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The Need For Volunteer Engagement

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Abstract

Although there are a large number of non-profit organizations and volunteer opportunities available, there is a lack of volunteer engagement within organizations making it difficult to complete mission goals. This project was implemented and completed by Community Builders for Monterey County executive director and intern. Community Builders for Monterey County is a 501c(3) non-profit organization that was created to connect volunteers to different non-profit organizations around Monterey County. This project was created with the purpose of assessing potential volunteer needs in a survey style form in order to better understand how to get volunteers more engaged. The project resulted in 15 people filling out the survey. Upon analysis of the responses it was discovered that individuals were ultimately not engaged due to lack of time and not knowing where to find volunteer opportunities. Some of the next steps the agency can take are to continue to distribute the survey with larger audiences to get a better idea on how to cater to volunteer needs and make themselves more accessible, whether it is via social media, at schools, in person or at volunteering tabling events. In turn organizations are able to get more volunteer engagement to help achieve mission goals.

Keywords: Volunteer, engagement, non-profit, organizations, retention

Agency & Communities Served

Agency

This project was implemented and completed by Community Builders for Monterey County executive director and intern. Community Builders for Monterey County is a 501c(3) non-profit organization that was created to connect volunteers to different non-profit organizations around Monterey County. The mission of Community Builders for Monterey County is

to foster local community and civic engagement by amplifying local volunteer opportunities, engaging with local businesses, elevating civic literacy and local government engagement, and by providing the resources that enable our community to mobilize amongst themselves to move forward causes that affect us all (n.d., para. 1).

Community Served

Community Builders for Monterey County serves the whole Monterey County. Monterey county has a population of 432,858 residents as of 2023 according to the Census Reporter. The median age within Monterey county is around 35 years old with the majority of the population being around 10-19 years of age (Census Reporter, 2023). The population is made up of 61% Hispanics, 28% White, 5% Asian, 2% Black and 3% other (Census Reporter, 2023).

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

There is a lack of volunteer engagement all throughout different nonprofits around the United States which has a negative impact on the functioning of nonprofit organizations. Volunteer engagement is essentially the process an organization follows in order to ensure that

volunteers and supporters are interested and actively engaged with the organization (Mobilize Blog, 2023). Certain factors contribute to the lack of volunteer engagement such as an organizations limited outreach to the public, potential volunteers lack of time and a mismatch between volunteers and what organizations are trying to convey about their mission goals. In 2023, the National Council of Nonprofits conducted a nationwide survey to gather data about the current state of the workforce within non-profit organizations across the country. Upon analysis of the results they gathered, they were able to identify that 74.6% of nonprofits that completed the survey reported having an increased amount of volunteer vacancies within their organizations (National Council of Nonprofits, 2024). Volunteers play a vital role to the functions of a nonprofit organization, so to have a lack of volunteer engagement can be devastating not only to the organization itself, but the community as a whole. When an organization is unable to secure the workforce needed to provide the services they say they offer, they are unable to serve their communities because they cannot effectively deliver the services which in turn makes it difficult for those in need to receive the help they wish for (National Council of Nonprofits, 2024).

Another study conducted by the Do Good Institute at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy had discovered that America is experiencing what they call a "generosity crisis" meaning the percentage of volunteers at organizations across the United States has been decreasing since 2021 (Dietz & Grimm, 2023, p. 1). The study was also completed via survey format across 60,000 households nationwide including a sample from every state in the country further demonstrating that the lack of volunteer engagement is a nationwide problem and not just an issue that is affecting specific communities (Dietz & Grimm, 2023, p. 1).

The social problem of lack of volunteer engagement and its causes and consequences are visually represented in Figure 1: Problem Model.

Figure 1: Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Limited outreach	Lack of volunteer engagement	Lack of funding
Lack of time		Limited outreach
Mismatch between volunteers and organizations		Limited impact

Contributing Factors

Limited outreach

Limited outreach plays a pivotal role as to why there is a lack of volunteer engagement within nonprofit organizations. Outreach is an essential tool for community engagement that can be used for many purposes that helps an organization take action (Bowman, 2019, p. 3). An organization could have plenty of volunteer opportunities but it was found that what was best for an organization was if they actually took action in building a relationship with their volunteers and community by interacting, similar to a marketing like approach (Bowman, 2019, p. 7).

Lack of time

Another contribution to the lack of volunteer engagement is a lack of time. According to a study conducted by the Stanford Center on Longevity, 90% of Americans want to volunteer but only one out of four Americans actually do (Yotopoulos, 2016). A majority of Americans according to the study that was conducted by the Stanford Center on Longevity, cited lack of time being their main reason as to why they did not volunteer and a lack of schedule flexibility, keeping the working class in consideration (Creative Volunteer, 2020). Without individuals

having the time or flexibility to volunteer, it does make it difficult for volunteers to be engaged and involved with nonprofit organizations.

Mismatch between volunteers and organizations

The lack of volunteer engagement across nonprofit organizations is also due to the fact that sometimes there is a mismatch between the mission statement and goals an organization is trying to convey to the public in order to retain volunteers. Sometimes organizations have difficulty engaging volunteers because they do not involve the people who are directly affected by the problem the organization is trying to solve, because studies show volunteers and the public in general, respond to authenticity and being involved in decision making (Bowman, 2019, p. 10). The Stanford Center of Longevity had also discovered that individuals did not volunteer due to not having enough information on the organizations themselves and volunteer roles (Yotopoulos, 2016).

Consequences

Lack of funding

The lack of volunteer engagement can also be the cause of different consequences such as lack of funding. A lot of nonprofit organizations rely on funds from grants and donations, and funders usually invest in organizations in order to strengthen the organization and watch it succeed (Kahl, 2022). If funders see the lack of volunteer engagement within an organization, they will worry about the overall success of the organization and their ability to meet their mission goals therefore feeling less inclined to donate to the organization (Kahl, 2022). The Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement had discovered these findings through a study conducted by Sue Carter Kahl, PhD involving 27 funder participants who expressed that volunteer engagement is an important factor in their decision to donate or not (Kahl, 2022).

Organizations need funds in order to keep operations running and if there are no funds, the organization is at risk of not completing their mission and providing services effectively to the public.

Limited outreach

As mentioned previously, limited outreach is a contributing factor to the lack of volunteer engagement in nonprofit organizations, but it is also a consequence of the lack of volunteer engagement as well. In order to get volunteers engaged, that involves different outreach efforts such as fundraisers and creating materials that advertise the organization (Bowman, 2019, p. 10). The question is, if there is a lack of volunteer engagement, then where are the volunteers that are going to help spread the word about the organizations? Without volunteers, an organization cannot produce the services it is supposed to provide to the community, creating a ripple effect (National Council of Nonprofits, 2024).

Limited impact

Nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers in order to provide the services and spread awareness on the issue that they are trying to address and mitigate in the community. The data collected by the National Council of Nonprofits (2024) confirmed that because of the shortage of volunteers and lack of volunteer engagement, nonprofits have a reduced capacity and ability to be able to provide services to the communities they serve. The community in turn suffers because of the waiting lists for certain services as well as reduced amounts of the services that they need. If organizations are unable to provide services that are supposed to help their community, they are also failing to achieve and “live by” their mission statement creating false expectations.

Project Description and Implementation Process

Project Description

I conducted a survey on volunteer engagement and what is needed in order to keep potential volunteers motivated and willing to participate and stay with Community Builders of Monterey County. I am essentially conducting an evaluation/research project in order to assess what the organization can do to improve and increase volunteer engagement and retention by identifying the barriers found from survey results.

Project Justification & Benefits

The project addresses the contributing factor of the mismatch between volunteers and organizations which causes the problem of lack of volunteer engagement. The organization will be able to assess and determine areas of improvement and how they are able to retain volunteers and get them more engaged. Hopefully they can apply the feedback from the survey to implement future changes to the organization based on the findings from the survey and cater to potential volunteer needs and the barriers they face.

Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan

I am conducting an evaluation/research project in order to assess what the organization can do to improve and increase volunteer engagement and retention. At least an anticipated 50 participants will fill out the survey. I will create the survey on google forms and have it accessible electronically and also in paper format to print out the surveys to distribute in person. I will count up how many survey responses I get anonymously placed into the survey response box. Upon discussion with my mentor, I did meet the expected outcome of assisting Community Builders for Monterey County on identifying barriers to volunteer engagement on a much smaller scope in hopes of expanding that pool of people by attending larger events. From that

pool of people the organization will be able to accurately determine areas of improvement and common barriers to volunteer engagement. Once the common barriers are identified, it will be easier for the organization to determine what issues they may need to address and how they can cater to volunteer needs.

Implementation Process

As displayed in the table in Appendix A, the first step to the implementation process of the volunteer engagement and retention survey was to meet with my mentor and board members in order to discuss the content of the survey and what data we were looking to obtain. After discussing the contents of the survey during our board meeting and going over the agenda, I created the surveys and went over the questions with my mentor. I then planned along with my mentor some tabling opportunities where I was able to present these surveys to potential volunteers. Once we identified the tabling opportunities, we then attended the tabling event to be the Seaside Farmers market and distributed said surveys on paper to event goers as well as emailed them to potential volunteers who signed up for our emails, and with their consent. I distributed surveys and collected survey data up until the third week of April in order to have time to then calculate the survey data collected and provide a graph or spread sheet of the data that was collected. The data collected was then presented to the organization in order to assess and implement changes needed in order to increase volunteer retention and engagement.

Project Results

I conducted the survey at the Seaside Farmers Market as part of one of the tabling events Community Builders For Monterey County was a part of. There were two other anticipated tabling opportunities in May that the organization had planned for but they both got canceled, leaving the organization with one tabling event to conduct the survey. The survey consisted of

five questions that asked participants their age, are they interested in volunteering, have they volunteered before, where do they hear about volunteering opportunities and what barriers they face when volunteering. Participants were given the surveys in paper form and were asked to anonymously place the survey in a drop box to not influence results. The project however, did not meet the expected outcome of 50 participants. Only 15 people filled out the survey. Upon observation of the survey responses it was discovered that individuals were ultimately not engaged due to lack of time and not knowing where to find volunteer opportunities. My mentor said that the organization would use the survey moving forward in larger events since we only had an outcome of 15 surveys in total. My mentor did take the survey feedback into consideration and is working collaboratively with the community and media relations team to try and get more exposure to our organization and see how the organization can make volunteer opportunities more available to those with time constraints.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The factors I have identified as contributing factors to the lack of volunteer engagement coincide with the survey I conducted. Upon my research, I identified that lack of time, a mismatch between organizations and volunteers, and limited outreach contribute to lack of volunteer engagement. Majority of the results I received with the surveys I collected demonstrated that people do have difficulty with engagement because they do not have time and have limited information about organizations and the message they are trying to convey.

Instead of completely placing a focus on gaining volunteers, the organization can possibly try and shift their focus on reshaping the way they convey their mission statement so the public has a better understanding of what the organization is trying to accomplish. The organization could also create more specific descriptions of volunteer positions and have a little

bit more time flexibility for those volunteers that have time constraints. My recommendation to the agency is to continue to distribute these surveys at larger tabling events to have a larger pool of data that will help better analyze and obtain more accurate results.

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Appendix A

Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables
Have a planning meeting/workshop with organization members	By February 10, 2023	Mentor, Student, Agency board members	Zoom link, Meeting agenda, task list, past volunteer engagement surveys from workshops	Meeting minutes, Task assignments
Create Surveys	By March 8th	Mentor, Student (me)	Computer, research resources, past workshop surveys	Survey
Attend tabling events	March 8th - April 18th	Mentor, organization members, volunteers, student (me)	Tabling materials (table, pamphlets, organization cards, surveys)	Survey Distribution
Distribute Surveys At Tabling Event	April 18th	Student	Surveys, computer, pencils/pens	Survey responses
Calculate survey data and display graph of data collected	By April 18th	Student	Surveys, Computer	Volunteer engagement table/data. Capstone project