

Reaction to Proposed Roadmap for the Volunteer Sector: Academe

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Volunteerism, conceptually, is any effort by an individual or in collective effort with others to work for the betterment of oneself, other individuals, communities, society or the nation. As such, the “volunteer” does not expect any monetary or reward in return though the target community, in some cases, give some form of recognition in the end. They do not work for money but for less tangible but more important forms of “remuneration” such as building self-esteem, self satisfaction, improving their health, developing contacts (and sometimes get good-paying jobs), appreciation and an opportunity to build skills.

The term roadmap, to me, implies a clear and specific guide to proceed from one point (i.e. where we stand at present with regard to volunteerism) to a final destination (the full implementation of the Volunteer Act of 2007). The present roadmap does not give me that impression, but I guess with time and some editing, this will result in this clear way to our destination.

Information and Education:

Schools have to be classified to 1. with volunteer or 2. without volunteer organization/ office. The needs with regard to information dissemination will vary between the two. It will be easier to enhance volunteerism in a situation where the mechanism for this activity exists.

Basic information that need dissemination in an academic unit are:

What is volunteerism?

Role of volunteerism in the attainment of the goals of the academic unit.

Volunteerism and service learning- differences and similarities.

NSTP as an introduction to volunteerism.

Volunteerism – benefits for the volunteer

- benefits for the community and the nation

Role of volunteerism in nation-building.

RA 9418 implementation of provisions by the academic sector.

At the University of the Philippines, the Ugnayan ng Pahinungod was organized in recognition of the stake of the University in the development of the underserved communities. Volunteerism is seen as a way to:

1. share with society what the University has analysed and discovered
2. enrich teaching and research with knowledge culled from people themselves about the conditions and needs of the nation
3. propagate actions and values most honored in society, which are: human dignity, social justice, love of country and respect for all beings
4. build character and promote values education, and
5. promote the study of volunteerism and related topics as a subject of scholarship and instruction.

Capability building/training:

The fastest way to build the capability to implement volunteer activities in the academe is to institutionalize volunteerism by the organization of a volunteer office. This can organize volunteer activities/affirmative action without stopping other school organizations or individuals from pursuing their own volunteer initiatives. The organization can link up with local and international institutions, receive requests for affirmative action, assess target community needs and plan activities.

A system for the continuous training of volunteers has to be put in place. This will be based on the needs assessment for each volunteer activity (e.g. teaching of teachers, medical mission, tutorials, environment care, alternative energy sources, etc.) and must take advantage of all the human resources of the academic organization.

A mechanism for identifying target/needful communities and other clienteles must be established for the provision of volunteer services by the faculty members and/or students, all these aimed at improving the welfare of the target, utilizing the resources (knowledge and expertise) of the academic provider.

Volunteers for disaster management must always be ready to respond on short notice. The youth, which comprise the bulk of the academic community, is always “restless” and in need of harnessing their energy towards meaningful activities, particularly in times of crises when they are eager to participate in the resolution of.

Volunteering policies, systems and procedures:

Each academic institution must create its own guidelines on:

1. volunteer activities available to students, faculty members and the rest of the academic community
2. qualifications of volunteers
3. activities open to students
4. deployment procedures
5. code of conduct/ethics
6. security of volunteers, especially students; include waiver/insurance system

There is a need for developing a course curriculum on volunteerism locally. No such course is available yet though there are graduate programs in many developed countries. These courses will also include resource management, volunteer training, and the like.

Resources:

Each academic unit must make volunteer programs part of their regular budget. This is easily justified in that volunteer actions enhance and reinforce what the classroom lecture simply states. Volunteerism brings the students to the community and exposes them to real, not theoretical, problems and social situations. The resolution of these real community crises allows the academic institution to contribute directly to community development.

The PNVSCA can assist in securing funding for various volunteer programs. Its role includes identifying potential financial supporters of different activities (i.e. health, environment, agriculture, etc.)

Sharing of resources must be encouraged, particularly human resources of the different schools.

Implementation:

The NSTP can be used to introduce students to volunteerism. It has to be emphasized, though, that volunteerism is different in that its activities are not expected to result in academic credits or monetary remuneration. Eventually, activities may include both country-wide and international volunteer actions.

Service learning gives students real-world experience by incorporating community work into the curriculum. It is used as a model that combines academic learning and community service and thus leads to tangible benefit for the community. Inasmuch as this is a graded activity, it is not “volunteerism” in the strict sense of the word.

Every academic institution must establish its own volunteer organization to organize, coordinate, assess needs, prepare programs, establish linkages with other organizations both locally and abroad.

A mandatory reporting system must be in place to see how the academic institution is complying with RA 9418. This way the PNVSCA can check who may need assistance in their volunteer activities.

Advocacy:

The volunteer organization is in charge of promoting, campaigning and recruitment of volunteers, as well as the dissemination of information related to available volunteer programs of the school. This must be a continuing program all year round so that all potential volunteers are made aware of the program which best appeals to their volunteer spirit. Advocacy includes room to room meeting with students and organizations, use of multi media, publication of newsletters, posters, fliers and magazines and inclusion of volunteerism promotion statement in all school programs.

A system of recognition of best volunteer practices, greatest contribution to community development or nation-building, most active school organization in volunteerism, etc. may be organized by the school to promote volunteerism. It must be emphasized though that such recognition or reward activities are not the objective of volunteerism but rather an advocacy activity to promote and make known the results of volunteerism in the school. As the main statement of volunteerism, we often say “Volunteer and make a difference”.