ERNOP Research Note

How to make volunteering more inclusive?
Effective strategies to increase volunteer inclusiveness

Philine S. M. van Overbeeke; Stephanie A. Koolen-Mass; Lucas C.P.M. Meijs; Jeffrey L. Brudney

What strategies can be used by organisations that recruit and place volunteers to guarantee a more diverse and inclusive environment for participants? This research shows that certain individuals tend to be excluded from volunteer opportunities based on their own perceptions about lack of previous volunteering experience and perceptions of receiving organizations. Reasons for the lack of prior volunteering experience can include a lack of economic, social, and cultural resources needed to engage in volunteering. This means certain groups, such as unemployed citizens, ethnic minorities, and physically disabled individuals, are underrepresented in volunteering due to exclusion.

Gatekeepers are individuals who are the first point of contact for prospective volunteers and who direct them toward volunteering opportunities within nonprofit organizations. Sometimes there are two gatekeepers: sending and receiving.

The strategies to be used by the gatekeepers in the sending organisation should be: enforcing, enabling and encouraging the current and prospective volunteers.

#Volunteering #Inclusiveness #Diversity #Recruitment #Strategies

Background

It has been argued that volunteering actually **exacerbates social exclusion** and reproduces existing social hierarchies. In turn, social exclusion **diminishes pro-social behaviors** such as volunteering.

Due to exclusion, certain groups, such as **unemployed citizens, ethnic minorities, and physically disabled individuals**, are underrepresented in volunteering.

Gatekeepers in sending organisations might have the ability to reach individuals **outside the scope of the receiving-organisation,** therefore.
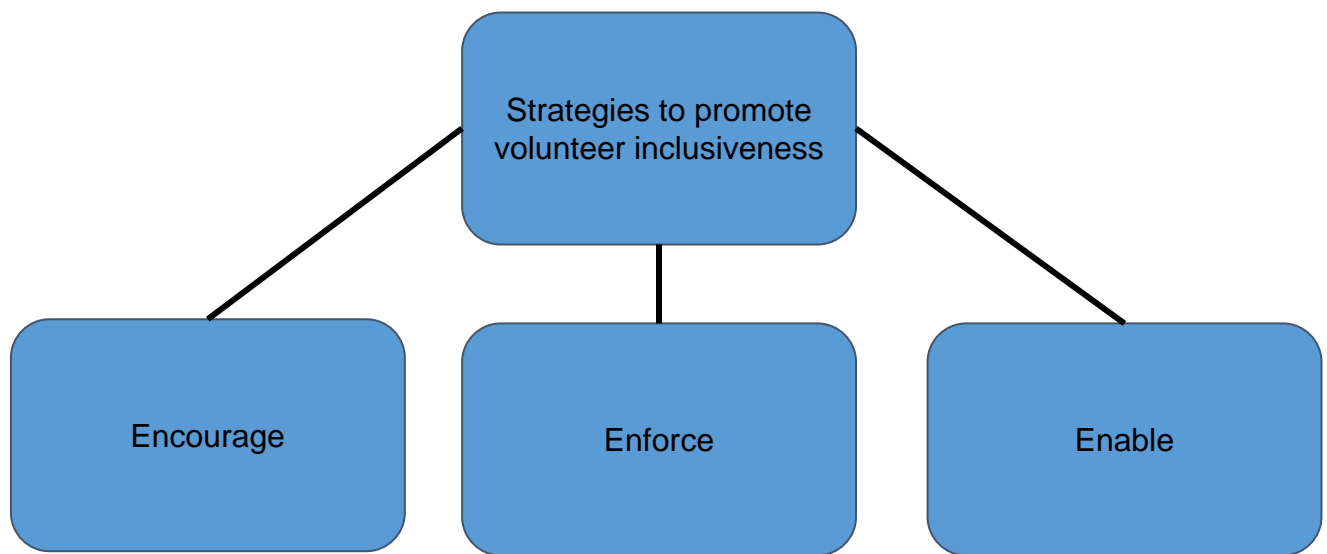
Activities such as screening and matching volunteers are an efficient and effective strategy to meet organizational, and they **jeopardize volunteer inclusion.**

The authors argue that nonprofit organizations can **enhance volunteer** inclusion if volunteer recruitment deliberately targets audiences with non-volunteer antecedents.

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Learnings

Qualitative research was conducted in a **two phased interview process**, and has interviews with 15 sending-gatekeepers. These were selected from a database provided by the Dutch Organization of Volunteering.

All participants agree that, the **current mechanisms and processes to attract and place volunteers are often not sufficiently inclusive**. In their experience, individuals with non-volunteer antecedents are often underrepresented, possibly as a result of not being asked to volunteer.

Encouragement actions such as **lectures, inspirational workshops and tutorials should be carried out,** to make volunteering seem more attractive to the new participants. It will remove barriers and show new participants that volunteering is accessible.

Enabling can occur when the sending gatekeeper is provided with the chance to place the prospective volunteer in a placement by providing **facilitated access to information through training and support**

Mandated volunteering can enhance volunteer inclusion. In some companies or community service, volunteering can be mandatory for all employees or students. Although this strategy can have disadvantages, such as the lack of motivation of the participants, the authors note that **encouragement and training can be employed to overcome this challenge**.

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