

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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As Minnesota is gradually coming out of the recession, the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) conducted a follow-up study to our 2009 report on the status of volunteerism and volunteer programs during challenging economic times. In late 2010, 350 leaders of volunteers and nonprofit managers across the state responded to a survey. Six themes emerged in the findings.

### Volunteers have a real impact in tough times

- 30% reported volunteers helped preserve organizational services.
- 54% reported increased reliance on volunteers compared to two years ago.
- Of the 15% who experienced a decrease in inquiries from new volunteers:
  - » 26% have cut back on services or programs that volunteers helped make possible;
  - » 49% reported paid staff have to do work that volunteers used to do.

### Volunteering plays an important role for the unemployed

- 66% of those organizations experiencing increased inquiries about volunteering indicated the increase was primarily driven by unemployed people.
- Job seekers are reportedly gaining references, skills, contacts and other benefits through volunteering.

### Volunteer interest is still high

- 50% reported that volunteer hours have increased compared to a year ago.
- 33% experienced increased numbers of inquiries from potential new volunteers.

### Few experienced benefits from the start of the economic recovery

- 86% had not seen changes in their volunteer program from the apparent start of the economic recovery.
- 74% percent reported organizational fiscal stress continues.
- 81% reported the economic downturn has affected the volunteer program in one or more ways.

### Less concern over volunteers replacing staff than expected

- Only 6% reported that program staff indicated they perceive volunteers as a threat to their jobs.

### Volunteerism practices are being updated

- 58% involved volunteers in new roles and positions in the organization.
- 48% increased flexibility of when volunteers can volunteer.
- 42% asked volunteers to use their professional or workplace skills.
- 35% involved volunteers in leadership positions or managing projects.



## Strategies

Faced with fiscal stress and rapid changes in volunteer availability and organizational needs for volunteer services, many volunteer managers developed creative strategies to respond to the shifting environment. Common suggestions included:

- **Customize involvement** to fit the volunteer's interests, talents and availability.
- Offer **more short-term**, week-end and evening volunteer opportunities.
- Offer **expanded roles** for volunteers in the organization.
- Offer volunteers **opportunities to lead projects**.
- Provide volunteer opportunities that **use professional skills** and have **higher levels of responsibility**.
- Involve **volunteers in recruiting other volunteers**.
- Increase **involvement of student** volunteers and interns.
- Increase **use of technology** in recruiting and communicating with volunteers.
- **Form partnerships with schools and other organizations** to recruit volunteers and to work on projects of joint interest.
- Market volunteer positions to **job seekers** and support them to get the most out of the experience.
- **Streamline and standardize practices** for intake of volunteers and running the volunteer program.
- **Increase communication with volunteers** about the needs of the organization and its clients.
- **Involve staff throughout the organization** in working with volunteers.
- Advocate for and **position the volunteer program** effectively.

## Conclusions

**Organizations are updating their practices to engage volunteers; a higher level of volunteer involvement is part of how many organizations will emerge from the recession.** There is increased reliance on volunteers and dramatic shifts in how organizations involve volunteers. Volunteers are having a real impact on organizations during tough economic times and are part of how organizations are transforming to succeed in a changed economic landscape.

**Be ready for further changes in who is volunteering.** Analysis of comments found 11 changing trends in who is volunteering. It is likely that volunteers' expectations will continue to change and organizations will benefit by being alert to the changes and ready to adapt to them.

**It is unrealistic to increase reliance on volunteers without investing more resources.** Throughout the report there was documenta-

tion that cutting staff for volunteer programs resulted in fewer volunteers and less service. Only 7% of respondents saw an increase in their volunteer program budget in 2010, however, 55% are projecting greater reliance on volunteers in the coming year. It is unrealistic to expect continued growth through volunteers without increased investment in resources.

**Volunteer managers should be recognized for the new and more complex role they play.** Survey results showed how today's volunteer managers need the skills to market, delegate, inspire and sustain the organization's mission. The expectations on these professionals are greater than ever before. They need support and recognition from their agencies that reflects their increased level of responsibility.

**Volunteers have a deep impact in Minnesota communities and have promising potential to further address key problems in the state.**

The demographic data of survey respondents highlights how widespread volunteerism is in Minnesota. Given the trend this study found in growth of reliance on volunteers, citizen volunteers provide promising potential to address key problems in Minnesota, if we invest to move volunteerism forward.

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**For the full survey report go to** [www.mavanetwork.org](http://www.mavanetwork.org).