- Improve your English through practical use.
- Help others with what you know best: your own language. ■

Selected References

Campbell, Katherine Noyes and Susan Ellis, *The (Help!)-I-Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management*.

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Koenig, Bonnie, "Is It Time for You to Go International?", *Nonprofit World*, May-June 1998.

Lauer, Larry, "Nonprofits Going Global: Opportunities and Problems from a Communicator's Perspective" *Nonprofit World*, November-December 1995.

"Meeting the Challenge of Diversity," *Nonprofit World*, July-August 1992.

Muehrcke, Jill, ed., *Volunteer Management, Leadership Series*.

Nichols, Judith, ed., *Lessons from Abroad*.

These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. To order, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (608-274-9777).

Susan J. Ellis, recognized internationally as a leader in the volunteer field, has been conducting workshops on volunteer management for the past 17 years. She is founder and president of *Energize, Inc.*, 5450 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144 (215-438-8342), author of *The Volunteer Recruitment Book* (see references), and a faculty member of the *Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations*. For a free catalog of resources on volunteer management, contact *Energize, Inc.*, 5450 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144 (215-438-8342 or 800-395-9800). For free tips and advice on all aspects of volunteer management, visit the *Energize Web site* at <http://www.energizeinc.com>.

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