

Connections

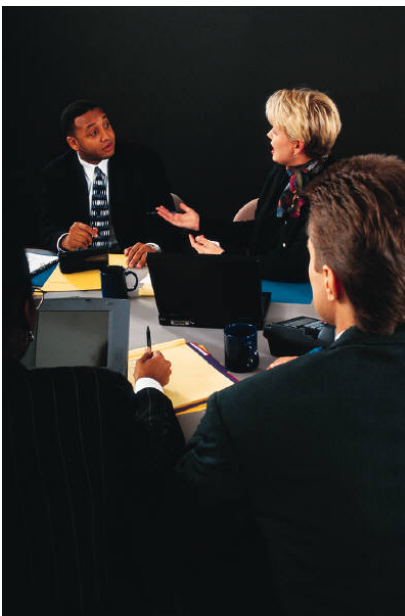
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IN THIS ISSUE

An introduction to using focus groups in voluntary sector organizations

by Jim Klingle



Overview

Voluntary organizations are increasingly seeking feedback from their clients for improving programs, gaining an understanding of client needs for new services, or informing funders of client satisfaction. The focus group is one of the research tools that is often used to gain this feedback.

The purpose of this article is to:

- Define what a focus group is;
- Discuss the purpose and origin of the focus group;
- Describe what focus groups can and cannot tell you;
- Identify when and when not to use focus groups;
- Clarify what types of questions should be asked in a focus group;
- Introduce how to conduct a focus group; and
- Discuss some challenges in organizing focus groups.

Definition, Purpose and Origin of the Focus Group

According to the American Statistical Association (1998), focus groups are “in-depth qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people, brought together to discuss a host of topics.”¹ As Stewart and Shamdasani (2007) note, the focus group, also known as “focused interviews” or “group depth interviews”, was created after the Second World War to assess audience response to radio programs. Since that time, the focus group has expanded beyond marketing for use by social researchers and evaluators for gaining understanding about how people feel or think about an issue, product, service or idea.²

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Individual commitment to a group effort—that’s what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

Vince Lombardi

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The typical focus group is between six to eight individuals who have something in common. Krueger and Casey (2000) note that through the actions of a skilled focus group facilitator, participants in a focus group are encouraged to share their perceptions and points of view, without pressuring them to vote or reach consensus on the topic under discussion. The facilitator captures the points made by focus group participants for careful comparison and analysis later. Krueger and Casey (2000) stress that the group discussion occurs several times with similar types of participants so the facilitator may identify interesting trends and patterns.³

What Focus Groups Can and Cannot Tell You

Marczak and Sewell (1999) provide a listing of what focus groups can and cannot tell you. Focus groups can help identify:

- How groups of people think or feel about a particular subject.
- Why certain opinions are held by a small number of people.
- How the planning and development of new programs or services can be improved.
- How existing programs or services may be evaluated.

They note that focus groups cannot help identify:

- Valid information about individuals. Because focus group information is collected at the group level, it cannot be applied to an individual.
- How things have changed over time. For example, a focus group is not a valid way to learn how much progress an individual client has made to achieve his/her goals.
- Information that can be applied generally to other groups of people. As a focus group



consists of a small number of individuals who take part voluntarily, it cannot be assumed that their views and perceptions represent those of other groups that might have differing characteristics.⁴

When to Use and Not Use Focus Groups

Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that focus groups should be considered for use in cases when:

- A range of ideas or feelings is being sought.
- Differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people are being sought.
- The purpose is to uncover factors that influence opinions or motivations.
- Ideas are being sought from the group.
- Ideas, materials, plans, or policies are being pilot tested.
- Information is needed to design a large-scale quantitative study.
- Information is needed to help clarify and confirm quantitative data already collected.
- Clients or an intended audience place a value capturing the

comments or language used by focus group participants.⁵

Krueger and Casey (2000) do not recommend using focus group interviews when:

- Consensus is being sought.
- Educating people is the desired outcome.
- There is not an intention to use the results.
- Sensitive information is being asked that should not be shared in a group or might be harmful to someone if shared in a group.
- Statistical forecasts are needed.
- The environment is emotionally charged, and a group discussion is likely to intensify the conflict.
- Other methods can produce better quality information in a more economic way.
- The confidentiality of sensitive information cannot be assured.⁶

Types of Questions Asked in a Focus Group

The American Statistical Association (1998) stresses the importance of asking open-ended questions that provide the option of a variety of

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responses. In addition, it suggests that questions should be:

- Clearly formulated and easily understood.
- Neutral so that how the question is asked does not influence the response.
- Carefully sequenced to begin with easier, more general questions before moving to more difficult ones.
- Ordered to start with less personal topics before proceeding with more personal ones.⁷

Focus groups are typically two hours in length. This is usually as much time as most participants can remain engaged and energetic. Krueger and Casey (2000) note that 30 minutes out of a two hour focus group is usually spent waiting for participants to arrive and leaving time at the end of the focus group session for questions and summarizing. This leaves just 90 minutes for the opening, introduction, and key questions. It is common for focus group sponsors to ask as many questions as possible. This may be tempered by reminding them that they will gain richer feedback from focus group participants by allowing them time to consider and offer thoughtful, in-depth responses to questions. For that reason, it is often recommended that two hour focus groups address no more than five or six questions.⁸

Conducting a Focus Group

Marczak and Sewell (1999) describe three phases to conducting a focus group: conceptualization, interview, and analysis/reporting.

The Conceptualization Phase involves:

- Identifying the purpose of the focus groups

- Determining who will provide the information being sought.
- Specify an approach to the focus group, a time line, and proposed budget.

The Interview Phase consists of:

- Developing questions that are carefully planned, open-ended, and logically sequenced.
- Pilot testing the focus group questions and revising as needed.
- Facilitating the focus group. Facilitators play a critical role in the success of the focus group. They must be good listeners, skilled in group process, and be sensitive to the views of the group.
- Recording the discussion through note taking. Ideally, someone other than the facilitator should take detailed notes.⁹

The Analyzing and Reporting Phase involves the following:

- The facilitator prepares a focus group summary. Marczak and Sewell (1999) state that the following factors should guide

the analysis of the focus group feedback:

- Note the frequency of commonly used words and phrases by focus group participants.
- Examine the context of words and then interpret comments in light of the context.
- Follow the flow of individual's conversation and note any changes in position as s/he interacts with others.
- Give more weight to responses that are specific and based on experiences rather than those that are vague and impersonal.
- Look for the larger ideas, trends, or insightful ideas.

- It is important that a focus group report be descriptive and present the meaning of the data, as opposed to being merely a summary of discussions.¹⁰

Challenges in Organizing Focus Groups

As a frequent facilitator of focus groups, our company representatives have noticed that there are increasing difficulties in bringing together individuals in a focus group setting. The growing demands on people's time has affected the ability and willingness of individuals to attend a focus group, even when the topic is of great interest to them. We find it is becoming increasingly common for people to accept a focus group invitation, often with real interest, and then fail to show up for the focus group.

One of the ways used to address the low attendance rates of focus groups is to issue double the invitations for the numbers required. This means inviting between 12 and 16

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individuals to attend a focus group for which six to eight participants are sought. If all who are invited attend the focus group, we have a second facilitator available so that two separate focus groups may be conducted.

It appears that providing refreshments or a meal is no longer an effective means to guarantee focus group attendance. Alternately, it has been our experience that nearly 100% attendance can be achieved if focus group invitees are paid to attend the focus group. Typically, this involves payment to each participant in the amount of \$20 to \$25 in cash at the immediate conclusion of the focus group. It is important for facilitators to clarify with potential participants beforehand how much they will be

paid to participate in the focus group and how and when it will be paid. ☐

References

¹ American Statistical Association. (1998). American Statistical Association, p. 1.

² Stewart, D. W. and Shamdasani., P.N. (2007). Focus groups: Theory and practice. 2nd edition, Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 1 – 2.

³ Krueger, Richard A. and Casey, Mary Anne. (2000). Focus Groups. A Practical Guide for Applied Research. 3rd Edition. Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 4 – 5.

⁴ Marczak, Mary and Sewell, Meg. (1999). Using Focus Groups for Evaluation. University of Arizona, 1999. Retrieved October 3, 2007

from <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/focus.htm>, p. 1.

⁵ Krueger and Casey. (2000). p. 24.

⁶ Ibid, p. 25.

⁷ American Statistical Association. (1998). pp. 4 – 5.

⁸ Krueger and Casey (2000). pp. 63 – 64.

⁹ Marczak and Sewell (1999). pp. 9 – 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

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Affordable and accessible insurance solution found!

by Carol Cheung



Imagine an affordable and accessible insurance for the nonprofit/voluntary sector. Imagine no longer – it is now being provided by The Co-operators. *Community Guard*, an insurance and risk solution for the nonprofit/voluntary sector piloted in Alberta, provides flexibility in accessing and affording liability coverage. The Co-operators assess your risk with you and together you can decide which liability coverage best suits your

organization, allowing you to pay only for what you need. A sample of what The Co-operators offer is:

- Directors' and Officers' Liability
- Commercial General Liability
- Blanket Accident Insurance (no this is not insuring your favorite blankie!)
- Commercial Property Insurance
- Crime Coverage

Non-Owned Automobile Insurance
Community Guard also provides stable premiums, giving you a year's notice if premiums need to increase more than 5%.

“Priced affordably, *Community Guard* packages insurance products, including Directors' and Officers' Liability, can be found in one place – a place where The Co-operators understands the complexities, challenges, and unique needs of nonprofit community-based

organizations,” says Karen Lynch, Executive Director of Volunteer Alberta.

The Co-operators gives back to the community through a nonprofit fund and are easy to access with specially trained agents in the voluntary sector. Along with this initiative, they are subsidizing a year membership with Volunteer Alberta (Associate Level) for any nonprofit/voluntary organization purchasing *Community Guard*. ☐

For more information on the pilot project *Community Guard*, visit www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca/about/community_guard.asp or call Volunteer Alberta at (780) 482-3300.

Carol Cheung is a projects coordinator with Volunteer Alberta. She can be reached at projects@volunteeralberta.ab.ca



RCVO On the Road

Imagine RCVO staff travelling along Alberta's highways, carrying their expertise and resources, to voluntary sector events in YOUR community. This is RCVO On the Road (OTR)—an innovative and dynamic program provided free of charge to all organizations associated with the non-profit voluntary sector throughout Alberta.

Depending on your needs and the space available, the OTR program offers:

1. Full library: RCVO information packages and display with a full complement of articles, samples of library books, book sales and, where Internet is available, access to databases of funding sources.
2. Partial library: files and books related to the topic of the event.
3. Display and book sales: RCVO information packages on RCVO services and books sales.
4. Display only: RCVO information packages.

Alternatively, RCVO may send individual participant packages of customized resource materials to conferences and meetings without staff.

RCVO On the Road, also offers workshops related to volunteer management and fund development. For more information on the On the Road program, please visit www.rcvo.org and click on "OTR."

Web Picks

Whether you're looking for quick information and practical tools, or theoretical papers and ongoing discussion, there are plenty of voluntary sector-related websites out there, and some of them are gems. Here are several:

Help With T3010A

Are you struggling through CRA's T3010A form? How about the TF725 or T1236? Make a difficult job easier by visiting the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia website, where you will find a very helpful set of annotated forms that will answer your questions. Just hover your

cursor over a yellow bubble and a box containing the explanation related to that field will appear.

www.legalinfo.org/templatepage.html

All Things Volunteer Management

Susan J. Ellis' website, tagged "Especially for leaders of volunteers," contains a wealth of resources (including an online library and bookstore) and a diversity of opinions and thoughtful discussion from real-life volunteer managers. Be sure to check out the sections "Hot Topics" and "Collective Wisdom."

www.energizeinc.com/

Famous Wills & Bequests

At Bequest Guide, you can follow the history of planned giving, learn legal terminology *and* read about the Duchess of Windsor's \$50 million legacy in jewels! This colourful site is both informative and entertaining.

<http://bequestguide.org/index.htm>



Courses

Executive Leadership in the Non-profit Sector

Enhance your nonprofit leadership career while working

Leaders in Alberta's more than 19,000 voluntary/nonprofit sector organizations recognize the increasingly complex environment in which they operate. More than ever, they know that to survive and thrive, they must be skilled in not only managing within their organizations, but also be effective in leading collaboratively in the wider community; locally and globally. With an expanded role in leading effective social change, today's voluntary sector leaders must collaborate more, develop and nurture increasingly complex relationships, deal with multiple forms of resource generation and work with diverse community partners in achieving shared goals.

The program

Grant MacEwan College, through the new Executive Leadership in the Non-profit Sector post-diploma program recognizes the trend towards greater collaboration and complexity within the community. Through a part-time, hybrid program combining face-to-face and on-line learning, MacEwan has attracted students from throughout Alberta. The seven course, 18-month program focuses on personal and collaborative leadership, organizational and community capacity building, human and financial resource development, governance and advocacy. It is a cohort-based program which

encourages peer learning and relationships to support collaborative work in the community.

Who might be interested

Students in the program are often mature students working and volunteering in nonprofit organizations in senior leadership roles. Others aspire to adding to their experience in the public and private sectors allowing for a transition to roles within voluntary/nonprofit organizations. Most are experienced in the sector and are building on diplomas and degrees, but a combination of education and experience is welcome. Students currently working in the sector have found succession planning and career development discussions with their boards or senior staff, useful in gaining support for furthering their education with workplace support.

Financial assistance

Student financial assistance for the new program includes scholarships supported by the MacEwan School of Business, as well as possible support through several new bursary programs funded by the Government of Alberta in support of non-profit human services organizations. Training bursaries are offered by several foundations to qualifying applicants and many other funding resources are available to prospective applicants. Additional student funding information can be obtained at www.macewan.ca/leadership or contact macdonaldw@macewan.ca.

The next start date for the program is September 2008 and the College will accept admission applications beginning October 2007. For further information go to www.macewan.ca/leadership, contact executiveleadership@macewan.ca, or contact Wendy MacDonald at 780-497-5267.

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

John Quincy Adams

Learning Opportunities

“So What? Linking Research & Practice in the Voluntary Sector”

2007/2008 Series

In recent years there has been a massive increase in the quality and volume of applied research regarding best practices in managing and leading nonprofit organizations. Grant MacEwan College, in conjunction with the Resource Centre for Voluntary Organizations (RCVO) and TransCanada, is once again offering a series of breakfast discussions, called the “So What?” series, aimed at increasing knowledge and dialogue about applied research with leaders of community organizations.

First Session: Marie Gervais and Elizabeth Le—Intercultural Competence in the Voluntary Sector: Real or Ideal (Full)
Wednesday, November 7, 2007

Second Session: TBA
Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Third Session: Karen Bruce—Transitions: the Art of Implementing Positive Change
Wednesday, April 3, 2008

Time and Place: 8:30-10:30 a.m., Room 6-313H, Grant MacEwan College, 10700-104 Ave., Edmonton, AB

For information on the series call 780-497-5616 or e-mail rcvo@macewan.ca

RCVO NOTICE

- Watch for updates to our events on www.rcvo.org
- See our website for our On The Road Destinations this fall

WillPower Wills Week 2007 Charities Luncheon

Friday, November 16, 2007
12:00—1:30 p.m.,
Conference Theatre, Room 5-142,
Grant MacEwan College,
10700-104 Ave., Edmonton, AB
(Lunch is included)

**Build it and they will come...
A practical approach to building legacy gifts for your organization**

Guest Speakers Charles and Suzanne Nunn—Endowment Horizons, California

Here is a rare opportunity to meet with the founders of Endowment Horizons, California – a company specializing in unique gifting programs that generate breakthrough results.

Each year more organizations recognize the need to initiate an endowment program only to discover what a formidable task it can be. It doesn't have to be.

For more than two decades, Endowment Horizons, California has been helping charitable organizations establish successful endowment programs.

In this seminar, Charles and Suzanne will reveal and discuss the **four essential components of a successful endowment program** and share their valuable insight and expertise.

Plan to join us over lunch for this informative and inspiring presentation.

Charles and Suzanne have donated their time to provide this valuable content to leaders in the charity sector. **There is no charge to attend this event.**

Please RSVP by calling the Edmonton Community Foundation event line at 780-423-4956.

Fundraising Success: Where to Start and How to Build It!

Saturday, November 24, 2007
Grant MacEwan College
10700-104 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Achieving success takes resources! Are you raising funds in a small organization; or starting a new fund development program; or just learning the basics? Then this workshop is for you. Come and explore the answers to key questions on regulations, the people needed on your development team, the right tools to use, and how to compete with high profile campaigns.

This workshop was created with the support of TransCanada Pipelines to create awareness, build confidence and provide resource materials and sources for further learning with regards to fundraising programs.

Registration information and form at www.rcvo.org—click on events—or call 780-497-5616 or e-mail rcvo@macewan.ca.

Board Leadership: Ideas Into Action Conference

Saturday, March 29, 2008
Grant MacEwan College
10700-104 Ave., Edmonton, AB

Mark your calendar!

This conference is focused on board members of voluntary/nonprofit organizations and will have a variety of sessions addressing the needs of both beginner and experienced board members.

Government of Alberta's proposed Bill 1— *The Lobbyist Act*

by Russ Dahms

Background

Premier Ed Stelmach introduced Bill 1 – *The Lobbyists Act* in the Legislative Assembly on March 7, 2007. Following is the Premier's address as recorded in Hansard:

One of our top five priorities is governing with integrity and transparency, and this act, the Lobbyists Act, is an example of our commitment to this principle. Our commitment to openness in government, openness in business dealings is demonstrated in three ways through the Lobbyists Act: first, by establishing a lobbyist registry; secondly, by requiring lobbyists to declare existing contracts they have to give advice to government; and lastly, by regularly publishing an online, searchable index of who has contracts with the government. One of the key features of the legislation is the prohibition from lobbying and providing advice to government on the same issue at the same time.

The lobbyist registry will be administered by the Ethics Commissioner. It will be fully accessible on the Internet and will identify the subject matter of each lobbying activity.

Bill 1 was given Second Reading in the Legislative Assembly March 20, 2007 and March 22, 2007 and was forwarded to the Standing Committee on Government Services on May 29, 2007.

In a July 19, 2007 press release, the Standing Committee announced its interest in receiving input from Albertans throughout August and September. The Muttart Foundation, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary



Organizations, the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, Volunteer Alberta and numerous other organizations made presentations at the public hearings held by the Standing Committee of Government Services September 27 and September 28. The Committee subsequently considered this input at their meetings held October 3 and October 9.

The Standing Committee will present its recommendations to the Legislative Assembly in early November, 2007 for debate and subsequent third reading.

Overview

As it is currently proposed, the *Lobbyists Act* is extensive and complex legislation that will necessitate nonprofit organizations dedicating significant resources to the administrative exercise of tracking and reporting communication with virtually all government officials. If the organization is contracted by government to provide paid advice about a subject, the organization must also dedicate resources to query and monitor relationships that board members, their business affiliates and spouses have with government to ensure that no associated person is lobbying government about the same

subject matter for which the organization is contracted to provide advice.

While the activity of lobbying is purported by government to be a “legitimate activity”, the proposed legislation sends a particular signal to the nonprofit sector that may discourage valuable day-to-day dialogue and relationship building. The threat of substantial fines (\$50,000 to \$200,000) will most certainly prompt many organizations to consider refraining from speaking to any and all provincial government officials. This signal is seemingly in direct conflict with the government interest in working closely with the nonprofit sector through initiatives such as the Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector Initiative.

The Hansard record of the Standing Committee on Government Services discussions about the input provided by various nonprofit sector organizations indicates the Committee's recommendations may not sufficiently address concerns raised by the nonprofit sector.

1. **Government Scope**

One of the primary issues surrounding the proposed *Lobbyists Act*
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Act is the extremely broad range of government officials included within the proposed Act. These individuals are defined as public office holders and include:

- an MLA;
- any person on an MLA's staff;
- an employee of a government department;
- a person appointed to an office or body by the Lieutenant Governor in Council or member of Cabinet;
- an employee, officer, director or member of a Provincial entity identified in the regulations.¹

CONCERN: Every government employee will be a public office holder, as will citizens and anyone (including employees of nonprofit organizations) appointed to Government committees, boards and authorities. Productive day-to-day conversations that currently take place between Public Office Holders and anyone in the nonprofit sector may in future be classified as lobbying. This could have a substantial chilling effect on the willingness of the nonprofit sector to communicate with Government officials and negatively affect vital working relationships.

SOLUTION: Narrow the scope of Public Office Holder to include only elected and senior level government officials.

2. Nonprofit Sector Scope

The proposed legislation applies to organizations, whether incorporated, unincorporated, a partnership or a sole proprietorship, including:

- a business, trade, industry, enterprise, professional or voluntary organization or institution;
- a trade union or labour organization;

- a chamber of commerce or board of trade;
- a charitable or nonprofit organization, association, society, coalition or interest group;
- a government other than the Government of Alberta.²

The absolute inclusion of charitable and nonprofit organizations is unique to the proposed Alberta legislation. For example, Quebec's lobbying legislation states the following provision for exemption of nonprofit organizations:

"Only the organizations constituted to serve management, union or professional interests, or the majority of whose members are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of such enterprises, are subject to the rules regulating the practice of lobbying activities...On the other hand, Greenpeace, Centraide, the Association of persons suffering from depression...are among nonprofit organizations that are not within the scope of the Act, except when they hire a consultant lobbyist to promote their interests."

CONCERN: There is no provision in the proposed Alberta legislation to exempt public service nonprofit and charitable organizations as there is in other jurisdictions. The norm in other Canadian legislation is that an organization does not have to register as a lobbyist unless total time of all paid staff in lobbying activities surpasses 20% of "one person year".

SOLUTION: Adopt a 20% threshold thereby eliminating the impact on the vast majority of public service nonprofit organizations.

3. Dual Role

The proposed legislation prohibits lobbying on a subject matter and

holding a contract for providing paid advice to government or a prescribed provincial entity on the same subject matter at the same time. The prohibition applies to situations of a single individual, and also when two people associated with each other have these roles. For example, the prohibition would prevent a person from lobbying on an issue if their spouse holds a contract for providing advice on that same issue. This prohibition applies to relationships between:

- spouses and adult interdependent partners;
- corporations and their directors or senior partners;
- private corporations and their shareholders;
- employers and employees, whether the employer is an individual, partnership or corporation;
- partnerships and their partners or where the partner is a corporation, a director, senior officer or shareholder of that corporation; and
- principals and agents.³

CONCERN: Nonprofit public service organizations will need to dedicate further resources to research and monitor the status of contracts



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held by board and employee partners and spouses. This prohibition may also influence the willingness of organizations to accept government contracts, to avoid being muzzled by this prohibition.

SOLUTION: Examine alternate measures to achieve the desired transparency of public service nonprofit organizations through disclosure mechanisms rather than prohibitions and huge fines.

What You Can Do

Final debate and decision regarding Bill 1 – *Lobbyists Act* will take place in the Legislative Assembly in November/December 2007, where the Assembly will consider recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Services and discuss amendments to address outstanding issues.

You and members of your nonprofit organization can make a difference

by expressing your concerns to Premier Ed Stelmach and Edmonton Region MLAs as soon as possible in early November. ☐

¹ Alberta Justice. A guide to Bill 1: The *Lobbyists Act*.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

For further information, contact Russ Dahms, Executive Director of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations at 780-428-5487 or e-mail director@ecvo.ca.

Training initiatives from Volunteer Alberta

by Andrea Burkhart

Imagine taking time out of your busy schedule to volunteer at a local community based group on the weekends. Now imagine showing up your first few times only to find that there is no work for you to do... or at least no work that is appropriate or interesting...

Now imagine being a volunteer coordinator and bringing in a new volunteer to work with disabled children. You understand there will always be a supervisor present and so choose to save the organization money and skip the Police Information Check... Imagine next what happens when the volunteer shows up and the supervisor does not...

Both scenarios are dangerous prospects (an all too frequent occurrence) for the nonprofit/voluntary sector. In the first example (which has in fact happened to me), you run the risk of losing volunteers because they are not placed appropriately. Furthermore, your organization's reputation as a fun and



rewarding place to volunteer is damaged.

In the second scenario, the dangers are obvious. There may be legal liability and that is just the start of the harm that could be done...

Luckily there is a tool for the nonprofit/voluntary sector to ensure that these scenarios do not materialize. The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (CCVI) engages and involves volunteers to get your organization functioning at an increased effectiveness level while encouraging incredible results from volunteer engagement. Positioning screening as a management tool is a crucial part of involving volunteers and can be used to include and welcome volunteers rather than to exclude certain people.

Between November 2007 and March 2008, Volunteer Alberta, through the strategic funding of the Wild Rose

Foundation, is offering new training initiatives on the CCVI for the province's nonprofit/voluntary sector on just these topics.

CCVI and *Rethinking the Screening Process* - each a ½ day training workshop - are scheduled for six locations throughout Alberta. More will be offered later in 2008 in another six locations but to get in on these practical workshops now check the Volunteer Alberta website at www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca and go to news and events and then to training opportunities.

Make the decision to change your perspective on volunteer management. Take the workshops!

Andrea Burkhart is a program manager with Volunteer Alberta. She can be reached at progmgr@volunteeralberta.ab.ca.

Character in fundraising— principle number six: Persuasiveness

by Roger Breault



This article is the sixth of a series on the subject of seven character traits to develop to become an effective, productive and authentic fundraiser. It is written with the intent to fill a sizable gap in the formation and education of those who want to be true fundraising professionals.

Have you tackled a CFRE accreditation exam? If you have, you'll know that it is comprehensive. It grills you on all aspects of fundraising: annual giving, direct mail, events, planned giving, capital campaigns, elements of case statements and some aspects of management. Sadly, the measure of whether you qualify as a "professional" does not evaluate one of the most important elements of the business: your persuasiveness.

Persuasion is essential. Effective fundraisers are successful salespeople. Don't take this pejoratively. Above all, successful salespeople actively listen and practice the art of appealing to their clients' inner desires. Fundraisers must be able to influence and convince prospects that charitable gifts help donors satisfy an unfulfilled need and a deep yearning to aid others.

How persuasive are you? How good are you at convincing others to support your cause? Can you articulate a prospect's need to support your organization in plain clear language? Can you explain

what makes your agency distinctively different and how it makes a veritable difference in the community? Can you do it with logic, emotion? Can you illustrate the positive impact of giving through concrete, poignant, real-life anecdotes about people you've served? How good are you at capturing the imagination of a prospect? This takes life-long practice.

The power of persuasion is crucial in fundraising. To be effective you need to persuade leaders to champion your cause and others to support it. Mainly, we rely on three skills to be persuasive: 1) an ability to listen attentively, 2) a facility with the written word, and 3) the development of a verbal talent of expressing yourself commandingly. Fortunately these are capabilities that we can hone. When we polish these competencies, we develop a strong character trait that will nourish us in our careers and in our personal life. "De facto", we become persuasive.

How do we work on these character traits? Effectual communication can be defined as the exchange of information whereby both parties are transformed by the interchange of ideas. Many noted authors have proven that persuasive people have worked hard on developing this ability. It can be mastered. I know. I used to do most of the talking when I conversed with others. In doing so, I thought that I'd be far more convincing. Nothing is further from the truth. Persuasive people are first-rate listeners, not foghorns. The study of body language helps also.

As fundraisers we are called upon to write persuasive copy. We write case statements, brochures, direct mail, reports, letters and plans. Wording, text formatting and our prose differ depending on the purpose of a document. Our writing style must vary according to the emotion and the effect that we want to elicit on the

part of the reader. Do you write with the reader in mind? Does the style of our writing respect the reader? Have we used proven techniques and writing tricks to call special attention to salient points of the text? Books and articles provide answers. To be persuasive, read them; practice what the masters tell us.

Verbal acuity is one of the most important character traits of fundraisers. All of us can become better at expressing ourselves. If you are not comfortable addressing a group of people, take a course on how to do it; force yourself to accept speaking engagements to tune your verbal skills; if needed, join Toastmasters to get better; expand your vocabulary through selected readings.

A Short List of Selected Readings on the Subject of Persuasiveness in Fundraising

Carnegie, Dale, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

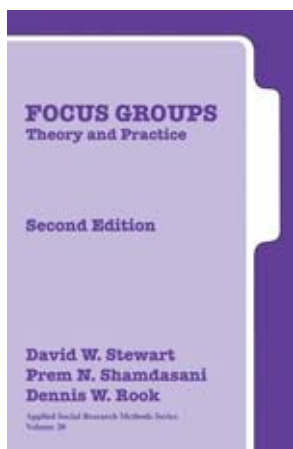
Kerr, Michael, *You Can't be Serious, Putting Humor to Work*

Victor, Dr. Mark, *How to Sell Yourself to Anyone*

Ziglar, Zig, *Effective Public Speaking*

Roger Breault is a private fundraising consultant and manager of Fund Raising Consultants of Alberta. He can be reached at 1-866-420-3338, toll free or 780-455-3338.

BOOK REVIEW



Focus Groups: Theory and Practice: 2nd edition

by David W. Stewart, Prem N. Shamdasani and Dennis W. Rook
H 61.28 .S74 2007

Focus Groups: Theory and Practice, provides a systematic treatment of the design, conduct, and interpretation of focus group discussions within the context of social science research and theory. The book examines every facet of focus group research, from selection and recruitment of group participants, to the selection of a moderator, to conduct of the interviews, through the analysis of focus group data. Also included are discussions on designing the interview guide, the importance and influence of group composition, the art of conducting the focus group, and the characteristics of effective moderators.

Key Features:

- coverage of the use of new technologies in focus group research

- a chapter that provides a historical perspective on the development of focus groups including their roots in early group therapy research and new, updated examples of the uses of focus groups
- a discussion of the use of information technology for conducting groups on-line and by video-conference
- new methods for the analysis of focus group data

To borrow this book from Grant MacEwan's Learning Resources Centre, contact Michelle Bezenar, Interlibrary Loans, phone 780-497-5857, e-mail: bezenarm@macewan.ca

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