



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Managing a Volunteer Workforce

Erica Mani, Regional Chief Executive Officer
American Red Cross - West Virginia Chapter

Erica Mani became the regional CEO of the American Red Cross, West Virginia Region in November 2012. Her responsibilities include supervising 11 offices across the state.

Prior to joining the Red Cross, Ms. Mani served in various general counsel and leadership roles in state government during the past decade. Most recently, from November 2010 to November 2012, she served as deputy chief of staff to West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin. Ms. Mani also practiced law at Bowles Rice from 2005 to 2007, in the areas of labor and employment law and government relations.

Ms. Mani was born and raised in Weirton, West Virginia. She earned her law degree from West Virginia University College of Law in 2001, where she was a member of the Student Administration Judicial Board and Chief Justice of Moot Court. She received *West Virginia Executive Magazine's* Young Gun Award in 2006 and was recognized by *The State Journal* as a member of its "Generation Next: 40 Under 40" class of 2007.

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

The mission of the American Red Cross is to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors. Every day throughout the Red Cross, people mobilize to help their neighbors whether they are down the street, across the nation or around the globe. A half-million volunteers and more than 30,000 employees of the Red Cross help provide these life-changing and often life-saving services. The American Red Cross has more than 500 locally supported chapters, including seven in West Virginia. The Red Cross provides a unique community-based network focused on helping disaster survivors, connecting the Armed Forces with their families, teaching skills that help save lives, supplying blood and offering international services. The American Red Cross has a vision for mobilizing the power of volunteers by becoming the premier organization for people, groups and organizations to donate



American Red Cross

their time and talent. The focus is on building an integrated, aligned strategy and support structure for volunteer efforts across the organization.

According to the most recent findings from *Volunteering and Civic Life in America*, West Virginia ranks second in the nation at 74.5 percent for doing favors for neighbors. According to the report, 332,610 West Virginians supported a large number of worthwhile organizations through volunteering in 2011. The American Red Cross has 710 active, trained and registered volunteers in West Virginia who respond locally, nationally and internationally to disasters; teach first aid and other safety courses; offer support to Veterans and Military families; and provide other office support. Hundreds of additional volunteers provide support at blood banks in West Virginia and serve with the organization as spontaneous



volunteers or on short-term service projects. The Red Cross is always searching for additional dedicated volunteers.

To successfully utilize and manage volunteers, it is important to understand a volunteer's motivation, skills and talents. Individuals engage in volunteer work in order to satisfy important personal goals, and understanding those motivations is the most critical factor in ensuring a positive volunteer experience. Motivating factors include:

- Values: humanitarianism and helping those in need;
- Understanding: learn more about the world and exercise skills that are often unused or learn new skills;
- Enhancement: grow and develop psychologically;
- Career: gain career-related experience, leadership experience or explore a career; and
- Social: strengthen social relationships and gain networking opportunities.

Volunteer programs have evolved with the changing social climate in America. Originally designed to suit the needs of stay-at-home moms and retired individuals, new volunteer programs now incorporate technology, remote management and flexible job descriptions designed for families, teams, businesses, youth and more, and provide accommodations for a variety of schedules and diversity of volunteers. It is essential to realize that a new volunteer doesn't want to simply make a contribution – they want to make a difference. Business volunteer programs are designed to provide team-building experiences and nonprofits need to capitalize on these initiatives. Families are also volunteering in the evenings or on weekends to spend valuable time together, and service trips are replacing vacations for some families.

The Red Cross, during the past year, has advanced our technology; upgraded our volunteer management system nationwide; partnered with Grainger to develop a new web-based system for screening,



The Red Cross joins with the kids of Piedmont Elementary in Charleston, West Virginia, to show appreciation to first responders for the work they do to make our schools and communities safer places

supporting and mobilizing volunteers for all sizes and types of events; created a national, regional and local network of volunteer managers and committed organizational resources to professional development for our volunteer service staff. We also are committed to providing opportunities that match today's volunteer needs. Our team is creating systems and projects to reach into rural communities, work with other nonprofits and community-based organizations, and create partnerships that help support our recruitment efforts. We are committed to developing leadership among our volunteers.

It is imperative for organizations to follow key management practices when dealing with volunteers, including regular supervision and communication, liability coverage or insurance protection, regular collection of information on volunteer numbers and hours, screening procedures to identify suitable volunteers, written

policies and job descriptions for volunteer involvement, recognition activities such as award ceremonies, annual measurement of the impacts of volunteers, training and professional development opportunities and training for paid staff in working with volunteers.

More than 90 percent of all the work done at the Red Cross is through our volunteers and we are committed to building and sustaining the best volunteer program in the nation. We strive to follow the most current best practices in volunteer management, in addition to responding to the needs of our existing volunteer force. The Red Cross is an organization that creates great opportunity for our volunteers to make a positive impact on the organization and on their communities. For more information or to volunteer, please visit www.redcross.org. ▽