Volunteer Management Resources on the Web

By Adriana P. Cuervo, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Many libraries, museums, and archives rely on volunteer staff to enhance workforce potential, to carry out fundraising and education duties, and to help connect with users. Although some believe that managing volunteers requires more work than the volunteers can actually accomplish, institutions can benefit from investing time and resources in training and developing a good working relationship with volunteer staff. Regardless of any preconceived notions, a well-managed volunteer program can reinforce an institution’s mission and values. While a general search on volunteerism in library literature yields a myriad of articles and booklets on volunteer programs and management know-how, the Internet also offers quality resources and practical information that can be of use to any archivist working with volunteers.

Volunteer-Management Resources

Enlisting volunteers entails more than just finding a project for them to complete. Volunteer managers must cover a few additional bases, ranging from a thorough screening process to a successful conflict resolution policy. The following Web sites provide a wide range of volunteer-management resources, practical advice, and sample forms that can be adapted to fit any particular need.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, http://www.nationalservice.org/about/volunteering/, aims to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. This federal agency oversees programs such as Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. The Web site offers national and regional profiles of volunteering activity, including a good amount of statistical and census data that can be useful for volunteer recruitment efforts and for tailoring a specific project or event to a segment of the population. “Tips for Nonprofits Using Volunteers” suggests a set of key issues that any organization should consider before implementing a volunteer program, such as “Do you have buy-in from your staff for incorporating volunteers into different aspects of your organization?” and “What are the costs and benefits associated with volunteers?”

ServiceLeader.org, http://www.serviceleader.org/, a project of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, provides information on numerous aspects of volunteerism. This site offers a useful set of resources that address specific topics in volunteer management, such as program evaluation, risk management, professional development for volunteer managers, and legislative issues. For example, the short article entitled “A Few Pointers on the Unpleasant Topic of Firing Volunteers” provides an interesting overview of this sensitive and important issue.

For those interested in a scholarly approach to volunteerism, Voluntary Action, the Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research, http://www.ivr.org.uk/voluntaryaction/articles/, provides a forum for informed discussion about volunteering and related issues, including active citizenship and social capital. This UK-based journal examines volunteerism through a range of disciplines in order to connect research, policy, and practice, but users must pay a small fee to access a majority of the documents offered.

Users must also pay to access The Nonprofit Good Practice Guide, http://www.npgoodpractice.org/Volunteers/, a portal to Web content related to nonprofit organization management. The Web site offers indexed content to on-line publications, along with a brief abstract of each document. The results are compiled by type of resource (such as sample forms, articles, reports, etc.), in a manner that might be a useful starting point for a volunteer program.

Outreach and Recruitment

Finding and securing volunteers is another vital component of any volunteer program. Even if a project requires only a few hours of commitment, finding the perfect match is often a challenging task. On-line recruitment efforts can usually help cast a wider net when promoting volunteer opportunities. United Way, http://national.unitedway.org/volunteer/, is a good place to connect with local organizations that share similar interests, since the site provides a national directory of volunteering opportunities where any nonprofit organization can advertise upcoming projects and events. VolunteerMatch, http://www.volunteermatch.org/, offers a similar service in which prospective volunteers can search opportunities by area of interest and zip code proximity.

(Continued on page 18)
Institutions occasionally need to focus their resources and recruiting efforts for a single, major project, such as moving to a new location, presenting a public programming event, or celebrating a milestone in the institution's history. This option for volunteer use is often more manageable from the archivist's standpoint and has the added benefit of establishing connections for future collaborations. For those who want to match such events with a specific date, the Web site Calendars: A guide to locating events for each day of the year, http://www.sldirectory.com/cal.html, provides a good starting point for selecting a date and a theme for an event. Another great resource, Planning Your Next Successful Volunteer Project, http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/planning.html, is written with student populations in mind, but still highlights the basic points of planning a large volunteer event. The author explains the “rule of halves,” a formula for calculating the ratio of people contacted to people who actually show up to help, which can help make any major volunteering event a success.

Archives-Specific Information

For those seeking advice from within the profession, the Archives and Archivists Listserv is a great resource for many archival issues, including volunteer management. The Listserv archives from April 1993 to September 2006 can be searched on-line at http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html, while postings from September 2006 to the present can be found at http://forums.archivists.org/read/?forum=archives.

Finally, I would like to include a few notable resources that are not Web-based, but still effectively address volunteer management specifically in archives:


Adriana P. Cuervo is the assistant archivist for music and fine arts at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). She is active in MAC, currently serving as a member of the 2008 Program Committee, and in SAA, serving as the mentoring program coordinator and as cochair of the Performing Arts Roundtable. Adriana received her M.L.I.S. from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at UIUC in August 2005.