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Het artikel 'The role of government in stimulating and sustaining volunteerism: A United States perspective' is gebaseerd op een inleiding van Jeffrey Brudney voor de commissie Lokaal Vrijwilligersbeleid in februari 2004. Brudney bevestigde tijdens die presentatie dat er in de Verenigde Staten heel andere relaties tussen de overheid en het vrijwilligerswerk zijn dan, wat wij in Nederland zijn gewend. Bovendien weten we überhaupt nog weinig over die concrete relatie tussen vrijwilligerswerk en de overheid. Deze verschillen maken het artikel van Brudney moeilijk te plaatsen en niet direct toe te passen in de Nederlandse context, maar niet minder relevant en interessant.

Het grote verschil tussen de Verenigde Staten en Nederland lijkt te zijn dat in de Verenigde Staten de civil society veel directere en rechtstreekse banden heeft met de samenleving en het bedrijfsleven, dan in ons land. Dit is in lijn met het directe en indirecte model van bemiddeling tussen bedrijven en vrijwilligersorganisaties, beschreven door Van der Voort (2003). Zelfs een bemiddelende instantie, zoals de United Way, wordt grotendeels gefinancierd door de sector zelf en vooral het bedrijfsleven, en dus niet indirect via belastingen en de overheid. United Ways en de daaraan gekoppelde Volunteer Centers zijn daarom in hun relatie tot overheidsbeleid niet te vergelijken met onze vrijwilligerscentrales. Naast deze private bemiddelaars zijn er behoorlijk grote vrijwilligersprogramma's van de lokale overheid zelf. In deze programma's runnen vrijwilligerscoördinatoren, rechtstreeks in dienst van de lokale overheid, vrijwilligers die allerlei overheidstaken uitvoeren zoals het opruimen van parken, het regelen van het verkeer bij festiviteiten, het ophalen van huisvuil in kleinere gemeenschappen, het weghalen van graffiti (zie bijvoorbeeld <http://phoenix.gov/commidx.html>). Het artikel van Brudney is, met name bij de lokale overheid, vooral gebaseerd op het stimuleren en onderhouden van deze laatste vorm van vrijwilligerswerk. Meer internationaal vergelijkend onderzoek naar vrijwilligerswerkbeleid is absoluut noodzakelijk, waarbij de verschillende relatiepatronen tussen de overheid en de non-profit sector moeten worden meegenomen.

Ondanks de grote verschillen in die context, geeft Brudney met zijn indelingen (vier c's: climate, context, culture and conditions en vier p's: provide in-kind support, provide technical assistance, provide assistance in 'matching' and provide incentives for volunteer work) een toevoeging aan ook hier bekende begrippen. Het artikel van Brudney is daarmee weer een kleine stap op weg naar meer kennis over vrijwilligerswerkbeleid.

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The role of government in stimulating and sustaining Volunteerism: a United States perspective

6

Jeffrey L. Brudney

For the past forty years or so, expanding the number and different types of people who volunteer has been public policy in government and an avowed aim of the voluntary sector in the United States (Chambré, 1989; Brudney, 1990).^{*} Volunteerism has a much longer and richer heritage in the U.S., dating back to the historic observations of Alexis de Tocqueville in the early 1800s, who characterized Americans as a "nation of joiners," and to pre-colonial times (Ellis and Noyes, 1990). The movement to increase volunteering by the American people took on new energy and new urgency in the later part of the twentieth century as governments at all levels - federal (national), state (the U.S. has 50 states, each represented in the federal government), and local (cities and counties) - as well as non-profit organizations began to consider more seriously the potential of volunteerism as an approach for delivering services and building social capital. This movement is accelerating in the U.S. as organizations strive to develop - in the words of Brudney (2003) - "Volunteer Management Capacity."

Across the globe, many other national governments are trying to influence and stimulate volunteering and volunteerism (Smith, 1998). The recent 2001 International Year of the Volunteer (IYV2001) has been a major driving force in this push to expand volunteering. Nearly 130 countries took part in IYV2001, and more than 500 committees were established at the national, regional and local levels to plan and coordinate a host of activities and events. Each of the four IYV2001 goals - promotion, recognition, facilitation and networking - resulted in significant achievements and measures that have the potential to strengthen the global volunteer movement considerably (Smith and Ellis, 2003).

For purposes both specific to the U.S. and comparative with other nations, it is instructive to assess the ways

in which the different levels of American government have worked - and might work further - to increase volunteerism. To that task we now turn. We should caution, however, that because no empirical studies on the extent of volunteer promotion and support activities by U.S. governments have been undertaken, the analysis to follow must be tentative and conjectural, awaiting further confirmation in research.

The Role of the Federal Government in Volunteerism

What can the U.S. national government in Washington, DC, do to stimulate and sustain volunteering? The federal government has an overarching role in the U.S. political system, a view we might call "from above." We can summarize the steps that the federal government might take with four "c's":

- create a *climate* to encourage volunteering;
- create a *context* to protect volunteers;
- create a *culture* of knowledge about volunteering;
- create *conditions* to support volunteer involvement financially.

First, the federal government can create a *climate* to encourage volunteering. Creating a climate for volunteering approximates two of the IYV2001 goals, promotion and recognition. Government leaders should frequently ask the public to volunteer, as Presidents have done with regularity since President Kennedy's famous exhortation delivered at his 1961 inauguration: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what

^{*} This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Commissie Lokaal Vrijwilligersbeleid (Netherlands Committee on Volunteer Policy), Utrecht, The Netherlands, February 11, 2004. The author thanks the members of the Commissie Lokaal Vrijwilligersbeleid and especially Dr. Lucas Meijs for their helpful comments and suggestions.

you can do for your country." In his 2002 State of the Union Address, President George Bush called on all Americans to become more involved as citizens and to devote 4,000 hours, or two years, over their lifetimes to volunteer service. Elected leaders should talk about the importance of volunteering, and link volunteering to helping the community and being a good citizen. Such repeated promotion of volunteering at the highest level of government helps to establish a climate in which volunteering is expected.

Political leaders should also "model" or set an example by volunteering themselves. Former President Jimmy Carter is, perhaps, the best-known President volunteer through his work with the volunteer group Habitat for Humanity, an international organization that builds houses based on the principle of "sweat equity" (the recipient of the house also take some responsibility for the construction). Leaders should model or set an example also by involving volunteers in their work or office.

What else can the federal government do to promote volunteering? The federal government can create a **context** to protect volunteers from legal action so long as they are acting appropriately; the fear of law suit is otherwise a deterrent to volunteer participation. For example, in 1997 the U.S. national Congress passed the Volunteer Protection Act to afford legal or liability protection to volunteers. The Volunteer Protection stipulates that a volunteer to an organization is not liable for harm caused by an act or omission of the volunteer working on behalf of the organization, if:

- The volunteer was acting within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities in the organization at the time of the act or omission.
- If appropriate or required, the volunteer was properly licensed, certified, or authorized to undertake the activities that led to the harm.
- The harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, reckless misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of others.

These provisions of the Volunteer Protection Act help to limit legal action against volunteers, as intended. An unintended benefit of these aspects of the Law as well is that they reinforce the importance of sound volunteer management practice to avoid legal action: For example, they encourage organizations to establish job guides or descriptions for volunteer positions so that the volunteer is acting within the scope of her or

his responsibilities in the organization; provide training and see to certification for volunteer activities that require them so that the volunteer is prepared for the work that she or he will perform; and screen volunteers to make sure that they do not possess the wrong types of motivations and reasons for service and, thereby avoid problems of willful or criminal misconduct, negligence, or indifference. Creating this favorable context through legislation is open to any country and works to facilitate volunteerism and volunteering, the third goal of IYV2001.

Third, the federal government in the U.S. tries to create a **culture** of knowledge about volunteering - which again facilitates volunteerism. The federal government funds research on volunteer management, including inquiry into which managerial practices work best with volunteers; basic research on volunteering, such as why people volunteer and continue to volunteer; and finally monitors rates of volunteering over time and volunteer demographics to determine if public policies and programs aimed at increasing volunteerism are having the desired effect. Dissemination of this knowledge also helps to promote volunteerism, another goal of IYV2001.

Too often researchers and practitioners accept and act uncritically on what we *think* we know about volunteers, rather than on the basis of substantiated knowledge. For example, we tend to assume that: volunteers will only perform certain types of jobs; that their work is unreliable or poorly done; or that one cannot terminate or "fire" a volunteer when circumstances warrant and, similarly, that volunteer programs must accept any person who wants to volunteer; or that employees will not work well with volunteers. At best, this "conventional wisdom" is incorrect; at worst, it is damaging, for it condones behavior that undercuts effective volunteer programs and involvement (Brudney, 2002). Research supported by government (or other sources) can counteract negative stereotypes concerning volunteers.

Finally, the federal government can create **conditions** to support volunteer involvement financially, which is a traditional form of facilitation. The federal government can make matching grants to organizations that are willing to use volunteers, for example, to pay the support costs for volunteer involvement (for example, for publicity, training, reimbursement, evaluation, etc.). The federal government might also make funds available to organizations that are willing to expe-

periment creatively with volunteers, for example, by having volunteers coordinate and supervise other volunteers. And consistent with the emphasis on research above, government (or other funders) should require that any organization that receives funding for volunteer involvement prepare a report that describes the results so that other officials, observers, practitioners, and researchers can learn from the example.

The Role of Local Government in Volunteerism

We turn now to the most basic level of U.S. government, local government or cities and counties. As opposed to the federal government, these entities are at the "ground level." By contrast to some other countries, too, for example, the United Kingdom (Osborne, 1998) and The Netherlands (Van der Pennen, 2003), volunteer centers are not agents of the State in the U.S.; in general, they are not part of government, and are not responsible for implementing governmental policy, even though they may receive some funding from government (Brudney with Kim, 2003). In research based on a survey of the practices of some 329 local municipalities in The Netherlands, Van der Pennen (2003, p. 34) states that local municipalities sponsor volunteer centers and strive to:

- Show appreciation for what volunteers and their organizations do by giving prizes, pins and other mementos
- Match volunteer demand to supply through "volunteer job banks"
- Recruit new groups (young people, minorities) to volunteer
- Retain volunteers
- Create favorable circumstances for volunteers, such as accommodation, finance and insurance policies;
- Arrange for training and other ways of consulting with volunteer organizations
- Facilitate better networking among nonprofit organizations
- Enlarge the network of voluntary organizations by opening it up to volunteers from businesses
- Promote volunteering by showing its diversity

Based on the U.S. experience, below we summarize the steps or actions that local governments can take to stimulate and sustain volunteerism with four "p's:"

- Provide in-kind support to organizations that want to use volunteers

- Provide technical assistance to organizations that want to use volunteers.
- Provide assistance in "matching" volunteers with organizations.
- Provide incentives for volunteer work.

Local government can provide in-kind support to organizations that want to use volunteers, such as sharing facilities, equipment, and supplies. Local government can also provide technical assistance to volunteer-based and community groups, on such practical but important matters as:

- The legal rights and protections of volunteers and the responsibilities of organizations to them, including the Volunteer Protection Act (see above)
- The role and importance of having someone in charge of the volunteers, for example, the director of volunteer services, who will oversee involvement and maintain a point of accountability as well as quality control
- The features that an effective volunteer program needs to succeed, such as recruitment, training, supervision, and so forth

Local governments can also provide assistance in "matching" volunteers with nonprofit and other voluntary groups and organizations in the community. They can help these organizations to recruit volunteers by posting volunteer opportunities, and encourage people who want to volunteer to provide contact and other pertinent information to be made available to organizations seeking new or additional volunteers. Studies of volunteer centers show that a small number of U.S. governments maintain formal volunteer centers for this purpose (Brudney with Kim, 2003). Many others do so informally.

Lastly, local governments can provide incentives for volunteering, for example, by creating internships for people who want to work as directors of volunteers and placing them in organizations that need this type of assistance; giving credit on applications for government employment for work done as a volunteer; and encouraging business and nonprofit organizations also to recognize the experience gained as a volunteer in job applications. Local governments, including school districts, might further require community service hours to graduate from high school. Many school districts in the United States and at least one state (Maryland) have such requirements in place.

The Role of State Government in Volunteerism

We now turn to the question of what U.S. state governments can do to stimulate and sustain volunteer activity. The United States has 50 different state governments. Each state is relatively autonomous but subject to the dictates and policies of the federal government. The view from U.S. state governments is not "from above" - the federal government - or at "ground level" - local government - but somewhere in-between.

State government *can* do much to promote volunteering. Almost any of the activities that we have discussed thus far *can* be carried out by state governments. In practice, however, state governments have probably done less than the federal government or local governments to promote volunteering. As indicated at the outset of this article, because no empirical studies have been undertaken on the extent of volunteer promotion and support activities by any of the levels of government in the U.S., this statement must be treated as conjectural. In addition, less research has been undertaken on the role of volunteers in the states than at the federal or local levels in the U.S. (a comparison which may, in fact, support the observation that the states have been least active in volunteerism). Nevertheless, observation seems to warrant this conclusion concerning the states.

For example, state governments follow the mandates of the federal government for volunteer (and other) programs when the federal government makes *funding* available. Thus, the states have supported the State Commissions for National and Community Service and the AmeriCorps volunteer program. However, if and when the federal government cuts back or eliminates volunteer programs, state governments generally appear loath to pick up the funding slack. In addition, studies of new volunteer programs inaugurated by the second President Bush, Freedom Corps and Citizen Corps, found that the states were not well prepared to assume responsibility and operation of these programs (Brudney and Gazley, 2003, 2002). It should be noted, though, that these studies were undertaken early in the life of Freedom Corps and Citizen Corps, and circumstances may have changed.

The record of state governments with respect to "State Offices of Volunteerism" - central offices intended to support volunteer activity, programs, and management in the state - suggests much the same conclusion. States tend to fund this office during good economic

times, but they tend to cut funding or eliminate this central point for state volunteerism when the economy founders. Even during good economic times, the names and organizational auspices of these state offices can be highly variable and difficult to locate.

As a result, less knowledge is available concerning the state level than the federal level or the local level in regard to volunteer activity. In general, state governments maintain a "low profile" with respect to promoting volunteering. Many fewer people report volunteering in connection with state government than local government, although the rates are very comparable between state government and the federal government. The difference is that the federal government has a long history of very visible promotion of volunteering (see above). The policy areas with greatest volunteer activity at the state level appear to be tourism, economic development, corrections, and recreation. In sum, state government might be the "new frontier" for volunteerism - if state leaders are willing to make a commitment to it.

Conclusion

This analysis has taken on a difficult, but important question: What is the role of the three levels of United States government - federal, state, and local - in stimulating and sustaining volunteerism? This issue has not been the subject of systematic inquiry heretofore, so our analysis must remain tentative.

Although this article is not based on international comparative research, an interesting difference between the U.S. and other governments seems to be that the role of the U.S. government in stimulating and sustaining volunteerism is much more aimed at volunteers in direct service for government than is the case in many European countries. According to Van der Voort and Meijs (2004), this comparison is an example of the difference between direct and indirect relations of the nonprofit sector and the society in general. In The Netherlands, the government plays a more important role in activities such as matching volunteers, arranging corporate community involvement, creating community service at schools and funding organizations, and acting as an intermediary between nonprofit organizations seeking support and citizens and companies interesting in providing it.

The analysis has uncovered a wealth of techniques used by U.S. governments to promote volunteerism. The list includes: exhortation of volunteering by politi-

cal leaders, legal protections for volunteers, funding (or partial funding) of volunteer programs, technical assistance to these programs, in-kind support, incentives for volunteering, and so forth. These techniques support all four of the 2001 International Year of the Volunteer goals - promotion, recognition, facilitation and networking to strengthen and expand volunteering and volunteerism (Smith and Ellis, 2003).

The length of this listing of techniques may help to explain, at least in part, the high level of volunteering achieved in the United States. According to biennial, nationally representative surveys of the U.S. conduc-

ted over the past 15 years or so compiled in *The New Nonprofit Almanac And Desk Reference* (Weitzman, Jalandoni, Lampkin, and Pollak, 2002), about half of all Americans 18 years of age and older report some act of volunteering in the previous year. Although we cannot compare the relative effort of the three levels of U.S. government directly in this domain, such comparison is less important than the overall conclusion: Governments in the United States engage in a variety of programs and activities to stimulate and sustain volunteerism.

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