

Mobilizing Volunteers in Low-Income Communities

Title of Project:

Mobilizing Volunteers in Philadelphia Communities with Few Resources (**Mobilizing Volunteers in Low-Income Communities**)

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Overview and Goals of Project:

History:

The history of this project is very important. The "Community Volunteer Mobilization Project" (*Exploring Volunteer Mobilization in Low-Income Communities*) was an out growth of Board Training, done several years earlier by the VOLUNTEER CENTER, for Philadelphia's Neighborhood Assistance Councils. The NAC's are all community volunteers, looking at their neighborhood problems. It was evident during the Board Training sessions that a need existed for Volunteer Management training, for "hands on community volunteers". Over the next two years, due to lack of funding, the VOLUNTEER CENTER often provided "band-aide" answers to volunteer engagement questions. The POLF Grant provided the opportunity to build on our existing relationships, establish new ones in order to provide the needed training in selected zip codes of the city. Providing people with the skills they needed to take a Leadership role in their community will go a long way in Helping to Build Better Community's.

Original Goals of the Project:

The VOLUNTEER CENTER planned to provide volunteer management training, to fifty community volunteers, in sections of Philadelphia that had few community resources (low-income). The plan was to identify non-profit Managers of Volunteers, who were members of our local DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies), to be trained by the VOLUNTEER CENTER staff to train the community volunteers taking part in the Community Volunteer Mobilization Program. During the Community Volunteer's training, the trainers were to identify 10 to 15 individuals that they thought could be "trained as trainers" and go back to their neighborhoods and train others to get involved in solving community problems.

Amended Goals:

As the VOLUNTEER CENTER looked at how to measure training and impact, we decided to increase the number of people trained from 50 to 100 or more. We also added the Mayor's Commission on Literacy as our third collaborating organization. Working with volunteer tutors who were in need of additional volunteer management training, the Commission would assist us in identifying host sites and participants for our trainings. We also decided that all of our Community Trainers would not come from the classes we were holding. It was discovered as we talked to individuals in our communities, that some of them did not need to attend the "first set of trainings", because they already possessed volunteer management skills. They would be great candidates to "Train as Trainers" and they were already seen as "leaders" in their community.

Challenges:

Developing a new program is exciting. Having an idea and putting it into practice is often different than we expect. Sometimes it is easier than expected; often it is harder and changes must be made. It is a time to find out how to take what you know and adapt it to a new audience.

As we recruited volunteers, located neighborhood host sites and developed training materials we discovered 5 very important challenges/differences:

1. **Vocabulary:** is very important when working in grassroots communities. In the traditional non-profit arena, we use the word "volunteer" for those unpaid individuals recruited to help us accomplish our mission. It is often not the word of choice used in the grassroots community. Examples of vocabulary differences are: in the religious community the word is "helping out" or on some neighborhood streets the volunteer may be referred to as "a street walker" (someone who checks on the senior citizens living on that street). The culture of the neighborhood often determines the vocabulary.

2. Flexibility: is essential when working with non-traditional volunteer groups or churches. A chain of command must be observed. In most cases, it is not good to go right to the top. Most of the people with whom you must communicate are volunteers and only in "on certain days and at various times". Often answering machines or faxes are not available. Individuals to be trained change, as well as the location of the site. It is part of working in grassroots/low-income communities.

3. Patience: the need to repeat information many times is necessary so that all members of the church/community group are informed of what may be occurring. The traditional forms of communicating are not always available. E-mail, answering machines and or fax machines may not be in use. US mail is often the method of communication. Everything takes much, much longer to get accomplished. Making many, many, many telephone calls to finally get an answer from people who want to "get trained" or to secure training site is not unusual. Good records, along with contact names and telephone numbers, are vital. SMILE! SMILE!

4. Material: adapting traditional volunteer management training material to a very different audience is a challenge. Phrases we take for granted may be "foreign" to grassroots volunteer community groups and churches.

5. Communities talk: even in a big city, word spreads and people talk. They call to find out how they can get involved in the training sessions or why their neighborhood was not chosen to be part of the program. Explanations should be short, honest and often diplomatic. We must try to keep everyone happy.

What Changed as a Result of the Project (i.e. Increased Volunteering, etc.)?

We tend to measure impact and outcome, in the traditional non-profit community, in large numbers. In our "new community program", it is often little the things that have the greatest impact.

- New collaboration between Urban Bridges at St. Gabriel's Church and Ford Memorial Temple to develop literacy program for adults.
- Development of a glossary of "Words" that mean the same as the word Volunteer.
- Community individuals better able to get help for them selves and neighbors because of receiving a free copy of the First Call for Help Directory
- A contract between the VC and National School and Community Corps to train 25 Community Volunteers.
- Community volunteer will use the training material and manual in her new job at Temple University Center for Social Policy and Community Development. Will be able to help VC make new connections in the community.
- Volunteers ready to recruit and engage their neighbors and friends in solving community problems

Critical Recommendations for Working in These Communities:

1. Make sure you have good connections and relationships in the community. You are an outsider.
2. You do not live in the community in which you are working so do not think you know the neighborhoods and all the players.
3. If you are from a different ethnic group, you must try to develop trust and understand their culture.
4. Hear what is said! Do not "just listen"
5. Do your homework. Be sure you involve people in the community so they take ownership of the program/training.

Hoorays -What Really Made You Go the Extra Step?

1. We felt and saw the commitment and enthusiasm of the people we trained. The United Way VOLUNTEER CENTER of Southeastern Pennsylvania was seen as not only working with non-profits, but with the whole community. We made many new "friends" and were told over and over again how important the training we were providing was. Best of all, we expanded our knowledge of how to work with grassroots community volunteers.
2. Last, but not least, the Community Trainers we trained have continued to train others in their communities, some even training more than the "five" new community volunteers.

Next Steps:

Develop a better method of evaluating the impact and outcome of our project. (Camara and I will be working with Susan Ellis in July)

If you had additional funding, how would you carry your project forward?

We would expand the pilot trainings into other communities, using the community Trainers from Phase II of our project. We would provide Leadership Training for our original group and other community members.

Inner City Community Terminology

Street Walker (Walks the streets to check on senior citizens)

Willing Worker (One who pitches in where there is a need)

Social Activist (One who advocates for a neglected group)

Resource Person (One who know "what's happening")

Resident/Caring Person (One who organizes community needs)

Advocate (One who stands up for the downtrodden in the neighborhood)

Block Captain (Civic representative for the neighbors as defined by city blocks)

Community Liaison (Representative of their community to other neighborhood groups)

Community Developer/Organizer (One used in community development organizations change agents)

*For more information on Mobilizing Volunteers
in Inner City Communities contact the
United Way VOLUNTEER CENTER of Southeastern
Pennsylvania at 1 800 VOLUNTEER*

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**WHAT'S
IN
A WORD?**

"VOLUNTEER": A word with many MEANINGS!

VOLUNTEER is a word that is automatically part of a non-profit organization's vocabulary. It is important to remember that, like the word staff, the word volunteer is a **pay category** and not a **JOB title**.

We identify our board members, along with the friendly visitor working with seniors, as "volunteers". We write position descriptions for "volunteers" as well as staff. We tell the community and others of the help "volunteers" are to our organization, identifying them as our "volunteers".

VOLUNTEER is a word that is not automatically part of an inner city setting or the religious community's vocabulary. People in both of these settings may occasionally use the word "volunteer" to refer to individuals with whom they work, but more often have a word or phrase of his or her own.

This information was gathered as an outcome of a grant The United Way **VOLUNTEER CENTER** of Southeastern Pennsylvania received from the Points of Light Foundation, Samuel S. Fels Fund and the Philadelphia Foundation to work with individuals and groups in Philadelphia that needed additional resources. The goal of the grant was to identify and train individuals who would recruit more people to get involved in their community in helping solve community problems. We worked with churches, neighborhood councils and community groups to recruit and train the "volunteers".

As a result of this work, we discovered the difference in vocabulary. The **VOLUNTEER CENTER** has developed this pamphlet in the effort to share our findings with others that may wish to work in these settings.

Listed below and on the back cover you will find Word and Phrase Comparisons

Nonprofit Organization Terminology	Faith-Based Terminology
Volunteerism (To serve of one's own free will)	Ministry (To serve others in response to God's will)
Volunteer	Good Samaritan
Recruit	Invite
Position Description	Ministry Description
Program	Ministry/Effort
Assign	Connect
Supervise	Shepherd
Evaluate	Reflect
Recognize	Affirm