

Advancing Cultural Diversity in Volunteer Management (519 and 905 Areas)

Diversity and Volunteer Management: A Capacity-Building Framework

Prepared for: Final Inter-Regional Forum (12 June 2009)

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Diversity and Volunteer Management: A Capacity-Building Framework

Introduction

After several decades of work on diversity, we have a solid public policy foundation in Ontario plus many, many resources to support cultural competency in organizations. Yet up to this point, there hasn't been much focus on applying what we know about cultural diversity to the management of volunteer resources – even though volunteers are integral to the voluntary and non-profit sector.

The 2006 census tells us that the number of foreign-born in Canada has nearly tripled during the past 75 years and now almost one in five of the total Canadian population is foreign-born. In fact, between 2001 and 2006, Canada's foreign-born population grew by 13.6% -- four times faster than the Canadian-born population. Immigrants to Canada include many skilled and creative individuals wanting to contribute to the country they now call home; however, many organizations don't feel equipped to tap into this source of new volunteers.

Both volunteer management and diversity management¹ are often under-valued within organizations and, therefore, under-resourced. That is a major block to the effective integration of cultural diversity in volunteer management.

The Project team and Reference Group recognize that any efforts to advance cultural diversity in volunteer management require organizational buy-in to changing the views towards volunteer management and diversity management and the resulting practices and funding priorities within organizations.

The Final Inter-Regional Forum of the Advancing Cultural Diversity in Volunteer Management Project (to be held 12 June 2009) is designed to provide tools and resources as well as to create a dialogue that will assist organizations and communities to promote the value of both volunteer management and diversity management.

This paper describes a conceptual framework for understanding the work to be done in advancing cultural diversity in volunteer management. While a conceptual framework is a theoretical tool, this paper looks at how the ideal model can be adapted and used in practical terms.

About the project

The Advancing Cultural Diversity in Volunteer Management project is an initiative funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. The goal is to develop the organizational and community capacity of non-profit organizations in the 519 and 905 area code regions of the province to recruit and support a more culturally diverse volunteer base. The project involved a series of eight Community Dialogues (Phase 1), a 905 and a 519 Regional Forum (Phase 2) and a Final Inter-Regional Forum (Phase 3) that brings together participants from all communities in both regions. Details about the Project can be found at www.culturaldiversityandvolunteers.ca.

¹ A word about terminology: It is acknowledged that the term "volunteer manager" is not the current preferred terminology because using "volunteer" as a prefix implies that the manager is a volunteer (vs. a professional). However, for the purpose of this paper – and presenting diversity management and volunteer management with a parallel and equal importance – the terms used are "diversity manager" and "volunteer manager."

The Conceptual Framework

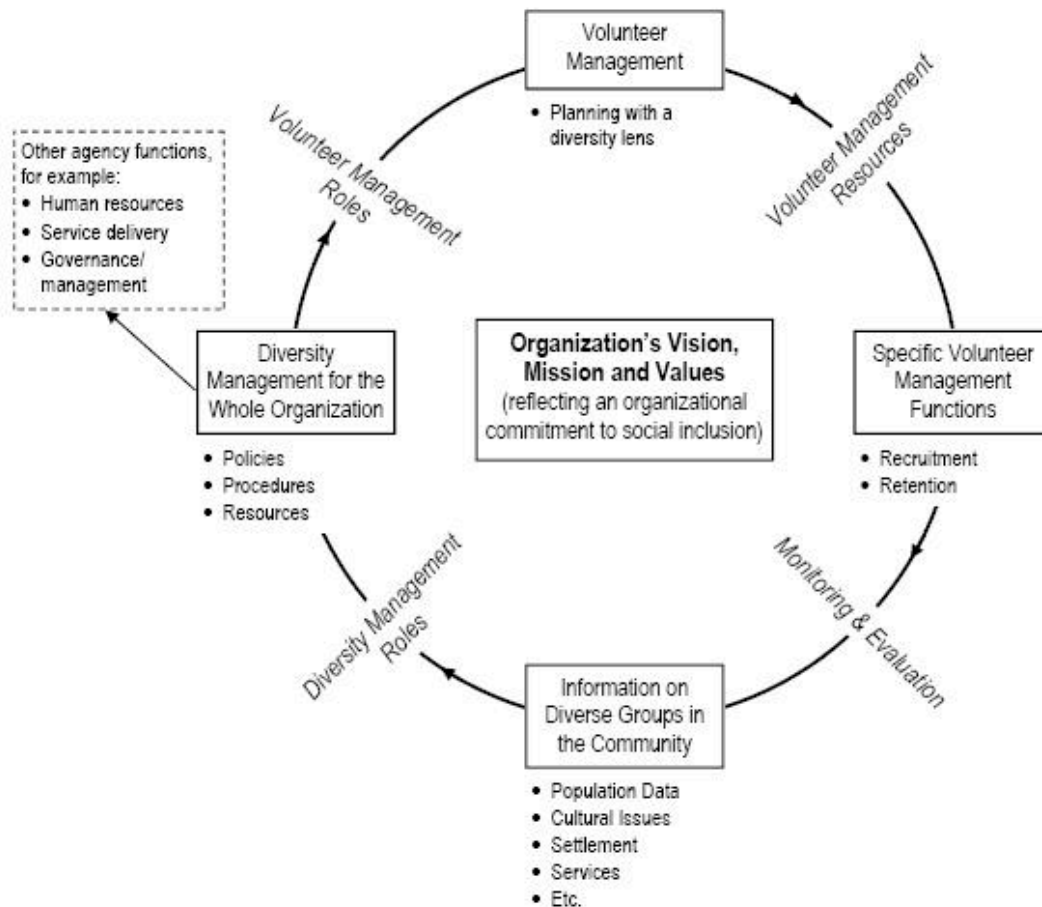
The conceptual framework is based on the information gleaned from eight Community Dialogues (held during Phase 1 of the Project) as well as a review of the literature and the input from members of the Reference Group and Project team plus feedback from participants at the two Regional Forums (Phase 2 of the Project).

The purpose of a conceptual framework

A conceptual framework is a model; it is an outline of possible courses of action or approaches to a situation. A conceptual framework provides an organized way of thinking about a project that is based on ideas and research. Presenting a conceptual framework in diagram format helps to explain the ideas and how they are connected together.

It is important to remember that the conceptual framework is both theoretical and ideal. Reality can look very different and, therefore, this discussion paper looks beyond just the theoretical and ideal level. In order to make the conceptual framework meaningful to those who are looking for a tangible and practical tool, the framework is first presented in theoretical terms and then discussed in terms of how it can be adapted to fit small and medium-sized organizations. The paper also discusses the various entry points into the framework.

Diagram of the conceptual framework



Description of the conceptual framework diagram

In the centre of the conceptual framework diagram is the *Organization's Vision, Mission and Values* and the need to reflect an organizational commitment to social inclusion. The positioning of the vision, mission and values at the hub of the cycle is very important. The central position captures the critical importance of all this work beginning with organizational commitment to social inclusion. This is vital, not only for advancing cultural diversity in volunteer management, but also relates to all other agency functions (which are represented in the broken line box connected to *Diversity Management for the Whole Organization* on the left hand side of the diagram).

The conceptual framework describes a cycle starting at the south end of the above diagram with *Information on Diverse Groups in the Community*. It indicates that, ideally, the first step in doing this work is an understanding of the community context: What is the population data? What is known about the cultural groups in the community? What settlement and immigrant-serving organizations are in the community? Where are the partnership possibilities? The framework emphasizes that the best course of action is to start with an understanding of this important information.

Moving in a clock-wise direction, organizations are advised to hire a *Diversity Manager* who will develop an organizational culture that is socially inclusive and capable of providing culturally appropriate services. This lays the foundation for the organization's *Volunteer Manager* to then incorporate diversity policies and procedures into his or her *Volunteer Management* planning. Of course, *Volunteer Management Resources* must then be secured in order to implement diversity management policies and procedures in collaboration with the *Specific Volunteer Management Functions* of recruitment and retention.

The final step is *Monitoring and Evaluation* which leads back to the beginning of the cycle. In reality, it is not about going around the circle only once. It is about going through each step, learning and going around again in new circumstances with another level of complexity and knowledge.

Adapting the conceptual framework

As pointed out, there is a gap between theory (i.e. a conceptual framework) and on-the-ground practice. Theory informs but it doesn't literally dictate action. What the conceptual framework provides is a visual for discussing how to move forward and part of the discussion has to focus on how to adapt the framework to the realities of organizations while being as true to the intent of the theory as possible. Nonetheless, it is important to present the ideal so there is an understanding of how to change and advance as well as a goal to work towards.

Small- or medium-sized organizations

54% of all Canadian voluntary and non-profit sector organizations have no employees, another 26.3% have only one to four employees and 7.7% have five to nine employees.² These are important numbers to consider when presenting the conceptual framework because typically only large organizations have full-time Diversity Managers or Volunteer Managers. Recognizing that this is not the case in many organizations, how can the framework be adapted?

The focus of the framework is on the *role* of diversity and management and volunteer management. While ideally, there would be resources to devote a full-time staff person to both volunteer management and diversity management, what is important is that the function of both is

² Source: National Survey of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations (2004)

charged to someone within the organization because there is an organizational commitment to the importance of both volunteer management and diversity management.

This is particularly important to consider for the large number of all volunteer groups; they are not excluded from this framework. If the focus is on the function, then all volunteer groups can also move forward by inserting this responsibility into volunteer position descriptions and recruiting leadership volunteers with knowledge of volunteer management and/or diversity management.

Another approach is to take a community-wide approach – rather than focusing on individual actions of smaller agencies. Collaborative partnerships could allow smaller organizations to share resources strategically. One example comes from the Niagara region where a number of organizations which were unable to afford individual diversity managers, hired and shared a single diversity manager.

Starting at different places on the cycle

The ideal entry point into the conceptual framework is the south end of the diagram: *Information on Diverse Groups in the Community*. Starting at this point means that organizational effort is built upon research and knowledge. In reality, organizations decide to focus on diversity management and volunteer management as the organization evolves and after certain policies and procedures, research and commitments are already in place. Within one organization, some staff may have a better understanding than other staff or a deeper commitment to diversity management and/or volunteer management and, therefore, the entry point into the framework may not be so straightforward.

The entry point is less important than the commitment to move forward. What is important to remember is that the greatest level of change occurs when there is organizational commitment. Advancing cultural diversity in volunteer management can happen with an enlightened volunteer manager but his/her actions will be limited and the outcomes neutralized if the whole organization is not working with a vision/mission/values that reflect a commitment to social inclusion and/or if that person does not have adequate resources. Similarly, advancing cultural diversity can happen when an organization operates with a commitment to diversity; however, they lose the benefit of professional volunteer management expertise if the organization doesn't value and resource the role of volunteer manager.

It is also important to note that while the arrows on the diagram move deliberately from one item to the next in a clock-wise direction, completion of an item in its entirety is not necessary for moving on to the next. *Information on Diverse Groups* informs *Diversity Management* which in turn informs *Volunteer Management*. In a learning organization with a goal of advancing cultural diversity in volunteer management, however, it is very easy to visualize, for instance, how learning in volunteer management could be the impetus for changes in diversity management which could lead to a desire to learn more information on diverse groups in the community.

The conceptual framework provides a road map for describing the process of advancing cultural diversity in volunteer management. It is background context for the Final Inter-Regional Forum where participants will learn about the conceptual framework but also hear from successful diversity and volunteerism projects from several different communities (and take home case studies and sample resources and tools as well as tangible ideas). In addition, there will ample opportunity to talk with local partners about continuing this important conversation and engaging others in order to create change in local communities and within individual organizations.