

Topic 2 | Inclusion and exclusion: Messages and transmitters

Objectively, there is no reason for an individual not to volunteer. In both the Netherlands and Belgium, the average volunteer devotes four hours to volunteering, thus objectively indicating that time cannot be the problem. Furthermore, volunteering is offered so widely that everyone should be able to find something, regardless of availability and ability. The following are several well-known examples of making volunteering accessible: 1) micro-volunteering and 2) virtual volunteering, which can be performed in a short time and along the way (e.g., [the fish doorbell](#)); 3) episodic volunteering, which has a clear beginning and end, such there is no follow-up obligation; 4) the availability of volunteering involving both “hands” and “knowledge,” such that every competence should be able to be deployed somewhere; and 5) team volunteering, which can also ensure that people who do not feel safe volunteering with strangers can do so with people they know. In short, everyone can volunteer somewhere.

As in other parts of society, however, volunteering also excludes people. One explanation is that volunteer management often proceeds from the interests and needs of the organization rather than from the wishes of the volunteers. The second involves volunteer management that does not link volunteers to positions, but that creates positions for volunteers—a form of volunteer management that views the recruitment of volunteers as the beginning of a dialogue aimed at achieving cooperation. To have a dialogue, however, contact must be made. This contribution focuses on overcoming associated barriers.

Objective and subjective exclusion

Objective exclusion is something that can indeed take place within a specific organization. For example, it could occur if the volunteering must be performed on site and the volunteer is not able to get there. It could also occur if it is not possible to make the volunteering “small” or flexible. In addition, some volunteer positions require specific training (e.g., a requirement to have a driving license in order to serve as a neighborhood bus driver). In some cases, it can be possible to resolve these problems with some effort from the organization, but this is not always the case. Unresolvable exclusion results from a well-run selection process in which the

potential volunteer and the organization go through several rounds of negotiations before deciding not to proceed.

Subjective exclusion is the result of exclusion based on prejudices and unjustified associations. Such subjective exclusion can take one of two forms: self-exclusion and organizational exclusion. In addition, exclusion can be explained by the message or transmitter not being effective for certain groups. Plug (2021, Part 2) provides several explanations for why specific Dutch people of non-Western background are excluded.

Self-exclusion occurs when potential volunteers deem themselves unsuitable for volunteering or when they assume or fear that they will be rejected. In many cases, they may also simply think that they will not fit in with the other volunteers. Self-exclusion is also a form of self-protection. While being rejected for a paid job or training is painful, being rejected for volunteering is absolutely confrontational.

The prevention of self-exclusion is complicated, as the volunteer organization is probably not even aware of it. One method to address self-exclusion is to divide recruitment and placement across two gatekeepers. The first gatekeeper then challenges people to volunteer, helps them find something that suits them, and opens the conversation with the second gatekeeper (Van Overbeeke et al., 2022). Van Overbeeke and colleagues (2022) describe three strategies: **1) Encouraging**: adjusting terms to the target group, approaching specific groups, and explaining what volunteering is; **2) Enabling**: preparing the receiving organizations and preparing the volunteers; and **3) Enforcing**: requiring, which can prevent self-exclusion and organizational exclusion, but which can also have disadvantageous effects.

Organizational exclusion is often a negative consequence of an effective recruitment process. To make recruitment efficient and effective, many organizations focus on target groups that are likely to respond positively to the invitation. The first approach often involves approaching potential volunteers from within the circle of current volunteers. Somewhat more abstractly, this appears to involve working with “objective” antecedents of people who volunteer (e.g., high educational level, age appropriate to the work, certain neighborhoods). Although this seems logical (and, in itself, it is logical), the consequence is that certain neighborhoods are

then never invited, just as there are also neighborhoods where door-to-door collections are never held.

The prevention of organizational exclusion is not necessarily complicated, but it is presumably expensive. It requires a conscious decision to recruit in locations (e.g., neighborhoods) where the chances of success are likely to be low. This is analogous to the collective action problem described in the section on recruitment and retention.

One good example of an effective approach to people with different antecedents is to go through the beneficiaries of the organization. In some organizations, it could be possible for members of the target group to become volunteers at a later time. This could be referred to as an alumni policy based on the emotion of “giving back” or, perhaps even better, as “paying it backward.” A program that involves alumni as volunteers or donors also provides strong evidence of impact: the target group has become a former target group, as they are now able to give instead of receive. Moreover, if they do this for the specific organization, it provides evidence of attribution.

Non-effective messages and transmitters

While it makes perfect sense that not everyone should be approached in the same way to volunteer (or to buy a car or soap), very little is known about the effectiveness of messages within the context of volunteering. Organizations might consider forming a diverse and inclusive focus group to review messages ahead of time. As demonstrated by an exploration by Luca van Seumeren (2020), “new faces” (i.e., people who are never actually asked) describe, define, and value themselves at the intersection of characteristics. This goes deeper than traditional thinking in terms of target groups, which often proceeds from a single characteristic. The same exploration also addresses the role of networks, role models, and communication. In this case as well, the message is differentiation. This point is elaborated further by Plug (2021, Part 3).

Part of the differentiation also involves learning about how other groups interpret volunteering. As demonstrated by an international comparative study on the perception of volunteering (Handy et al, 2000), actual definitions and felt emotions do not differ much at all between countries: volunteering is helping others without being paid for it. The situation

becomes more confusing at the level of concrete activities (see also Van Seumeren and Plug, 2021, Part 1, on the perception of volunteering by Dutch people of non-Western background). For example, donating blood is not perceived as volunteering in all countries. This corresponds to a European trend study (Meijs & Hendriks, 2021), which indicates that differences between countries with regard to volunteering can also be explained according to differences in what volunteers do (or are able to do).

Reading list for these topics:

- 1 The three strategies for how third parties can help to make volunteering more inclusive. An explanation in Dutch and a link to the original article:
Van Overbeeke, P. S., Koolen-Maas, S. A., Meijs, L. C., & Brudney, J. L. (2021). You shall (not) pass: Hoe derde partijen vrijwilligerswerk inclusiever kunnen maken [How third parties can make volunteering more inclusive]. (*blog*) <https://www.nov.nl/themas/wetenschap/wetenschap+-+blogs+en+nieuws/2045286.aspx?t=You-Should-not-Pass-Hoe-derde-partijen-vrijwilligerswerk-inclusiever-kunnen-maken>
Van Overbeeke, P. S., Koolen-Maas, S. A., Meijs, L. C., & Brudney, J. L. (2022). You shall (not) pass: Strategies for third-party gatekeepers to enhance volunteer inclusion. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33(1), 33–45. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11266-021-00384-0> Open Access
- 2 Hoe krijg je nieuwe gezichten naar jouw organization? [How to bring new faces into your organization]. By Luca van Seumeren. [Read here](#)
- 3 Over massamedia en beelden van vrijwilligerswerk met onder andere Friends en The Big Bang Theory [On mass media and images of volunteering, with Friends and The Big Bang Theory, among others]. By Luca Van Seumeren. [Read here](#)
- 4 A European trend study demonstrating that differences in volunteering percentages can also be explained by the possibilities of engaging in volunteering: a sort of chicken and egg situation.
Meijs, L.C.P.M and P. Hendriks, assisted by A. Dobрева. 2021. New trends in the development of volunteering in the European Union. *Study for the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)*. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-09-22-293-en-n.pdf> (Open Access)
- 5 A fundamental study of similarities and differences in public perceptions of volunteering in eight countries.
Handy, F., Cnaan, R.A., Brudney, J.L. et al. (2000). Public perception of “who is a volunteer”: An examination of the net-cost approach from a cross-cultural perspective. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 11, 45–65 https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=spp_papers
- 6 Three blogs on the website of the NOV (association of Dutch volunteer organizations) by and in response to the thesis by Dave Plug on approaching Dutch people of non-Western background for volunteering. It addresses perceptions, explanations, and areas of focus.
 - [Perceptie van volunteering door Nederlanders met een niet-westerse achtergrond](#) [Perception of volunteering by Dutch people of non-Western background].
 - [Ondervertegenwoordiging van Nederlanders met een niet-westerse achtergrond](#) [Under-representation of Dutch people of non-Western background].
 - [Het betrekken van Nederlanders met een niet-westerse achtergrond](#) [Involving Dutch people of non-Western background].

Additional literature

Handy, F., Cnaan, R. A., Brudney, J. L., Ascoli, U., Meijs, L. C. M. P., & Ranade, S. (2000). Public perception of “who is a volunteer”: An examination of the net-cost approach from a cross-cultural perspective. *Voluntas*, Vol. 11, pp. 45–65.