

Nonprofits benefit when volunteers fit the job they're assigned

By Phyllis Korkki, New York Times

The recession dealt a double blow to many nonprofits. Just as it ratcheted up demand for their services, it also forced them to cut their budgets. So in times like these, volunteers are more valuable than ever.

But volunteer work can be plagued by inefficiency. Suppose a nonprofit manages to recruit a large group of people to help with a project. It's not a given that they will have the right skills for the effort, or that the nonprofit will know how to mobilize them, said Michelle Nunn, chief executive of the Points of Light Institute, which helps organize volunteer efforts.

Sometimes, the nonprofits with the most need are those that don't have the money to hire people to supervise volunteers, said Gary Bagley, executive director of New York Cares, which mobilizes volunteer projects citywide.

To avoid squandering a volunteer's good will, more organizations, including Points of Light and New York Cares, are working to match supply and demand with more precision. For example, they are enlisting volunteers to serve as managers of other volunteers. And, in the process, these people are broadening their experience and adding ballast to their résumés.

Technological advances are aiding this push to properly match volunteers. A Web site called Sparked, which started a year ago, allows people to use their computers to help others in a variety of ways. "It's desktop volunteering," said Ben Rigby,

the company's chief executive. People can spend as little as a few hours or even just a few minutes helping out.

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