



Nonprofits and Volunteers in North Dakota Communities

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Abstract

This study looks at non-profit organizations in North Dakota to see how they attract and keep volunteers, how volunteer hours can be used to draw funding to nonprofits, and the increasingly important role non-profit groups play in local economies by creating jobs, services, and acting as a voice for those who might not be heard otherwise. Results show how universities can support local communities by developing research data nonprofit groups can use to solve practical problems, by acting as a bridge between student volunteers and appropriate organizations, and by creating a journal or online site communities can use to connect with each other and as a resource for information. This paper examines the following questions: which kinds of volunteer work do the people in North Dakota consider beneficial? What do residents consider to be the main benefits of volunteer work in U.S. society? What do they consider to be the main problems and challenges associated with volunteer work in U.S. society? The research used qualitative methods. The study made use of focus group data and panel discussions analysis published in academic journals. The research concluded that the main issues confronting volunteer organizers are limited resources, and the need for information and knowledge about volunteer efforts in North Dakota. In these circumstances community engagement centers serve as vital sources of news and information. They can also serve as a prospective mobilizing platform for volunteer organizations.

Key words: Volunteering work; Community engagement; Opportunities for engagement and university collaborations

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INTRODUCTION

People around the world volunteer to support their friends, family, neighbors, and communities. Non-profit organizations are well-represented in American history and volunteerism remains part of the American legacy. Around eighty-nine percent of households in America give money to charitable organizations. In addition, around forty-four percent of adults contribute their time to work for charity (Mutz & Murray, 2006). One modern urban myth claims people volunteer because they have nothing else to do, but people volunteer for many different reasons (Mutz & Murray, 2006). The definition of “volunteer” includes people who provide their services, in terms of time and skills, without any sort of monetary benefit (Starnes, 2004). If boredom is not the basis for volunteering, and volunteers are not paid, what motivates people to volunteer? This paper will use existing studies and data collected in North Dakota communities to discuss some of the reasons why people feel the need to volunteer, to build their own organizations if an appropriate non-profit group is not available, and to examine what volunteer resources non-profits need to reach their goals. According to *Volunteering in America* (2011):

Volunteering and Civic Engagement in North Dakota trends and highlights overview overall, in North Dakota in 2011: 30.6% of residents volunteer, ranking them 16th among the 50 states in ND 71.9% do favors for their neighbors. 90.1% eat dinner with their family a few times a week or more. 48.6% discuss politics a few times a month or more. There are 158,280 volunteers for 14.1 million hours of service and \$306.4 million of service contributed. (p.1)

Nonprofit organizations are part of the American legacy. Nonprofit groups draw people who want to save

and serve others, and to influence public policy by giving those they represent a public voice (National Council of Nonprofits, 2013; Bradburn, 2009). Voluntary work and community service have become increasingly important in recent times (AmeriCorps VISTA, 2011). Studies show people volunteer for personal and practical reasons, and communities benefit economically and through improved quality of life for residents. Volunteers benefit through personal association with others, adding skills to their resumes, making their voices heard and by knowing they are improving their communities (Prins et al., 2010). Communities benefit because non-profit organizations create jobs and draw funding for economic development. While citizens benefit through volunteer efforts, non-profits must make an effort to attract and keep compatible volunteers. Effective collaboration between communities and universities can create bridges between researchers and existing data, systems to collect and disseminate data, and student volunteers (Cravens, 2007; Boaz & Muller, 1992). This study focuses on volunteering, opportunities for engagement with nonprofits, and volunteer efforts in North Dakota communities.

Research questions are: which kinds of volunteer work do the people in North Dakota consider beneficial? What do residents consider to be the main benefits of volunteer work in U.S. society? What do they consider to be the main problems and challenges associated with volunteer work in U.S. society? Qualitative methods are used in this research. The study made use of focus group data and panel discussions analysis published in academic journals. The literature review explores different topics such as volunteering for community and opportunities for engagement, volunteers in North Dakota communities and volunteering for community and the need for information and knowledge.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Volunteering for Community and Opportunities for Engagement

First, why do people volunteer? Many people say they want to give back to their communities. In a way, it is a form of payback for what the community gives them (Siva, 2009). Some are motivated by different religious and philanthropic views. Some religions consider charity to be an important part of worship. Many people show charity by contributing money to charitable organizations. Community service is an option for those whose financial situation may not allow them to contribute money. They can give back to the community through volunteer work, by giving “time and expertise to different organizations” (Siva, 2009, p.9). Volunteers get a pure sense of unadulterated satisfaction when they give back to their communities. Volunteers generally have better self-esteem. Many people feel better about themselves

if they do something for the community (Dummies, 2011). Volunteers can learn different skills while giving some of their time to others and add these skills to their resumes (Snyder et al., 2000). In this age of increased unemployment, improved job skills can motivate people to volunteer when they are between jobs. Many seniors, particularly retirees, are active volunteers. Rather than sitting at home while their skills go to waste, they volunteer to chase away boredom, socialize and make new friends. Through their service, they gain the feeling that their services are needed. Socialization and affirmation through volunteer work prevents depression in old age (Siva, 2009). People of all ages associate happiness and satisfaction with being part of the bigger picture in their communities, no matter how small or big. Sometimes people are motivated to volunteer for personal reasons. Many people work for a cause, such as cancer or other diseases, because they have experienced the pain of losing someone close. They might volunteer either to find a cure, or just to be there for people who suffer from the same condition (D’Armond, 2013). According to Volunteers of America (2013) people in the U.S. and North Dakota volunteer because

Volunteering is the perfect way to feel connected to their community. The simple act of offering their skills and enthusiasm will positively impact the lives of others, as well as their own. The intent of volunteerism is to both generate and harness the community’s desire to assist in the overall improvement of the quality of life for everyone. Each individual brings a unique perspective, which fosters relationships and interaction with others (p.1).

Non-profit organizations exist around the world, working for millions of causes. These groups support communities in every country who have great needs that require care and love. Non-profit organizations address the needs of the different communities through service and finances. Total contributions to nonprofit organizations amounted to at least \$241 billion in 2004. The figure shows the number of people who want to contribute to charity (Mutz & Murray, 2006). These non-profits draw different volunteers who want to care for others. They also work efficiently to give the poor a public voice they can use to affect public policy (Council of Nonprofits, n.d). The need for these nonprofit organizations remains particularly important in rural communities, who often face shrinking populations and dropping community budgets. In North Dakota, for example, these organizations contribute almost 10% of the state’s Gross Domestic Product (North Dakota Association of Nonprofit Organizations, 2000). These figures highlight the important role non-profits play, the value of volunteerism, and support developing new organizations, when needed, in these rural communities.

If a community does not have volunteer opportunities and people still want to volunteer, they can pursue two options. One option, provided by Mike Selvon (2013),

is working with other communities. Selvon (2013) says serving other communities can be extremely beneficial and satisfying for the soul. When the earthquake hit Pakistan many people from around the globe sent financial aid and many volunteered to work for the relief operations. When major disasters occur, community service proves to be particularly satisfying because this is where one is helping someone who really is in need. This type of community work can require volunteers to use their volunteer time and often travel at their own expense to a place where they work hard and live in miserable conditions. The volunteer work in such areas can include digging trenches to provide water for the community, building houses for those who may have lost their houses in natural disasters such as flood and earthquakes, and digging pits for latrines (Selvon, 2013).

If no non-profit groups are available in a community, Selvon's (2013) second option would be to open a new community group. This is no easy feat. It requires money, proper marketing, advertising, organizers, and managers and of course volunteers to make the organization run. Starting a new non-profit group takes a lot of passion for a cause. Imran Khan, the famous celebrated cricketer, philanthropist and politician, established the Shaukat Khanam Cancer Hospital, one of the best in the world. He succeeded because he had the zeal and the passion to take the initiative. Another organization that grew from passion is Habitat for Humanity. Founded in 1976 by two farmers determined to end homelessness, the organization has built more than 200,000 homes in more than 100 countries. These examples show community service rests on the phrase "when people work together, they are stronger" (Mutz & Murray, 2006). Non-profits need different resources. Resource sharing, including wealth, time, effort, knowledge and ideas all form the necessary steps to ensure the success of an organization. This is one way society as a whole benefits from resource sharing (Mutz & Murray, 2006).

1.2 Volunteers in North Dakota Communities and Opportunities for Engagement

Universities and their surrounding communities can learn a lot from each other, but it can take planning and effort to develop effective relationships. This article examines the results of the Preliminary Report on Community-University Conversations in North Dakota and compares the findings from these focus groups to the panel discussion on community volunteering held during the 4th Annual Community Connect Forum at the new Community Center in Mountain, North Dakota on April 30, 2011.

Today nonprofits have become valuable assets for small, rural communities in North Dakota. Nonprofit organizations registered in North Dakota by 50% between 1990 and 2000 and were responsible for expending \$1.8

billion in 2000, nearly 10% of the state's Gross Domestic Product (Rakow, Helegson & Weber, 2004). These groups bring foundation and federal grant money to the state, they develop and employ growing numbers of people in the work force, and they contribute to improved living standards in their communities. Despite their important contributions, nonprofit groups are often overlooked. This article develops a more comprehensive picture of the challenges North Dakota nonprofits face by examining results from focus groups and the discourse from a panel discussion to see what new concepts emerge. Including insights from the panel discussion and the audience comments during the question and answer period afterwards will update and inform the existing data on the status of nonprofit groups.

The focus groups identified four content areas as most important to the participants. These were (a) the need for information and knowledge the communities could easily access and use, (b) production of information and knowledge they could use and share, (c) developing effective community-university collaborations, and (d) a community-university journal to offer useful, accessible information to the communities (Community-University Forum Focus Group, 2008). The discourse from the panel discussion on volunteering in the community was examined in relation to these four points.

The study is limited by available data on nonprofits in rural North Dakota communities. Most of the data was drawn from the preliminary report on focus groups printed in 2008 and from detailed notes taken during a panel discussion on volunteering presented at the 4th Annual Community Connect Forum in 2011. However, the research is based on data specific to communities in North Dakota, which are the focus of the study, and developed by reputable sources. Themes are identified by examining key terms used by speakers in the panel discussions, then connecting them to similar findings developed through focus groups.

While the reports and panel discussion used as primary resources for this study target particular goals and therefore may create gaps in the conclusions, we feel the results are well-supported. The Preliminary Report reviews asked focus groups what sort of information resource would be most useful to them, the Opportunities for Engagement study asked how the University of North Dakota could most effectively link academic resources with the needs of the communities, and the Community Connect Forum panel discussion drew experts and audience members active in nonprofit community groups. The results from the three studies show overlapping responses to questions about needs, expectations, and experiences.

2. VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion was organized around a key theme, “How can we grow the spirit and effectiveness of volunteerism in our communities?” Dr. Hunter Goodman led a panel discussion. Goodman (2008) represented the Arkansas Coalition for Excellence, or ACE, a membership organization comprised of nonprofits, individuals, foundations and businesses committed to helping Arkansas nonprofit groups succeed (Arkansas’ Nonprofit Association, 2008) There were four other panelists (one was not present, so Goodman spoke for her) and each was given a question to discuss. Connie Olson is a member of the North Dakota Junior Chamber Jaycees, a non-profit organization created to help people between 18 and 41 develop personal skills and international connections they need to succeed in community and business ventures. Nancy Feldman is the vice president of Pembina Recreation Board and volunteers with American Legion Auxiliary. Leighann McKenzie is originally from Tennessee and now works with RSVP + Northeast N.D., a federally and locally funded program dedicated to connecting agencies with needs to volunteers with skills. Annie Le is a senior at University of North Dakota and has been accepted as a PhD student in psychology and sociology. She took part in the UND Stone Soup bus tour of rural North Dakota as part of a service-learning college course.

Goodman (2008) opened the discussion by stating the primary question and offered these quotes to direct the discussion.

If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea, from French author and aviator, Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit, spoken by noted 20th century American Quaker D. Elton Trueblood.

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has, stated by Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist. (Book Rags Media Network, 2013)

Goodman’s (2012) quotes set the tone for the discussion by calling up images of willing, motivated people thoughtful enough to want to bring positive change to their worlds and who will work to create positive community changes to benefit future generations. Her use of quotes created a sense of continuity. This discussion was designed to help people in small, isolated communities find and motivate volunteers drawn from a limited pool of candidates. It would be easy for them to feel discouraged. These quotes created a sense of hope by showing the best people are capable of giving to

others and by demonstrating that others have successfully overcome the same challenges. In the first minutes of the discussion, Goodman (2012) gave the audience tools they could use to meet their goals for finding and motivating volunteers.

Connie Olson opened the discussion with her question, “Can service clubs be an effective way to attract younger volunteers to community service?” Olson used her organization, Jaycees, as an example. Jaycees targets adults younger than 41 years old, offers members opportunities to learn career-related skills, gives them a chance to make friends and network, and offers opportunities to gain practical experience while serving others (North Dakota Junior Chamber, Jaycees, 2011) “Everyone is looking for a way to meet new friends and to help,” she said. “We just need to find new ways to attract people.” This organization has strong roots in the business sector, supporting the figures connecting the North Dakota Gross Domestic Product to nonprofits.

Panelist Leighann McKenzie was asked, “What creative ways can volunteers be recognized?” A member of RSVP + Northeast North Dakota, McKenzie (2011) works with this federally and locally funded program to connect agencies with needs to volunteers with skills. She recommended organizations hold recognition events to honor volunteers, particularly for organizations with too many people or with volunteers spread across a larger area, so it would be difficult to recognize each one every day. Local businesses in her community also contribute, offering discounts to volunteers who log 60 hours of service. “They give their time and their love of volunteering to the community and organization,” she said. “It is important to say thank you.” Contributions from local businesses indicate owners and managers recognize the important role nonprofits play in economic development.

Nancy Feldman works with the Pembina Recreation Board, which maintains a web page with links to recreational services offered by local businesses (Pembina Recreation Board, 2011). Her discussion question was, “What tips do you have to maximize effectiveness and prevent burnout of community volunteers, particularly in small communities?” Feldman acknowledged there is no perfect solution but did say she felt the most effective way to maximize effectiveness and prevent burnout is to establish rapport with community, and rapport develops through discussion about changes citizens would like to see in their communities. Her suggestion relates to Goodman’s (2012) quote, teach people to love the sea, not look for wood. To share the goals and needs related to an organization or event with the community. If people find something they care about they will work willingly to reach the goal. Feldman used a personal experience to illustrate her point. “We have Santa Day and Turkey Bingo,” she said, “but with only six active members on board there are not enough volunteers to make some

events flow.” She solved the personnel shortage by talking to the high school, where she was able to tap into student resources. Her solution involved younger people in the community; an important step in local volunteer recruiting.

Annie Le took the UND Stone Soup student bus tour over spring break as part of the Service and Rural Communities service-learning class. The tour allowed students an opportunity to meet people living in rural North Dakota communities (Center for Community Engagement, 2013). Her discussion question was, “What have you learned about the spirit of volunteerism in ND?” She said volunteering helps you connect with people inside and outside the community. It creates stronger relationships with yourself and others. The psychology student reminded the audience that it’s a known fact, those with social contacts live longer than people without. During the Stone Soup bus tour to rural areas Le made many connections with people who care about their communities. The Stone Soup concept is based on an old folk tale about a traveler who shows the people in a small, hungry village that they can care for each other when each person contributes what he or she has. Le used the story as an example of volunteerism as an individual and a group effort. “Volunteering is like a free education,” she said. “You learn about new things.... You learn about yourself, you grow as a person, and you learn about the world around you.”

Goodman (2012) summarized the discussion with practical suggestions. To grow the spirit and effectiveness of volunteerism in our communities, she said we need to find ways for recognition and celebration of volunteerism there. In order to do this, she said, organizers need to maximize, record, and capture great volunteer work in community, and she offered suggestions on how it could be done. She recommended students and the university as good resources. Students can build spreadsheets and keep records to effectively track volunteer hours and follow community events. The records document where people are working, how long they volunteer, and what improvements they contribute to their communities. “There can be lots of ways to celebrate,” she said. Find an event to fit the community and the volunteers.

The audience contributed well-developed questions that effectively expanded the contributions of the panelists. One woman asked why people don’t volunteer. Le’s answer was short and to the point. “Work and kids,” she said. Feldman added another dimension; some people are shy and quiet. They would rather stay in the background. But sometimes their concern for their children and the welfare of the community can draw them out. “I’m here for my daughter,” she said. “Today it’s all about kids.” When you volunteer, she said, bring the kids along. Goodman (2012) reversed the question, suggesting we ask why people DO volunteer. She feels they volunteer to make a difference in the community. Organizations

need to be creative when connecting volunteers to service projects, and be sure volunteers are offered flexible hours. McKenzie mentioned most volunteers are students and older retirees because they have time. Baby Boomers and other age groups are still working and have less time to volunteer. However, McKenzie said they do volunteer for special events on the weekends.

Since existing groups have mostly exhausted the local pool of available volunteers, McKenzie advised people interested in volunteering should look for an existing organization rather than start a new one. Her group, RSVP, evaluates people who want to volunteer and matches their interests and talents with appropriate groups. She said most of their groups, like Altru, assess volunteers to be sure there is a good fit. They use the same principle toward volunteers as employees but volunteers are paid in good feeling rather than money. “If student volunteers are filing papers, they are less likely to enjoy what they are doing and less likely to come back,” McKenzie said. “We need to make sure people are doing what they love.”

Audience questions and comments soon brought to life the saying, “Time is money.” This is certainly true of volunteer time. Some organizations receive matching funds based on volunteer hours so it is important to accurately track and place monetary value on volunteer time. Goodman (2012) stressed the importance of volunteer hours in the independent sector. Organizations need to calculate the dollar value of service because volunteer services contribute a huge value to group. She said organizations can translate this value into funding opportunities. Feldman, who works with American Legion Auxiliary, said it is amazing how many hours people contribute. Their message was to take full advantage of this important volunteer resource.

Speakers and audience members shared potential sources for volunteers that are usually overlooked. One audience member works with the North Dakota Museum of Art. They use community service people as a source for volunteers. These are people who have been ordered by the court to perform community service. “Sometimes,” the speaker said, “They do their 50 hours and we never see again. Others want to volunteer again.” There is the added benefit of giving others the opportunity to appreciate something that might change their life a little bit. UND students were also mentioned. They can be contacted through the Center for Community Engagement and there is a volunteer bridge group and RSVP + on campus at the Memorial Union. Another audience member suggested Greek organizations and honors programs with a mandate to perform community service. McKenzie was more direct. She said she has developed a central group of volunteers to put together a Brighter Future Awareness picnic for marginalized youth by setting up meetings and calling corporate offices. Local businesses, large and small, were very responsive. It was an opportunity for them to say thank you to the statewide community.

Goodman (2012) summarized the discussion by reviewing the main points. They talked about the best ways to utilize volunteers, either through hands-on volunteer work, tracking hours, working at a booth, or conducting research. Volunteering offers great opportunities for service learning. It combines students in a classroom with work experience. It can be community connection and communication. It can be service offered by a young person, an older person, any one of any age with time and willingness to give. Volunteering is an opportunity to help the community grow. "Remember," she said, "how we feel when we walk in the door determines if we come back."

The panel members and the audience discussed methods they have found effective in attracting and motivating community volunteers. Their results elaborate and in some cases support findings from the preliminary report on communication between communities and universities, published in 2008 through the Center for Community Engagement at University of North Dakota. Dr. Goodman (2008) created an effective framework for the discussion by identifying three important elements to effective volunteering. Effective volunteers will care about the work they are doing, they are willing to contribute toward long term projects with benefits they may never receive, and they believe they can make a difference (Burr, Choi, & Caro, 2005). Her opening statement creates three possible categories for effective volunteering. The first, finding volunteers who care about what they are doing.

3. COMPARISON WITH COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY FORUM FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The Preliminary Report on Community-University (2008) Conversations in North Dakota was developed to establish a journal designed to link people in universities with people in the surrounding communities. University and community advocates met to establish a framework for the study and four main content areas were identified. As stated earlier, these are the need for information and knowledge, creating information and knowledge, Community-University Collaborations, and a Community-University Forum. Panel participants talked about how important it is to collect and organize data on volunteers, particularly volunteer hours, and they discussed utilizing resources available through local universities. The forum panel concentrated on attracting and keeping volunteers, which is slightly different from the goals of the forum, so we eliminated areas not relevant to the volunteer discussion.

3.1 Need for Information and Knowledge

The Community-University report identifies information as "information for use in and by the communities

as accessed through several forms of media..." and "information on key community issues...and the expertise needed to address them are difficult to access and not centralized." (Community-University Forum Focus Group, 2008, p.2) The question about information is interpreted in relation to broadcast media, with focus groups identifying primary sources and frequency used. Consistent patterns show the following mass media methods for gathering information and frequency used, including television (> 95%), print journalism (> 90%), radio broadcasts (> 85%), and the internet (> 85%). Interpersonal communication methods include "word-of-mouth" (>80%), sources in the work place, service agencies, school, and email (> 60%), and community groups such as community/social support groups, churches, cell phones (<50%), and city government (<10%). Focus groups in the Community-University Forum Focus Group Executive Summary indicated they use combinations of these methods simultaneously. (p.4) Not surprisingly, respondents reported an over abundance of information in the community; so much it was hard to absorb (p.5). This contrasts with others who feel there was a general lack of information or there was poor dissemination (p.5) The report states one theme emerged; the need for centralized, reliable information presented in a varied, easily accessible format (p.5).

Panelists and audience members at Community Connect Forum talked about using these methods to connect with potential volunteers and to recognize their accomplishments. Feldman suggested sharing the goals and needs of each organization or event with the community to generate a responsive spark. The focus group responses (above) indicate effective ways nonprofits can reach potential volunteers. Mass media can be used to distribute public relations ads, online sites often host community bulletin boards, and a few active members can speak to community groups. Of course, success depends on developing projects appropriate to a specific community. According to Rakow, Helgeson, and Weber (2008), demographics such as the age, sex "66% of respondents to the Opportunities for Engagement assessment were women working for small nonprofit agencies in larger communities" (p.12) and occupations can help target messages to the appropriate audience, but ultimately success will depend on knowledge of the community and what citizens value.

Effectively assigning value to nonprofit groups and projects is critical in overcoming volunteer inertia. Most communities engage in planning (85% of survey respondents for Opportunities for Engagement study, p.iii) but they had difficulty putting plans into action. The six most frequently identified social issues communities identified are shrinking populations, employment, economic uncertainty, families under financial stress, and alcohol and drug abuse (Community-University Forum Focus Group, 2008, p.1). Several focus groups in the

Community-University Forum Focus Group Executive Summary (2008) reported they made concerted efforts to ensure key community issues relevant to everyone were widely available but they still had problems putting plans into action (p.5). Extrapolating from the data, we can infer that community nonprofits include these issues in their plans of action, but they still have problems bringing them to completion. Some problems were identified by the focus group respondents. They were concerned by the lack of expertise and alternative views, leaving activists with little knowledge to work with when creating action directed toward solutions for community problems.

People become volunteers for many different, often simultaneous, reasons. The panel talked about personal development (job-related training, networking, meeting friends, and potential for employment) motivation to change something in the community, for appreciation and public recognition, and because it is required (court-ordered community service, school or club requirement). Olson outlined benefits people aged 18-41 can access through membership in Jaycees, which is structured to offer business-related opportunities. Here members can learn product management skills, utilize training opportunities, compete in writing and speaking contests and develops business networks. Members also have opportunities to contribute to their communities by participating in local events.

Combining business skills with volunteering can be an effective way to find work. The nonprofit sector in the U.S. experienced 70% growth between 1991 and 2001, employing nearly 10% of the working population and growing at a higher annual rate than business or government (Alvarado, 2001). This employment sector could continue to grow. Of organizations responding to Opportunities for Engagement needs assessment study, 39% said they have difficulty filling openings and almost 36% anticipate employment opportunities in the near future (Rakow, Helgeson, & Weber, 2004, p.13). One economic driver could be improved cash flow. Nonprofits play a significant role in attracting foundation and federal grant money to an area, developing and employing growing percentage of the work force, and improving quality of life in communities. These figures create persuasive reasons for those considering volunteer work.

3.2 Production of Information and Knowledge

In the preliminary report, this section was used to determine how involved people are in creating and using information in their communities. This includes sharing information with others. Some of the information is used to attract and keep volunteers. The Preliminary Report found nonprofits were nearly universal in the call for more volunteers (p.7). Dr. Janet Mohen, who contributed to the Preliminary Report, identified the need for more participation, particularly through motivating young people, as a key issue in rural communities because older

residents are “tapped out” (p.14) and 8 of the 31 focus groups specifically noted the need for more volunteers (p.7).

While tangible benefits are nice, people also volunteer because it is personally rewarding. McKenzie said Altru Hospital uses the same principle with volunteers as with employees, but volunteers take home a personal sense of satisfaction while employees receive paychecks. This is why it is important to match individual abilities and interests with a compatible nonprofit and an appropriate task. Several panel speakers discussed effective ways to match volunteers with projects and organizations. RSVP + acts as a bridge between volunteers and nonprofit groups. McKenzie reports her group serves 60 organizations in Grand Forks alone. Feldman said the city administrator in Pembina knows what services and skills community groups need. Her example demonstrates how 10% of citizens who use city government for information on nonprofits might be served (Preliminary Report, p.4). University of North Dakota was also mentioned as a source for student volunteers. The Center for Community Engagement and the Memorial Union at University of North Dakota were both mentioned as good sources for student volunteers. Others recommended court ordered, community service people, students of all ages, and members of organizations who require members to perform community service. Volunteer bridges can assess these and other potential volunteers, and match them with appropriate organizations.

4. COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIONS

While community-university collaborations hold promise, the way still needs to be effectively paved. Preliminary Report contributor, Dr. Rodney Hanley, said the few focus groups he facilitated seemed to be taking a “wait and see” attitude toward a proposed Community Engagement journal, which would act as a collaboration between the university and communities (p.13) and many in the focus groups felt there was a disconnect between the university and the community (p.8). Focus group members who recognized community support from the university said most concentrated efforts in the nearby community (Grand Forks) rather than working with rural communities, leaving the people feeling marginalized and ignored (p.8). Problems included spotty follow-up and few direct benefits for communities who participated in surveys and other research, and there were communication problems between the Ph.D.s and experts from specialized fields who were approached by community members looking for information and help (p.8). Students and faculty also reported feeling marginalized by community members. Some students reported feelings of animosity and lack of interest in university events while faculty members said

the available academic knowledge was not used enough and was not accessible enough for local and regional communities (p.9). However, both sides felt hopeful the situation could be improved. Community members said they would like help with community sustainability, recycling, economic development and managerial administration, land management, affordable housing development, and rural health care (p.9). All of these areas involve creating practical solutions to statewide community problems using academic resources.

4.1 Community-University Forum

This section of the Preliminary Report on Community-University Conversations in North Dakota (2008) describes elements the focus groups said they would like to see in a journal or website. Several ideas were echoed by members of the panel discussion. The report identified two important factors: the format should be user-friendly and it should act as a centralizing and coordinating entity, and something that would avoid duplication and allowing users from different organizations to share information (p.10). Communication and connection was seen as an important component, specifically to build a bridge between communities and the university. The bridge building mission is similar to building bridges between organizations and potential volunteers discussed by the volunteer panel. The proposed journal or web site could serve both functions, particularly since the audience and panel members mentioned university student volunteers several times and considered them to be a valuable resource. Goodman (2008) said students and the university can be a good resource, particularly for developing spreadsheets and documenting volunteer hours.

Developing data based on volunteer hours and accomplishments is important for nonprofits. In fact it is probably the most important message delivered in the discussion. Maintaining good volunteer records can be used to appropriately thank volunteers for the work they do, they document changes each group bring to their communities so they can be recognized for their contributions, and they allow better management of volunteers. Some volunteers offer their services because they are expected to contribute to their community, either as part of a court-ordered mandate, a school requirement, or for an organization. Most importantly, records allow nonprofits to translate documented volunteer hours into cash equivalents. Organizations interested in applying for grants or funds can use these figures to demonstrate their value to the community and encourage contributors. Strong volunteerism shows strong community support and structural stability, which encourages potential investors. It also means a group of volunteers can do what they set out to do. With 85% of survey respondents stating they engage in planning but have problems putting their plans into action, (Opportunities for Engagement study, p.iii) financial supporters will want some proof an organization can seal the deal before they open a checkbook.

The findings in the preliminary report indicate the financial value of a data base. Focus group participants from the Community-University Forum Focus Group (2008) said a community-university forum or journal would allow community organization leaders to share ideas about general activities, events, cost-sharing partnerships, and other ideas they can use to resolve community issues. Local and regional people would be better able to contribute directly (p.11). Moderator and study contributor, Dr. Gregory Gagnon, said it was not surprising the focus group participants wanted practical assistance from researchers to help them create solutions for community challenges. He also found it could be hard to create effective collaboration between community members and organizations, and university members and their organizations. "Each wants the other to provide assistance in the context of needs," he said. One solution would be to find funding to hire students and faculty members to work for local organizations on their projects, and to hire local organizational staff to do research for academics. (Preliminary Report, p.12-13) Documenting volunteer hours could make this dream a reality.

4.2 How Can Universities Support Community Nonprofit Organizations?

The speakers and audience members at the panel discussion on volunteering shared many effective, creative ways to attract and keep volunteers. Their discussion shows they have spent a lot of time and effort working on this problem, and they took advantage of the opportunity the forum provided to share their insights. However, the most important issue attendees seem to approach for the first time was creating and maintaining records on the work of the group and of volunteers. This conclusion is based on audience questions and comments from panelists, particularly Dr. Goodman, and is supported by the documentation from the Preliminary Report and Opportunities for Engagement (2008), which reports the important financial role nonprofit organizations fill in North Dakota. The study is based on a mail survey, sent to a sample of 360 nonprofit groups in North Dakota. Responses were received from 212 surveys (59% response rate) creating a viable statistical pool. Of respondents, about eight percent work in communities of less than 500 people and another 28% work in communities with 500 –10,000 people, 21% are in communities with 10,000 to 40,000 and almost 40% were above 40,000 people (p.13). The nonprofits were asked to describe the kinds of research they feel is important to their organizations, and most said they do not conduct research. The largest group who do (32%) research said they conduct community needs assessment, about 25% said they conduct demographic research, client research or evaluation, research for program development, and to assess their organizational effectiveness (p.13).

The university could contribute to the communities by helping them develop and maintain data on their organizations, particularly in communities struggling for financial and volunteer support. A journal or web site could be created and maintained by the university as a resource for communities, and possibly act as a bridge between community groups and students who want volunteer experience and faculty willing to offer academic research directed toward practical applications.

CONCLUSION

Dedicated people are a significant requirement for the working of an organization, especially where there are no monetary benefits. Therefore, the North Dakota focus group and panel discussion described in detail the various techniques to keep the volunteers dedicated. Although, the motivations for volunteering are different from person to person, however, there is no denying the fact that it is extremely important for these people to be kept motivated. The discussion gave various suggestions to do it, some of which are discussed in the paper as well. The paper also gave various solutions to reach these volunteers if a new organization is being formed. It is very important for group leaders to be encouraging and trusting towards their employees. In this way, the volunteers will feel honored and trusted. They will work better towards achieving the goal of the company. Communication remains an important factor in this. When there is true communication, proper teams will be created that will align themselves with the corporate identity of the company. The employees will take all values, Purpose and Vision into consideration. Volunteering is by no means an easy task. However, it takes less, but gives a lot. The long run benefit in the form of satisfaction is extremely high. In small communities like North Dakota, the nonprofit organizations have made millions that translate into economic development of the state. Therefore, Small communities grow and prosper.

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