

During the Annual General Meeting, groups were asked to identify successes of the Strategic Volunteer Engagement presentation, presented by Laurel Benson - President and CEO, as they have experienced it within their organizations as well as its perceived challenges and benefits. There were plenty of valuable insights that came out of the discussion.

Here is a summary of the results of the group discussion on Strategic Volunteer Engagement.

CEO

Successes

- Engaged and enthusiastic people
- Highly effective team for both
- Credibility to organization
- Organized and strategic plan
- Professionalism
- Will shore up base of operations
- Benefits to org and to volunteer
- N.B. for volunteers to see the results – provides sense of satisfaction and acknowledgment
- Fresh eyes to provide new ideas (talk to Maria-Lynn at CentrePoint for success stories)
- **MUST BE ON BOARD**
- Diversification of skill sets enhancement of services
- Led parking audit – create solution
- Help HR dept and identify needs/solution
- Created website to work for wiki and trained for use
- Set up strip irrigation for minimal dollars

Benefits

- Delegate and frees employee time
- Innovative – fresh ideas

- Expertise of volunteer
- Willingness & flexibility
- Tapping into resources
- New perspective
- Engaging volunteers and using their knowledge to give back to community, while benefiting themselves
- Volunteer becomes “ambassador” or “champion” for your org – creates network of support
- Volunteer can get to know Canadian working experience & culture
- Staff development knowledge sharing create more welcoming environment
- Takes load off of CEO/Board and Staff
- Effective use of time/happens faster
- Staff growth and development through mentorship
- Projects possible that would not have happened

Challenges

- Convince and embrace staff to accept volunteers
- Volunteers to match positions
- Not having enough positions
- Training (making time)
- Changing policies & procedures
- Staff don’t always have skills to engage volunteers appropriately – staff can be nervous
- Must recognize while money may not be required, do need to provide support (relationships, resources)....need clear expectations
- How to capture all aspects of outcomes/success due to sector turnover – volunteers need to know what “success” will look like
- Needs transparency
- Communication with various levels within org – to stay on target
- Staff buy in follow through value people (not just money)
- Need to establish practices and policies – responsibilities
- Finding alignment – hard to say no

Volunteer Manager

Successes

- Higher quality service or product, deliverable
- Engaging individuals who may not have otherwise been engaged

- Program development, planned and unplanned
- Diversify program based on strength of volunteers
- Break outside box to build added capacity and change
- Mutual benefit. Value added to volunteer and age
- Increase effectiveness and focus of volunteer opportunity
- Fabulously skilled volunteers came forward related to their passions
- Success seems more likely if the volunteer manager position is stable
- A more diverse repertoire of volunteers
- Retention rates are longer as volunteers are engaged in doing what they love

Benefits

- Volunteer has a more rewarding volunteer experience
- Volunteer more likely to spread the word of the organization or volunteering or more likely to return
- Less stress on staff – opportunity for more staff development
- Volunteer feel good and increased skills
- Organization increased capacity
- Organization open up to new potential constituents
- Clients received benefits we could not provide
- Wider range of volunteer experiences/expertise to utilize

Challenges

- Utilizing the skills of the volunteer
- Recruitment – how do you advertise your specific needs - but stay open to other opportunities
- Consistency of service delivery
- Risk management
- Staff threatened
- “Tool to” sharing volunteer with other orgs
- Way for volunteers to determine what they want to do and how much time “screening” tool
- Understand how volunteer fits
- Fear of failure/losing volunteer control of quality of work uncertain
- Performance management challenge
- Defining terms of reference (job description)
- Effective communication at start
- Just staying friends after the first date if engagement is not suitable

- Volunteers who will commit up to a year because of the initial investment re: screening
- Greater sense of disappointment for client if volunteer a “no-show”
- How to attract volunteers to a fixed-schedule program
- Have to think “out of the box”

Board Member

Successes

- How do we prepare people to step in a board role?
- Bringing new perspectives
- New ideas/with cross generational representation
- Increases community outreach
- Grows program areas
- Staying connected with org and being “hands on”
- “Building bridges” (networking, connecting with community) connecting with people with skills who benefit the organization
- Learning from staff experience for direction
- Diversity (celebrating it!) i.e. broad range in age

Benefits

- Best practices
- Gaining access of specialize skills
- Bring neutral view point
- Board experience to develop professional development
- Allows for flexibility of involvement w/s.v.
- Recruitment of new board members
- New enthusiasm/energy
- Allows board to reach a higher level of visionary generative thinking with high level engagement
- Removes some of the workload
- Naturally recruits the individuals the board needs on boards and committees
- Already connected with people who are looking to help you

Challenges

- People don’t always want to volunteer in their specialized skills
- Engaging upcoming generations and meaningful experience (board re-energizing self)
- Competition for the same skill set (from other org)
- More flexible with volunteer frameworks (i.e. virtual volunteer experience)

- Cross generational representation
- Threaten to staff by s.v. involvement
- Through the balance of current board
- Time restraints
- Great people are spread thin – we need them as mentors
- How can we implement ideas into our current board structure?
- Understanding the day-to-day work of the organization
- Breaking tradition and thinking creatively
- Crossing over barriers
- Risk assessment and accountability

Volunteer

Successes

- Already engaging/this way/grassroots (Parks Fdn)
- Leadership groups
- Well connected volunteers/long term volunteer is there for the right reasons
- Volunteering in a meaningful role
- Allows one to share experience and enthusiasm
- Be an advocate for the volunteer program
- Empowers volunteers
- Less confining
- Ambassadors of the org (built in)
- Achieving the mission and vision of the org
- Effective delegation
- Working through the project
- Enhancing the program itself (making it better)
- Sharing of best practices – including specific examples to share with others/steal good ideas
- Raise visibility of the org
- Full circle involvement – volunteer/contacts/funders
- Experience – relationship – connection
- Lets' "pride" it
- Contribution to community development
- Resume/skill building/life planning/future education
- Outside the "box" thinking
- Leadership development

Benefits

- Familiar with volunteers/skills
- Expand resources and skill set
- People come with other skills

- More loyalty and attachment to agency
- Skill development
- Allows one to apply skills in different environment and contribute to community
- Chance to explore other interests and passions
- Recognizes volunteer skill set
- Retention of volunteers
- True integration to org – belonging, relationship building
- Growth and development of skill sets
- Clear and articulate motivation to be with the org alignment
- Respect on both sides (contracts) – professionalism – personal difference
- Support from all levels of the organization
- Clear definition of role – light at the end of the tunnel – timeline, etc.
- Magnitude of options/opportunities
- Helps individuals to figure out “who they are”; “what they want to do”; potential to volunteers as a family together

Challenges

- Change/recruitment
- Concerns in not following systems
- Limiting number of people interested
- Getting the commitment for more volunteering paid staff vs volunteer’s work (trust)
- Self-awareness of skill sets/strengths
- Understanding limitations of organizations
- Lack of support from staff
- Outline controls – limits of can and can’t be done within the role (boundaries)
- Finding the right fit (position descriptions)
- Want contract volunteering – creation of project to fit individual
- Perceptions of role of high skill volunteers (intimidating)
- Alignment of “personal” values and agency – how do I choose? Personal journey.
- Are volunteer managers up for the challenge of professionalizing the profession?
- Organizational capacity? Can it handle high skill volunteers; practicum students; service learning.
- Where can you agency use HEADS or Hands?