

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service

VOLUNTEERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, founded in 1993, is an organized group of grantmakers representing the whole spectrum of philanthropy, including private foundations, individual donors, corporate foundations, and community foundations. The Forum pursues a two-part agenda, to engage philanthropy in support of service and to provide leadership in identifying, creating and promoting effective service policies and practices.

The December 2002 California Forums on Volunteerism & Service were co-sponsored by:

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In December 2002, the Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, in partnership with the Independent Sector, Northern California Grantmakers, Southern California Association for Philanthropy, and the California Association of Nonprofits, sponsored two dialogues on volunteerism and service—one in San Francisco and the other in Los Angeles. The purpose of these sessions was to examine, through conversation, the value and impact of President Bush's call to every American to give back to our communities and neighborhoods through volunteer service. This report presents a summary of the conversation in San Francisco on December 9, along with themes that arose during both forums.

The San Francisco dialogue, moderated by Jeff Clarke, President and CEO of KQED Public Television, featured Peter Hero, CEO and President of the Community Foundation Silicon Valley; Chuck Supple, CEO of the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism (GO SERV); and Pat Loomes, Executive Director of Girls Inc. of Alameda County. More than 150 people attended the event, representing a cross section of philanthropy, business and nonprofits. The perspectives presented and the information that emerged in the discussion may be useful to policy and practice.

FINANCING VOLUNTEERISM & SERVICE

The conversation began on a point of controversy. Jeff Clarke initiated the dialogue by asking Peter Hero, "Are there enough foundations involved in funding service and volunteer programs?"

"That's easy—no," Hero replied. "In many cases, when foundations are forced to cut funding, when their own resources are constrained, they retreat from their support of infrastructure. And for the most part those grants that

support operating expenses are also financing volunteer recruitment and training efforts."

Hero explained that due to lack of direct funding for volunteer-related costs such as recruitment, training, supervision and recognition of volunteers, usually these expenses must be "buried" in a nonprofit's general operating fund or human resources budget. "We have a few progressive foundations that are funding and supporting volunteering and service and doing so explicitly," he continued, "but not enough of them."

Clark asked whether Hero himself was promoting the need for foundation funding of service and volunteering within the philanthropic sector? Hero said no, adding, "The case for funding volunteers and service must be made by the public benefit sector, by the nonprofits themselves, by their boards of directors and by their staff."

TRENDS IN GIVING & VOLUNTEERING

This past year the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley conducted a study of the community's perspectives on philanthropy and volunteerism and tracked

trends in both. Hero shared some of the relevant results of that inquiry. The good news, according to Hero, is that 49% of the respondents indicate that they engage in some form of volunteer activity, exclusive of donating money or belonging to a service organization. The bad news is that a full 45% of those who report that they engage in volunteer activity do so fewer than six hours per month.¹

The amount of time people are giving, according to the foundation's trend analysis, is declining. Hero shared that, according to his foundation's study, Californians who say they did something for their community in the past year reported that the number of hours they are contributing dropped on average, from 16 to 13 hours per month. Indeed, Hero asserted, "As our culture has changed, so too has the nature of the volunteering that we do."

Pat Loomes, of Alameda County Girls Inc., described how this change is affecting her organization: "We are seeing people come forward who want to spend less time over a shorter period of time." Girls Inc. has a clear mission—inspiring all girls to be strong, smart and bold—and depends on volunteers to make that mission bear fruit. The volunteers tutor and mentor the girls, provide them with ongoing and consistent support in their process of development, and serve as role models. With a staff-to-youth ratio of 1 to 15, the program could never afford to provide each young girl with her own dedicated staff person to serve as a mentor. But with volunteers fulfilling this function, the girls receive that support. They also learn from their mentors what it means to give to others and the rewards of that contribution. These are one-on-one relationships that change lives.

But now, Loomes explained, "Our classic volunteers are being replaced by short-term volunteers who make more modest investments of time." A classic volunteer works with a girl once or twice a week for two hours or more and commits to the schedule for six to nine months. The change in commitment, Loomes said, makes the agency's job both more

expensive and challenging. "We must still mount an effective training program for volunteers, and because of the reduced level of investment we must recruit more volunteers to provide a full academic year's worth of coverage for the girls in the program." So the per-child costs associated with recruiting, training and supervising the volunteers are higher now than in the classic volunteer model.

When asked why the change in volunteers is occurring, Loomes speculated that "more and more families are relying on two wage earners, so there is less time available to contribute to others." Peter Hero, reflecting on demographic changes, wondered whether we are "tapping into the World War II generation—the baby boomers who are finding themselves with time on their hands?" He suggested that perhaps baby boomers could fulfill the "classic volunteer" paradigm that Loomes desired. Loomes replied that in her program it is important for girls to see young women

in positions of authority and influence. Older adult volunteers have important roles in nonprofits, but Girls Inc. needs younger women volunteers, given its program model and goals.

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

With respect to donations, Hero described another emerging trend that is of interest and perhaps concern to community-based nonprofits. In the CFSV study, almost a third of those who reported donating money said they gave less than 10% to local Silicon Valley nonprofits.¹ Their money, it seems, is going elsewhere—perhaps to their communities of origin, Hero speculated, since 24% have lived in the valley five years or less. An audience member from Network for Good asked what repercussions this fact might have. Hero replied, "This is a challenging trend, and it is gradual but apparent. What we know," he said, "is that the longer people stay in a community, the more likely they are to volunteer in that community and to give money locally." Hero also pointed out that the workplace was once a primary recruitment ground for community

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PETER HERO, CEO & PRESIDENT
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SILICON VALLEY

¹ "Giving Back the Silicon Valley Way – 2002 Report on Giving and Volunteerism in Silicon Valley", a publication of the Community Foundation Silicon Valley, available for download from their website www.cfsv.org or call 408-278-2200 for more information.

volunteers, but people now have less connection to a “work place.” The more disconnected people are from a primary place of employment, the more challenging it is to make contacts for volunteer recruitment and contributions.

On the topic of whether technology has played a role in drawing people’s time and or money away from local communities, Hero thinks it’s not likely. While people may find opportunities to give online, he believes they actually do their service because of human connections. Pat Loomes shared her own view of technology and the value it adds to her program: “Technology makes our communications with our volunteers easier and less expensive, and that contributes to better and more consistent engagement.”

MARKET THE VALUE OF THE EXPERIENCE

Jeff Clark asked the panel, “Why is it important for people to serve? What is behind this call to serv-

ice?” Chuck Supple of GO SERV responded: “Citizens play a critical role in public problem solving.” In California, service and volunteering have made a difference with respect to child abuse and neglect services. AmeriCorps members are supplementing the professional services provided by a

child abuse and neglect agency, and the involvement of community volunteers and Corps members has resulted in dramatic reductions in referrals. “That’s why we rely on service and volunteering,” Supple explained, “because it can be an

effective method for addressing community challenges and problems. It provides neighbor-to-neighbor solutions.”

Supple also pointed out that national service—“AmeriCorps and the like”—helps bring together people from different backgrounds so they can learn about one another. “This, too, invigorates our civil society,” he asserted, “putting people together

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PAT LOOMES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALAMEDA COUNTY GIRLS INC.

CREATING A HIGH-QUALITY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE...

Participants in the California Forums suggested the following actions creating high-quality volunteer programs:

TO FOUNDATIONS

Provide operating support. Foundations often support the ethic of service and volunteerism but do not provide the necessary funds for nonprofits to support high-quality volunteer programs. Operating support is essential for volunteer recruitment, training and retention.

TO POLICY MAKERS

More state and federal funding is needed. The success of nonprofits’ volunteer programs depends on more than just recruiting enough volunteers. While policymakers can be helpful in articulating the importance of volunteerism, they must be prepared to also support the nonprofit infrastructure. Nonprofits can and should communicate this need to policymakers.

TO NONPROFIT, GOVERNMENT, AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Know the motivations of volunteers. While people might be initially motivated to volunteer by their heartstrings, they will only come back if the experience meets their personal goals. Find out what these goals are. Ask volunteers about their motivations, interests and what they hope to gain from the experience. Ask them both about their goals for themselves and their goals for their community.

Hire a Volunteer Manager. Volunteers need to have a manager who coordinates their work and is also their advocate. This position is a practical must for an organization with volunteers, but the person who fills it also needs to be given a “voice” within the organization. A strong volunteer manager will bring the issues of the volunteer program to the forefront of the organization.

Make the “ask.” Ask up front for volunteers to make a commitment to come regularly, and set high standards for volunteer participation. Participants who had experience with volunteers saw them rising to challenges-not shying away-and this made the experience a better one for both the individual and the organization.

across communities to find solutions.” Supple believes that national service is helping to cultivate the next generation of nonprofit and public leadership. “Service and volunteering help young people to see themselves as change agents for good.”

One strategy for encouraging volunteering is for nonprofits to do a better job of promoting their volunteer opportunities. “People are using the Internet like a global positioning system,” Peter Hero explained, “finding general places to give and go.” But to bring these people in the door, the nonprofits must market the value of the experience. The public benefit sector could do a better job than it is doing, according to Hero, to make volunteering an attractive option for people who have time to give.

“At the same time,” Hero continued, “We do have opportunities to encourage engagement.” His foundation works with wealthy individuals, getting them involved in the community. And that involvement influences their charitable giving. “People who have a powerful experience serving will be influenced by that experience.” He described work he is doing in Eastern Europe and Central America helping to develop the public benefit sector there. What distinguishes the United States, explained Hero, “is that Americans don’t just give money — they give time.”

An audience member asked, “If part of what we are trying to achieve through service and volunteering is civic engagement, how do we connect service with public policy and political engagement?” The panel agreed that it is important to complement a service experience with some formal training, to give people a sense of the limits of their service and what is actionable that lies beyond the realm of the volunteer experience or the direct service delivery. This understanding helps people appreciate the need to

be involved at a policy level. But in order for the person who is volunteering or serving in an organization to appreciate this relationship, there must be a conscious effort to make the connection.

VOLUNTEERISM-MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER

The current budget challenges, both at the state level and nationally, will place more demands on the public benefit sector. There will be more people in need of services and support and less money available to provide it. This fact makes the case for building a strong cadre of volunteers to augment organizational capacity to deliver services. At the same time, all agree that there are costs associated with mounting an effective volunteer effort. And while those costs may be comparatively less than hiring full-time staff, they are nevertheless real costs that require real dollars.

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PETER HERO, CEO & PRESIDENT
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SILICON VALLEY

From the standpoint of service and volunteering, the last two decades have been a period of dramatic change and opportunity. We have seen an important expansion of stipended domestic service through AmeriCorps. We have seen three Presidents—Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and his father George Bush—promote the ethic and value of service consistently and with passion. We have seen increased support for school-based service-learning programs, we have heard President Bush’s call for an expansion of the Peace Corps, and we are now witnessing the launch of the new Citizen Corps effort. These have all been supported by legislative acts, a public policy frame that provides a reference for the role of government in promoting the value and practice of service and volunteering. Nonetheless, the giving itself is personal, not political. We may be inspired to action by others, but the action we take is our own.

For conference information, please visit
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