

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT TRANSFORMING LIMITED ASSETS INTO BOUNDLESS RESOURCES

We as funders must recognize that volunteer engagement is not a program but a critical strategy to assist all organizations and community groups in accomplishing their missions in this time of rising needs and decreasing resources.

— Jane Leighty Justis

WHY SHOULD FUNDERS INVEST IN VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY?

- Effective volunteer engagement has been shown to reap a \$6 return on every dollar invested when considering the financial value of volunteer involvement.¹ In addition to such strong return on investment, improved volunteer engagement has far reaching benefits.
- Research shows nonprofits are stronger in all capacities and are more adaptable and capable of going to scale when they successfully engage at least 50 volunteers.²
- Volunteer engagement is a critical component in helping nonprofit organizations deliver on their core mission by boosting human capacity cost-effectively.
- Funding volunteer capacity leverages your existing investment in the community—across all impact areas—and aligns with every type of grant making strategy.

PIKES PEAK VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Organizations at all levels are recognizing that they must actively commit to volunteer engagement as a core strategy in addressing the challenges of rising needs and decreasing resources. Our foundation saw an opportunity to help local organizations expand their impact by tapping into the rich pool of local human capital. Since 2011, we have convened community leaders, funders, and organizations at the board and executive level as well as staff and volunteers. We have partnered with them in offering vision, training, coaching, peer learning, cohort projects, and networking opportunities. “Time and talent” were required from us as well as “treasure,” and it has produced powerful results in terms of impact and mission expansion.

EXAMPLES OF RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- An increase of thousands of pounds of food was distributed by a local food pantry through restructuring and adding supervisory volunteers.
- A volunteer speaker’s bureau was created and trained for a local advocacy organization.
- Student and adult volunteers created a donated clothing store for other students in foster homes.
- A pilot project was created through partnership between an organization and church to recruit mentors for kids aging out of the foster care system.

¹ Points of Light. www.pointsoflight.org/service-enterprise-initiative/research

² TCC Group. “National Core Capacity Assessment Tool Dataset: ‘Positive Deviants’ in Volunteerism and Service,” 2009.

OUTSIZED IMPACT... A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS

The high impact volunteer experiences of 25 organizations have informed numerous other nonprofits in our community.

- Innovation has emerged as a key strategy in many organizations for expanding resources as well as developing a deeper reservoir of talent.
- Executive directors, development staff, and volunteer engagement leaders are recognizing the value and impact of volunteer resources and are willing to invest staff time and money to support and develop more effective partnerships with them.
- Corporations are joining the conversations and expanding their employee volunteer efforts.
- Directors of Volunteer Engagement are meeting regularly to share best practices and engage in peer learning. Many are working toward their national certification in volunteer administration.
- People who volunteer give ten times more money than those who don't and they usually give where they are involved.³
- The work of the Initiative will continue under the leadership of our local Center for Nonprofit Excellence. The momentum will be sustained and we will be able to step into a support role.
- The Leighty Foundation will now turn its attention to the creation of capacity building resources for national distribution to grant makers and organizations.

WHAT CAN FUNDERS DO?

SHIFT OUR CONTEXT

Effective engagement of volunteers is about achieving mission and making volunteerism core to a nonprofit's strategy, not about engaging volunteers as an afterthought.

INFLUENCE THE FUNDING DIALOGUE

Convene funders in your community to discuss how you might build this capacity in your grantees. It's not about investing in a new cause; it's about supporting the causes you care about!

FUEL THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Well-supported volunteers can create significant value, but we have to invest in effective engagement to unleash this potential by:

- Requesting basic information in grant applications about applicant volunteer engagement practices and how volunteers are involved in accomplishing their mission.
- Welcoming a budget line item that reflects volunteer resource needs and staffing.
- Encouraging your staff and family to volunteer in community organizations to gain firsthand knowledge of what it takes to make volunteering successful.
- Collaborating and sharing critical learning with other grant makers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- Support training and building capacity to improve volunteer engagement practices.
- Fund a "volunteer engagement audit" to help grantees evaluate their current practices.
- Fund volunteer engagement staff positions
- Fund Service Enterprise Certification for the nonprofit.
- Fund national certification for volunteer management (CVA).
- Make volunteer involvement and demonstrated effective volunteer engagement practices a condition for larger funding.

For more information, contact Jane Leighty Justis jane@leightyfoundation.org

Now is the time for us to seize this unique opportunity to provide the resources and training needed to support volunteer engagement and to equip leaders in partnering with volunteers—our most valuable renewable resource

— Jane Leighty Justis

³ Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund. "Volunteerism and Charitable Giving 2009: Executive Summary"