

City of Las Vegas Volunteer Management Policy Analysis

Summary

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Dr. Chris Stream

Robert Fash, Jose Rodriguez,

Bert Washington & Heather Whitesides

The City of Las Vegas current volunteer management program is unable to provide effective administration of its volunteers. The City's decentralized model of the volunteer management process currently varies by department, resulting in difficulty in administering the volunteer program citywide. In a decentralized system, each department uses different methods. In addition, departments show a sense of ownership and collaboration with the volunteers in which they utilize. A decentralized process also resulted in lack of information reporting, improper following of policy, and little to no follow-up from department management. In this capacity, the city is unaware of a true representation of the value the community provides. In the end, the city would like to be able to report the true benefit of having a volunteer program to the City Council, and help to administer an effective citywide volunteer program.

In March 2010, the City of Las Vegas Mayor and Council adopted citizen engagement as one of its six priorities. All strategic plans, government actions, and fiscal decisions for the City should align with one of the City's six priorities. 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. Other Las Vegas priorities include sustainable livable neighborhoods, vibrant urban fabric, fiscally sound government, pro-business environment, and safe city.

With a main focus on volunteerism, citizen engagement can assist the City accomplish its mission, "to provide residents, visitors and the business community with the highest quality municipal services in an efficient, courteous manner and to enhance the quality of life through planning and visionary leadership." Working within the mission, it is sought to answer the following question: "What type of volunteer management program would work best for the City of Las Vegas?"

As stated above, each department currently operates in decentralized model. Some departments are compliant with the current volunteering policy and others are not. For example, some departments do not report services rendered by volunteers for the department, nor do they follow the required background check processes. There are consequences to not defining the desired process the City would like to have with their volunteer management program. Most importantly, not identifying the processes clearly will perpetuate the under achievement or under utilization of volunteers in and for the City of Las Vegas. Clarification can also benefit City Management; with a clear reporting and numbers management technique in place, the City of Las Vegas will be able to accurately develop a dollar value from the impact of volunteer efforts.

There are individuals and groups that seek to support community efforts. Currently, these citizens have no clear system of contacts or options available to them. This lack of structure can cause community members to not take pride in their community or feel their city government does not care for the community either. The situation is currently unacceptable; the likelihood the problem will become worse is probable. Therefore, it is concluded:

- Current economic conditions limit the city's ability to supply needed services. Volunteer's can help offset the costs for these services, but if the overall management/outreach is not available, then volunteers will find it difficult to participate.
- City council will not visualize the true benefits of community engagement without a structured volunteer program.
- Lack of consistency in enforcement and reporting.

In order to move forward, a clear understanding of how different departments view the current management structure should be developed. In an analysis, four departments within the

City of Las Vegas (Leisure Services, Neighborhood Services, Human Resources, and the City Manager's Office) were questioned at the request of the City. Each department has their own interpretation of what a volunteer is and what is necessary for a volunteer to be associated with official City programs. The following paragraphs will highlight the departments' questioned by the study group:

Neighborhood Services- indicates there is a draft program administration manual, but it has not been adopted officially. Its representative, Maria Castillo Couch, presented some significant background on how her department interacts with volunteer groups and the need to track and prequalify their activities and participation.

Leisure Services- represented by Edward Jost, has a different viewpoint on the need to have all volunteers go through a screening process before volunteering for the city. This may be a result of his Department's interaction with youth and senior activities, which can require prequalification of persons who work with these vulnerable age groups.

Human Resources- Nancy Stiles shared tracking sheets of the information given to her by city department's that report volunteer hours donated to the City of Las Vegas. Recently she was given the task of overseeing the volunteer tracking and was not familiar with the potential conflict volunteer activities may have job duties of persons represented in the collective bargaining process.

City Manager's Office- Brian Knudson was interviewed briefly and provided some insight on the City Manager's viewpoint and desire on volunteer management oversight within the City of Las Vegas. The City Manager wishes to have some uniformity in the management of volunteers. There is also a desire to track all time and overall outcomes of volunteer activities so the activities can be reported in a meaningful way.

It appears that the volunteerism requires governmental support for the citizens of the City of Las Vegas. According to Volunteering In America, Las Vegas community averaged 259,800 volunteers per year between 2007 and 2009. This ranks Las Vegas as 49th among the 51 large cities. During the assessment of why the City's volunteerism rate is so low, questions arose such as: are there not volunteer opportunities for citizens? How do citizens find out information about volunteering for their city? Can the City's low volunteerism be related to the City's volunteer management program? These questions assisted in establishing the City's current practices used today.

Not having a cost benefit analysis of a volunteer program has kept the City Manager's Office uninformed about effectiveness of volunteer efforts. Also, although there is a policy in place that states each department is to report volunteer progress to the Human Resources Department by the fifth of every month, only two departments was found to actually report its numbers. This inability to follow policy, as well as have no accountability of tracking and reporting performance measures, can also stem for poor departmental camaraderie. Departments do not communicate which could also cause problems for the organizational culture and make up. By not communicating their practices or sharing information, there is a lack of consistency in reporting. This results in departmental separation, and no uniformity in reporting methods, tracking practices or management reporting.

In order to address some of the factors that play a role in the City's volunteer management program some policies were identified through best practices. The following descriptions are brief outlines:

