Volunteer Management at a Major Sports Event such as the Winter Games

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Abstract

The first volunteer programme implemented by an Olympic Games organizing committee was for the Lake Placid Games in 1980. Since then, these programmes have become considerably more sophisticated, both at the Winter Games and the Summer Games. They are now one of the elements of the success of the Games, as they are of all large sports events. In this respect, they pose managerial problems that it is essential to be aware of and to understand, in order better to deal with them. The aim of the present article is to present these problems (planning, organization, recruitment, selection, training, motivation, evaluation, putting expertise to best use) in the light of experiences at the Winter Games in Calgary 1988, Albertville 1992, Lillehammer 1994 and Nagano 1998, which the author observed in various capacities, and through which the development of volunteer programmes can be followed. Lessons are identified for similar large sports events.

Introduction

From the outset, the Winter Games, like the Summer Games, have always needed a large contingent of volunteer personnel to ensure the smooth running of the sports competitions. In that they reflect the long tradition of volunteering in sport in general: the amateur status of the competitions was matched by the volunteer status of the officials. Moreover, up to the middle of the eighties, the Olympic Charter included the following declaration: "If it were not for the voluntary service given by thousands of men and women who are members of the IOC, the IFs, the NOCs and the national federations, there would be no Olympic Games. It would be impossible to pay for these services, which are so gladly contributed by those who believe in sport" (IOC 1982:70).

From the 1970s, the Olympic Games began to attract increasing numbers of spectators and journalists from countries other than the host country. The number of NOCs sending teams and important visitors (VIPs) also increased. Language skills became essential in order to welcome these new participants. The OCOGs (Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games) responded by recruiting and paying legions of hostesses (and hosts) who were easily recognizable by their uniforms in the bright colours of the Games. No one yet mentioned volunteers.

The first specific programme of any size intended to openly recruit volunteers (over 33,000 of them!) to fill the thousands of temporary posts required for the smooth running of the Games dates from the Los Angeles Games in 1984 (Perelman 1985:187). This is paradoxical in that it was in that decade that the Games began to generate considerable revenues, even profits, which might have been used to pay temporary staff. But the implementation of such a programme was in keeping with the American tradition of volunteering in the non-profit sector in general, and was helped by the exceptional image of the Games in the United States in particular.

It was for the Olympic Winter Games in Lake Place (New York state) in 1980 that the idea of creating such a programme was realized for the first time, under the direction of Ursula Trudeau. A group of 6,703 volunteers (249 of whom spoke at least one language in addition to English) was thus recruited beginning in the summer of 1978, mainly for the organization of the sports competitions (including the pre-Olympic events) and reception of the delegations (OCOG 1980:165). The author was among this group.

But it was not until 1988 that the volunteer programme became a constant in the organization of the Winter Games, under the successive names of Team '88 (Calgary), Equipe 92 (Albertville), '94-laget (Lillehammer) and Team '98 (Nagano). This article proposes to give a summary description of these programmes, and to draw from them the main managerial lessons that can be applied to the implementation of similar projects in large sports events. Consequently, the paper will be in two parts. The first is devoted to a presentation and comparison of the volunteer programmes at the Winter Games from 1988 to 1998, which the author observed informally in various capacities, and for which there exist more or less detailed reports, which are mentioned in the bibliography. On this empirical and documentary basis, the second part of the article identifies and comments upon the managerial themes for the success of such programmes according to the four classic functions of management.

1. Volunteer programmes at the Winter Games since 1938

Table 1 evaluates the size of the volunteer programme in comparison with some indicators of the scope of the Winter Games which, as from 1988, took place over 16 days.

Table 1 - Some indicators of the Winter Games 1988-1998 (Chappelet 1998:93)

	Calgary 88	Albertville 92	Lillehammer 94	Nagano 98
Participating NOCs	57	64	67	72
Sports events	46	57	61	68
Participating athletes	1,423	1,801	1,738	2,177
Tickets sold	1,338,000	913,000	1,212,000	1,275,000
Total accredited persons	39,121	39,046	42,163	84,367
Total volunteers (during the Games)	9,498	8,647	9,054	32,579
Ratio of volunteers/ accredited persons	24.3%	22.1%	21.4%	38.6%

One can see that, while the various indicators of the Winter Games rise progressively, the volunteer programme remains stable from 1988 to 1994, with around 9,000 participants (21 to 24% of accredited persons). The quantitative leap we see in Nagano was due to the acceptance of volunteers for just a few days, while the others required a minimum presence throughout the duration of the Games. A more meaningful comparison would need statistics for man-hours, which are unfortunately not available. The characteristics of each programme are summed up in the following paragraphs.

1.1. Calgary 1988 (OCOG 1988:440-443; OCOG 1988b)

The volunteer programme was directly inspired by that of the Stampede, the big rodeo organized in Calgary each year. Applications were received from twice as many candidates (24,117) as there were positions to be filled. Each volunteer had to commit to doing at least 120 hours' work (over approximately three weeks), which drew protests from those people who could only provide sporadic help during the Games. Over two thousand people offered their services outside the Olympic period. Many Alberta companies granted ten days' paid leave to those employees willing to take ten days' holiday to act as volunteers. The OCOG tried to have volunteers participate in all stages and at all levels of the organization, while keeping coordination and budget control in the hands of paid staff. One hundred and thirty-three orientation sessions were organized beginning in 1985, to introduce the 16,000 candidate volunteers to the jobs to be filled and to allocate them.

Ten thousand volunteers were given general and specific training by means of a manual and videos. More advanced courses were laid on for those people who would be playing a key role. In addition, a recognition system was set up. It included the award of a gold pin, the organization of dinner dances every year from 1985 to 1988, and the opening almost three years before the Games of a volunteers' centre in the ceremony stadium (Club '88). Volunteers and OCOG employees received identical uniforms according to their functions, but the high number of different styles made distribution complicated, and meant that some people were unable to find the right size. This problem was resolved at future Games by the adoption of a unisex style from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy, which simplified logistics and was a strong element of identification and cohesion among the organizing personnel whether paid or not. The list of volunteers for Calgary is printed at the end of the official report of the Games (OCOG 1988:674-706), a tradition that was carried over to Lillehammer and Nagano (OCOG 1995: vol. IV, 20-65; OCOG 1999: vol. III, 258-347).

1.2. Albertville 1992 (OCOG 1992:34-42)

Unlike Calgary, which was able to draw upon a lively tradition of volunteering, the Albertville volunteer programme was the first and largest of its kind in France. It would not be overtaken until the football World Cup in 1998 (Villemus 1998:192). From the time the programme was launched, four objectives were set: to reinforce an Olympic tradition; to share the achievements of the athletes; to make the Games a good-natured celebration; and to meet the challenge of excellence and professionalism. The OCOG clearly wanted to emphasize the quality of volunteers rather than their number. The programme developed in four stages: evaluation of requirements, recruitment and allocation, training, operational management.

The evaluation of requirements was done at the end of 1989 on the basis of a global analysis by OCOG chiefs of the tasks that were essential to the organization of the Games. Those that could be assigned to volunteers were then transformed into work positions and "equivalent persons" (some 7,350). This analysis concluded with organization charts for each Olympic venue and potential job descriptions. On this basis, a targeted recruitment drive was launched with certain university and club communities, if possible within the Savoie region, in order to reduce accommodation requirements. There was no general call for volunteers, such as through advertisements, as it was feared that too many candidates would respond. Around 2,500 volunteers came from companies that were members of the "Club Coubertin" (national sponsors), including the company Bis in the "temporary employment" category, which had previously been involved in the 1968 Games in Grenoble. Twenty per cent of applications were spontaneous. A wide variety of reasons for wanting to volunteer can be found in their statements: meeting foreign people, enjoyment of driving, being able to speak their mother tongue once again, acquiring professional experience, feeling more closely integrated in the region, experiencing the Games from the inside, not wanting to miss out on an important event, etc.

(OCOG 1990:5). The allocation of volunteers was done taking into account their skills and the three geographical and functional preferences they were asked to provide in their application. At the end of 1990 some 7,000 out of a total of 8,647 volunteers already knew precisely what their job would be.

An original training programme then began, with a general section in five modules, assisted by 250 computers (multimedia programme produced by IBM, a sponsor of the Games) and a specific section in the form of a ring binder and on-site training. This training, which was empowering in itself, was supplemented by various motivating activities before the Games: regular correspondence, identity card, "Journal des Equipiers" (three issues), free promotional items, invitation to test ever ts, introductory day and party in Lyon in November 1991 (where a vow was taken to "keep smiling"). In addition, a special logo was created to identify "Equipe 92", representing people forming the letter "V" with their arms.

Centralized operational management by a 15-member team gave way, four months before the Games, to decentralized volunteer management on-site under the responsibility of a human resources person from the central programme team. During the event there were only thirty resignations and ten dismissals. The average age of volunteers was 34 for the women and 40 for the men. Everyone had an invitation to the closing ceremony (followed by a party) and the dress rehearsal of the opening ceremony. They also had the opportunity to attend events outside their working hours. After the Games, associations of former volunteers were set up in the Savoie region, and they are active in tourist hospitality.

1.3. Lillehammer 1994 (OCOG 1995: vol. I, 126-136)

The 9,054 volunteers aged between 8 and 83 at the Lillehammer Games were all members of Team 94 ("94-laget" in Norwegian), along with the OCOG employees (880 people) and the Norwegian armed forces personnel (2,100 people).

They all wore the same grey and magenta uniform bearing a logo showing two figures pushing a circle. The average age was 31 for women and 37 for men. Most of the volunteers (nearly 60%) came from the Olympic region, because of the scarcity of available accommodation and the desire to keep qualified local personnel for post-Olympic use of the facilities. The rest were found lodgings in schools or with families. They all had to work a minimum of the sixteen days of the Games, with two days off.

On the strength of Scandinavia's long tradition of volunteering (Halba 1997:128), the OCOC's recruitment strategy was based on partnerships with Norwegian athletics clubs and some forty local sports clubs. Local schools and the Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education were asked to fill posts requiring certain specific areas of expertise. On the basis of a preliminary analysis of needs, volunteers were categorized in three levels according to their level of responsibility. Recruitment began in the spring of 1991, starting from the top level of responsibility, which meant that successful candidates were able to then be involved in the selection of their future subordinates. By November 1992 almost all the posts had been filled. This pyramidal recruitment by means of partnerships avoided the creation of a specialized bureaucracy and wholesale rejection of too many people who had applied in good faith.

All of the candidates (13,729) were entered into a database inherited from Albertville, and their criminal records were checked by the police. Motivational measures to pre-empt resignations were undertaken, and flu vaccines were administered. A reconfirmation of each entry was officially requested. Care was taken to ensure that sponsors did not entice volunteers away for their own Olympic promotional activities. Two OCOG employees were responsible for regular communication with the

volunteers, by means of targeted mailings and a monthly newsletter that ran from March 1993 to January 1994. This newsletter, called "Olympic Post" (Olympiaposten) was more frequent but less attractive than the Albertville newsletter. Decentralized volunteers' offices were opened in each district that had an Olympic venue. Two general meetings were organized in Lillehammer's main ice rink: one exactly one year before the Games and the other over a weekend in November 1993. Only 385 resignations were received before the Games, and one per cent of volunteers dropped out during the Games.

Training courses comprising three four-hour sessions were given in small interactive groups led by some fifty instructors, with the aid of written and audiovisual material. Unlike Albertville, computers were not used. This training, which emphasized the global nature of the event, was obligatory for volunteers and OCOG staff. The courses took place in the evenings or at weekends in local schools. They were amalgamated into an adult education programme that was run for over 10,000 employees of Norwegian companies sponsoring the Games. Technical training was the responsibility of each department, coordinated by a forum of representatives of various sections of the organizing committee. It was supplemented by an induction and training programme for volunteers at the venues. In addition, despite Norwegians' good language skills, around a thousand volunteers followed language courses given by high school teachers in the Lillehammer region and in Oslo.

1.4. Nagano 1998 (OCOG 1999: vol II, 160-171)

The number of volunteers involved (over 32,000), to which must be added the 15,000 or so volunteers dedicated to the cultural programme, makes Nagano the largest winter volunteer group, not far below the heights achieved for the Summer Games in Atlanta in 1996 (47,466). This impressive total can be explained by the fact that most of the volunteers worked for only part of the Games (sometimes only a few days).

Contrary to preceding OCOGs, and because of Japan's lack of experience in volunteering, NAOC (the Nagano Organizing Committee) launched a public recruitment campaign from May to September 1994, which attracted 32,261 candidates in 18 areas. The successful applications (around two thirds) showed that there was a lack of drivers familiar with the region and computer operators. This deficit was filled by calling upon local economic organizations and subsequently Nagano's universities. The need for interpreters was covered by a campaign targeted at professionals working with foreign clients. In addition, local companies detached nearly 11,000 staff. The cultural volunteers were recruited through 188 theatre, culture and folk art groups (sado, kimono, ikebana, etc.) and provided activities at the Olympic sites.

Further to this call for applications, four hundred team leaders were chosen after interview and followed by a special one-month training course in the autumn of 1995. Final positions were assigned in November 1996, one year and three months before the Games, with the possibility of modifications at the request of the persons concerned. Over half of the volunteers were allocated to the transport system: 31% as drivers, 16% to the car parks and shuttle buses and 8.9% to directing traffic. 17% were interpreters (mainly in English). 9.8% were assigned to security and 4.9% to ticket control. Over a hundred general training courses were organized beginning in January 1995, supplemented by training at pre-Olympic competitions and language courses. Some volunteers living in Tokyo organized their own group to help them to prepare for the Games, and published a manual of useful advice and a regular newsletter (Nakajima, 1999).

An official newsletter for volunteers was published quarterly from 1995. It was supplemented by a private page and a forum on the Nagano '98 internet site, the first for a Winter Games. A rest and leisure area for volunteers was set up during the Games near to Nagano station, with the help of a

Japanese sponsor. A ticket to attend the rehearsal for the closing ceremony or an outside event was given to the volunteers, along with a pin presented symbolically by the IOC President towards the end of the Games. The IOC President was also careful to underline their contribution in his speeches for the opening and closing ceremonies. A minimum of eight days' volunteer service was needed in order to be able to keep the silver-coloured uniform.

Table 2 - Demographic characteristics

	Calgary 88	Albertville 92	Lillehammer 94	Nagano 98
Total volunteers	9,498	8,647	9,054	32,579
Men	52%	66.6%	60%	64.8%
Women	48%	33.4%	40%	35.2%
From the region	95.1% (Alberta)	50.7% (Rhône-Alpes)	59.6% (Hedmark & Oppland)	75% (Nagano Prefecture)
From elsewhere in the country	3.7%	46.2%	40.1%	25%
From abroad	1.2%	3.1%	0.3%	0.2%
Under 30	-	27.4%	-	30.2%
31 to 60	-	71.9%	-	61%
Over 60	_	0.7%	_	8.8%

Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the volunteer population. From the point of view of sex, there is some similarity between Lillehammer and Calgary (where there is almost parity), and between Albertville and Nagano (where men represented over two thirds of volunteers). The number of foreign volunteers is low in all cases, except in Albertville where it was over 3%.

Table 3 - Occupations of volunteers*

	Calgary 88	Albertville 92	Lillehammer 94	Nagano 98
Students	-	18.5%	35.8%	21.5%
Employed	_	69%	69%	55.7%
Retired	-	8.77%	2.1%	11.7%
Unemployed	-	3.69%	2.5%	11.1%

^{*}including housewives

Table 3 gives the usual occupation of volunteers, showing major variations between Games in the number of students (100% variation) and the number of retired people (500% variation). The data is not available to make a socio-professional study of volunteers (white collar, manual workers, agricultural workers, blue collar, etc.), which would be interesting.

2. Management issues raised by volunteer programmes

Going beyond the details that are specific to each edition of the Winter Games, and the cultural particularities of the countries (on three continents) in which they took place, what lessons can be learned from this Olympic experience? What are the managerial characteristics of a successful volunteer programme for a large sports event? In order to address this question, we propose organizing the discussion around the four classical functions of management (Thiétart 1993:22): planning, organizing, motivating and evaluating, with particular emphasis on the function of motivating, which concerns the implementation of human resources.

2.1. Planning

Planning involves setting objectives and authorizing their realization on time and on budget. It must be based on a study of previous similar events, so as to benefit from the experiences of the past. The main objective of a volunteer programme is obviously to have the right people at the right time and in the right place, and at a cost that is significantly lower than that involved in paying the requisite number of people. Such a wage bill could be estimated for the Winter Games as a minimum of US\$ 40 million (10,000 volunteers × 20 days × US\$ 200/day with social contributions). But the saving made should not be the only managerial objective, as the volunteers will for many participants personify the event. They will be an essential communication element during the event and during the preparations. A qualitative objective therefore needs to be set for the volunteer programme, as the volunteers will be the true ambassadors of the organization. In addition, dynamic interaction between volunteers and organizers also addresses the objective of direct communication about the event to the sports circles concerned, and indirect communication through the exchanges of opinion they provide with the general public.

Time planning is directly dependent on the planning of the sports event. At the Winter Games it begins at the end of the previous Games. Generally speaking, the first two years are devoted to recruitment and selection of candidates, the third to training and the final year to assignment and use of volunteers in pre-Olympic and then Olympic events. Like the Games themselves, volunteer planning for a large event needs to begin as early as possible, and an adequate budget has to be set aside to organize and manage this area. Indeed, although volunteers are not salaried, they do engender significant expenditure on communication, equipment, transport, catering and accommodation. This budget can be partly sponsored, in particular by companies specializing in temporary employment.

2.2. Organization

Organization means putting in place the structures and procedures that will provide a framework for the running of the event for its duration at each of the sports or logistical venues (including media centre, hotels, etc.). This is a delicate function to the extent that those responsible for a volunteer programme must think ahead to a (divisional) organization by site, when up to a few months before the event they are working in a (functional) organization by general areas of responsibility (sport, marketing, communication, technology, security, etc.). They have to plan for this organization if possible with the future managers of the sites, who have to build a cohesive team with the volunteers they are

assigned. The Albertville OCOG referred to its volunteers as "team members" to better under ine their membership of the global organization, and the need to work together as a team.

With the aim of providing more detail on this organization in the field, a detailed analysis should be made of personnel requirements, site by site, and standard organization charts should be made for each, with job descriptions giving an indication of the necessary skills (technical, language, in expersonal, etc.). This work will facilitate the allocation of volunteers to many of these positions. The others will have to be filled by paid staff or agents. This should be repeated several times in order to check how these provisions fit with any new requirements, and to limit associated expenditure. On the other hand, a definition of the various procedures necessary to the running of a site can probably be no more than sketched out in advance, on the basis of a manual or general procedures drawn up by the organizer (e.g. opening/closing of the site, incident management, awarding medals, press conference procedure, dealing with important visitors, etc.). These procedures should then be adjusted as the event approaches according to the available volunteers. Such an adjustment is part of on-site training, for example during test events or in the setting-up of a venue. It is strongly dependent up on the infrastructure and resources available. Clearly, a purely hierarchical organization cannot function in the context of a large event where each venue is more of an "adhocracy" (Mintzberg 1990:285).

2.3. Motivation

Motivation means recruiting the right people for each job defined in the organization stage, and motivating them so that their behaviour towards their future "clients" (athletes, spectators, officials, media, etc.) is appropriate. For a sports event, volunteer recruitment can be done through an advert-isement to the public or by approaching specific target groups through representative intermediaries (clubs, unions, schools, etc.). The second method has often been preferred at the Winter Games because there is a degree of specialization in the tasks, and in the Olympic atmosphere. It can potentially attract a large number of candidates who would have to be turned away, which is not good from a communication point of view. In the case of smaller events, the recruitment campaign is part of the communication needed for the event.

Volunteer candidates need to fill in form, which it is desirable to be able to manage by means of computers, with the usual precautions in terms of processing sensitive personal data. A rigorous selection should be made on the basis of skills, candidates' preferences, and any accommodation and transport constraints. Volunteers must not be assigned only to subordinate posts. They must receive the same consideration as paid staff, no more and no less. Interviews are recommended for many positions, although they are time-consuming. They should be done in a friendly manner. Allocation should if possible be negotiated geographically and functionally, in order to ensure strong commitment by the volunteer and availability on the day. In international events, language skills should be available at all levels.

The gap between the candidate's profile and the position to be filled can be partially closed through training. This facet of motivation is particularly important, as most of the volunteers will not be familiar with the sports event context. They must have training that is specific to their tasks, but also giving an overview of the event in order better to communicate it to participants. Training also requires good information before and during the event. At the Olympic Games in Atlanta, a flagrant lack of training and information often rendered volunteers useless and ineffective. No such error has been made at recent Winter Games. New information technology, particularly the internet, should increasingly be used to facilitate recruitment and training of volunteers, and communication with the OCOG. In this respect, the site designed by the "human resources" sponsor of the 2000 European Championships in football in Belgium and the Netherlands is a good example (http://euro2000.adecco.be).

Training is also an essential element in motivating volunteers. By definition, volunteers are strongly motivated when they sign up. Nevertheless, this motivation should be maintained and built upon as soon as they are recruited (on the basis of an approved job description) and until the last day of the event. Before the event, contact should be made and perpetuated through correspondence, symbolic gifts and meetings. During the event, if it lasts several days, fatigue and burn-out should be avoided by planning rest days and providing pleasant rest areas. Care must be taken with the working atmosphere. Uniforms should be studied particularly carefully in order to give those wearing them a sense of self-worth. All these forms of non-financial remuneration have been given at both the Winter and Summer Games, along with the rewards and thanks that have become customary (diplomas, pins, mention in official speeches, etc.). The Albertville Games were probably the most generous. Attention should nevertheless be paid to ensuring that these symbolic rewards are not the main reason for people to volunteer. This can be done by announcing them gradually.

Beyond these collective measures, each manager should try to understand the personal motivation of the volunteers working with them. This managerial task is particularly difficult as the time for conversation during the event is limited. The dialogue must therefore begin before the event, if possible during test events or previous discussions organized with this in mind. Volunteers should be encouraged to organize their own activities in their regions of origin. The manager of volunteers must also, like any good manager, organize optimal working conditions in his sector and, at the right moment and in an egalitarian fashion, acknowledge the efforts made and the success achieved by volunteers and paid staff alike. Here also, the ephemeral and often stressful nature of a large event makes it difficult to fully achieve these difficult tasks. In addition to their technical abilities, the managers, who might be volunteers themselves, must also therefore be chosen for their human qualities.

2.4. Evaluation

Evaluation means analysing the performance of an organization and the individuals working for it in order to make the necessary corrections to make it work better. The gratuitous nature of the work provided by the volunteers at a sports event in no way obviates the need for such control. It is in fact essential to the success of a major event, in which some teething problems can be forgiven at the beginning, but increasingly less so as the end approaches. Dismissal of volunteers should be used in serious cases. Unplanned resignations can also happen, and provision should be made for reserves.

In terms of the organization as a whole, evaluation is also an opportunity to put the knowledge acquired to good use. The best volunteers can be identified with a view to hiring them for other sports events or other hosting activities. Olympic cities such as Albertville and Nagano, which did not have a solid volunteering tradition, have been able to capitalize on their volunteer programmes to develop tourist activities.

3. Conclusion

Volunteering in large events bears little relation to traditional sports volunteering as it can be found in clubs and federations. It is indeed intense, but usually sporadic (a matter of a few days), contrary to volunteer involvement with a sports club, which can stretch over several years. It is generally very enriching, both for the volunteer and for the people around them. They receive important symbolic rewards. It is a unique personal experience. In other words, this kind of volunteerism is not in crisis, unlike club volunteerism. Although it is not too difficult to recruit volunteers for a prestigious event, even in countries such as France or Japan where the cultural precedent is lacking, unlike in Canada or Norway, nevertheless they have to be well managed if their intrinsic motivation is to be main-

tained. A sports event is in effect an organization without a past or a future. Its image and therefore its success are thus largely in the hands of its volunteers, who will create the image as the event progresses. This deserves to be considered beforehand, carefully prepared for, and managed with tact.

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