Measuring the Impact of Volunteering

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Before you start some work, always ask yourself three questions - Why am I doing it, What the results might be and Will I be successful. Only when you think deeply and find satisfactory answers to these questions, go ahead.

- Chanakya
Brainstorm

How do you measure the impact of volunteering?

The Power & Value of Outcomes

Learn More
Session Goals

• Explore ways to measure the impact of volunteering
• Consider evaluation in terms of programs, the growth in the volunteers, and the impact on the community and clients we serve
• Explore the difference between outputs and outcomes
• Consider how to develop and track evaluation outcomes
# Central Indiana Volunteer Program Survey Results – Outcome Tracking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of 123 agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our organization collects accurate data on the number of volunteers and hours served.</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our organization tracks impact of volunteers beyond the number of volunteers, the hours</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>served, and the dollar value of hours served.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We routinely use organized feedback to improve our volunteer management and engagement</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies and practices.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We track the retention rate for our volunteers</td>
<td>32%</td>
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</table>
What is an outcome anyway?

- **Outcomes** tell us what is different as a result of an activity, program or volunteer effort.
- Outcomes require two measurements in time or two data sets to compare.
- They compare how things were to how they are – what changed as a result of your efforts?
- Beware that other factors can and often do also affect the change you are trying to create – you should minimize them when possible.
- Outcomes can sometimes be difficult to determine and are often confused with simple data collection (outputs).
Is impact different than outcomes?

- **Impact** is sometimes considered the long-term changes that occurred due to the outcomes you achieved.
- Impact might be described as a sustained change or a sustained outcome overtime.
  - Example outcome:
    - Number of volunteers who developed stronger computer skills by volunteering over four months.
    - Tutoring that brought a group of students to grade level reading in the school year.
  - Example impact:
    - Impact: Number of volunteers who continued to use computer skills over the three years in their professional career.
    - NOT Impact: Tutored students who reach grade level reading but fall behind again the next year.
Difficulties in Measuring Impact

• To measure true impact requires an extended period of time and the ability to follow clients, groups or a community for several years
• Shorter term outcomes are easier to track and require less organizational resources
• The more you are trying to track impact over time, the more likely the change may be affected by other factors making it difficult to assure the change is primarily from your efforts
• Impact often requires ongoing interventions or supportive structures
Do outcomes matter?

Brilliant surgery! Well done! Shame the patient died.
Why are outcomes important?

- Tracking outcomes is a critical part of every volunteer program.
- Outcomes help to determine if there is a real change as a result from volunteer efforts or what changes might need to be made to a program.
- Knowing the change you are making justifies the effort, resources, and time invested into the program.
- Measuring volunteer satisfaction is not enough – you must go beyond satisfaction surveys and into actual comparative data about the work you are doing.
- For colleagues, leaders and volunteers to fully respect a volunteer program, it’s important to track and explain outcomes.
Benefits for Tracking Outcomes

• Showing outcomes is probably your most important way to:
  ✓ Develop organizational support
  ✓ Increase understanding of the importance of volunteers
  ✓ Increase perceived value of volunteers to the organization
  ✓ Help your volunteers understand the impact of their work and increase the retention rate for volunteers
  ✓ Help donors understand or support your volunteer program
  ✓ Elevate the role of volunteer manager in your organization
Outcomes Build Your Credibility

• 30% of nonprofits evaluate the impact of their volunteer programs annually (Source: Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations, 2004)

• Some additional example outcomes might include:
  • Clients who adopt routine exercise programs after attending a volunteer led education session about the importance of physical fitness
  • Clients who obtain employment after attending a resume writing and interview coaching series of classes
  • The financial or economic savings to a nonprofit agency created by volunteer efforts
  • The effective adoption of best practices for a volunteer program and increased volunteer retention
Activity

In pairs:

• Why do you and/or your organization struggle to develop effective outcomes for volunteer activities?

• If you have effective outcomes, in what ways do you struggle to collect those outcomes?
SUCCESS

WHAT PEOPLE THINK IT LOOKS LIKE

WHAT IT REALLY LOOKS LIKE
Common Challenges to Measurement

- We lack the skill or knowledge to effectively measure volunteer outcomes
- We lack the capacity to manage the evaluation process
- We lack the tools or technology to complete this work
- We are able to measure some outcomes, but we consider them to be incomplete or partial measurements
- Different groups, departments or external partners measure different things, and we have difficulty finding measurements that make sense to everyone
- It's easier to track outputs (like number of volunteers or volunteer hours) and activities completed (such as tutoring sessions, meals prepared or walls painted) than true outcomes (what is different as a result of the volunteer effort)
- We haven't established effective measures yet
Types of Outcomes

1. Organizational Effectiveness and Resources – impact on the organizations’ ability to better complete its mission

2. Volunteer Personal Growth – impact on the volunteers’ ability to build or use skills or the impact on their decision to increase volunteering or donating

3. Partner Agency Impact – impact on other partner agencies to better complete their missions

4. Client/consumer Impact – impact on the clients, students, or consumers who access services through the organization or school

5. Community Level Impact – change in the community or a percentage of the population impacted by the issue
Some Possible Outcome Measures

- Improved development of professional skills for volunteers
- Decreased program or administrative expenses due to volunteers’ efforts
- Increased financial contributions from volunteers
- The monetary value of in-kind products secured through volunteers
- The monetary value of professional skills and services provided by volunteers
- Increased ability to reach your target population due to volunteer engagement
- Increased ability to achieve organizational goals due to volunteer efforts
- Increased media coverage due to volunteer efforts or projects
- Partner agencies who increase services or reach goals due to the services you provide or the collaborations you have
- Community level change or collective impact strategies on quality of life due in part to volunteer efforts
Measures of Relationship

- Increased number of volunteers
- Increased volunteer frequency or retention
- Increased individual donor amounts
- Increased awareness of organization’s work
- Increased referrals to the organization for giving, advocating or volunteering
- Increased personal connection to or trust in the organization
Example Project: One-time

Neighborhood Cleanup

• Neighborhood cleanups are an easy way to engage large numbers of volunteers to complete a sizeable amount of work on a limited budget in a comparatively short amount of time

Project Outcomes

• Reduce litter and improve the appearance of a neighborhood

• Create a sense of community and pride among neighborhood residents

• Increase community awareness about environmental conservation and recycling
Example Project: Ongoing

Community Garden

• Community or school garden projects plan, create, and maintain a garden for a school, neighborhood or community service organization

Project Outcomes

• Increase gardening and nutritional value knowledge for those who plant and maintain a garden
• Improve the look of a school or neighborhood
• Provide healthy food alternatives to low income families or schools
• Engage a large group of volunteers in an ongoing opportunity to enhance community health
• Create a harvest of vegetables, flowers, herbs and/or flowers
Outcomes Process

1. Clarify or Determine Outcomes - Agree on the intended outcomes of an activity, service, or program

2. Measure Outcomes – Record the outcomes that you achieve in a systematic way

3. Analyze – Review the data and determine what is and isn’t working

4. Report – Report outcomes to appropriate stakeholders

5. Make changes – Plan and implement changes to the program as needed
Volunteer Activities

Activities are the actions that are needed to run your volunteer program —what you do with program resources in order to achieve outcomes and, ultimately, your goals.

Common activities are:

• Developing promotional materials and educational curricula
• Providing services, such as education and training, volunteer referral, volunteer management
• Connecting people with volunteer opportunities
• Conducting annual volunteer recognition activities
Outputs are the measurable, tangible, and direct products or results of your activities.

They lead to desired outcomes—benefits for participants, families, communities, or organizations—but are not themselves the changes you expect to be produced.

Examples of program outputs include numbers and descriptions of:

- Classes taught or meetings held
- Materials developed or distributed
- Participants served
- Hours of service provided
- Partnerships or coalitions formed
- Volunteers recruited
People Often Confuse Outcomes and Outputs

Outputs = “putting” the numbers together

Outcomes = change is “coming”
Outcomes

Outcomes express the results that your program achieved after a selected period of time.

Outcomes are the changes that occur or the difference that is made for individuals, groups, families, organizations, systems, or communities during or after the program.

Outcomes are generally changes in knowledge, behavior or condition.

**Outcomes should:**

- Represent the results or impacts that occur because of activities and services.
- Be within the scope of the program's control or sphere of reasonable influence, as well as the timeframe you have chosen.
- Be generally accepted as valid by various stakeholders.
- Be phrased in terms of change.
- Be measurable.
Outcomes – Changes in Learning

**Changes in Learning:**

- New knowledge
- Increased skills
- Changed attitudes, opinions, or values
- Changed motivation or aspirations

*For example:*

- Participating new board members increase their knowledge of nonprofit leadership
- Teens ages 15-18 increase their knowledge about community problems facing Central Indiana
Outcomes – Changes in Action

Changes in Action:

• Modified behavior or practice
• Changed decisions
• Changed policies

For example:

• Participating new board members engage donate to the organization for the first time
• Teens ages 15-18 participate in community service for the first time
Outcomes – Changes in Condition

Changes in Condition:

• Making a change in a situation:
  – Human – changes in people situations
  – Economic – changes in financial situations
  – Civic – community or city changes
  – Environment – physical surroundings

For example:

• New board members create an endowment that pays for administrative overhead expenses for the organization

• There’s a decrease in unemployment rate among women participating in a program
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities completed</td>
<td>Learning attained (knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participations done</td>
<td>Actions changed (behaviors, decisions, policies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conditions changed (community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we do/Who we serve</td>
<td>What changed as a result</td>
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### Outputs VS. Outcomes Examples: Food to low income seniors

<table>
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<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meals made or served by volunteers</td>
<td>Additional numbers of seniors who increased their knowledge about healthy eating habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food collected through food drives</td>
<td>Seniors that report increased healthy eating habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of low income seniors who receive food assistance</td>
<td>% reduction in hunger among seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What we do/Who we serve</strong></td>
<td><strong>What changed as a result</strong></td>
</tr>
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# Outputs VS. Outcomes Examples: Substance abuse group facilitation

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<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clients served or active in the group</td>
<td>Group members who increased knowledge about how to stay clean and seek support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals made to mental health providers</td>
<td>Members who stay clean after attending a support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions or cycles completed by the group</td>
<td>Increased number of participants who stay clean compared to national trends; OR estimated % of total substance abusers in the community who stay clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we do/Who we serve</td>
<td>What changed as a result</td>
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What are the outcomes? Learning? Behaviors? Conditions?

Develop at least one outcome each in learning, action and condition for these programs:

1. Mentoring program for low income high school students at risk for dropping out
2. Food pantry program for low income and people with limited resources
3. Residential housing for terminally ill patients with cancer
4. Volunteers who work at community fair booths for a job training program
5. Volunteers who enter data into computer databases about other volunteers’ hours and activities
Common Evaluation Tools

What tools can or should you use to track outcomes?
Tools for Outcome Tracking

- Surveys
- Pre/post Testing
- Focus Groups
- Individual Interviews
- Internal Data – volunteer hours/services provided; the impact on clients
- Established Best Practices – industry standards
- External Data – existing research that has shown another program like yours to have success
- Case Studies – intensive focus on one or few volunteers or clients affected
Make sure everyone knows the impact of volunteers and your programs

- Create an annual impact report to share with the executive director, senior staff, the board of directors, your boss, and others
- Common outcome measures everyone should track:
  - Fair market value for volunteer work completed
  - Professional develop cost for training
  - Volunteers’ donation history
  - Savings to the organization due to volunteer efforts
  - Values of in-kind donations
  - Skills based volunteering professional rates
  - Corporate relationships built from volunteering
  - How much volunteers raise in funding
Assessing Your Volunteer Program

- How do you assess outcomes from your program’s effectiveness?
- It’s important to assess your program by a set of standard best practices and find ways to enhance and improve it.
- This process can be seen as an outcome or as an impact to your organization.
- United Way has a assessment that can be completed by you on your organization to assess your volunteer program’s use of best practices.
Tips

- Outcomes require some comparison, so you may need to get a baseline (or initial set of data) and then allow time to pass before you can conduct the second measurement.
- Remember, if other programs implement that same strategy (even in other cities) you can assume your outcomes will be similar if the city and conditions are similar – maybe you don’t need to run your own outcomes.
- Outcomes don’t always last, so you may want to consider the long-term impact if you are able to follow the change over time.
- Tracking outputs takes time and planning, but will change the way people view your volunteer efforts.
Tips (continued)

• Seek help if you need it – universities, United Ways, workshops, others in your field

• Don’t be afraid to fail and try something different – sometimes you think you know the best outcome, but once you have measured it, you find out that it does not really capture what you hoped or anything at all
Final Thoughts

• What would you like to consider changing about your outcome measures?
• How would you go about it?
• What do you do when you don’t feel competent enough to conduct outcome measures or simply don’t have the time?
Questions?

Final Questions?
Anything I missed?

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