



**Basic Facts on
Volunteer
Centers:
What They Do
and
How They Do It**



Basic Facts on Volunteer Centers: What They Do and How They Do It

A Report on the Volunteer Center Survey



Volunteer Centers: What They Do and How They Do It
Catalog #: UCI0584
Price: \$2.00

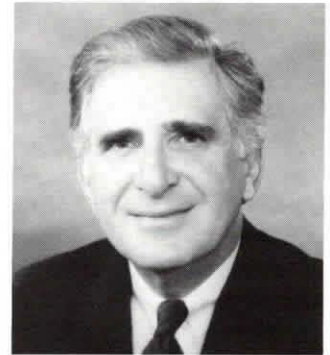
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Foreword

Volunteer Centers perform important services for individual volunteers, voluntary agencies and organizations, corporations, volunteer programs, and for the community as a whole. Their activities connect jobs with the doers of jobs, ensure effective management in not-for-profit organizations, train volunteer program administrators—in short, Volunteer Centers multiply the effectiveness of contributor dollars.



This report summarizes the results of a survey of United Way Volunteer Centers—how the Centers are operated and managed, the types of services they offer (and to whom), and the issues the Centers face in the next few years. The report is designed for directors of Volunteer Centers, United Way executives, volunteers, and professionals who provide health and human-care services. These individuals will find this report to be of value as they plan for the future—a future that will continue to emphasize the importance of volunteerism to the United Way mission: “To increase the organized capacity of people to care for one another.” As United Ways work to double volunteer capacity in their communities, these Volunteer Centers will constitute the framework upon which we can depend for achievement of our goals.

William Aramony

William Aramony
President
United Way of America

Executive Summary

This report cites results of the first United Way of America survey ever conducted of internal Volunteer Centers. *To summarize the results:

- Most United Way Volunteer Centers operate either as part of a United Way Community Resources Division or as a separate division.
- Volunteer Centers often share functions and responsibilities with other divisions of the United Way.
- Establishment by United Way or merger of the United Way with a separate 501(c)3 organization are the two most common ways in which the Volunteer Centers have been established.
- Directors of Volunteer Centers are usually full-time United Way staff. The "typical" Center consists of a director, another professional staff person, a support staff person, and three volunteers.
- Most Volunteer Centers have a Volunteer Advisory Committee.
- About half have a budget separate from the United Way. The median operating budget in 1985, including payroll, was \$32,135.
- Each Volunteer Center conducted an average of 4.5 seminars and workshop training sessions in 1985.
- On average, each Volunteer Center has referred more than 615 individuals a year to a volunteer opportunity.
- Most Centers report that some portion of their operation (other than bookkeeping or word processing) is computerized.
- The most critical issues facing Volunteer Centers in the next few years are 1) finding enough volunteers, 2) expansion of their own services to meet demand, and 3) maintaining stable budgets.

* For the purpose of this report, the term Volunteer Center (or Center) has been used for organizations whose formal name may be Voluntary Action Center (VAC) or Volunteer Bureau.

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the first study United Way of America has conducted of internal Volunteer Centers. The report contains data never before available and gives United Ways an overview of Volunteer Center practices nationwide.

These survey results are especially useful for United Ways interested in establishing a Volunteer Center or improving an existing one. United Way of America will repeat the survey periodically to update the information and document the growing importance of Volunteer Centers.

Methodology

United Way of America conducted the survey by mail during the summer of 1986. Questionnaires were mailed to all United Way organizations that operate Volunteer Center programs or divisions. An internal United Way Volunteer Center is defined as a program, operated within a United Way or as a United Way division, that recruits, trains, refers, and recognizes volunteers; that mobilizes and coordinates volunteer resources; and that promotes volunteerism in the community.

To determine the number of United Ways that have Volunteer Centers, United Way of America contacted 536 chief professional officers by postcard. One hundred and fifteen United Ways responded that they had Volunteer Centers. Each of these 115 received a questionnaire. The response rate was 100 percent. This report evaluates the responses of all participants.

(Note: Throughout this report, percentages are included to quantify responses. Percentages on some tables may not total 100 percent due to rounding or multiple responses.)

Organization, Operations, and Evolution

Where Are United Way Volunteer Centers Placed?

United Ways vary in their placement of Volunteer Centers. The most common is placement in a Community Resources Division (34%). However, in 28 percent of all responding organizations, the Volunteer Center is a separate division. A few questionnaires indicated that United Ways included their Volunteer Centers in either the Communications, Agency Relations, Planning, Community Problem Solving, Allocations/Fund Distribution, or Planning and Allocations Division.

Table 1
IN WHICH DIVISION IS THE VOLUNTEER CENTER PLACED?

	Metro Size						All Metros
	1	2	3	4 (percent)	5	6	
Community Resources	56	20	43	35	40	23	34
Separate Division	19	35	35	29		38	28
Communications	13	5	4		20		5
Allocations/Fund Distribution	6	5		6		8	5
Planning		10		6		8	4

Which Divisions Share Volunteer Center Responsibilities?

The lines of responsibility for Volunteer Centers have been drawn in many ways, depending upon the history and structure of the local United Way organization and Volunteer Center operation. Typically, the Volunteer Center staff share some responsibilities and functions with other United Way divisions, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2
**FUNCTIONS SHARED BETWEEN
VOLUNTEER CENTER STAFF AND OTHER DIVISIONS**

	Metro Size						All Metros
	1	2	3	4 (percent)	5	6	
Information and Referral	14	13	21	23	19	30	41
Workplace Presence	22	20	13	16	6	4	32
Fund Raising	12	15	18	14	13	15	31
Community Problem Solving	10	7	13	11	13	11	23
Allocations	8	11	3	7	6	11	16
Planning	4	9	5	7	13	7	14
Planning and Allocations	4	7	8	5	6	7	13
Other	16	15	15	16	13	7	30
None	8	2	3	2	13	7	11

The everyday operations of most Volunteer Centers which include gathering data about the not-for-profit community make sharing this function with an Information and Referral (I&R) service a natural relationship. Thus, the "clearinghouse" role is shared by I&R and Volunteer Center staffs in 41 percent of Volunteer Centers. Other commonly shared functions are Workplace Presence (32%), Fund Raising (31%), and Community Problem Solving (23%).

Under the "Other" category some respondents mentioned such functions as Gifts-In-Kind and Management Assistance Programs; they also pointed out that Volunteer Center staff generally lend their assistance during the United Way Campaign.

The size of a United Way seems to have little bearing on how it coordinates functions between Volunteer Centers and other internal divisions. However, the one clear pattern that appears in relation to Metro size is that the larger United Ways tend to have Volunteer Center staff share functions with a separate Workplace Presence program.

Staffing Patterns

The directors of most Volunteer Centers are paid staff, either full-time (61%) or part-time (22%). Only two Centers reported having a volunteer director.

The average Volunteer Center has a staff of six: two professionals (full-time and/or part-time), one clerical staff (full-time or part-time), and three volunteers (usually part-time).

Advisory Committees and Representation on United Way Boards

Most Volunteer Centers (75%) have a volunteer Advisory Committee. Of those, 84 percent have representation of that committee on the local United Way board.

How Old Are Volunteer Centers?

Volunteer Centers are a phenomenon of the 20th century. Some early Voluntary Action Centers were established as independent organizations; others have always been a part of a United Way.

As two early examples, the Minneapolis Voluntary Action Center was established in 1919; the Volunteer Center of United Community Services in Detroit was founded in 1936.

Up to the mid-1960s, growth of the number of Volunteer Centers was slow. In the years between 1966-1976, 50 Volunteer Centers were established. Since that time the numbers have been growing steadily. Thirty Volunteer Centers had joined United Ways between 1970-1979 and 62 Volunteer Centers joined or were founded by United Ways in the period 1980-1987. In fact, of the 115 United Way Volunteer Centers, 92 of them (80%) have become part of the United Way in the last 17 years. More than 50 percent of all United Way Volunteer Centers have been formed or have come into United Way during the past six or seven years.

How Did They Become Part of United Way?

Existing Volunteer Centers merged with United Ways (in 40 percent of the cases) or United Ways established new Volunteer Centers (in another 40 percent of the cases).

Respondents identified some "other" paths, including requests from an existing volunteer organization to join United Way, merger of United Way with another organization that already had a volunteer function, and a gradual increase in funding by United Way as another funder reduced its support of the Volunteer Center.

Budgets

Total Operating Budgets

Fifty-one percent of respondents indicated that their Volunteer Centers had budgets separate from other divisions/units of United Way. The median total operating budget (including payroll) was \$32,135 for 1985. The average budget was \$51,423. In this case, the median is the more meaningful figure—the average was considerably increased by a few very large budgets that ranged up to \$233,000.

Sources of 1986 Volunteer Center Budgets

United Way Volunteer Centers receive more than 50 percent of their budget dollars from their United Ways. Again, this is an average figure—half of the respondents indicated that 97 percent or more of their budgets comes from United Way; 10 percent of the Centers are completely funded by United Way.

Two Volunteer Centers report that they receive up to 50 percent of their budgets from foundations; one reports that 44 percent of its budget is generated by fees for services.

Some Volunteer Centers report that 2 to 5 percent of their budgets comes from the Federal government. Little support comes from state governments.

Almost half of the Volunteer Centers (48%) reported receiving in-kind contributions of furniture, supplies, equipment, or services.

It is obvious that United Ways support their Volunteer Centers, and that most of the Centers are significantly dependent for funding on the United Way organization. Alternative funding solutions are possible through outside support (federal, state, and foundation monies) or fee-generating services.

Citizen Review

Only 22 percent of United Way Volunteer Centers report that their budgets are submitted to the United Way citizen review (allocations/fund distribution) process.

Volunteer Center Programs

Written Mission Statements

Respondents were unanimous in reporting that the mission of their Volunteer Centers is **promotion of volunteerism**. All of them view themselves as clearinghouses for volunteers. Their goal is recruiting, training, and placing as many volunteers as possible. Two typical responses were:

“To expand and strengthen volunteer involvement.”

“To promote citizen participation in the public and voluntary sectors of the community by: recruiting, interviewing, screening, and referring volunteers to nonprofit agencies; setting standards for volunteer programs and community involvement; assisting in development of new community programs; offering workshops and guidance for volunteer coordinators.”

Programs and Activities Operating Within Volunteer Centers

There are many activities and programs operating within United Way Volunteer Centers. As might be anticipated, the most common activity reported is the recruitment and placement of volunteers (90%). Consultation and technical assistance on volunteer management (69%), volunteer recognition programs (69%), and referral and/or placement follow-up (67%) were the next most frequently selected choices from a list of 14 possible activities.

Table 3
ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS CURRENTLY
OPERATING WITHIN A VOLUNTEER CENTER

	Metro Size						All Metros
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Volunteer Recruitment and Placement	85	99	92	89	75	93	90
Consultation/Tech. Assistance on Volunteer Management	88	85	77	63	38	27	69
Volunteer Recognition Programs	85	85	54	84	38	47	69
Follow-Up	69	80	69	63	75	47	67
Training/Volunteer Management	69	80	50	53	50	33	56
Skillsbank to Match Volunteer Skills With Agency Needs	69	75	38	53	38	53	56
Corporate Volunteer Programs	99	45	19	42	—	20	52
Directory/Volunteer Opportunities	69	50	35	42	25	60	49
Volunteer Fairs	54	60	42	47	—	40	45
Volunteer Programs for Groups	58	55	50	53	50	47	43
Agency Board Training	54	50	38	16	13	27	37
Volunteer Training	42	40	23	21	38	40	34
Management Assistance Programs	38	45	12	16	25	29	26
Other	92	70	35	37	38	27	53

Seminars, Workshops, Training Sessions, and Referrals in 1985

One of the functions of a Volunteer Center is to conduct seminars and workshop/training sessions designed to help the nonprofit community develop its volunteer management capacity. The 115 respondents reported conducting 523 seminars and workshop training sessions, an average of 4.5 workshops per Volunteer Center.

The respondents referred a total of 70,710 persons for volunteer placement in 1985, an average of more than 615 per Volunteer Center.

What Statistics Do Volunteer Centers Track?

To determine the types of statistics tracked by Volunteer Centers, the questionnaire provided a list of categories. Respondents were asked to check those that pertained to them. Table 4 lists the responses.

Table 4
STATISTICS THAT VOLUNTEER CENTERS TRACK

Number of people referred	100%
Number of training participants	100%
Source of referral	73%
Client characteristics	63%
Client's employer	43%
None	3%

Involvement in Workplace Presence Programs

Approximately half of the Volunteer Centers responded to a question about involvement in Workplace Presence programs (also known as United Way at Work programs). Of those that responded, 58 percent indicated that their Centers took part in their United Way's Workplace Presence Programs. The roles identified were: serving as a clearinghouse for United Way volunteers, coordinating corporate volunteer programs, and making presentations to companies taking part in Workplace Presence programs.

What Percentage of Agencies Served by the Volunteer Centers Are Affiliated With United Way?

Survey respondents were asked to identify the percentage of United Way-affiliated agencies served by their Volunteer Centers. The answer (on average) was 29 percent. It is clear that Volunteer Centers are a significant point of "external" contact for United Ways, or that their services extend beyond traditionally affiliated organizations to include the larger community.

Are Volunteer Centers Evaluated on a Regular Basis?

Two-thirds (68%) of the Volunteer Centers indicated that they are evaluated on a regular basis. The questionnaire did not seek information about method, procedure, or use of the evaluation.

Technology

The survey asked Volunteer Centers whether they use computers for functions other than word processing and bookkeeping. Most Centers (71%) reported that they have computerized their operations, using both mainframes and personal computers (PCs). Personal computers were more common (51%) than mainframes (20%). Most Volunteer Centers have Apple PCs (23%), 19 percent have IBMs. The most common mainframes were IBMs (14%).

Volunteer Centers use computers to: compile volunteer directories, keep a resource file, perform statistical analysis, and operate a Skillsbank.

Respondents were also asked to report on "important recent events" and many reported that they had computerized some program functions, and were pleased with the results.

Table 5
COMPUTERIZED FUNCTIONS

Volunteer Directory	33%
Resource File	31%
Statistical Analysis	30%
Skillsbank	30%
Client Requests	23%

Is Your Computer Linked to the United Way System?

Most respondents indicated that their computers operate independently; only 23 percent responded that they are linked with the computer system of the United Way.

Most survey participants did not respond when asked how their software was designed. This suggests that they either did not have the information or were not familiar enough with computers to respond. Of the few who did answer, the most frequent response was "outside consultant" (12%). Other responses were "outside vendor" (4%), "United Way Management Information System Staff" (2%), and "user's group" (1%).

Collaboration With Other Organizations

The Volunteer Centers were asked to identify those groups with which they had ongoing relationships for coordinating projects or conducting special events. Most often cited were local governments (22%), professional associations(17%), and other Volunteer Centers (16%).

Table 6
ONGOING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Local government	22%
Professional associations	17%
Other volunteer centers	16%
State government	13%
Information and referral programs	7%
School districts	6%
Corporations	5%
Junior League	3%
Other	13%

Respondents were also asked to identify their affiliations with other membership organizations. Thirty-four percent of the Volunteer Centers reported affiliation with VOLUNTEER: The National Center; only 7 percent with the Association for Volunteer Administration (see Table 7).

Table 7
OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

VOLUNTEER: The National Center	34%
State associations	14%
Association for Volunteer Administration	7%
American Society for Training and Development	2%
Other	7%

Significant Developments

The Centers were asked to name their most significant development during the previous year. Increased publicity through special programs was mentioned as a significant development by more respondents than any other, followed by improvements in recruitment, training, and placement of volunteers. Computerization was mentioned by 12 percent of the Centers as significant.

Table 8
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT
IN YOUR VOLUNTEER CENTER DURING THE LAST YEAR

Increased publicity through special programs	25%
Improved volunteer recruitment, training, and placement	15%
Computerization	12%
Increase or training of staff	11%
Merged with United Way	10%
Assessment of needs, long-range planning	9%
Stronger advisory council or board	7%
Miscellaneous	6%
Nothing	7%

Critical Issues

Table 9
THE MOST CRITICAL ISSUE YOUR VOLUNTEER
CENTER FACES IN NEXT TWO YEARS

Enough qualified/committed volunteers to meet increasing demand	29%
Financial support to meet the need for expansion of services	21%
Maintain stable funding in light of government budget cuts or troubled local economy	15%
Long-range planning, marketing—clarify future status of volunteer center	10%
None	8%
Determine needs in agencies/companies/community	5%
Training and support for volunteers	1%
Miscellaneous	11%

The critical issues that respondents identified for their Centers fell into a few specific categories. More than any other issue, the Centers cited the need for enough qualified, committed volunteers to meet increasing demand. The next most frequently mentioned issue was money for planned expansion. Maintaining stable funding in an environment of government cutbacks was next, followed by a need for long-range planning.

Some typical responses are quoted here:

"Decline of the number of volunteers available for the agencies. One of the traditional sources of volunteers has been the housewife. Now, more and more women are working outside the home."

"Capacity-building within the volunteer sector: Developing the staff and resources to implement a comprehensive program of training and consultation aimed at increasing the capacity of the local volunteer sector to utilize volunteers effectively."

"Having United Way Board to recognize potential and value of Volunteer Center and provide resources to exploit."

"The development of partnerships with local governments and corporations plus working with the not-for-profit community to develop volunteer opportunities with the employed person."

"Increased programming and emerging needs have forced us to rethink our interview-and-referral-intensive operation and to concentrate on making the best use of limited staff resources."

"Budget reduction as a result of Gramm-Rudman and impact it will have on programs."

"Recruiting and placing volunteers in agencies that have severe budget cuts from government sources."

Conclusion

As the first formally conducted study of United Way Volunteer Center operations, this information constitutes "baseline" data. United Way of America's 1988 survey will enlarge upon and refine this information.

A Volunteer Center is an invaluable asset in helping United Ways meet their Second Century Initiative goal of doubling volunteer capacity. Volunteer Centers that are a part of the United Way system are involved in activities considered to meet nationally recognized standards of Volunteer Center operations. They are meeting the demands and challenges of volunteer promotion, recruitment, training, placement, and recognition.

This report points up the similarities and differences in management, operations, function, and placement of the Volunteer Centers. What is known about activities nationwide can improve the way individual Volunteer Centers operate in the support of volunteer activity through United Way.

Appendix Volunteer Center Directory

ALABAMA

Ms. Jo Howell Greer
Voluntarism Coordinator
United Way Volunteer & INFO Center
United Way of Central Alabama, Inc.
3600 Eighth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222-3223
(205) 251-5131

Ms. Delores McLeod
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Dothan, Alabama 36302-0405
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ALASKA

Ms. Sharon D. Richards
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Anchorage, Alaska 99508-3456
(907) 272-5570

ARKANSAS

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United Way of Pulaski County
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(501) 376-4567

CALIFORNIA

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San Diego, California 92123
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(209) 943-0870

COLORADO

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Director
Mile High United Way Volunteer Center
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Denver, Colorado 80211
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Ms. Sarah MacQuiddy
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Greeley, Colorado 80632-1944
(303) 353-4300

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(912) 883-6700

Ms. Linda Pulley
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Ms. Laverne H. Gold
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Augusta, Georgia 30901
(404) 826-4460

Ms. Lydia Thompson
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Savannah, Georgia 31412-9119
(912) 232-4465

IDAHO

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Marketing & Community Service Director
Volunteer Bureau
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Manager
Volunteer Center
United Way/Crusade of Mercy
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Chicago, Illinois 60603-4012
(312) 580-2723

INDIANA

Ms. Susan Waymire
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United Way of Madison County, Inc.
1420 East Tenth Street
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Anderson, Indiana 46015-1200
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Liz Clark/Joan Foster
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First Call For Help/Volunteer Services
United Way of Bartholomew County
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Columbus, Indiana 47202-0827
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Ms. Patricia Nader
Group Manager
Human Resources
Lake Area United Way
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Griffith, Indiana 46319
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Ms. Martha Bolyard
Director
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United Way of Central Indiana
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Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-1471
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IOWA

Ms. Charene Starcevic
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510 5th Street
Ames, Iowa 50010-6214
(515) 232-2736

Ms. Susie Schwieger
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Community Resources Division
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Waterloo, Iowa 50703
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Ms. Joey Bishop
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KANSAS

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Volunteer Center of
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KENTUCKY

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LOUISIANA

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MAINE

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MARYLAND

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MINNESOTA

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MISSISSIPPI

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MISSOURI

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United Way Mission:

To increase the organized capacity of people to care for one another.



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