In many minority communities volunteerism is a close-knit and personal obligation. Whether a member of a church group sewing quilts for the needy, the circle of mourners bringing dinner to bereaved families, or taking in the child of a relative, a rich tradition of high-level and undocumented volunteerism is alive and well in most minority communities. Most people refer to this as "helping out".

This tradition of community involvement indicates that minority communities possess a rich and as yet untapped volunteer pool. Yet, it is easy to see why the highly structured and professionalized form of volunteerism that CASA/GAL offers would be somewhat suspect to people with experience only in informal helping. It might help to look at some reasons minorities do not volunteer. The United Way of Santa Clara, California, conducted a research poll to find out and these were some of the reasons given:

- Minorities were not asked
- Fear of being used as a token
- Do not feel connected to the mainstream community
- Lack of personal time
- Emphasis of minority culture on family involvement over community involvement
- Lack of identification with agencies that are serving minority clients
- Lack of knowledge about volunteer opportunities
- Belief that minority input is not taken seriously
- Uncertainty about benefits of involvement
- Economic hardship

These were not all the reasons given, but are ones that present serious challenges. While it is not possible to eliminate all of these obstacles to volunteering, there are a number of effective strategies that can be utilized to overcome many of them. Your key selling points should focus on participation in the CASA/GAL program as an opportunity to respond to a community need, to make a meaningful difference, and to use their skills or knowledge to directly affect the quality of life of children.

There are some general recruitment guidelines that will help you develop specific strategies targeted to minority communities:

- Emphasize altruistic rather than personal reasons for volunteering. Research has shown that people who volunteer recognize that personal gain is possible from volunteering - work experience, self-confidence, and recognition from their community. However, such personal benefits are strongly perceived to be the wrong reasons for volunteering. Efforts to promote altruistic benefits are viewed more positively.
A personal appeal is the most effective approach. Asking someone to volunteer one-on-one is still the best way to recruit volunteers. Although posters, flyers, and ads do increase awareness of volunteer needs, the strongest appeal is still the personal one. The appeal is even stronger if it is made by a member of a prospective volunteer's own minority community.

Develop the image of CASA/GAL as an organization to which people can feel a strong personal attachment. Most volunteers need to feel a bond to the organization they support. This bond is usually achieved because an organization provided a direct benefit to them or someone they know. A real challenge then is to find the "hook" that will create that bond to CASA/GAL. For example, tell stories of children from minority communities who have been helped by CASA/GAL (without breaching confidentiality).

Recognize and take advantage of the "era of volunteerism." Volunteerism is growing more popular every day.

Volunteerism -- as well as a new social commitment -- has replaced working and materialism as the vogue.

**Strategies for Attracting Minority Volunteers**

Participate in community events and organizations to increase awareness of CASA/GAL, to distribute materials, and to ask for volunteers. Examples of such opportunities follow:

- Participate in cultural, fraternal, church related events.
- Distribute materials at street fairs, music festivals, block parties, and historical celebrations.
- Distribute culturally appropriate materials and pulpit messages to churches and community centers.

**Use minority media extensively.**

- Distribute PSAs to minority radio stations.
- Distribute camera-ready ads targeted to minority communities to local magazines and newspapers that market to minorities.
- Run PSAs geared to minorities on local cable television stations.
- Enlist the support of minority disk jockeys who can promote volunteerism by offering give-aways, such as records or gift certificates, to people who volunteer.
- Ask minority retailers to distribute recruitment materials to their customers.
- Enlist the help of barber shops, beauty shops, doctors' and dentists' offices to distribute brochures.
- Display posters at delicatessens, convenience stores, drug stores, dry cleaners, and fast-food restaurants.
Enlist the support of minority role models within the community.

- Local minority sports stars, newscasters, business leaders may be willing to promote CASA/GAL in public appearances.
- Invite local minority leaders to serve on an advisory committee to provide suggestions for recruitment strategies.

Make use of existing community resources.

- Be sure volunteer centers are aware of your need for minority volunteers.
- Conduct joint minority outreach projects with other volunteer organizations.
- Solicit support from minority business organizations, minority bar associations, and minority-controlled agencies such as the Urban League.
- Involve local minority organizations in sponsoring CASA/GAL volunteers.
- Local churches, social clubs, and businesses might well support a "CASA Volunteer Fund" to defray the expenses of volunteering.
- Designate a staff person to be in charge of minority recruitment.
- Establish an inclusiveness advisory committee which includes members of the minorities you are targeting.

Source: National CASA Association