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## Categorized | IN OUR COMMUNITY

### One organization helps those who recruit and manage volunteer staff

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By **STEPHANIE FOX**

There was a time when charitable organizations could count on volunteers to put in long hours and stay at their posts for years. But, societal changes—women in the workplace, the increasing demands on time for families and for both young and older people—have drastically changed the face of reuniting volunteers. For people whose job it is to find and retain these people, the new reality is challenging.

MAVA, the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration is a statewide non-profit organization based at 970 Raymond Ave. Its mission is to educate and advocate for those whose job it is to find, recruit, and organize volunteers for non-profits, charitable organizations, and governmental entities. Their social mission, they say, is to create partnerships building on resources to serve all of Minnesota.

Currently, MAVA, the largest professional membership organization in the state representing professionals involved in volunteerism, works with a variety of non-profits and governmental organizations. They partner up with, among others, the City of St. Paul, Dakota and Hennepin Counties, the Girl Scouts of River Valley, Habitat for Humanity. Members say that it is a leading resource for people involved in volunteerism to exchange ideas and information.



"We have upwards of 700 members representing hundreds of groups," said Karmit Bulman, MAVA's director (*photo right provided*). "We are keeping them apprised of the new trends and giving them the tools to adjust their strategies accordingly." But, she said, these professionals are working with some serious disadvantages.

"This is a hidden profession with a lack of job equity," said Bulman. "This is the same type of job as a corporation's development director, a program director, or a human resource director. But, they are paid much less. They are the first to go when there are budget cuts. They are often not included in the executive team or strategic planning." "They are undervalued, and their work is often misunderstood," she said. "These people are a hidden resource, and they are treated like second-class workers even though they are the secret sauce that makes these organizations work." MAVA is here to help. The mission of MAVA, she said, is to support and to train these experts to do their jobs better and to advance their profession in the face of inequity. Founded 16 years ago as a way to bring volunteer organizers together, to help them do their jobs better and to change the face of their own profession as well.

Last summer, MAVA began a study to find the roots and the results of the problems. CEOs of 464 organizations filled out a 22-question survey to learn more about the attitudes and problems faced by organizations that use volunteers. Bulman found that one misperception from the CEOs is that volunteers are easy to recruit and retain. "But, they are not. Without volunteers, most of these entities could not achieve their missions," she said. "I interviewed 25 CEOs, and they said they feel that this study is game-changing." Bulman said that there are things the leaders of organizations can do to support their staff members. She recommends that they let their recruiting staff know that they are valued, to give more responsibility to staff members, to involve them at higher levels throughout the organizations, and to invest time and resources in their volunteers and staff. "You need education, orientation, supervision, performance evaluation, and job descriptions. You need policy and procedures so the staff can do their work," she said.

The research examined why there is a lack of understanding about the nature of volunteers and who leads them. The results showed that this inequity ultimately undermined the effectiveness of nonprofits and government organizations. Some of the training helps non-profit organizations adjust to the changes in volunteerism. "In the trade era," she said, "people would put in many hours a week. We still see that model, but the Millennial generation and

even the Baby Boomers are now more likely to be short-term volunteers. Therefore, recruiters have to change their methods.”

There is also a move to skill-based volunteers, she said. Organizations are not just looking for people to stuff envelopes. They want accountants, graphic designers, and other highly-skilled occupations.

Other changes, said Bulman, is the move toward inclusion and equity. Organizations that service certain groups need to include volunteers from those groups. MAVA’s study showed that volunteers aren’t just people of privilege, she said. One workshop offered by MAVA focuses on engaging volunteers from diverse and immigrant communities.

Through MAVA, organizations can also become certified Service Enterprises, operations that excel and bringing out the best from their volunteers. Service Enterprises are proven to be more adaptable, sustainable and capable of scaling their impact in comparison to peer organizations. Some of the 45 Minnesota based Service Enterprise organizations include the City of Roseville, Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, Make a Wish, Catholic Charities and Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minnesota

MAVA also runs workshops to teach volunteer leaders to advocate for themselves, to get organizational buy-in, learn workplace negotiations and foster leadership.

MAVA has its own volunteers. Anvita Pattani has been working with MAVA’s Strengthening Service Task Force, identifying sponsors and donors for the last few months. “I also spread the word about MAVA and raise awareness about the cause,” she said. Pattani moved to Minneapolis last December and thought that the best way to meet new people would be to get involved as a volunteer. “While looking for opportunities, I met quite a few people, one who worked with MAVA. That’s how I got involved.” Nationally, the volunteer rate for adults older than 16-years is 24.9 percent. In Minnesota, the second best state for volunteers, the rate is 35.43 percent. “I have not seen volunteerism done as passionately as it is done in Minnesota,” she said. “Equally important is our community’s reliance on volunteers. I wanted to be a part of that.”

Ann Fosco, the Community Impact Director with Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly, one of MAVA’s Service Enterprises, has worked with a number of non-profits and finds MAVA to be invaluable. “With the past three or four organizations I’ve worked with, I have made sure that they are members of MAVA,” she said. “The opportunity to connect with other non-profits and to engage that community helps us better do our mission. We learn from each other; we share materials, ideas, and research. This wouldn’t happen without MAVA.”

The days of organizations automatically having a professional volunteer coordinator is fading, she said, so she has signed on as one of MAVA’s trainers to help staff without this kind of experience understand their new assignments. “For some, this is an extra responsibility,” she said. “We talk about the different things they can do to support their volunteers.”

“Volunteers change the world,” Bulman said, “from civil rights to the anti-gun violence movement. It’s volunteers who put their passion into action. MAVA is here to support the people who find and guide those volunteers so they can do the work that needs to be done.”