

By Jesse Alter

Victories of Volunteerism

Community needs, member enthusiasm, connections that clicked:
All helped shape Summit Award-winning efforts to improve society.

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EVER GIVE UP. THAT'S the unanimous advice from the winners of this year's Associations Advance America Summit Award, one of ASAE's highest honors.

The AAA Summit Award is given annually to associations that implement innovative community-based programs. This year's winners are the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, New York City; American Podiatric Medical Association, Bethesda, Maryland; American Trucking Associations, Alexandria, Virginia; Association of Air Medical Services, Alexandria, Virginia; Ohio Restaurant Association, Columbus; and Score Association, Washington, D.C. Learn about the actions the winners took to push volunteerism along to take their associations to new heights.

Give 'em what they need

Perhaps the most important aspect to consider for a volunteer program is examining the need for the program's services. For all six Summit Award winners, the driving force that pushed their programs forward was responding to their respective communities' demands for the services their programs provide.

For instance, the American Institute



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of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) noticed that when disasters such as hurricanes or wildfires occurred, much attention was given to immediate needs such as shelter, food, and clean-up. However, another essential service was being overlooked—the need for financial education following a disaster. AICPA consulted with the American Red Cross, as well as the National Endowment for Financial Education, and began crafting such an educational resource. Explains Anat Kendal, AICPA's director of financial planning, "The intention was to educate the public on financial issues related to a disaster—the immediate need when a disaster strikes, what happens in the weeks after, and then the long-term issues."

The finished product was an informational guide available in print and PDF formats that covered issues such as dealing with property damage and

restoring lost documents. Since the guide's launch in 2003, the Red Cross has distributed nearly 120,000 copies, and the online version has received more than 600,000 hits. Realizing the demand for the program's services, AICPA is looking into working with additional governmental agencies to further educate the public on disaster recovery.

The Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS) had similar experiences with its Atlas and Database of Air Medical Services (ADAMS). With the numbers of U.S. highway deaths remaining constant across the past few years, the association was looking to find a way to help bring those high numbers down. Working with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, AAMS embarked on an ambitious Web-based project to map out locations of air ambulance services and overlay that

information with locations of highway deaths. The idea was, explains AAMS Executive Director and CEO Dawn Mancuso, CAE, "if we could identify where the assets of these aircrafts were and compare them to where the highway deaths were happening, we may have some information about causation and be able to do something about it."

The reaction to the proposed project was so positive that it encouraged AAMS to branch out even further and provide information on fly zones, available aircraft types, medical specializations, and other figures. All of these statistics were then placed into a database, and the asset locations were geocoded and placed on a map. That map was then placed over a map of the highways, as well as a map of highway death and injury information. The result was a highly informative online database that could be used for a variety of reasons. For instance, the Transportation Security Administration requested the use of ADAMS for the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City. With the help of the database, TSA had access to all area air ambulance services that might be flying in and out of Manhattan and the greater New York area to secure the airspace during the convention. Information from ADAMS is also currently helping state emergency planners increase their preparedness for disasters such as hurricanes and other emergencies.

For both AAMS and AICPA, the overwhelming need for services and the subsequent positive community response contributed greatly to the successful implementation—and continued growth—of their projects.

Harness enthusiasm

Having enthusiastic volunteers on board and responding to their interests also contributes to a service program's success. As Mike Russell, vice president of public affairs at the American Trucking Associations recounts, the association saw a surge in the number of truck drivers registering for ATA's Highway Watch program after the terrorist

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Recapping the Winners

Who: American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, New York City

What: *Disaster Recovery: A Guide to Financial Issues.*

Together with the help of the American Red Cross and the National Endowment for Financial Education, AICPA put together a guide to educate disaster victims on financial issues such as estate settlement, dealing with debt, and reconstructing lost records. The guide is distributed by the Red Cross at disaster sites and is also available online in PDF format.

What's next: Work with additional national and local governmental agencies to increase the public's knowledge of disaster-related financial planning and recovery.

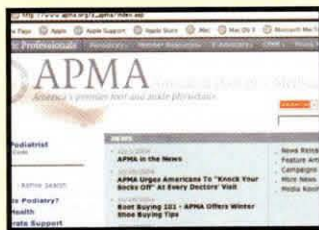


Who: American Podiatric Medical Association, Bethesda, Maryland

What: "It's What You Don't Feel That Can Hurt You"/"Best Walking Cities in the U.S." A diabetes-awareness campaign, "It's What You Don't Feel That

Can Hurt You" focused on educating the public that the loss of feeling in one's feet can be an early sign of diabetes. Related to foot health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, APMA also launched the "Best Walking Cities in the U.S." campaign, which, now in its second year, lists the 125 top walking cities in America.

What's next: Continue to expand both programs, broadening the scope of each, and getting more parties involved, especially the National Institutes of Health.



Who: American Trucking Associations, Alexandria, Virginia

What: Highway Watch. Initially launched as a training course to educate truck drivers on highway safety and reporting problems to the proper authorities, the program expanded its

focus after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In addition to training drivers on the basics of highway safety, the program now educates drivers on highway security, teaching them what to look out for and how to report suspicious activity. While most truck drivers enroll in the program on an individual basis, ATA had its first corporatewide registration for the program, allowing approximately 13,000 employees to receive training.

What's next: Expand programs to all 50 states, enroll even more truck drivers and highway workers in the program, and encourage further corporatewide training.

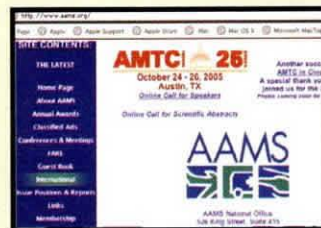


Who: Association of Air Medical Services, Alexandria, Virginia

What: Atlas and Database of Air Medical Services (ADAMS). With the help of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, AAMS

has assembled America's first Web-based, multilayered, geocoded database of air ambulance resources. The customizable data provides information on air ambulance fleet locations, aircraft types, fly circles, and more. Initially created with the intention of helping bring down the number of highway deaths in the United States, ADAMS has been accessed for other reasons, most notably by the Transportation Security Administration during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

What's next: Collect more data—perhaps expanding to include ground ambulance services—and make the database increasingly useful, especially for homeland security measures.



Who: Ohio Restaurant Association, Columbus

What: Ladders to Success.

The Ladders to Success program is a partnership program between the Ohio Restaurant Association and the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC). Initially, the association and the commission worked together to place people with disabilities—mental and physical—in jobs at various restaurants throughout Ohio. The program has since moved away from direct job placement and now focuses on marketing RSC services to individual owners and operators of restaurants.

What's next: Replicate the program in other associations, branching out from restaurant jobs into other vocational areas.

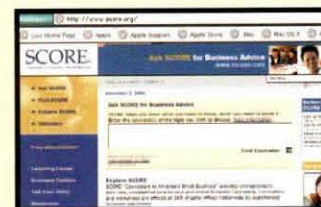


Who: Score Association, Washington, D.C.

What: Small business counseling. Since 1964, Score has provided the small business community with free counseling services. Approximately

10,500 volunteers donate their time to meet with small business owners or potential small business owners and answer questions or provide information on managing a small business. Eighty percent of the volunteers are retired businesspeople with years of experience in the business world. Score recently added an online counseling service for clients who feel more comfortable with e-mail, rather than the phone or a face-to-face meeting.

What's next: Pay more attention to technology, how it affects adult learning, and the ways it can be used to provide counseling services to remote areas of the country.



attacks on September 11. Since 1998, the program had been training truck drivers on the basics of highway safety.

Seeing the increased desire among those in the industry to volunteer and contribute to post-9/11 recovery, Russell and ATA decided to take the program a step further and train truck drivers on highway security, as well, teaching them how to spot and report suspicious activity. "We have 3.1 million professional truck drivers on the road at any given time," explains Russell. "That's one of the strengths—that we're everywhere." Since then, more than 30 states have put the Highway Watch program in motion, and all 50 states have agreed to participate in the Highway Watch program eventually. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security recently signed a \$40 million contract with ATA to expand the program beyond truck drivers to the entire highway sector. By

responding to members' enthusiasm, the association was able to expand the Highway Watch program and serve even more community members.

Ken Yancey, CEO of Score Association, also credits much of the success of Score's small business counseling program to its volunteers. The program currently boasts 10,500 volunteers, all of whom provide free business counseling to small businesses around the country. The majority of the volunteers are retired businesspeople, who, according to Yancey, do not want to stop working. "What Score does is allow those folks who are interested to continue to use that knowledge and wisdom and ability and all that information that they've accumulated over a lifetime of business," he explains. "The fact that these men and women have volunteered their time and talent is what makes the magic. It doesn't work if that doesn't happen."

Because the volunteers' enthusiasm is such a crucial element of the program, Yancey pays close attention to their suggestions. "We try to give [volunteers] the opportunity to volunteer on their own terms," he says. Through actively listening to his volunteers, Yancey has not only maintained a high quality of counseling, but has also embarked on innovative programs such as the recent implementation of online services, which now accounts for 30 percent of the organization's counseling.

Get connected, conserve cash

It's no secret that volunteer programs can get expensive quickly. However, sometimes it is possible to circumvent the high costs by taking advantage of in-house talents and community connections. When putting together the "It's What You Don't Feel That Can Hurt



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You” and “The Best Walking Cities in the U.S.” programs, the American Podiatric Medical Association discovered that extravagant budgets aren’t always necessary.

A midsize association, APMA knew that it didn’t have a lot of money to work with when the organization began planning its diabetes-awareness campaign, “It’s What You Don’t Feel That Can Hurt You.” Instead of hiring a public relations firm or media consultant, the organization focused its efforts in-house and used the talents and photographic equipment of the staff to put the campaign’s publicity materials together, saving the organization thousands of dollars. Then, recounts Director of Public Relations George Tzamaras, through connections, the organization was able to contact James Brown of NFL Fox Sports about joining the campaign. Brown, who has fam-

ily members with diabetes, agreed and volunteered to do radio and television public service announcements, as well as lend his voice to a short, animated cartoon placed on a campaign CD. “There are people out there willing to do so much for you,” says Tzamaras. “It’s just a matter of finding them.”

APMA had similar success tapping high-profile people for its “Best Walking Cities in the U.S.” program. Initially, APMA planned for the program to take about a year to organize and execute. However, through a contact at *Prevention* magazine, APMA was able to spread the word on the program sooner. *Prevention*, which focuses on healthy living, jumped at the chance to get involved and cut the planning time from one year to three months. Through *Prevention*’s contacts and staff, as well as shared funds between the two organizations, APMA was able to successfully launch an incredibly large-scale program without breaking its budget. And the additional media exposure was an added bonus. “When you have something positive that you want to share with people, their reaction is basically positive,” says Tzamaras. “I’m not going to say it’s going to happen on the very first call, but eventually you’ll find a person somewhere who’s going to say, ‘That’s a brilliant idea, and we want to help.’”


Perseverance pays off

But what do you do when it’s your association that doesn’t get everything it needs on the first call? What can you do to keep a struggling volunteer initiative moving forward despite obstacles? Ninia Downs, executive director of the Ladders to Success program, cosponsored by the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) and the Ohio Restaurant Association, was faced with that question when RSC first tapped the Ohio Restaurant Association to help run the program in 1989.

Downs, who helped RSC start the Ladders to Success program in 1985, contacted the president of the Ohio Restaurant Association about partnering with RSC, but received unenthusiastic

responses for six months. Undeterred, she encouraged her contacts in the hospitality industry to write letters to the president, outlining the benefits of the program, which places people with disabilities in competitive jobs. The letter-writing campaign failed as well, and it was only after a face-to-face presentation to the president and board of directors that the association reluctantly agreed to join the partnership. Determined to show the association how beneficial the program was, Downs invited the president to visit several of the businesses where the program had placed workers. And finally a connection was made. “It really won the president over, seeing people with disabilities at work,” she says.

Since then, the bond between RSC, a state agency, and the Ohio Restaurant Association has strengthened, and together, the two organizations have become deeply committed to continuing the Ladders to Success program. Downs admits, however, that frustrations occasionally still arise due to the differences between the ways a government agency does business versus the business style of a trade society. Having seen the results when the program works successfully, though, she remains steadfast and works through the frustrations. “I think when there’s a good idea and it really meets everyone’s needs, you can make it happen,” she says. When it’s slow, “you just need to keep plugging away at it.”

Although some of the Summit Award winners faced fewer frustrations than others, all six acknowledge that launching and then maintaining a volunteer program is not easy work. Says Mancuso of the Association of Air Medical Services, “There are going to be times when it’s a lot of hassle and a lot of extra work, but if you can keep your eye on the vision of what’s going to be better as a result of your efforts and communicate that constantly, I think you’re most likely to build awareness and support.” 

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