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Volunteerism in the Cultural Arts - A Hidden Treasure?

Moderated by Rob Jackson

Introduction

Most volunteer management workshops, conferences and professional associations welcome a wide spectrum of participants from any setting that involves volunteers. However, in practice, speakers and writers tend to focus attention on volunteering that delivers a service, normally in health and social care settings. Case studies, examples of volunteering and vocabulary choices disproportionately assume that volunteers are "solving problems" or "meeting community needs." So we hear about mentors, friendly visitors, tutors, care givers and other similar roles – all of which makes people who work in the cultural arts feel like stepchildren.

It is therefore not surprising to find that volunteer program managers in cultural arts settings seek out one another and meet separately as an affinity group – a form of 'self-defense' against the feeling of being ignored by their social service colleagues.

In this issue's Keyboard Roundtable, we wanted to pick this apart a bit further with the following questions:

- Why has this divide occurred or why does it seem to be perpetuated? Are there, in fact, substantive
 differences between volunteering on behalf of arts groups vs. social service settings? What are
 these differences? Are they superficial differences of vocabulary or real issues requiring
 approaches that are unique to cultural arts settings?
- Why is it that libraries, zoos, botanical gardens and aquaria most frequently self-identify with groups more traditionally considered "cultural arts," such as museums, orchestras, performing arts groups, etc.? Where are the commonalities?
- How might the field minimize the feeling of separation among arts colleagues? Or, should there be this affinity grouping, unapologetically?
- What might social service organizations learn from the experience of volunteering in arts settings?

To help answer these questions, we invited four leading individuals in the field of arts and cultural volunteering to share their views. The resulting article and discussion, coordinated by Convening Editor Rob Jackson, UK, makes for very interesting reading. Once you've had the chance to digest the thoughts and insights of our Keyboard Roundtable participants, please share your responses to continue the debate and strengthen our field.

Gloria Deucher, **USA**, has been involved in volunteer resources administration since 1991. Response

Jan Milroy, USA, has been with Living History Farms, a 550-acre, open-air museum, for 17 years – the last 15 as Coordinator of Volunteer Services. Response

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Lynn Blackadder, UK, has run a consultancy since 1997, combining her enthusiasm for the arts with a proven track record in management. For seven years, she was a voluntary member of the Advisory Board developing excellence in volunteer management for Volunteering England. Response

Gesa Birnkraut, Germany, is General Manager and founder of BIRNKRAUT|PARTNER, a consulting company in the area of strategic arts support for companies and arts institutions. Response

Gesa Birnkraut Responds

Germany has a long tradition in volunteering in the social sector. In the arts, it is a slightly different matter. The arts financing system in Germany is highly state-subsidized and therefore many of the bigger houses – though there is an on-going stagnation or even sinking of the budgets – don't work with volunteers. The responsibility of the citizen has been minimized through the responsibility of the state. For example, I established the first professional volunteer program for a symphony orchestra in 2004 at the Konzerthaus am Gendarmenmarkt Berlin – financed through the Robert Bosch Foundation.

For smaller houses, socio-cultural centres or citizen-founded arts institutions, this is a different matter. There are plenty of examples of volunteer activities and many of these non-profit houses wouldn't survive without their volunteers.

Most of the cultural institutions – no matter if they are big or small - don't have any professional volunteer managers if they have volunteer managers at all. Because of that, the situation concerning networks, conferences or publications is difficult. Many events focus on the needs of volunteer managers in the social area.

Why has this divide occurred or why does it seem to be perpetuated?

In Germany this comes from lacking a tradition of volunteering in the arts on a highly professional level. Cultural institutions that work with volunteers often don't see the need of professionalizing their volunteers or the responsible managers. As the number of interested participants from the arts is so small, there are few offers that are especially for the arts. We can see that at the moment at a currently running project of the cultural foundation called Hamburgische Kulturstiftung in Hamburg, Germany. They created, together with the Koerber Foundation from Hamburg, an award called *start art*; through the award, institutions and companies planning on founding volunteer programs or implementing change processes in existing programs could apply for the opportunity to win a mid-term consultancy of professional volunteer management consultants. Although Hamburg is a city known for its high civic engagement and many institutions work with volunteers, only a handful of projects applied for the award. Similar results could be seen on the organized workshops and seminars. The need is still not seen for professionalizing this area of expertise. I believe this is a process which needs continuous lobbying and promoting to become a normal part of the voluntary sector in Germany.

Are there, in fact, substantial differences between volunteering on behalf of arts groups vs. social service settings? What are these? Are they superficial differences of vocabulary or real issues requiring approaches that are unique to cultural arts settings?

In my opinion there is a substantial difference between the two sectors. I see the differences in various areas:

1. Reasons for the volunteering

In the social sector, volunteering is chosen often because of the love for the others, of the caring for social needs of the society and the people. In the arts, a more emotional love for the arts is the basis for this activity. So in the social volunteering, the person is in the focus; in the volunteering for the arts, the philosophical principle of art is the focus.

2. Fields of activity

If we look on the level of the boards, then the motives and the activities are probably quite similar in both areas. I see the differences here more in the areas of direct service volunteering. In the social field there is a clear need for direct service volunteers in all kinds of caring, communicating, serving the patients of the social institution. In cultural institutions the needs are more in the areas of information of customers, helping in the marketing or PR department and helping in the educational programs of the institutions. Fundraising in Germany, for example, is still not a matter where volunteers would be involved.

3. The spirit of a cultural institution

In my experience the thinking and acting in cultural institutions is still very different from any other non-profit institution. As referred to under point one (above), not only are the motives for volunteering in cultural institutions driven by the love of the arts, but the whole arts institution is focused around the cultural product. This makes a difference in the whole way the institution functions.

4. Different services

Social institutions offer services and answer needs. The patients of the social institutions in many cases cannot choose if they want the service or not, because they are in need of this service. Cultural institutions offer education and a different way of answering philosophical and societal questions and they also entertain. The customers can definitely choose if they want to purchase tickets to go to cultural events, as there is no actual need for them to have a minimum of a theatre visit once a week. Though arts and culture is a need in general for society, the single citizen can choose when and which arts event is the right for him or her.

In my opinion, these differences can not only be explained as superficial differences in vocabulary but in the major uniqueness of the cultural field and also in the major uniqueness of the social field. Different approaches are needed. This can be seen in marketing, in PR, in lobbying, in the financial setting and also in personnel settings (difference between artistic and management side for example). That means also that there are different approaches for volunteer programs. In the social field the volunteers can help and be active in the core competency of the institutions and directly be of assistance of the social workers, while volunteers in the arts will always be active in the management of the surroundings as PR, marketing and/or education. One will only rarely find volunteers at the core activity of cultural institutions: the artistic process.

How might the field minimize the feeling of separation among arts colleagues? Or, should there be this affinity grouping, unapologetically?

I think the arts volunteer field in Germany has to find their own importance and self-assurance. Once this is accomplished a separation will not be found as strongly, as equal affinity groups will share much easier common experiences or might even find innovative ways in the other affinity group.

Participants respond to Gesa Birnkraut:

Jan Milroy (USA)

Gesa, fascinating to learn about the "arts financing system" in Germany. Much of what you shared gives weight to the idea that social services are more immediately important than the arts. But as you also write, the "arts volunteer field in Germany has to find their own importance and self-assurance."

Gloria Deucher (USA)

Gesa's description of the history and development of volunteerism in Germany is very interesting. "The responsibility of the citizen has been minimized by the responsibility of the state." However, in the "smaller houses," where presumably the state funding is not very generous, there are plenty of examples of volunteer activity. Isn't it heartening to see the universality of human nature – that caring, interested people just seem to fill in where a void exists?

Lynn Blackadder (UK) Responds

A bit of background to the 'issue': who are cultural volunteers? Managers of cultural volunteers often have to deal with a problem that managers of caring volunteers most probably do not: the fact that many cultural volunteers do not think of themselves as volunteers, and do not use the term 'volunteer'. This is particularly true of volunteers in museums and galleries – from the large national institutions to small, entirely volunteer-run local organisations.

The volunteer body of the art world has traditionally been, well, posh: members of the upper classes who have a lot of money and therefore a lot of free time, and a desire to be associated with the perceived elitist cultural institutions for which they donate their time (and often their money). The traditional organisational vehicle which has promoted this type of philanthropy is 'the Friend': someone who pays money to belong to a support group associated with the organisation, and who quite often (though not always) will give their time in privileged – and often essential – roles, such as manning an information desk in a museum, guiding and sometimes behind-the-scenes work (e.g., cataloguing or conservation). Until fairly recently, these people would not describe themselves as volunteers. The word 'volunteer', to them, suggests an entirely different animal – one that would, in fact, describe those in caring volunteering roles. Friends groups have traditionally been difficult for cultural organisations to manage as a result of their unique status as volunteers *and* financial donors. Our cash-strapped cultural institutions need both their time and money, but often don't know – or struggle with – how to manage often quite strong personalities who feel that they should have a say in what the organisation does and how it runs itself.

Volunteers who run arts organisations themselves often don't see themselves as volunteers. They will be Trustees, or have specific titles, but don't use the 'V' word. Like their grandee counterparts in larger organisations, they often wholly reject any requirement for using best practice in volunteer management (e.g., volunteer agreements or a Volunteering Handbook) because they are usually extremely capable and often highly qualified people who don't see themselves as belonging to the volunteerism field.

For both of these groups then, the 'V' word relates to someone who occupies a particular place in society and has particular motivations which they do not associate themselves with.

At the same time, cultural organisations of all sizes are often quite literally underpinned by the student volunteer body: the sea of competing art history graduates who need work experience to get their first paid job take voluntary posts for usually short- to medium-term periods of time, doing basic administrative tasks, warding galleries and education support work. These people will definitely see themselves as volunteers – and often experience the worst of what cultural volunteering has to offer: rarely are their travel or subsistence expenses paid (no budgets); with poor in-house management (usually assigned to an Education or Front of House Manager with an already pressurised job and no volunteer management skills or knowledge of best practice or legislation etc.); and little feedback, personal development planning or career progression facilitated by the institution into paid jobs (some will be better than others).

Interestingly, many unpaid jobs in the art world are being advertised as Intern positions. Those advertising must believe that the word 'Intern' is more appealing than volunteer to potential applicants, perhaps suggesting a more professional, structured approach to involving people who are unpaid. However, I am left wondering if this is needless at best and further devaluing volunteering at worst. There is no shortage of volunteer support in the arts from the student/graduate body. And with an increasing culture of, and support for, youth volunteering in the UK, young people will expect to do and even seek out some volunteering experiences from an increasingly young age – regardless of what it's called.

How do you manage?

If, as has traditionally been the case in many arts, heritage and other cultural institutions, volunteering and therefore volunteer management has been unrecognised, unacknowledged or undervalued (or all three!), then how do you manage? If you realise yourself as being, say, an Education or Front of House Manager and that your role is actually volunteer management, you look to other people in similar situations. Unless these people are linked to organisations such as Volunteering England, and unless there is a Volunteer Centre nearby, you might not know where to start. You will have few resources — human or financial — to support you internally. And if no top-down volunteering culture exists, you will just

manage volunteers in a reactive, organisational needs-based way as best you can. It won't be clear what is to be gained by attending a seminar with volunteer managers from other sectors, and perhaps — in fairness — in the past those organising seminars have not highlighted the benefits to all sectors of attending seminars, focussing on specific issues instead. If you're new to volunteer management, it won't be obvious to think about contacting the local hospital to see what lessons can be learned there.

What are the differences between the sectors?

Unless an arts organisation is wholly volunteer-run, the operational set up is likely to be one where the services provided by paid staff are supplemented by volunteers rather than key roles being held by volunteers. This being the case, there will be less of an impact on the delivery of services if a volunteer decides not to turn up at his or her appointed time. I imagine that someone with an appointment to turn up at a blind person's house to read to them for an hour would feel more of an obligation to meet their voluntary commitment in this instance. This doesn't at all mean that cultural volunteers are not as motivated, committed or responsible, just that there is probably more riding on the contribution of caring volunteers than cultural volunteers. Similarly, if, as a volunteer at a zoo, you knew that by not turning up certain animals would suffer, your volunteering might take a more important role in your life (I realise this is a bit of a sweeping generalisation, and so look forward to what my colleagues think of this assumption!). If a volunteer museum information officer or guide doesn't turn up for work, visitors will still have an enjoyable experience and find their way around. It comes back to this idea of cultural volunteers supplementing rather than delivering key services.

I imagine that there is a great deal of pride associated with caring volunteering that might be lacking in cultural volunteering. There might be a great deal of excitement about being in close proximity to paintings worth millions of pounds, and linked to that the knowledge to be gained by volunteering, but whether or not one feels pride based on the importance of their role is not obvious. There are exceptions. The social inclusion volunteer programme at Imperial War Museum North in Manchester was a project that instilled enormous civic pride in its volunteers — many of whom were categorised as excluded prior to their involvement. Through their on-site training in customer services, the volunteers developed new skills and confidence, and presented a highly knowledgeable and passionate interpretation service: local people describing local history to visitors from all over the world.

The volunteering experience (need and motivation) might also be more cerebral in nature in cultural volunteering – a desire to be associated with high culture primarily for one's own personal development rather than the benefit of others. This might be one answer to the question of why libraries, zoos, etc., align themselves with cultural organisations rather than caring ones. Also, cultural volunteering can be a very private thing. So cultural volunteer managers need to respect and meet the diverse needs of volunteers.

What's happening now?

There has been a step change in the past 10 years in cultural volunteering, though much work has still to be done. I think that volunteer management resources are more widely available to cultural volunteer managers, and there is more support for volunteering in their organisations. One often sees paid volunteer management posts advertised – a rarity in the past. I'm not sure that they feel as isolated as in the past. Cultural management organisations such as the Museums Association, and policy and grant-giving organisations such as Arts Council England, has done a lot of work to promote positive volunteering and sign-post resources for managers. I think that experienced cultural managers would benefit from the experiences of caring managers, though new managers would benefit most from colleagues in the sector. I am less sure about what caring volunteer managers might learn from cultural organisations. Exchange programmes would be great for interested volunteers and managers to suggest improvements to the way things work internally, based on their experiences of other sectors.

Participants respond to Lynn Blackadder:

Gloria Deucher (USA)

How sad that we as volunteer resource managers still struggle to have the 'V' word recognized with the respect it deserves. Some won't accept that it applies to them; sometimes it's called something else in

recruitment campaigns. I, too, have noticed an increase in the word "intern" when in reality the job is designed as a traditional volunteer assignment. Or students will use the term instead of 'volunteer' when they contact our office looking for the same.

Regarding Lynn's comment about pride: In my work with volunteers in two different cultural institutions, I didn't see any less pride about their volunteer work than I saw in the service sector volunteers I worked with. I think it goes back to the basic source of what motivates them. Here at Thirteen/WNET, our volunteers are enormously proud to say they are supporting the mission of public television, even if all they did on a particular day was help us get out a large mailing. It isn't a matter of life and death but our volunteers would argue that our cultural institutions are part of what make life worth living (the nurturing of the soul, as Jan pointed out.)

Gesa Birnkraut (Germany)

Another difference here – internships and volunteers are, in my opinion and also commonly thought in Germany, two totally different things. Even if they are unpaid, an internship should provide some sort of education and training on the job for the student or young person to help him find his place in the work place; internships are definitely full-time activities. Volunteers, on the other hand, are serving on a very short time every week, a couple of hours and they are doing that for themselves and for others but not necessarily for education or finding a job. I think it is absolutely important to make a distinction there!

Jan Milroy (USA)

Lynn, a **very** interesting narrative about 'who are cultural volunteers.' You are certainly correct that they are often called by other names, and don't feel they are volunteers in the traditional sense. An interesting fact from our museum: up until about 16 years ago, the members of the Board of Directors were not invited to the year-end volunteer recognition event (they did receive a special gift at a reception for them). Then we realized they should be invited as they are volunteers, too.

I, in part, agree that what the cultural volunteers provide is not as life and death as social services. But I think it also depends on the expectations that the organization has for its volunteers. We have four historic sites where if the volunteer historical interpreter assigned does not come, the site is empty. I do think it affects a visitor's tour immensely, as our emphasis is on portraying "living' history. And over the years we have raised our expectations of volunteers and they have adjusted well.

Lynn Blackadder (UK)

Thanks to Gesa for her comment. I have no experience of internships in the arts in the UK, though I do understand that it is a formal educational/work experience form of volunteering. My point was that this sort of volunteering has been happening for a long time but without it being called an 'internship'. Several colleagues cut their teeth in long-term volunteering roles. My worry is that calling it an internship is a move away from calling it volunteering which, for some people in the sector, is a term they do not want to be associated with.

Also, over here, the range of non-internship volunteering roles available in the sector is extremely diverse and doesn't fit neatly into the other distinction you give. I know volunteers who practically run small offshoots of larger charities from their homes – it's a cottage industry and a full-time job! Though I appreciate you were simply trying to emphasise the different nature of an internship.

I've been fascinated by the cultural differences raised by those taking part in this Keyboard Roundtable.

Gloria Deucher (USA) Responds

I've been in the volunteerism field for about 16 years so can't really speak to any long-term trend *towards* a focus on the social or human service aspects of volunteerism. I can say, however, from the time I entered the field, the focus was already there. It was about that time that (the first) President Bush had just announced his "thousand points of lights" initiative.

The initiative was announced in the context of budgetary constraints and the need to make hard choices

as a nation:

"We will turn to the only resource we have that in times of need always grows — the goodness and the courage of the American people. I am speaking of a new engagement in the lives of others, a new activism, hands-on and involved, that gets the job done."

In other words, as the government stepped back, citizens were called upon to step forward. Some would argue that this signalled a period during which there has been a certain amount of shredding of the social safety net. The pendulum is swinging back towards an atmosphere in which citizens are once again left to figure it out and provide for their own social welfare. So much so that volunteering now seems to be equated, at least in the media, with social change and civic improvement and solving the ills of modern society.

A quick look at a few volunteer-related Web sites and publications comes up with the phrases "change the world," "making a difference in the lives of others," "strengthening families," etc. Indeed, the 2007 Points of Light Conference theme "proudly declares the power of collective action to solve our problems – a hallmark of America's character since our founding." I would argue that there is a great deal of additional volunteering that goes on that isn't necessarily about problem-solving but contributes to the rich fabric of American life nonetheless.

Award programs also tend to focus on the community problem-solving impact of a volunteer's work. Since moving from the healthcare setting, I more often than not feel closed out of opportunities to nominate my volunteers for public recognition. The spotlight usually focuses on individuals and groups who solve social problems and build strong communities. A volunteer in a cultural institution can provide important behind-the-scenes support, but if the work doesn't tug at the heart strings (i.e., mentoring a child, saving abandoned pets, creating a community garden from an empty lot) it's very likely to be overlooked or not eligible at all. It makes me stop and wonder if this doesn't send a message that some volunteer work is seen as more important than others.

Interestingly, the first time I really became aware of this "elitism" was when I announced that I was leaving the hospital to take a position at a zoo. It was the volunteers themselves who reacted as if I were going to less important work.

I have not, though, noticed substantive differences between cultural and social service volunteers as far as volunteer enthusiasm, commitment and the need for appropriate training and supervision. However, at the risk of second guessing people's *motives* for volunteering, I will venture to say that I have noticed a difference between the two groups.

Volunteers in arts groups (and here I am including libraries, botanical gardens and zoos) seem to be more drawn by an affinity for the institution itself or the "big picture" cause that the institution represents. These institutions contribute to the vibrancy of a community. They entertain AND educate. People who choose to volunteer here are passionate about art, music, literature, the environment, etc., and want to dedicate their time to maintaining and sharing this legacy. They are more driven by the mission of the institution.

On the other hand, volunteers in social service settings seem to be more drawn to the idea of making a difference by helping to alleviate the immediate pain and suffering around them. For them, the rewards of volunteering may come from the immediacy of a one-on-one situation (i.e., tutoring a child, visiting the ill, serving in a soup kitchen). They are more driven by the individual act of doing good.

The needs of the agency or institution will dictate how the volunteer program is structured and what appropriate volunteer roles will be. However, why someone might volunteer for one organization rather than another has to be taken into account as it may have an impact on recruiting as well as rewarding and retaining volunteers.

As mentioned above, libraries, zoos and botanical gardens share with cultural organizations a mission to (among other things) entertain, enlighten and educate. Volunteer programs tend to be structured around

helping to fulfil this mission through community outreach, docent programs, tours, etc. Fairly rigorous training programs are usually required in order to prepare volunteers for these roles. In exchange, these organizations are in a position to reward their volunteers with perks unavailable to social service volunteers: free or discounted tickets to performances, unlimited admission to exhibits, "behind the scenes" access. At Thirteen/WNET, I've had the opportunity to offer "Insider Insight" lunchtime presentations with producers of popular programming. We make tickets to performances available whenever possible. And what could be more exciting than the prospect of being seen on television while volunteering for one of our pledge drives? In this way we are able to make volunteers feel very much a part of the "family."

How might the field minimize the feeling of separation among arts colleagues? Or, should there be this affinity grouping, unapologetically? What might social service organizations learn from the experience of volunteering in arts settings? I honestly can't speak to this because I don't feel a strong separation in the New York City community. The New York Association for Volunteer Administration (NYAVA) is open to and welcomes all volunteer resource administrators, no matter the nature of the organization for which they work. The Greater New York Association for Directors of Volunteer Services in Healthcare (GNYADSV) has a strong and active presence in the tri-state area, too. Volunteer Program Administrators (VPA) is also active in New York City cultural institutions. There are people who have dual memberships in both NYAVA and GNYADVS. Others participate in both NYAVA and VPA. In the past couple of years, NYAVA and GNYADVS have begun to work together to present joint workshops on topics of interest to both their membership bases.

However, affinity groups are important because no one professional organization can meet the wideranging needs of such a diverse group of volunteer administrators. It's important for like-minded people who are dealing with similar issues (such as regulatory agencies in hospitals or setting up a docent program in a museum) to have access to each others' experience and expertise.

Participants respond to Gloria Deucher:

Gesa Birnkraut (Germany)

In Germany there has also been a shift towards a stronger civic engagement in the past years as the state (officials) saw that they have no chance in staying on the same level of budget and have to cut back in their responsibilities. The difference to the U.S. is that we have a very strong state and a tax system which is high on everyone. We also have a very strong social system provided by the state – a German without health insurance, for example, is nearly not imaginable. That means that there is a very strong feeling against volunteering in fields where the state, until now, held the responsibility – for example schools, kindergarten and also part of the social system. So in Germany there will never be a development as strong as in the U.S. about solving problems through volunteers.

Jan Milroy (USA)

Gloria, I appreciated your comment, "I would argue that there is a great deal of additional volunteering that goes on that isn't necessarily about problem-solving but contributes to the rich fabric of American life nonetheless."

You mentioned awards ceremonies. In my following essay, I mention a United Way event of a couple of years ago. Since I wrote this essay, I've attended this year's event. The emcee started with an introduction and talked primarily about solving problems. And of the approximately 60 non-profits represented, again there were only two from the cultural arts.

I also thought your point about how arts volunteers are more drawn to the mission of the organization than the social services volunteer who is meeting an immediate need is probably an accurate insight.

Jan Milroy (USA) Responds

Volunteerism in the cultural arts – the hidden treasure of our field? At first glance, "yes." I think volunteerism in areas other than human services are somewhat hidden. However, I would only agree to

it being a "treasure" if it was clear that *all* other forms of volunteering are treasures, too. I don't want our area to stand out, but rather to be an equal partner in value and need. My problem is that I can't quite figure out whether that goal is realistic and achievable, or whether it even matters at all.

I have been working for Living History Farms, an open-air agricultural museum, for 18 years. I've been Coordinator of Volunteer Services for the past 15 years. I was new to the field of volunteer management so I immediately started attending various conferences, seminars and workshops to learn more about this rewarding field. I soon noticed there weren't many classes or sessions offered with arts and culture in mind. Most seemed to be oriented towards organizations that assist people with serious social and human service concerns. The information shared was still very helpful, since many of the basics of volunteer management are the same no matter the area is served. But I started to develop a feeling that my contributions in the museum world were somehow "less important" than those who were involved in what I thought were loftier pursuits.

Over the years, I have had an ongoing debate with myself in an attempt to prove that the arts and culture are as important in our lives as any other area. I have looked for studies done on the positive and life-changing effects arts and culture have on people. The amount of information out there on this topic has increased greatly over the years, indicating that our souls need arts and culture as much as our bodies need food and shelter. Still, I've always felt a difference. Has this just been the result of my own insecurities and doubts?

We're all probably aware of Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" chart that was developed in 1968. The chart proposes five basic needs of humans. Level One deals with physical needs such as food and water, sleep and shelter. Level Two involves feeling safe both physically and mentally. Level Three describes our need to belong to someone or a group. Level Four involves our feeling special and valued. At the top of the list is Level Five which is self-actualization. Maslow proposed that the levels above can't be realized until the levels below are realized. So, Level Two can't be obtained until Level One has been met, etc.

This premise would seem clear in the example of a child who goes to school hungry. She has a hard time paying attention in class, and learning about the world around her becomes difficult. But I also know that we humans have from the beginning originated art to express ourselves. Cave paintings, jewelry and body painting by early peoples show the need for us as humans to nurture our spirits and souls. And as we evolved, our own sense of history helped us know who we are and who we wanted to become.

I belong to a DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies) and again, the arts and cultural organizations represented are few compared with other areas. Because of that, about 10 years ago a few of us decided to band together to form a small group that met in addition to DOVIA. We met periodically for lunch and conversation about issues we felt affected us in particular. It was a very useful group, but after a few years, and various staff changes, it fizzled out.

We recently decided to start it again and have reaped many rewards from meeting with our peers in the museum, zoological and botanical world. I told the group members I was going to be involved in this roundtable and I would like their input. I was quite surprised by some of the responses. Most of them wear multiple hats. In addition to being a director of volunteers, they may also be the education coordinator or marketing director (as compared to me, who currently focuses on only volunteer management). My cohorts said they joined the group because they thought they would meet other people who also wore multiple hats, and that they could discuss subjects for which they are responsible, including volunteer management. In other words, this second time around the participants didn't join because they felt some kind of uniqueness or separateness from other organizations, but rather saw it as just a great networking opportunity.

So once again, I'm wondering if this perception I have is realistic. When I think back to my experience in DOVIA, I have never been made to feel like an outsider, and I've held many positions in that group, including president. When I've gone to conferences, I can't remember ever having felt like the field I was

in wasn't as important as others. But I think because the vocabulary and subject matter is often geared towards human services, I have felt separate.

What about the volunteers? Many of our volunteers also volunteer for other organizations, and my impression is they feel proud to be involved in all types. But a defining moment for me happened at a recent awards ceremony. Our local United Way has an annual volunteer awards banquet. Many different kinds of nonprofits are asked to participate. Among our own museum's honored volunteers was an incredible gentleman. He has been able to parlay his skills as a retired airplane mechanic to the volunteer job of repairing and renovating original equipment and vehicles that are over 100 years old! These are items we have never had time to fix! We would not be using these pieces were it not for him. The dinner and the awards part of the ceremony were lovely and very uplifting. But after it was over and I was congratulating him, he looked at me with kind of a sad face. After watching all the other areas people volunteer in, such as helping the homeless, he said he didn't feel he deserved an award, that what he did wasn't important enough. I was heartbroken. That was the very last feeling we wanted him to have after this event. I tried to convince him otherwise. I don't think I was successful.

Since then I have encouraged cultural institutions that have not participated in this awards ceremony to start – but even after a few more joined, we were still outnumbered by human service organizations. Again, United Way never makes any distinction in the perceived importance of the volunteer contributions or the agencies they help. Still, if this man felt the way he did, he probably hasn't been the only one.

Our volunteer world is made up of all kinds of people with a variety of values and priorities unique to them. If we all thought alike and saw the world in very black and white terms, then we might choose to chastise anyone who spends a single dollar or contributes time for a cause that does not involve the very basics of food and shelter. We all know those needs have yet to be met in our world. But unless we devise a world plan that has as its one and only task to feed and shelter every human being, people will always choose to spend their time and money on what's important to them. The issues are not black and white, and I believe our world should include aspects that can lighten the spirit.

Another part of this question involves the communities in which we live. The health of a community is enhanced by cultural arts, recreation and sports. We want people to move to the Des Moines metropolitan area and establish their businesses and raise their families. Our interlocking communities are definitely a better draw when we can offer a variety of experiences. Even smaller communities have something they are proud of, and they often will show it off in small local historical museums or through important landmarks. Our various ethnic heritages often are demonstrated for the community through dance, music and food. And those involved receive great pleasure in sharing this with others.

It's also true that not all prospective volunteers are comfortable with human service issues. It's important for us to offer them alternatives in their search for meaningful volunteer work. Many of our citizens are still not well informed about the variety of volunteer opportunities available, or they have stereotypical views of what a volunteer is and does.

At our museum, we strive to give volunteers opportunities to grow, to learn and to help provide our visitors with glimpses into the important role agriculture played in the growth of lowa and our country. We have a number of ways volunteers can participate, including orienting our guests, interpreting one of four historical time periods, providing behind-the-scenes support. No, we aren't providing food, shelter and medical support for those less fortunate. But I believe we are telling an important story, and our volunteers play a critical role in making that story come alive.

Participant responds to Jan Milroy:

Gloria Deucher (USA)

It's interesting that both Jan and I have had interactions with both cultural and service volunteers that indicate that they experience service volunteer work as being more "important" or worthy of recognition. I think that all the public messages about volunteering help give that impression. Volunteering is often

equated with personal satisfaction but not with having FUN, heaven forbid.

Summary Comments

Jan Milroy (USA)

You're not going to believe this – or maybe you will. One of the volunteers we honored at this year's United Way awards just came in to pick up his season pass. I congratulated him again on the award and asked if he enjoyed the evening. He said "yes," with a big smile. He said it was impressive how much people did, and in fact it made him feel as if his contribution wasn't much at all. I couldn't believe it – I tried to persuade him otherwise. He winds and repairs our historic clocks. Before he volunteered to do that four years ago, most of our clocks never ran!

Lynn Blackadder (UK)

Jan's story about the retired gentleman volunteer says a lot, I think.

Perhaps the key benefit of bringing the cultural and caring volunteering worlds together is that volunteers working only in one of these sectors can learn about the opportunities and benefits of working in the other. It seems to me that this sort of exchange will promote greater awareness of caring volunteering (using the term broadly) and the kinds of impacts that this kind of volunteering can have for those ready to move on from cultural volunteering, or to do something different in addition to their cultural volunteering. I can relate to this personally.

After 12 years of working in the arts, I feel a move coming on. I often consider changing focus to, for example, working with the homeless. Not because I believe this to be a more worthy pursuit; rather, I feel that for me, having done what I've done in my career, and at this point in my life, it would be more valuable all round. Perhaps some volunteers go through a similar phase. Though I do remember hearing recently of a man who'd spent his entire career working in the caring profession and who was going the other way (i.e., setting up an arts organisation). He said he felt he'd "done his bit" for society, and I remember thinking that he probably had.

I also can't stress enough the importance of art to the changing of some lives. I wonder if this concept is more popular in the UK than the U.S. or Germany. Our cultural institutions are seeing volunteering as a way of engaging people from traditionally excluded communities. We are very much focussed on the arts as a catalyst for personal and social change, not to mention economic change. I've seen this work in practice, and to a large extent I am a product of this myself. Getting people into galleries and theatres and opera houses for the first time can be life-changing. Volunteer programmes can help do this. Perhaps emphasising this aspect of cultural volunteering would help raise its profile in terms of its 'moral' importance. But then, the best of these programmes are self-help programmes. So again this is a very different kind of volunteering to caring volunteering which has as its focus the helping of others.

Rob Jackson, Convening Editor (UK)

Gloria suggests that cultural volunteers may be more mission-driven than service volunteers, whose drive may be more around "the individual act of doing good". Similarly, Lynn proposes that service/caring work may carry a stronger sense of pride and personal responsibility amongst volunteers than cultural pursuits (Gesa and Jan also touch on this issue of differing motivations, although less directly). Do you agree with these assertions or are we seeing differences because we're looking for them and so overstating their significance?

Gesa Birnkraut (Germany)

Yes, I would agree on the point and I find it a strong proof that all of us actually wrote something about it. I want to take it a step further. As everyone said, I would never state that cultural volunteers are less important or less responsible, still there is a difference in our perception of what kind of work is worth it and what is not. But if we keep to that and not take a strong position in that, I see that it leads to a far more complex discussion and lobbying process. If you say that cultural volunteering is not as important as caring volunteers, so you imply also that culture is not as important as caring and that is something which is not true. You will see that wherever you look – if you read histories about the concentration

camps or about times after wars – that culture is as much needed as caring, that it gives people life and the will to survive.

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