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## The Road to Measuring Volunteer Impact

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“How do you know you are making a difference? How do we move beyond satisfaction surveys and counting activities and attendees to show real impact? How do you tell the story of success? How do we capture the impact of an organization on clients, volunteers and the community beyond the dollar value? How can we most effectively show that to potential funders? How do we capture unintended but powerful benefits and unintended negative consequences? What do we do when we have great numbers but no real results?”

These questions were put forward by the CJVRM editorial team to initiate discussion for this issue of the Journal. But they are also questions that a group of five colleagues in the field of volunteer management have been asking themselves for several years.

It all began as one member of our group was presenting the annual statistics for her organization’s department of volunteer resources. She wondered if the hospital’s board of directors would really be able to understand the impact of their volunteer department, based on the figures she was about to present.

She knew that they had had a great year and had made a huge difference for the organization, but the measures she was reporting on were flat and did not speak to the impact of the great work volunteers were doing or the work of the volunteer department.

Once she finished the presentation using traditional tools that illustrated how many volunteers there were, the hours they contributed, their turnover rate and the types of volunteer activities performed, the board members politely nodded their heads and applauded. That is when she took a chance: “Well, we have 800 volunteers; so what? What does this actually mean? Out of those, 795 could be stuffing envelopes. How does this help the organization?”

How does the number of volunteers, the number of hours they contribute or the length of time they have been with the organization get to the root of how volunteers really contribute meaningfully to accomplishing goals and delivering services?

This experience with the board prompted her to approach some trusted colleagues in the field of volunteer management. It appeared that she was not the only one who had trouble figuring out measurements, statistics

and indicators that told a meaningful story. They all agreed that they needed to come up with consistent measures that would take them beyond counting activities to truly measuring the impact of volunteer engagement. Recognizing the need to promote the outcome of volunteer work, our group collaborated to find a way of capturing data and information that would identify where volunteers had the most impact and show how the work of the volunteer department aligned with and supported the needs of the organization.

Numerous articles have articulated the importance of evaluation from an outcomes-based perspective to address the question, “What kind of impact have our volunteer efforts made and are we being effective?” Yet managers of volunteers still lack a standardized tool for assessing the impact of volunteers in supporting an organization’s mission and goals.

As a group, we needed to find a fundamental basis from which to create valid measurements that showed volunteer progress and outcomes. As we began looking for an evaluation tool we could use, we identified that all our organizations had implemented the “balanced scorecard” method as the preferred measurement tool at the senior level. Developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in the early 1990s, the balanced scorecard is “a strategic planning and management system that is used to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organization performance against strategic goals.” It made sense to create a balanced scorecard specifically for volunteer engagement that aligned with how our organizations, and many others, already measured success.

Through numerous consultations, we identified the following key objectives and outcomes as a starting point for developing a balanced scorecard for volunteer engagement:

- to ensure that volunteer resources initiatives are aligned with the organization’s mission, goals and strategic plan
- to measure and evaluate volunteer contributions
- to measure and evaluate volunteer management effectiveness

Years later, after many arguments, lots of mediocre coffee, and countless brainstorming sessions, our process was born. We developed a framework to accomplish our key measurement objectives: the Volunteer Resources Balanced Scorecard (VRBSc). The VRBSc, with its accompanying Standardized Volunteer Opinion Survey (SVOS), would work as a set of tools to provide us with the ability to measure volunteer impact and effectiveness over time.

We have four main goals that we believe are vital to any volunteer involvement strategy:

- to ensure that the contribution of volunteers is aligned with the goals of the organization
- to identify and provide a broader and more meaningful approach to measuring outcomes
- to establish more relevant reporting measures
- to promote greater understanding and support within our organizations for professional management of volunteers based on recognized standards

Based on the positive feedback from colleagues and the continued interest in this topic, we saw potential for this scorecard beyond healthcare settings and decided to bring the VRBSc and its methodology to a broader audience by publishing a book. Our lens for this book widened in hope of being relevant to anyone interested in measuring

the impact of volunteer engagement, regardless of setting. The book entitled “Measuring the Impact of Volunteers – A Balanced and Strategic Approach” is published by Energize, Inc. [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com) and has been favourably reviewed by Paula Speevak, President and CEO of Volunteer Canada:

“A terrific contribution to answering the question that has remained elusive for years: How do we fully capture and demonstrate the social and economic value and impact of volunteering? Impact is seen in the capacity of an organization, their services and programs, the quality of life of those they serve, the links to and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods, and, of course, in the growth and wellbeing of volunteers themselves. This book provides a guided tour through the theory and models of measuring the value and impact of volunteering with a step-by-step approach to creating a Volunteer Resources Balanced Score Card.”

### About the Author

*For twelve years Heather Hardie was responsible for the strategic leadership and management of all volunteer activities and programs at Canada’s largest Cancer Centre. This included developing and implementing policies and procedures that addressed all quality improvement and risk management issues around the integration of volunteers into placements and programs throughout the hospital. All this is to be achieved within the “reality” of a “workforce” with diverse motivations none of which were financially based!*

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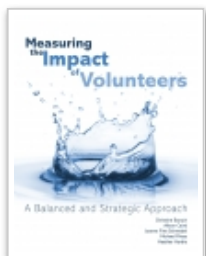
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