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Volunteer Management Analysis for the City of Las Vegas

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Volunteer Management Analysis

for the

City of Las Vegas

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Abstract

The City of Las Vegas current volunteer management program is unable to provide effective administration of its volunteers. We will discuss what type of volunteer management program would work best for the City of Las Vegas? Volunteer management models were examined to determine what best practices can be adopted by the City of Las Vegas. Research shows a correlation between citizen engagement, volunteerism in the community, and a better quality of life for citizens in communities that have active volunteer programs. Thirty-six jurisdictions were surveyed, most of which are in the Western United States, with four jurisdictions being highlighted. The two predominate models that were discovered were centralized and decentralized volunteer management models. A decentralized model allows jurisdictions the flexibility to allow individual departments to oversee their volunteer activities. A centralized model establishes a citywide volunteer coordinator which oversees most volunteer activities for a jurisdiction. Findings indicate that having a centralized program with a citywide volunteer coordinator can be beneficial to overall management of volunteer efforts and reporting those activities to the governing body.

Keywords: volunteer, management, citizen engagement

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Introduction

Social Capital

"The road to success is not crowded. Because while most are looking for ways to take, the truly successful people are finding ways to give. With a giving attitude, every situation is an opportunity for success." – Unknown (Energize, Inc., 2010)

The citizens of Las Vegas possess a very valuable asset, their willingness to give. Currently, the City of Las Vegas is not fully utilizing this asset. One way to make use of this resource is to implement a high functioning, more robust volunteer management program. Having a more robust program in place would provide avenues for actively engaging citizens in community services. For the last eight years, the City of Las Vegas has been below the nation's average volunteer rate[1]. On average between 2007 and 2009, Las Vegas was ranked 49 out of 51 large American cities in the areas of resident volunteering and hours served per resident (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010a). In 2000, Robert Putnam (2000) published *Bowling Alone* based on his extensive research of America's civic decline. His findings indicate that over the last 30-40 years there has been an increasing disconnect among families, friends, neighbors, and social structures. People are engaging more in isolated activities and behaviors. Therefore, they are losing the sense of social connectedness that is a foundation of our democratic society (Merrill Associates, 2003).

Nationally, levels of volunteerism vary based on many factors. Some factors include home ownership, foreclosure rates, unemployment, feelings of attachment to the community, work commute, education, or areas with high poverty[2] (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010). In Las Vegas, low levels of volunteerism may also be the result of high temperatures, gated communities, or the 24 hour nature of work within the community. Volunteering In America also

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[1] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Volunteer Rate
[2] See Appendices: Factors that Influence Volunteer Rates

suggests that low levels of community volunteering can be correlated to the number of local nonprofits. Nationally, there is an average of 4.45 nonprofit organizations per 1,000 residents. On average, Las Vegas only has 1.94 nonprofits per 1,000 city residents [3](General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010a).

In Putman's book, he explains the concept of social capital and the importance of citizen engagement in the community.

> In recent years social scientists have framed concerns about the changing character of American society in terms of the concept of 'social capital'…Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'…[However] A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

Putnam suggests that 100 years ago the United States faced a similar decline in social networks, but found ways to correct itself through the formation of new social structures that built social capital. He cites change came from the growth of organizations such as the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, Young Women's Christian Association, and the Urban League. Most of these organizations have a strong volunteer emphasis and build social capital through organized management (Putnam, 2000). Community projects support collective action, not under the scope of an organized nonprofit, but under the umbrella of a municipal corporation. This collective action binds the community together for a common purpose. Volunteerism is the bridge for groups to cross over from a position of desire to do good for the community, to the other side of accomplishing a need for society. Volunteerism is increasingly recognized as an important tool for building social capital (Merrill Associates, 2003).

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[3] See Appendices: Factors that Influence Volunteer Rates

Putnam contends that social bonds are a powerful predictor of life satisfaction, and if the loss of social capital continues, the effects will be profound. For example, communities with less social capital have lower educational performance, more teen pregnancy, increased child suicide, higher crime rates, lower voting rates, and the loss of other neighborhood quality of life indicators (Putnam, 2000).While his theory has been challenged, it has called attention to the concept of social capital (Merrill Associates, 2003). Las Vegas has lost social capital and is now seeing the profound, associated effects Putnam suggested. Societal values can be improved in Las Vegas through the practice of citizen engagement.

Background and Current Issue

City of Las Vegas Priority- Citizen Engagement

In March 2010, the City of Las Vegas' Mayor Oscar Goodman and City Council members adopted "Citizen Engagement" as one of its six priorities [2](City of Las Vegas, 2010b). This is important because all strategic plans, government actions, and fiscal decisions are aligned with one or more of these six priorities. In addition, City Manager Betsy Fretwell lists "citizen engagement" first among the "key initiatives in the local government administration" that she is "extensively involved in" as she oversees the operation of all municipal services for the city (City of Las Vegas, 2010a). Other priorities include sustainable, livable neighborhoods, vibrant urban fabric, fiscally sound government, pro-business environment, and safe city.

The positive effects of citizen participation can impact any one of the City's six priorities. One of those priorities, citizen engagement, can be accomplished through volunteerism[4]. It is important to recognize that volunteering represents more than just a non-paid asset to perform tasks for city government. It represents people who desire to be engaged actively in their community. They are

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[4] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Mission & Vision Statement, Values and Priorities

representative of a population that can be educated on the needs of the community (Sagawa, 2010).

Some of the most vocal supporters of city programs and services are those who volunteer for them and

have knowledge of the impact the city programs and services have on the community. The supply of

both organized and informal volunteers depends on people stepping forward in a spirit of personal

responsibility and community commitment. Public awareness of community problems and assets will

lead to better problem solving organizations and more informed public agendas (Sagawa, 2010).

Citizen engagement is the catalyst to achieve more livable neighborhoods, safer communities,

and having a more accountable government. Community support is paramount for change to occur in

neighborhoods. For example, crime reduction methods such as citizen watch groups who work with

law enforcement to improve the character of neighborhoods. Stronger citizen participation through

volunteerism can create the leadership needed to affect change and the voters to support it (Sagawa,

2010).

The City of Las Vegas continues to face significant economic challenges. The use of volunteers

is a means to assist some of the programs that are suffering due to cutbacks in staffing and overall

funding. In a recent article by Michelle Nunn (2010), she states "In challenging times, using volunteers

gives communities the power to both increase meaningful engagement with residents and discover

creative ways to meet expanding needs for local government services with limited resources" (Nunn,

2010). Citizen engagement is necessary for the community to support issues that require the most help.

The City of Las Vegas can emphasize citizen engagement to help the community survive the economic

recession with the help of volunteers.

Current Policy Environment

In 2009, Nevada had 415,700 volunteers. On average between 2007 and 2009, Nevada's

volunteer rates rank the state 50th among the 50 states and Washington D.C. More Specifically, Las

Vegas had 275,600 volunteers and of the averages from 2007 to 2009, Las Vegas was ranked 49th among the 51 large cities with 17.5 percent of its residents volunteering (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010a). These statistics on volunteerism indicate a systemically low rate of participation in Nevada and Las Vegas.

Research on City of Las Vegas volunteerism reveals that a volunteer policy exists to guide departments that operate with volunteers. The policy, "Policies and Procedures for Volunteer Workers for the City of Las Vegas,"[5] is administered by the City of Las Vegas Department of Human Resources. It indicates that volunteers must meet specific requirements before taking part in any operations on behalf of the City. Figure 1 details the procedures outlined in the policy.

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┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│Citizens shows│ ──▶  │  Volunteer   │ ──▶  │ Background *  │ ──▶  │  Drug test*  │
│   interest   │      │ application  │      │              │      │              │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
                                                                          │
                                                                          ▼
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ Department   │ ◀──  │Volunteer does│ ◀──  │ HR approves  │
│ reports to HR│      │   service    │      │  volunteer   │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
```
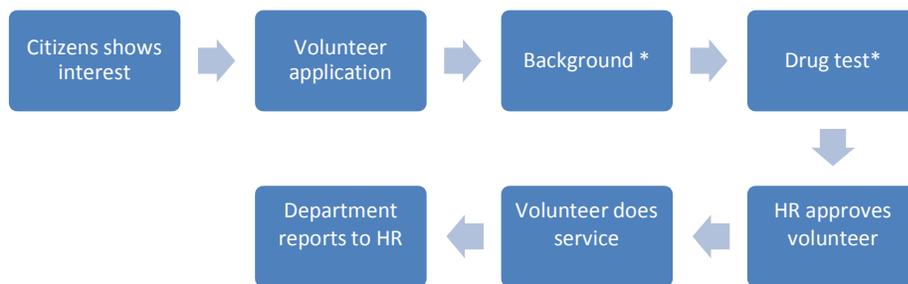
Figure 1. The process an applicant undergoes to volunteer for the City of Las Vegas.*

*Background check, including fingerprinting, and drug screening are for specific jobs.

In addition, the policy states:

- All volunteers will complete a Volunteer's Application[6] and forward it to Human Resources, Insurance Services Division.

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[5] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Volunteering Policy & City Manager Information Report 10/7/05
[6] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Volunteer Application

- The Insurance Services Division, upon receipt of the volunteer application form, will add the volunteer to the approved Volunteer Roster for each Department, and notify the sponsoring Department, in writing, of acceptance of the volunteer. No volunteer services will be performed prior to departmental receipt of this written approval.

- The sponsoring Department must report the names of all volunteers to the Insurance Services Division no later than the 5th day of the following month.

- When a volunteer has not worked for a 120 day period, they will be dropped from the Department's Active Volunteer Roster and must reapply to become an active volunteer in any program[7](City of Las Vegas, 2010c).

In addition to the defined policy that provides expected actions and results, city departments are also responsible for meeting specific requirements. For example, employees from Human Resources and the Insurance Services Division must verify whether the applicant should be accepted in the role of a volunteer. This is determined by analyzing the function of the service to be provided. An Analyst will assess the function, environment, any potential collective bargaining agreement conflicts, and if the service provided by the volunteer will create a dependency on the position.

Over the course of time, usage and interpretation of this policy has developed into a decentralized process allowing interpretation by each department. The policy was initially implemented to encompass the usage of all volunteers; meaning anyone providing voluntary service to the City of Las Vegas. However, during the initial consultation with departments that utilize volunteers, it was determined that only two fully adhere to the existing policy- Leisure Services and Human Resources.

Departments that follow the implemented policy consistently track the hours volunteers donate to the City via a Volunteer Roster, which is maintained by Human Resources. However, this tracking

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[7] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Volunteering Policy

system does not evaluate the effectiveness or overall impact volunteers have on city programs and services. In addition, Human Resources only records about 200 active volunteers. It was determined that other departments use volunteers, but are not reported or tracked (N. Stiles, personal communication, March 19, 2010).

Discovery

The problem begins with communication. Departments do not appear to be informed about the volunteer policy nor does the policy define a volunteer. Some different interpretations for volunteer include individuals performing court mandated community service, prisoner work details, neighborhood clean-up participants, Eagle Scout projects, and City employees volunteering in the community. There is no clear rule on whether these individuals are subject to the volunteer policy.

In addition to its lack of clarity, the policy is not enforced unilaterally. Departments are allowed to determine if and when they will adhere to the policy. As stated previously, some volunteers have not completed the appropriate application, been subject to drug or background checks, nor been tracked on the department Volunteer Roster. As a result, management cannot report impacts of volunteerism to the community, nor can they assess whether their efforts are beneficial.

The City of Las Vegas does not weigh the administrative costs of volunteer management against the benefits received through volunteerism. The City uses a performance-based management and budget system, which can be beneficial for the future volunteer management program in tracking its success and progress (City of Las Vegas, 2010b). Until relative performance measures are developed and used, the overall impact of volunteer efforts will not be accurately assessed. Lastly, this policy does not clarify the legal uncertainty associated with volunteering. The following concerns should be addressed: potential injury, liability coverage, required minimum age for operating

machinery, volunteers who serve in sensitive positions, and the need to have background checks for certain volunteers.

Method

Data Collection

Best practices on volunteer management were compiled and analyzed through data collection. The majority of the data collected are qualitative. Qualitative mediums used include electronic mail (email), telephone, and personal interview. Interviews were conducted with City of Las Vegas personnel to gain background information on its current volunteer programs. This includes feedback on possible solutions for the City's volunteer management program. Interviews were conducted with representatives from the City Manager's Office, Human Resources, Leisure Services, and Neighborhood Services.

Email addresses were obtained from city and county websites and other resources. After compiling the contact information, practitioners in the western regional jurisdictions of the United States were emailed a set of defined survey questions[8]. Responses were analyzed and additional information was solicited, as needed. Phone calls provided opportunities for more questions regarding the structure, or standard operating procedures regarding volunteer management programs.

The World Wide Web was used as a medium in the research process. Research was done through various websites. For example, Volunteering In America listed national volunteering statistics. City and county websites provided vital information and led to a better understanding of their volunteer programs. Information such as annual reports, policy, and volunteer openings were obtained via this medium. Also, some answers to the developed volunteer program criteria came from their

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[8] See Appendices: Sample Questionnaire to Cities/Counties Outside of Las Vegas

website(s)[9]. The United States Census website was used for demographic information for the

jurisdictions surveyed, as well as Independent Sector for the current hourly rate for volunteers.

In addition to the World Wide Web, a literature review was conducted in order to help develop

best practices and to formulate recommendations for the City of Las Vegas. Online journals and books

provided the majority of the literature review. Through theses mediums, a proposal was developed

providing possible solutions for the City of Las Vegas volunteer program management.

Cities Involved

Once the City of Las Vegas' current practices were understood, attention was placed on other

cities with volunteer programs. The following questions were formulated to evaluate volunteer

management policies of governmental entities:[10]

1. Does your city currently have a policy on volunteer programs?

2. Is it possible to get a copy of this stated policy?

3. What departments are involved in the policy management (HR, administration, etc)?

4. Does this policy have in influence on tracking and reporting (number of volunteers, hours
   served, etc)?

5. Do you have any reference to share? (e.g. How did you develop your program, best practices,
   benchmarks, examples of other programs, what did has not worked/challenges?)

This process began nationwide, looking at cities and counties that had either been accredited

for their volunteer program or had won awards, such as those recognized by the Corporation for

National & Community Service. Then, a decision was made to focus on cities and counties in the

Western United States. This included cities and counties in Arizona, California, Oregon, and

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[9] See Appendices: Sample Questionnaire to Cities/Counties Outside of Las Vegas
[10] See Appendices: Sample Questionnaire to Cities/Counties Outside of Las Vegas

Washington [11]. These cities were selected because of similarities to the City of Las Vegas with respect

to:

- Budget restraints
- Decline in economic downfall
- Statistics found on Volunteer In America
- Dollar value and hourly rate as reported by the Independent Sector

- Growth in land and population
- Diverse culture
- Challenges/opportunities
- Demographics (size, income, economic, social)

Analyzing Jurisdictions

Thirty-six cities and counties, in addition to the City of Las Vegas, were contacted. Of those

jurisdictions, fifteen had current and active volunteer policies[12].

Table 1
Number of cities and counties contacted by state

State	Number of Jurisdictions Contacted
Arizona	7 cities
California	8 cities and 1 county
Colorado	1 county and 2 departments
Florida	1 county
Indiana	1 city
Nevada	2 cities (not including Las Vegas)
Oregon	3 cities, 1 county, and 1 state program
Texas	1 city
Virginia	2 cities
Washington	4 cities and 1 state program

A comparative city was selected from Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington. They

exemplified program components that could be introduced to the City of Las Vegas. Below are

descriptions of those cities and their volunteer management practices.

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[11] See Appendices: Data Collected from Cities Contacted
[12] See Appendices: List of Cities Contacted

Current Volunteer Management Practices

City of Mesa, Arizona

It is estimated that in 2009, there were 1.2 million volunteers in Arizona. The average volunteer rates from 2007 to 2009 ranked Arizona 44[th] among the 50 states and Washington D.C. for volunteerism. Twenty-four percent of the residents in Arizona volunteer providing 168.5 million hours of service (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010a). It was estimated that in July 2008, Mesa Arizona's population was 462,823. The City of Las Vegas population was estimated at 558,383 for the same time period (Advameg, Inc., 2010).

City of Mesa Volunteer Coordinator Katie Brown provided information and literature on their volunteer management program. She demonstrated, both in emails and phone interviews, expertise and knowledge of its volunteer program (K. Brown, personal communication, June 17, 2010).

Having a specific volunteer coordinator to oversee volunteer opportunities and operations appears beneficial for engaging citizens in Mesa. This was determined through reviewing community oriented projects and programs, and discovering how volunteers are handled when seeking specific jobs within city government. The City of Mesa belongs to Cities of Service coalition; "Cities of Service is a bi-partisan coalition of the mayors of large and small cities from across our country who work together to engage citizens to address the great challenges of our time" (Cities of Service, 2010).

There is oversight on the performance measures recorded for Mesa's volunteer program. Performance measures determination is improved by having all city departments report their finding to the centralized Human Resource Department. Katie Brown utilizes the Independent Sector rate for calculating potential cost benefit. For 2008, Arizona was calculated at $19.25 (Indepenedent Sector, 2010).

While reviewing cities in Arizona, a comparison was made between Phoenix and Mesa. Research was conducted to compare the pros and cons of the Phoenix Model (decentralized volunteer management) versus the Mesa Model (centralized volunteer management). The Phoenix Model has a decentralized system of program-based oversight that works with Hands-On Greater Phoenix Volunteer Coalition and is also a coalition member with Cities of Service. Katie Brown indicated that the Phoenix model's partnership is limited to the scope of the contract (Hands-On Greater Phoenix) with the city. The Mesa model, with an in-house volunteer coordinator, has more flexibility in adapting to specific community needs. She also indicated that in Mesa, a background check can be dependent on the department in which the volunteer is used. If a person volunteers on an ongoing basis, background checks were usually performed.

In conclusion, when reviewing cities within the state of Arizona, the cities of Glendale, Mesa, and Tempe all have in-house volunteer coordinators. These coordinators act as the central point of contact for most of the city departments. In contrast, the cities of Phoenix and Tucson, as well as the County of Maricopa, rely upon outside organizations to coordinate community volunteers.

City of Sacramento, California

In 2009, there were approximately seven million volunteers in California. Comparing the average volunteerism from 2007 to 2009, this placed the state 41st among the 50 states and Washington D.C. for volunteerism. Approximately, 24.2 percent of the residents provided 935 million hours of service (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010b). It was estimated that in July 2008, Sacramento's (Sacramento County) population was 463,794 and Las Vegas' (Clark County) population was at 558,383(Advameg, Inc., 2010). In Sacramento, 414,900 volunteers were reported in 2009. With the average volunteer rates between 2007 and 2009, this ranked them 32nd among the 51

large cities, resulting in 38.1 percent of residents volunteer (General Corporation for National and
Community Service, 2010).

The City of Sacramento has an established volunteer program, as well as a published policy and
procedures manual for departments to follow. The centralized volunteer program provides a broad
source of expertise, talent, and manpower for the city (City of Sacramento Volunteer Program, 2010).
The city has a Volunteer Coordinator on staff to help administer the program citywide. Mary Lynn
Perry, current Volunteer Coordinator for the City of Sacramento, was the main contact. She oversees
developing and disseminating any information pertinent to the citywide volunteer program. She is also
tasked with developing quarterly reports that consist of the following: volunteer accomplishments,
departments that participate, number of volunteers, number of volunteer hours, and project cash values.
Sacramento also uses the Independent Sector to value the volunteer's labor. In 2008, California's
dollar value was $23.29 per hour (Independent Sector, 2010). Annual reports are compiled for the City
Managers to see what types of volunteer hours and activities are completed over each fiscal year.

In order to use volunteers, city departments are tasked with appointing a department volunteer
liaison, who is the Volunteer Coordinators' contact for questions regarding the department's program.
The liaison must also identify the following:

- tasks to be performed;

- number of hours requested and proposed schedule;

- skills necessary;

- required training to be provided; and

- anticipated duration of the assignment.

Department volunteer liaisons must attend meetings administered by the Volunteer
Coordinator. Sacramento has a citywide definition for a volunteer: "non-compensated individual who

offers services to a city department or affiliated non-profit agency." Sacramento has set definitions for the different types of volunteers, ranging from youth to professional. This eliminates any ambiguity among departments of what constitutes a volunteer.[13]

City of Portland, Oregon

In 2009, there were over one million volunteers in Oregon. On average it was found that between 2007 and 2009, Oregon placed 11[th] among the 50 states and Washington D.C. for volunteerism. It was also found that approximately, 33.8 percent of the residents provided 133.8 million hours of service (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010b). It was estimated that in July 2008, Portland's (Multnomah County) population was 557,706 and Las Vegas' (Clark County) population was at 558,383 (Advameg, Inc., 2010b & 2010c). In Portland, 653, 100 volunteers were reported in 2009. When reviewing the average of 2007 to 2009, this placed them 2[nd] among the 51 large cities, resulting in 37.1 percent of residence volunteer (General Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010).

The City of Portland does not have an overall city volunteer policy nor do they have a city volunteer coordinator. Portland allows each bureau, or department, to set its own policies and procedures for using volunteers. One stipulation that the city makes is that it will not cover volunteers under workman's compensation. As a decentralized volunteer management team, departments utilize the City's website to list all volunteer opportunities and information.

The City of Portland's website is not user friendly for citizens interested in looking for opportunities. Conversely, each department has their own web pages which are more user friendly. The City's website is currently being used by Commissions, Environmental Services, Special Projects, Parks and Recreation, and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement. Through these specific

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[13] See Appendices: City of Sacramento Volunteer Coordination

departments, there are opportunities to become involved in community coalitions, neighborhood associations, and community engagement projects.

Portland's Parks and Recreation has embraced the idea of "Friends Groups". With over 100 Friends Groups, community nonprofits and coalitions, Portland's Parks and Recreation documents over 450,000 volunteer hours annually (Volunteer Opportunities, 2010). These partnerships vary depending on the needs of each Friends Group. For example, Portland's Parks and Recreation may provide the program insurance and the Friends Group manages the volunteers through the City's application and background process. Other Friends Groups may provide their own insurance; therefore they process volunteers in their own application and background checks.

"The Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) provides coordination of Portland's neighborhood network" (Office of Neighborhood Involvement, 2010). This nationally recognized neighborhood system consists of 95 neighborhood associations and seven neighborhood district coalition offices located throughout the city. These district coalitions and offices provide support and technical assistance to the volunteer-based neighborhood associations, community groups and individual citizen-activists (Office of Neighborhood Involvement, 2010). A vital part of the ONI is organizing and maintaining neighborhood associations. ONI plays the role of the communication link between residents, neighborhoods, and City of Portland bureaus.

ONI also sponsors the Public Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC). This Council developed "An Outreach and Involvement Handbook for City of Portland Bureaus- A joint effort of citizens and bureaus staff" (Office of Neighborhood Involvement; City of Portand, Oregon, 2005). This handbook defines citizen involvement, why it is important, and outlines the best practices of managing volunteer outreach and participation.

In addition to volunteer opportunities found on its website, Portland partners with Hands On Greater Portland, home to their Corporate Volunteer Council (Corporate Volunteer Council, 2010), and Oregon Volunteers, the Oregon Commission for Voluntary Action and Services. Oregon Volunteers' mission includes to "promote and support the AmeriCorps and the programs that utilize AmeriCorps, volunteerism, and citizen engagement to strengthen Oregon Communities." (About Orgeon Volunteers, 2010).The 15-25 members on the Commission are appointed by the Governor. This program was established in 1994, under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, under the Oregon State Statute 458.555 (About Orgeon Volunteers, 2010). Oregon Volunteer's goals include developing and maintaining a clearinghouse of Oregon volunteer resources, supporting the implementation of the "Oregon Plan for Volunteerism," promoting volunteerism statewide, being an active participant in Oregon's service learning community, and creating and maintaining a direct service program to actively involve Oregon residents in building their community.

City of Seattle Washington

In 2009, 1.8 million volunteers were reported in the state of Washington. More specifically, 975.1 thousand volunteers (26.8 percent) were reported in Seattle. From the reported data from 2007 to 2009, this placed Washington as 10[th] among the 50 states and Washington D.C. and Seattle 4[th] among the 51 large cities. In July of 2008, it was estimated Seattle's (King County) population was 598,541 and Las Vegas' (Clark County) population was at 558,383 (Advameg, Inc., 2010).

A phone interview was conducted with City of Seattle Chief Service Officer and member of the Mayors' Office, Lynda S. Petersen, (L. Peterson, personal communication, June 13, 2010). The City of Seattle does not have an established volunteer policy. For city-based events, individuals must sign up as a volunteer, but are managed at the department level. The City's volunteer program is decentralized. Each department uses volunteers as they see fit and reports volunteer hours and

activities on their own terms. The numbers are reported to the Mayor's Office on an annual or quarterly basis.

Through the decentralized process, the city does not have a volunteer coordinator. Each department uses the City of Seattle's website to inform community members of volunteer opportunities. The website offers opportunities to donate to community nonprofits, lists city volunteer projects, lists community volunteering opportunities for local nonprofits, and provides global volunteering information. The departments that use this process are City Attorney, Public Utilities, Municipal Court, Parks and Recreation, Public Libraries, Animal Shelter, Emergency Management, and Department of Neighborhoods (City of Seattle, 2010).

Because of the decentralized process, the definition of a volunteer varies. In the Mayors' Office, an intern or a graduate assistant is not considered a volunteer. Individuals who receive court appointed volunteer hours are usually assigned to the County. Therefore, the city departments have little interaction with them. Seattle has two different types of volunteers, those who work events and others who work with vulnerable populations. For example, those who volunteer within the police department or those who work with children, go through a background check.

Seattle elects not to report the measureable impact of volunteering in dollar amounts. Although Independent Sector reports a dollar amount based on the hours and services the citizens of Seattle provide. The City does not want a misconception that the services volunteers provide could replace jobs or incomes of its citizens. Seattle, like Mesa and Phoenix, is a part of the Cities of Service coalition. Ms. Petersen is tasked with identifying current issues the city is facing and how volunteers can be used to address them. She made it clear that the goal of this program is not to increase the amount of volunteers but to identify issues the city is facing and how volunteers can be used to resolve them.

Results

The policy of implementing a more robust volunteer management system is necessary for the City of Las Vegas to:

- Effectively track time and effectiveness of the volunteer work product.

- Determine cost effectiveness of volunteers supporting City of Las Vegas services.

- Measure the benefit of citizen engagement.

- Develop community partnerships and nonprofits.

As indicated by Bardach, it is only sensible to see what kinds of solutions have been tried in other jurisdictions, agencies, or locales (Bardach, 2009). This best practices research presents many challenges as well as simple solutions to formulate a volunteer management program for the City of Las Vegas. Simple solutions will mimic the means and methods of jurisdictions facing similar challenges with managing volunteers. The challenge is choosing the appropriate volunteer management program for the City of Las Vegas. Obviously, a proven volunteer management model or concept that works for one jurisdiction may not work for the City of Las Vegas. Often times, the overall management of volunteers can be political, publicized, and can impact the quality of life for the community. Consequently, the approach to, and actual implementation of, a volunteer management system can be just as important as having a good plan on paper.

An analysis of the jurisdictional surveys reveals that the data is somewhat ambiguous. First, it is difficult to establish a benchmark. This is most likely due to not knowing the intimate details of the organization and the reasons why they choose a specific management model for their jurisdiction. The results of the research cannot guarantee whether a volunteer coordinator is the best solution for a particular jurisdiction. The quality or efficiency of the specific volunteer management system for each jurisdiction is not evaluated in this paper. The importance a jurisdiction places on citizen engagement

and its volunteer programs is evident through websites that show a broad range of volunteer opportunities and accomplishments.

Research focused on 36 jurisdictions in the Western United States for a number of reasons. The Western States are experiencing the same challenges in population growth, diversity, economic downturn, and vary in attitudes towards volunteering. Research has indicated that each jurisdiction has migrated to a particular management model out of necessity, and availability of resources.

The four month time frame for this study narrowed the research window on the evaluation of best practices of other cities that have volunteer management systems. The overall implementation of the recommendations specified in this study requires, a collaborative effort of all stakeholders. Stakeholders include city employees, nonprofit groups, civic organizations, volunteers and those who interact with programs and services affected by volunteers. This will include many meetings, future evaluation of volunteer interaction with city programs, and some decisions by city management on the overall direction and oversight of volunteers. This research can only make recommendations, related to the structure of the volunteer management system presented.

There was a response rate of 67 percent of the jurisdictions surveyed. Of the 24 jurisdictions that responded to the survey, 42 percent of those indicated they have a formal policy regarding volunteer management. With the other 58 percent, there was a response of no formal policy by eight jurisdictions and the remainder did not identify a policy[14]. The research focused on important aspects or considerations that could be incorporated into a future City of Las Vegas volunteer management program. The survey and subsequent, interviews and emails with responding jurisdictions showed some trends in the way jurisdictions internally administered volunteers.

Two management styles or models emerged. The first was a decentralized model where individual departments are given the leeway to recruit and manage volunteers in a manner best suited

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[14] See Appendices: List of Cities Contacted

for their programs and services. There is little oversight by a central authority such as a jurisdictional manager's office or in another department separate from where the volunteer is working. The second management model is where there is a dedicated volunteer coordinator. This person acts as the coordinator within the jurisdiction for all potential volunteers to filter through to a requested program or position. The volunteer coordinator will normally track the outcomes of time donated and report those outcomes in the appropriate means to their supervisor or governing body.

Four jurisdictions were highlighted because their volunteer management model has elements that can be implemented within the City of Las Vegas. These jurisdictions are Mesa, Arizona; Sacramento, California; Seattle, Washington; and Portland, Oregon. Each of these jurisdictions has differences in regards to their demographics, management style, community support, and success of their volunteer programs. It was determined that these four would provide the best starting point for extrapolating best practices into the City of Las Vegas.

Discussion

Centralized Volunteer Management Model

The benefits of implementing this model can vary from enhancing the city as a whole to benefiting citizen volunteers. The positive effect of a centralized system for the city begins with organization. Each of the 19 departments will have a clear understanding of the process. This understanding includes citywide policy and procedures, application, reporting, tracking, and measuring. This will allow better oversight, more accountability, and reduction of duplication of services within the City[15]. In addition, hiring a person with the primary role of volunteer coordinator will free members of departments from maintaining their volunteer programs, or asking current staff to take on roles that are outside of their job description. Information such as volunteer hours, grant funding oversight, resources, and annual reports can be developed and disseminated to departments,

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[15] See Appendices: Cost of Background and Drug Tests to the City of Las Vegas

the City Manager's Office, and City Council. Having a single point of contact and voice for city volunteerism, the coordinator can also be a liaison to third party organizations, nonprofits, and citizens. Lastly, this position would be responsible for community outreach and citizen engagement which can entail organizing and recognizing community volunteers.

One challenge of a centralized system is the city budget. A volunteer coordinator will be an added position, and potentially an added cost. Office space and other overhead costs should be considered when funding the program. With the implementation of the centralized model, ownership and inherited entitlement challenges may also occur.

Decentralized Volunteer Management Model

The framework will entail a completely decentralized volunteer management program. Departments will appoint a current staff member to take on the additional role of volunteer coordinator. This person will be responsible for reporting, tracking, and administrating their departmental volunteer program.

In the decentralized process the ideal situation would be to appoint a current staff member as the departmental volunteer coordinator. This person would be the point of contact for citizens, other departments, and managers. This model gives freedom to each department. They will have the ability to develop a volunteer process that best suits their needs, including department specific applications, background checks, drug tests, and volunteer tracking. They will also have the freedom to develop collaborations with community groups and nonprofits. Unlike the centralized model, this process will not add a salary or other resource costs to the City. In addition, departments can keep a personal relationship with ongoing volunteers.

The downside to a decentralized model includes the possibility to overload the departmental volunteer coordinator. The time spent by each department volunteer coordinator will need to be tracked. Current employees will be asked to take on additional work and may also have the expectation of working outside of their current job descriptions. Without a centralized person, there will not be a single person to champion volunteerism for the City. A decentralized system does not give the City a strong centralized tracking, reporting, or evaluation process. Each department will process and report according to departmental perspectives.
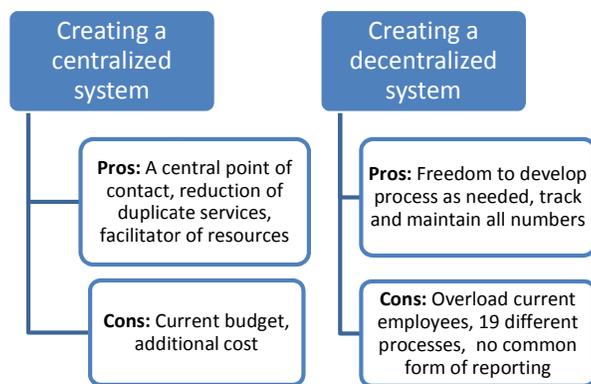
Figure 2. The advantages and disadvantages of the centralized versus decentralized volunteer management model.

Current City of Las Vegas Volunteer Management Model

The ramifications of keeping the policy that is currently in place would be to renew the awareness of the guidelines with each department, as well as the Human Resources department. This process entails centralizing the process of reporting and tracking that each department must complete. This will require upper management oversight to ensure each department follows procedures.

On the positive side, maintaining the current model will not disrupt the City departments with change allowing department to keep their personal relationships with ongoing volunteers. The downside to maintaining the current model is the City remains without accurate reporting of volunteer efforts, which makes it difficult to substantiate the benefits of volunteerism. Maintaining the current model will also incur expenses to the City by sending people through background checks. According to the current management practices, the City is still liable for the safety of those volunteering. By maintaining the current model, departments will not value volunteerism as a priority for the City. As stated above, by not having a more robust volunteer management program departments may continue to disregard volunteer policies and procedures and policies will continue to be unenforced. There will be a continuation of inaccurate statistics for volunteerism, lack of defined roles of volunteers, and inability to meet the City's Priorities.

Recommendation

The recommendations are that the City of Las Vegas adopt and enforce the centralized volunteer management program. This model will provide for better citizen engagement, measurement of program performance, and an overall improvement to services delivered to the Las Vegas community. Using a phased approach, the City will have an opportunity to evaluate each step, make changes as needed, and move forward towards an end goal that will be better received and facilitated by their employees. This continuum will also build a stronger foundation which will increase its likelihood to function long-term.

First, the city must revise its policy for volunteer workers. The policy must include a clear definition for a volunteer. Departments need to understand the criteria for volunteers before they are expected to comply with rules that govern them. To help create clear communication, the policy should also include an appendix that specifies common functions for volunteers in each department. These

appendices can be more readily revised without changing the core provisions of the program. The application requirements must also be adjusted. Although some volunteer functions require in-depth background checks, the majority of volunteer positions do not.

The second phase encompasses education, communication and enforcement. Research showed that only 42 percent of departments that used volunteers were aware of a policy to be followed[16]. After a clear policy is established, the city should educate all of its directors, managers, and supervisors. Emphasis should be placed on the simple requirements, importance of accountability, and the impact volunteerism will have on their services and our community. After creating buy-in from staff, each department will develop additional uses for volunteers that will help the city accomplish its priorities without increasing potential liability that currently exists. Management must also hold departments accountable. Although education will be ongoing, management must also take steps to ensure that the policy is not circumvented after it is communicated to all decision makers.

As departments adjust to the policy and increase volunteerism, internal supervisors will become proficient with tracking the criteria established by the revised policy for volunteers. This new position will ensure that the foundation of the program is solid and will grow the program to an advanced model for local governments to emulate. The citywide Volunteer Coordinator should have access and visibility to liaison with each department to initiate or improve their volunteer program. The coordinator will also have the authority to enforce the rules of the policy on behalf of the City Manager. Performance measures can be closely monitored and aligned with the City's priorities. Filling the Volunteer Coordinator position will be a critical step toward reaching the final phase of an effective volunteer management program.

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[16] See Appendices: City of Las Vegas Departments Contacted

The first priority for the new citywide Volunteer Coordinator[17] should be to establish categories of volunteers. Based on legal statutes, their experience, and feedback from departments including the City Attorney, the citywide Volunteer Coordinator can create categories such as a community ambassador, a professional volunteer, and an executive intern.
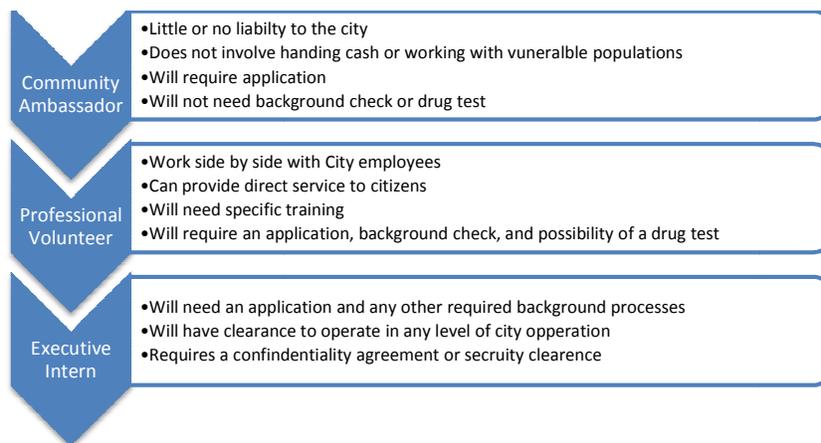

Community Ambassador
- Little or no liabilty to the city
- Does not involve handing cash or working with vuneralble populations
- Will require application
- Will not need background check or drug test

Professional Volunteer
- Work side by side with City employees
- Can provide direct service to citizens
- Will need specific training
- Will require an application, background check, and possibility of a drug test

Executive Intern
- Will need an application and any other required background processes
- Will have clearance to operate in any level of city opperation
- Requires a confindentiality agreement or security clearance

Figure 3. Three tier of volunteer categories

The ambassador will serve in a capacity that creates little or no liability for the City. For example, this volunteer will paint walls and fire hydrants, pick up trash at special events, and a host of other duties that do not involve cash, interaction with children or elderly persons, or duties that are not supervised by a city employee. The ambassador will not be subject to background checks and drug testing. The professional volunteer will serve along side of other professionals in the organization and maybe called upon to deliver services directly to citizens of any age with little or no supervision. This volunteer would require specific training, the ability to write reports, and would be subject to a background check and possibly a drug test at the discretion of the department. Examples of the professional volunteer include Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers,

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[17] See Appendices: Volunteer Coordinator Position Description

receptionists, instructors, coaches, and SafeKey employees. The executive volunteer would be subject

an application and any of the other requirements as determined by the Director of the department. This

volunteer would have the clearance to operate in any level of the city and could require confidentiality

agreements or security clearance. Examples of operation could include special projects working

directly with the Mayor and Council, consultant work for the City Manager, or as an intern with a

Department Head. The level of exposure, responsibility, and liability should determine the application

requirements for this category of volunteers.

After updating the volunteer policy, implementing the structured categories for volunteers, and

maintaining compliance, enforcement, and reporting, the volunteer coordinator's second priority would

be to establish public-private and public-nonprofit partnerships with nonprofit organizations, funding

agencies, and other entities that could provide human resources, best practices, and financial support

for the program. For instance, the Volunteer Center of Southern Nevada manages volunteers that have

cleared various background checks and applications. As part of an agreement, the organization can

accept responsibility for the volunteers that are provided to the city and dramatically impact

volunteerism in quantity, quality, and consistency. Clark County's Fusion Center, a center designed to

receive and disseminate intelligence for homeland security has established a partnership with the

Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit Southern Nevada (VHRU). VHRU staffs the front desk, checks

visitors in and out, answers phones, and provides other services to staff at the facility. Besides human

resources, this priority also includes identifying and applying for grants and donations. Reliable

revenue streams may be attainable to support the growth of the program and its staff. Attending

conferences and networking with other leaders in the field will ensure that the program remains at the

level of a world class city (Volunteer Homeland Reserve Unit, 2010).

        After the program has established itself as a proficient and credible operation, the citywide

Volunteer Coordinator would be charged with a substantial communication campaign to the

community. This campaign should include a user-friendly website that allows easy registration and

application to the program, information about opportunities to volunteer such as necessary

commitments, dates, times, and requirements, and appeal to potential volunteers beyond the City of

Las Vegas. As the entertainment capital of the world, the city has an opportunity to target

organizations that convene in Las Vegas to volunteer as part of their visit. If only one percent of

visitors volunteered while in the community, Las Vegas would add over 300,000 volunteer units per

year to its program based on the visitor volume listed by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor

Authority (2010). Accomplishing these objectives would not only engage the citizens of Las Vegas, it

would create a sense of community ownership, empowerment, inclusion and value that is absent for

many members of the Las Vegas community. It could also add a new element that could attract more

financial resources to the economy by increasing visitors and extending their stay to volunteer. This

would not only impact services to the community, it would impact revenue for the business

community.

        Although some of these recommendations may seem implausible, they are not. There is no

specific time requirement for any phase. The city may determine that accomplishing only one or two

phases of the program meets their needs. But as the city progresses through the implementation and

evaluation of each phase, the city will find that they have embarked upon a mission that combines best

practices from across the country, builds partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations, and

takes volunteerism to a height that no other community can likely achieve. Further research is

recommended to evaluate the progress made by the City of Las Vegas on improving the overall

management of volunteers under its supervision.
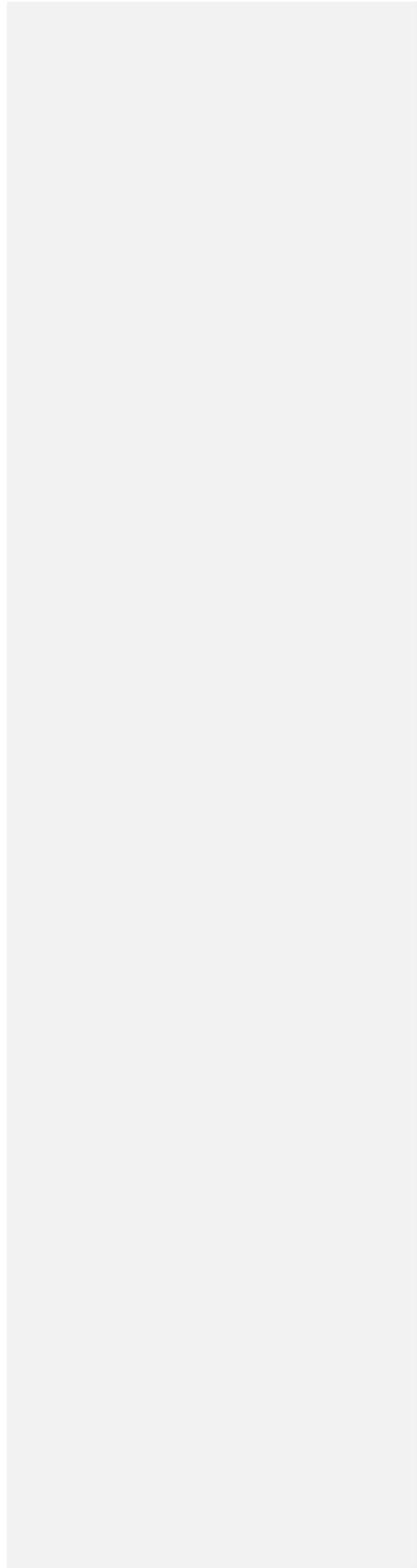
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