



Walking the Walk of Deep Volunteer Engagement

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Micro-Volunteering = Macro-Engagement

Doesn't matter if you're Bill Gates, Sheryl Sandberg or Jane Doe, you've got 24 hours a day to get anything and everything done. Today's volunteers, squeezed by a tight economy, mom and dad both working while seeking a "balanced" life, find opportunities to spend time outside of family and job scarcer and scarcer. And when available, that time rarely exceeds an hour or two here and there.



What Is Micro-volunteering?

In response, many non-profits and associations have created a micro-adhocracy by offering volunteering in micro-chunks thus creating opportunities for time-stressed members to make a meaningful contribution to the cause without a major commitment of time. Here are a few examples:

- [NASA Citizen Scientists](#)
- [Audubon Society - Christmas Bird Count](#)
- [Public Insight Network – Citizen Journalists](#)
- [American Academy of Diabetes Educators](#)
- [American Society of Association Executives](#)

A Common Set of Characteristics:

- *Of the Moment* – Tasks can be taken on as the opportunity arises...not much planning required for the volunteer.
- *Discrete and/or Small* – The task may take as little as 15 minutes.
- *Easy to Participate* – The task typically does not require an application process, screening or training period and or an ongoing commitment by the volunteer. A broader definition may include task forces and panels which by nature will require additional recruitment/preparation ... but the message is still “less is more.”
- *Non-Hierarchical* – The key is to keep this organic.
- But most importantly, the task *Matches the Individual's Passion and Desire for Meaningful Action* – an essential motivator as identified by the [Decision to Volunteer](#).

One might consider micro-adhocracy a macro-management nightmare, but there are a number of tools available to help coordinate and direct the process (and with demand high, expect more to come):

- <http://www.sparked.com/> (Instant Talent Pool, Virtual Skills-based Volunteering & Tracking)
- <http://www.conecomm.com/microadvocacy> (Charity Miles, Donate Your Desktop)

- <http://ivolunteer.com/> (sign up and manage volunteers for functions and events)

Bottom line, a robust micro-adhocracy significantly expands the opportunities for members to engage in your organization on terms that meet their need for flexibility, brief commitment and desire to move the mission. Over time, those micro-efforts snowball into macro-engagement and, with the right encouragement, larger volunteer commitments.

National Association moves from 1 in 26 to 1 in 5

The [Oncology Nursing Society](#) concluded that things were broken, namely, decision-making, prioritization, response time, communication and engagement. Future growth and vitality demanded more effective, faster decision-making, faster time to market and seizing more opportunities. Following a thoughtful and very inclusive process, ONS moved from the traditional, hierarchical governance structure to one characterized by a project team/advisory panel model. Before the switch, 1 in 26 members volunteered. After, that involvement jumped to 1 in 5.

Chapter keeps volunteerism steady in uncertain times

The International Special Events Society, Washington, DC Chapter was long a vibrant metro chapter. Then 9/11 followed by the economic downturn hit. On the heels of that came an onslaught of free “groups” and free events targeting the regions many event planning professionals. ISES DC membership numbers declined. Participation wavered. Today we're experiencing a turnaround. What helped weather the storm? ISES DC leveraged a micro-volunteering strategy that created a volunteer pool, many smaller tasks and plenty of opportunities to jump in help create great programs and services.

This material first appeared in

<http://www.marinermanagement.com/resources/blog/>

Letting Volunteers Define and Create Their Own Value from Association Building Blocks

Increasingly, associations are finding that members want to direct their own volunteer efforts. They want to engage, they want to develop their own skills, they want to help the association advance. What they don't want is to be micromanaged with a lot of association-specific rules and regulations. Some structure is necessary to easily on-board interested volunteers, primarily to define the job to be done and the resources that are available to them (see Things to Confirm, below). But then learn how to step out of the way and let the volunteer create their own pathway to success.



Things to Confirm

1. The Goal. Ultimately, what is the objective we're seeking to achieve with this volunteer engagement? Is it big picture strategy, mid-range program development, or short-term task? Don't let your volunteer think it's one when it's actually another. That will just lead to disappointment and confusion. And, whatever the goal is, give volunteers a chance to bow out, if they're not willing to work towards it.

2. The Roles. Who is responsible for doing the organizational work associated with the volunteer task? Another way of addressing this is to clarify how much staff support will be available. Some volunteers like to roll up the sleeves and do everything themselves. Other prefer logistics to be coordinated by staff. Others want to do it all themselves, but frankly don't have the time. All three scenarios can work, but only if it is understood from the beginning what the volunteer will do and what the staff member will do.

3. The Benefit. Why does it matter? Not for the association (that's covered in "The Goal"), but for the volunteer himself. What is he expecting to get out of the assignment, and does that match with what the association is expecting and able to provide? Many volunteers are looking for professional development opportunities, and a volunteer assignment for their professional association can often fit that bill. But sometimes a volunteer is looking for something different. For a chance to teach, or promote himself, or to widen his circle of influence. These are not necessarily bad benefits for associations to be offering their volunteers, but it is critical to clarify up front what the expectations on both sides of the aisle are in this regard.

This material first appeared on www.ericlanke.blogspot.com

A Success Story

One association is finding success with this strategy with regard to a key constituency—their next generation of volunteer leaders. As an experiment they created a networking community within their association that had only two requirements for membership. You had to be 45 years old or less and you had to self-identify as someone who was or who aspired to be a leader.

They seeded it by asking members of their Board to identify young leaders in their own organizations. They also sent a message out to their membership and invited more people in. Everyone who responded was brought together for an initial networking event, where they heard what the association was trying to achieve and what resources we were available to them.

And then the association got out of their way.

The young leaders started slow. They immediately appreciated the opportunity to connect with people not too unlike themselves. First, they said they would like to have their own social event where they could share new experiences and get to know each other better, and the association complied. Next, they said they would like to have some of the leaders of the industry come and talk to them about leadership, and the association complied. Then, they said they would like to have opportunities to present on topics of interest to them, and the association complied.

In a few short years what started as a small, uncertain group grew into a strong and vibrant community. And once that had happened, they began to ask to get engaged in association leadership positions. They wanted to run their own task forces. They wanted to chair program committees. They wanted to serve on the Board.

Guess what the association did? It complied.

Walk a Mile in Their Shoes

In order to be a good volunteer manager, you need to spend some time volunteering yourself. It will give you a whole new perspective on what works, what doesn't, and what your volunteers need from you in order to be successful.

Capital Area Food Bank: a volunteer's view

When and why did you [Elizabeth Engel] start volunteering at the Capital Area Food Bank?

I've supported CAFB for probably 15 years, but until recently, it was in one of three ways: donating money, participating in office food drives, or going to volunteer with [HandsOn Greater DC Cares](#) at one of their three big annual community service days usually with a team from my office.

You'll notice two of those three involve colleagues and co-workers. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is something that's always been important to me. When I launched Spark Consulting last summer, I figured that was the end of my CSR projects, since it's just me.

Then, around the holidays, I had an epiphany: at my last association job, one of the things I advocated for was to allow employees to engage in volunteer work during business hours on a regular basis (the team working on this had proposed up to one day per quarter). We weren't successful, but the thing is, I'm my own boss now. If I want to do regular volunteer work during business hours, I can!

CAFB was immediately on the top of my list for investing my CSR volunteer time. I believe strongly in the work that they do; they need volunteers year round; and, while they usually have no trouble filling their volunteer slots on weekends, they often need volunteers during the week. Perfect match!

What have you learned that might have surprised you or had a real impact on you?

I've learned that people in the DMV are incredibly generous with their time and resources. Even though I go during the week, there are always large groups of volunteers of all ages, genders, races/ethnicities, backgrounds, careers, locations, etc., at the CAFB warehouse. Although there are plenty of parent/teenager combos, and church groups, and school groups, there are also plenty of people from all



walks of life there by themselves investing a morning in giving back to their community.

The other thing that's always shocking is to realize exactly how many people in our region deal with food insecurity. The *Washington Post* recently ran articles on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, colloquially known as "food stamps") in [Florida](#) and [Rhode Island](#), which makes it seem like it's somebody else's problem in some other location. The DC area is one of the country's most affluent, and yet even here, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors don't know where their next meal is coming from. CAFB and the agencies they support aim to fix that.

Do you recommend the food bank as a volunteer opportunity for others? How would they get started?

Absolutely! As a matter of fact, CAFB is a great place to start being a regular volunteer, for all the reasons I listed above, plus two more: Mr. Washington and David, the two men who manage all the warehouse volunteers, make it incredibly easy to understand what you're supposed to do and how you're supposed to do it; and two, CAFB makes it incredibly easy to volunteer, with an [online calendar system](#) where you can see what kind of help they need where and when, and sign up immediately.

My next scheduled volunteer date is Friday morning, June 7. If, like me, you can't make the [DelCor volunteer night Friday, May 30](#), maybe I'll see you there?

This post first appeared on the Delcor blog, <http://www.delcor.com/Blog.aspx?id=835&blogid=154>

Volunteering in your local community – how do you get started?

1. Think about the causes that are important to you. It might be your faith community, scouting, kids, animals, hunger, the arts, the environment...you want to choose something your passionate about.
2. Think about what skills you want to offer. Do you want something relatively unskilled, or are you more interested in something that allows you to use skills you've developed in your career or in one of your hobbies?
3. Think about the amount of time you can contribute, and when that time falls. Can you be involved with something that's a weekly commitment? Monthly? Quarterly? Annually? Do you need your volunteer work to be on a regular or flexible schedule? How much time can you devote in any one sitting? Are you available week days? Week nights? Weekends?
4. Think about what kind of relationship you want. Do you want to volunteer at the same place every time, or would you prefer variety? Do you want to be working with a particular person or people (like mentoring or teaching) or with a group? Or is interacting directly with people in your volunteer work not that important to you?
5. Think about how you want to volunteer. In person or virtual? Do you want to do this alone, or in a group? Small group or big group? Does it matter to you if you know the other volunteers in the group? Do you want to bring your kids along?
6. Once you have answers to the above questions, it's time to find an organization. One good place to look: what organizations do you already donate money to? Do they have local affiliates that need volunteers?

Websites:

Volunteer Match - <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

Serve.gov - http://www.serve.gov/terms_search.asp

Volunteer.gov - <http://volunteer.gov/>

Idealist - <http://www.idealists.org/>

HandsOn Network - <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/>

Network for Good - <http://www1.networkforgood.org/for-donors/volunteer>

Resource List, Links, etc.

Additional Reading

- *Take the Meh Out of Membership: Microvolunteering* – <http://blog.avectra.com/take-the-meh-out-of-membership-microvolunteering/> (note: a look at making the connection with membership engagement)
- *Balance Your Volunteer Life* – <http://www.onsconnect.org/2011/04/working-for-you/balance-your-volunteer-life> (note: a neat example of how one association, Oncology Nursing Society, highlights volunteering)
- <http://www.helpfromhome.org/microvolunteering-project.pdf> (note: useable guide on “How To Develop A Microvolunteering Action”)
- *Adhocracy Blog* – <http://adhocracy.info/blog> (note: includes a look at a few cool ad-hoc examples in action)

Tools

- <http://www.sparked.com/> (Instant Talent Pool, Virtual Skills-based Volunteering & Tracking)
- <http://www.conecomm.com/microadvocacy> (Charity Miles, Donate Your Desktop)
- <http://ivolunteer.com/> (sign up and manage volunteers for functions and events)