

# Chapter 21

## Leveraging Workforce Diversity through Volunteerism

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the subject of workforce diversity as it directly relates to volunteerism, using the Peace Corps as an example. The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how nonprofit institutions can draw upon the value of workforce diversity in order to obtain competitive advantages. The Peace Corps' three-fold mission includes helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women, helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served, and helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans (Peace Corps, 2011a). This chapter specifically discusses how the Peace Corps incorporate diversity in their volunteer program. "The agency has always reflected the diversity of America and is actively recruiting the next generation of Peace Corps Volunteers" (Peace Corps, 2011b).*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of workforce diversity is no longer an alien concept. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2005) the United States (U.S.) workforce is becoming more diverse. A globalized workforce has given rise to the understanding that diversity is all encompassing and has proved to be beneficial (Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2006). There are many arguments that

support diversity, suggesting that society is better when we work together. Workplace diversity is increasingly viewed as an essential success factor to be competitive in today's marketplace. In an opinion poll, 81% of respondents said that it is somewhat or very important "to have employees of different races, cultures and backgrounds in the workplace or businesses" (Barrington & Troske, 2001). Diversity is touted as being 'good business' by corporate leaders (Crockett, 2003). Even though research supports the value that workforce diversity adds to organizations, nonprofits seems

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to lack diversity (Tempel & Smith, 2007; Allison, 2001). In the nonprofit sector, many organizations are involved in working and serving traditionally under-represented and marginalized groups. In these circumstances, the need for responsive and diverse workers takes on greater significance. Diversity not only assumes that all individuals are unique, but that difference is indeed value-added (Rodriguez, 1997).

## **DEFINING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY**

One of the major stumbling blocks in discussions surrounding diversity is its very definition. There are different diversity definitions available in management literature (Weisinger, 2005). According to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), only 30 percent of human resources professionals say that their company even has an official definition of diversity (SHRM, 2008). A study done by the U.S. Department of Commerce and Vice President Al Gore's National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) Diversity Task Force determined that diversity needed to be defined broadly and that it should encompass a wide range of initiatives that meet the changing needs of customers and workers (US Department of Commerce, 1999). In the context of nonprofits that includes the individuals served by the nonprofit as well as the volunteers and employees who work there. The study suggested that leaders and employees should take active roles in implementing diversity processes and in order for them to succeed they needed to be fully aligned with core organizational goals and objectives. The findings in the report illustrated that the benefits of diversity are for everyone. It also emphasized that diversity, more than a moral imperative, is a global necessity. For the purpose of this chapter, we use the following definition of diversity: Diversity includes all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals (US Department of Commerce, 1999).

## **THE HISTORY OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN THE USA**

Prior to World War I and up until the late 1970s, the human resources field found its roots in scientific management practices, bureaucratization, employment protective legislation, and unionization (Langbert & Friedman, 2002). Frederick W. Taylor (1911), who is regarded as the father of scientific management, promoted the practice of setting performance standards based on individual piece-rate incentives and cooperation of employees and employer through the economically motivated mutuality of interest. Additionally, Taylor emphasized the need to match employee abilities with the specific demands of the jobs through his 'first-class' man standard which required for his system's success (Wren & Bedeian, 2009).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. took its first steps toward promoting diversity in the workplace. During this period, several important pieces of federal legislation were passed in the U.S. in order to promote equity among workers. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. The goal of this committee was to end discrimination in employment by the government and its contractors. Workplaces were faced with a new business mandate of complying with the increasing legislations and regulations that required organizations to focus on achieving demographic variation in order to comply with federal Equal Employment Opportunity requirements. The first of its kind in the early 1960s, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in any federal program or activity. In 1965, President Johnson went one step further, with Executive Order 11246 to promote equal employment opportunity through a positive, continuing program in each department and agency (US Department of Labor, 1965). The Order prohibits federal contractors and federally assisted construction contractors and subcontractors that do more than \$10,000 in government business in one year from

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