



Using the Whole Talent Pool:

*An Interview with Shannon Maynard
and Robert Grimm*

Nonprofit Quarterly EDITOR IN CHIEF Ruth McCambridge spoke to Shannon Maynard and Robert Grimm of the Corporation for National and Community Service about their work, the latest research on volunteering, and trends in effective nonprofit staffing management.

The Nonprofit Quarterly: Describe your philosophy about managing staff—paid and unpaid—at nonprofit organizations and why firm distinctions between these categories of staff don't work.

Shannon Maynard: The nonprofit sector was really founded on the sweat, labor, ideas, and innovations of volunteers, of people who weren't getting paid. And over the last century, as the sector has professionalized, we've created all kinds of divisions for ourselves, particularly around volunteers and paid staff. We're also faced with a whole new set of challenges in terms of human capital, looking at an aging workforce and the possibility that baby boomers are going to retire. And we've got Millennials on the other end who have basically grown up as digital natives, having spent their whole lives connected, plugged in to the Internet, and thinking about social networks in a whole different way.

We're sort of in a state of turmoil, and turmoil and chaos can breed reevaluation and reinvention. I think we have a chance to break down some of the silos and artificial divisions in terms of looking at the labor that goes into achieving societal missions on behalf of nonprofits. We've got to be more resourceful and look at how we achieve some economies of scale.

One way of doing that is to think strategically and more broadly about what are we trying to accomplish, what kind of people power do we need, where does it make sense to have paid positions, and where do we supplement or expand the capacity of paid staff by bringing in volunteers? Many organizations have also gotten into a rut with the way they're using volunteers. Some organizations . . . haven't taken that step back to look at the big picture and . . . see where volunteers could be most useful.

Robert Grimm: The professionalization of the nonprofit sector has maybe gone too far, partly driven by thinking that volunteers can't do a lot

of things that they indeed can do. And we also are now dealing with a general stereotype that if you don't pay for it, it's not worth that much. We may really have to change our lexicon and stop using a word like *volunteer*, because sometimes people see volunteers as though they're amateurs and can't do highly skilled activities. We may have to change it to other terms that reflect the role and its potential.

To do that, you have to take a talent management approach and see talent as something that you need to invest in and mobilize, whether it's paid or unpaid. This requires . . . you to ponder the needs of the organization from top to bottom and think about how paid and unpaid staff could together address those needs.

NPQ: *What do you mean by "talent management"? Also, what are good engagement strategies, and how do they overlap between paid and unpaid staff?*

RG: First, recognizing that to get the most out of your paid or unpaid staff, you've got to invest in them. But you've got to have a plan of investment. Part of the problem is a lot of nonprofits suffer from the fact that there's huge staff and volunteer turnover as well as huge burnout. It's a phenomenon in volunteering that I've come to call the "leaky bucket". And an organization that doesn't do a very good job of managing and retaining paid staff is not going to do a good job of managing and retaining volunteers.

So you have to see them as together, and one of the practices of organizations that are doing that well is that they have a person who is an important senior person in the organization and is in charge of talent management, paid and unpaid. They really carefully listen to the skills and interests, for example, that volunteers offer, and then plug them in to where their interests and passions fit with the organization's needs. They provide training for staff and volunteers. They develop an environment where paid staff believe that to be successful they have to work

Many organizations
have also gotten into a
rut with the way they're
using volunteers.

SHANNON MAYNARD is the executive director of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation and special assistant to the CEO for strategic initiatives.

ROBERT GRIMM is the director of research and policy development at the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Talent management captures the flexible approaches that other organizations are taking in terms of working to meet the preferences and the needs of their workforce.

well with unpaid staff. So it's really breaking down some of these standard stereotypes about what a paid staff person can do and an unpaid staff person can do. What's also extremely important is recognizing the achievements of your talent, paid or unpaid.



SM: Talent management captures the flexible approaches that other organizations are taking in terms of working to meet the preferences and the needs of their workforce. Most of us, when we talk about the work we're doing, it is work that has been structured around these clear positions, and you have these roles and responsibilities. That's what creates, sometimes, the clear barriers between staff and volunteers, and the whole old construct where nonprofits say, "We've got this volunteer position to fill, we need someone to come in and be present on site from 9:00 to 5:00" when most people with jobs are working. So talent management breaks down those old paradigms and looks at the projects, the skills, and the talents and how to put together a team . . . to accomplish the outcome. Talent management brings with it a flexibility that takes into account how people spend their time and the technology that we have today that makes it a whole lot easier to go out and seek talent.

NPQ: *What are the barriers to changing from a hierarchical, paid workforce-centric organization to a more open system?*

SM: One of the barriers is the way foundations fund staff positions, and often positions are funded based on project and grant proposals, and can spend x percentage of their time working on the funded project. There are some barriers there that you can work around, but it requires management and leadership to step back and reevaluate their current human-capital strategy.

RG: Sometimes the stereotype of the volunteer—what is a volunteer job and what isn't—is a strong barrier. Another strong barrier is the fact that a lot of the leadership or the heads of some nonprofit organizations just don't see the valuable role that volunteers could play in their organization. They're willing to invest a lot in fundraising, but they haven't yet recognized the value of

investing in volunteering or talent.

NPQ: *How would this investment work in smaller organizations?*

RG: In small organizations, it's even more important to take this approach. These . . . organizations are really under-resourced, infrastructure-wise. Not closing the door on some things,

for instance: "We can't really have a great Web site because we just don't have anybody with that knowledge." But there's a lot of people with skills out there who would be willing to do this. And then there are all these other kinds of approaches: there are ways you could use technology to stay in touch with your volunteers that are really low cost and can work well for small organizations.

SM: When you get into smaller organizations I think staff understand the value, but you're put in that position of spending half your time implementing programs and serving the community and half the time fundraising. The fundraising often takes priority over the volunteer resource, and in the smaller organization it's less of a staff versus volunteer and more of a donor versus volunteer. Once again, we've got to break down these silos around how we categorize stakeholders and think more comprehensively about . . . "How do we engage people in the work we're doing?"

For example, I know the Capital Area Food Bank in Austin, Texas—it's part of the Second Harvest Program—they have volunteers who are helping them go online and do online marketing, and explore the world of social networking. There are young people out there who have plenty of time, who would love to . . . put in some volunteer hours. Really creative organizations are tapping into that. And they're also finding ways to recognize their volunteers . . . and give them the same visibility and the same sense of belonging that they do with their donors.

NPQ: *What are the trends in volunteering? How have rates and the demographics of volunteering changed?*

RG: One of the main misconceptions that people have about volunteering is that it is primarily about time, that people who volunteer have time on their hands. Recently, we did some research

There's been an increase
in the number of
people dropping out
of volunteering.

called time-use analysis. We looked at people who volunteer and how they spent their day versus people who don't volunteer. And what we found is that people who don't volunteer actually watch hundreds and hundreds of additional hours of TV a year compared to people who do volunteer. So one of the things that we're trying to stress is that volunteering is not necessarily about how much time you have. Volunteering is more about creating compelling opportunities that people want to make the time for.

Of the big trends . . . in volunteering one is that the baby-boomer generation is going to double the number of older American volunteers in the coming decades. Many of them—maybe half of them—will continue to work into their seventies . . . further demonstrating the stereotype of volunteers is wrong because people who continue to work are more likely to continue to volunteer. Thinking about ways to take advantage of this experience boom, of baby boomers, is a key opportunity for an organization.

Second, young people are volunteering at much higher rates today. There was recently a 25-year high in entering college students who believed that it was essential or important to help others. The voting rate has gone up the most in the last two presidential elections among the 18-to-24-year-old demographic. So there are a group of young people who are much more interested in service today than in the past.

But overall . . . volunteering has dipped, declined from the kind of a high for this decade in 2005. And part of the reason for that . . . is that there's been an increase in the number of people dropping out of volunteering. They go out and do it, and they aren't satisfied with what they get.

NPQ: *Why are they dissatisfied?*

RG: We've been doing some focus groups, and what it suggests is many times people show up, it's very disorganized, the work they're doing feels like "make work," they don't really feel like it's that essential or that they really need to be there. Maybe they're standing around for a half-hour or 45 minutes before they're assigned to do something. They don't really see the connection between the work they're doing and the mission of the organization.

The concerning thing for us is twofold. First, I mentioned the fact that there's a leaky bucket,

and one out of every three people who volunteer in a year aren't volunteering the next, and that trend is growing, and helping create a drop in overall volunteering. The other concern we have is that we've got a group of young people and boomers who appear interested and maybe more enthusiastic in engaging service, but if their initial experiences are bad, they may not come back.

SM: One of the other factors is that volunteers are more social. To Bob's point about people who are working, people who have connections with other people are much more likely to say yes to volunteering. We also find that the relationships the volunteers build with the other volunteers, with the people at the organizations, keep them coming back. That is significant as we think about the social fabric of this country and what it's going to look like in the next 10 years. If we can find more ways to build social networks, the nation as a whole will be stronger in terms of keeping people from being isolated from one another.

RG: More people volunteer through religious organizations than any organization out there. And yet some research we did a couple years ago found that 85 percent of secular organizations say they don't have any partnerships with a religious organization. So, many organizations are kind of missing an opportunity to partner with an organization that could be one of the key suppliers of their volunteer power.

We've seen some really interesting models of this. One, for example, is a local Big Brother–Big Sister that partners with a congregation to get mentors for children of incarcerated parents. Over a third of people volunteer with religious organizations, and half of their volunteering is not with the religious organization necessarily but to do with something out in the community. If you're a secular nonprofit doing some social service and you aren't thinking about and trying to develop a partnership with a religious organization to get some volunteers, you're missing an opportunity to really tap a strong group of volunteers.

NPQ: *How should being a nonprofit contribute to social capital, and what happens when these contributions don't occur?*

RG: Volunteer associations are part of the core, or the building blocks, of the civic tradition of a

When nonprofits do a really good job of mobilizing volunteer talent, they're not only going to get huge benefits for their organization, they're going to have residual benefits in the community.



community. When organizations are doing a good job of engaging the community, you're going to see high levels of citizen engagement. One of the things that we put out just now is this Volunteering in America Web site (www.volunteeringinamerica.gov) that allows you to get under the hood of volunteering and see volunteer trends for more than 160 communities.

Communities that have high levels of citizen engagement are different from communities that don't. In communities that have high levels of engagement, people have greater trust in each other, they know who their neighbors are, more parents are engaged in the schools, more people are paying attention to what government is doing. In a disaster, if I'm in the area where I know my neighbors, I regularly talk to them, I'll know if my neighbor down the street needs assistance with something. If I'm in a community where there's low levels of social capital and neighborhood engagement and if Shannon's down the street and she can't get out of her home without some assistance in a disaster, I won't know it, because we don't even talk to each other. So those are the larger benefits that happen.

There's also a good amount of research that

suggests that doing good for the community is good for you. People who regularly volunteer, just like regular exercise, actually get health benefits from it; they live longer, they have lower rates of depression, they recover more quickly from illnesses. *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* [by Stephen Post and Jill Neimark] talks about these rigorous medical studies. When nonprofits do a really good job of mobilizing volunteer talent, they're not only going to get huge benefits for their organization, they're going to have residual benefits in the community.

SM: It's easy, when someone walks through the door, to label them as volunteer and forget that they're also a parent, a neighbor, a congregation member. If you don't recognize the various dimensions, you're missing out on more networks and connections that are going to strengthen your sense of what's happening in your community and how you are relevant to solving an issue and making the community stronger.

Comment on this article at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>, using code 150303.