

The Status of Minnesota's Volunteer Programs In a Shifting Environment 2010

Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration
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www.mavanetwork.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

INTRODUCTION

The overall picture for volunteerism in 2010 is one of change. With the recession, volunteer programs have experienced widespread change in volunteer availability and in organizational expectations for the involvement of volunteers. The changes vary dramatically among organizations; some organizations reported the direct opposite of what was reported by others, such as having a flood or a dearth of volunteers.

The survey indicates there have been fundamental shifts in organizations' reliance on volunteers. The demand for volunteer services is greater today as volunteers take on expanded roles, lead projects, use professional skills, recruit other

volunteers and much more. Many organizations have risen to the challenge by developing a wealth of new strategies to involve volunteers. With this broadening of how volunteers are involved, the complexity of the job of a Volunteer Resources Manager has grown, deserving recognition for the higher expectations of the position. Some organizations are thriving with a growing volunteer corps. Others that have cut volunteer management staff and have learned the result is fewer volunteers and shrinking programs.

The following report is based on responses to a survey conducted by the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA)

between October 20 and November 12, 2010. The survey, a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in 2009, asked nonprofit and government leaders about changes in volunteer involvement and how they are responding. The invitation to take the web-based survey was sent to about 2000 contacts of MAVA and 300 members of HandsOn Twin Cities. The MAVA contacts included 689 MAVA members, plus past MAVA members and people identified by MAVA as working for organizations that involve volunteers. 426 people responded to the survey, with 350 complete surveys submitted.

FINDINGS

For about half of the organizations, more volunteers were involved and reliance on volunteers increased.

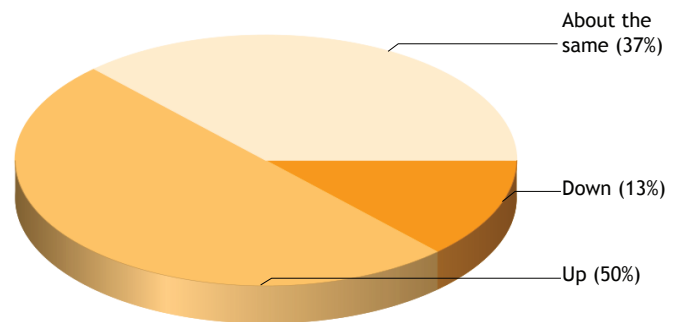
About half of the organizations reported volunteer hours and numbers are up compared to a year ago.

Organizations have experienced increases in both the number of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours served.

- 50% reported that *volunteer hours* have increased compared to a year ago, 37% reported that the number of volunteer hours was about the same, and 13% reported fewer volunteer hours.
- 46% reported that the number of volunteers has increased compared to a year ago, 39% reported that the number of volunteers was about the same, and 15% reported fewer volunteers.

By comparison, in 2009, a similar number (54%) reported that volunteer hours had increased and slightly fewer (55%) reported that the number of volunteer had increased.

The number of volunteer hours is:



“Our numbers of volunteers have increased and we expect our number of volunteers to increase next year and the following year as well!”

Reliance on volunteers has increased for most.

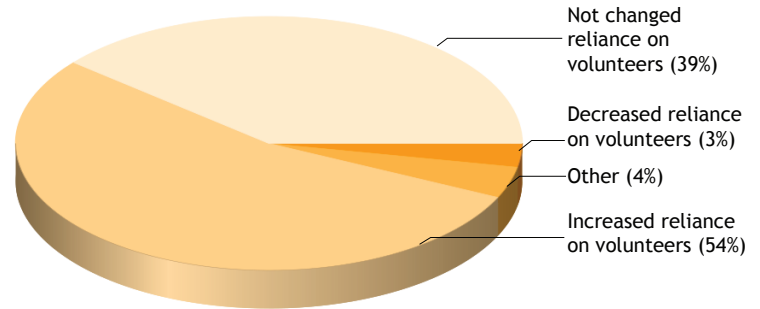
Fifty-four percent of respondents reported **increased reliance on volunteers compared to two years ago**, before the start of the recession. Thirty-nine percent reported no change in reliance on volunteers, and only 3% reported decreased reliance on volunteers.

In 2011, 55% **expect to increase their reliance on volunteers**, 33% do not expect a change, 2% expect to decrease their reliance, and 7% don't know.

Volunteers help preserve organizational services.

Increased use of volunteers had a positive impact on the services organizations can provide. Almost one-third of the organizations (30%) reported **volunteers have preserved organizational services** through their efforts.

Does your organization rely more or less on volunteers now compared to two years ago, before the start of the recession?



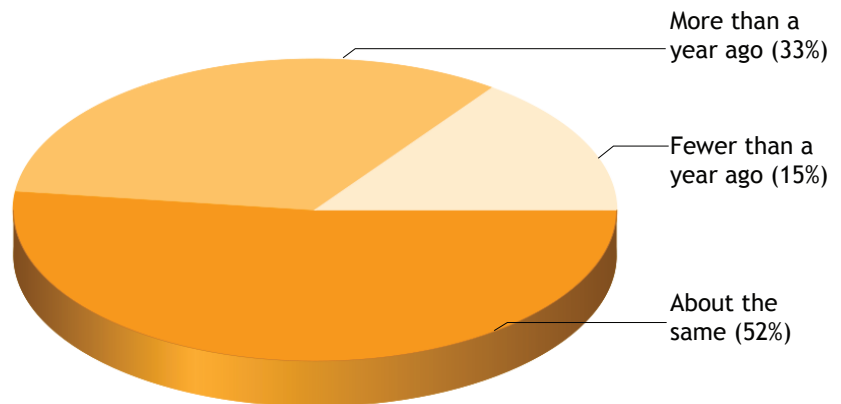
Nearly half of the organizations experienced changes in volunteer availability -- some up and some down.

For some volunteer programs, volunteer inquiries have increased and for others they have decreased.

Close to half of the organizations (48%) experienced a change in volunteer availability compared to a year ago. Thirty-three percent reported an increase in inquiries, 15% reported a decrease, and 52% indicated that the number of inquiries had not changed.

Smaller organizations (those with a budget of less than \$250,000) experienced the greatest decline in volunteer availability. On average, 23% of smaller organizations reported fewer volunteer inquiries, compared with 12% of larger organizations. Organizations in northern Minnesota had fewer inquiries from volunteers, compared with all other regions of the state. Some sectors, such as hospitals and museums, seemed to experience more of a growth in volunteers than other sectors.

How do the number of inquiries you receive from potential new volunteers compare to this time one year ago?



While 33% of all respondents saw a growth in inquiries, this has declined somewhat from 2009, when 43% of organizations reported a growth in inquiries, and the size of the increase is not especially large. 39% indicated the increase in inquiries was 0-10% higher than the previous year, 34% reported it was 10-20% higher, and 27% reported it was more than 20% higher.

The different experiences in volunteer interest are exemplified by one organization reporting, *“I think people are feeling over-tapped in terms of volunteering”* while another organization reported *“[It is] easier to recruit, because everyone’s fighting over the volunteer positions.”*

Unemployment continues to be the largest factor influencing new volunteers.

Among organizations reporting an increase in inquiries, the increase is primarily driven by unemployed people who became interested in volunteering. Sixty-six percent indicated that is the reason inquiries were up. Thirty-seven percent cited an increase in volunteer recruitment efforts and 31% indicated people are responding to community needs. Even among organizations that did not experience an overall increase in the number of volunteers, more than half of the new people interested in volunteering are unemployed.

Many comments described job seekers interested in volunteering:

“More people in search of jobs are applying as volunteers to use on their resume or to show their job skills in hopes of a paid position.”

“College students [are] looking for experience in hopes for a better chance when entering the work force.”

Regarding new inquiries about volunteering, 36% percent said new volunteers were more likely to have stronger workplace skills and 46% said new volunteers are more likely to be unemployed.

“Unemployed people are seeing [volunteering] as a way to learn more about organizations they’re interested in working for.”

Community needs inspire some people to volunteer.

Thirty-one percent of those organizations that experienced an increase in volunteer inquiries indicated it was because “people are responding to increased community needs due to the economic downturn.”

“People are more aware of the hungry in our community & want to help.”

“The organization has not demanded more volunteers but the community has demanded more opportunities to get involved with our organization.”

Other organizations reported the reverse experience.

“People are not into community service as much as they were.”

“Volunteering doesn’t seem to be as popular in general as it used to be.”

Some are starting to see a decline in the availability of job seekers as volunteers, compared to 2009.

Although unemployment was cited as a significant factor throughout the survey, fewer organizations reported this as the cause for their increase in volunteers in 2010 compared to 2009: 72% in 2009 to 66% in 2010 survey. Several comments reflected that some organizations are starting to see a decline in job seekers’ interest in volunteering due to higher employment and due to disillusionment by job seekers regarding how much volunteering will help them find employment.

“The economy is not recovering as fast as people expected and I think they are losing faith that intermediary volunteering will get them through.”

There are real consequences when volunteer interest declines, including reduced services to the community.

Organizations reported real costs when they don’t have enough interest from volunteers. Of the 15% who reported a decrease in inquiries about volunteering:

- 26% have cut back on services or programs that volunteers helped make possible.
- 49% reported staff has done work that volunteers used to do.

Sixty-two percent believe the economy makes it harder for people to volunteer and 26% believe inquiries were down due to reduced capacity at the organization to involve volunteers, due to budget cuts.

In response to the decrease in volunteer inquiries, 61% reported they have worked harder to recruit volunteers.

Most organizations were able to place additional volunteers, but for one-quarter, volunteer interest continued to outpace capacity to involve them.

Sixty-four percent reported being able to involve most of the interested volunteers. Twenty-four percent reported being able to involve some of the interested volunteers but having to put some on waiting list or turn some away. Three percent reported putting most on a waiting list or turning them away and 9% reported other strategies such as referring volunteers to other agencies, in order to deal with excess volunteer interest.

Comments provided insight on the challenges some organizations have keeping up with volunteers: “[I] am plugging away at background checks and placements, but find it is requiring more time than I have in my job.”

“Have involved many, but a lot of foundational work still has to be established to maintain a volunteer.”

Organizations are adding new volunteers and new positions for volunteers.

We asked if the involvement of new volunteers was made possible by

adding more volunteers to current volunteer positions or adding new positions. The most common response (51%) was *both*: adding more volunteers to existing positions and creating new positions. Twenty-eight percent of organizations indicated they primarily added more volunteers to existing volunteer positions and 14% indicated they primarily created new volunteer positions.

The profile of new volunteers is changing.

Hundreds of comments were received regarding changes in who is volunteering and their availability. Eleven trends stood out regarding changes in volunteer availability.

Eleven Trends in Volunteer Availability

Trends	Examples
1. Job seekers are volunteering.	<i>“More people in search of jobs are applying as volunteers to use on their resume or to show their job skills in hopes of a paid position.”</i>
2. Student volunteering is up.	<i>“The trend for students to seek volunteer experience continues to grow, whether or not it’s required of them.”</i>
3. The traditional corps of stable, older volunteers is declining for some organizations.	<i>“We have lost some of our older volunteers due to health changes. These volunteers are people who have been very committed to long-term volunteer relationships. They have also been very dependable and organized in reporting hours.”</i>
4. Group volunteering is up.	<i>“Shift in how people want to volunteer; they want to be a part of a group effort.”</i>
5. Corporate volunteering is up	<i>“Increased focus on corporations that give back to the community.”</i>
6. Volunteers from immigrant communities and communities of color are increasing.	<i>“Recent immigrants have found volunteering with us as a way to build work references, language skills, and build self esteem while using their native language.”</i>
7. Boomer- and retiree-interest in volunteering is strong.	<i>“I am finding that very capable baby boomers are eager and enthusiastic volunteers, willing to do anything.”</i>
8. Involvement of AmeriCorps and VISTA members is up.	<i>“More funding has been made available to the AmeriCorps programming, thus allowing our organization to involve AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers in volunteer management and marketing/communications needs.”</i>
9. “Mandatory” volunteering is up.	<i>“I’m noticing an increase in people completing service hours for school, court, and work time off.”</i>
10. Interest in one-time volunteering is strong.	<i>“Though the total number of volunteers has been somewhat stable, we see the continued decrease of volunteers willing to serve in one-on-one, direct-service positions that are on-going, and more willingness to do one-time volunteer opportunities with no obligation to continue, which is contrary to what most of our needs are at this time.”</i>
11. Changes in the time volunteers are available.	<i>“It has become more challenging to recruit volunteers for weekend opportunities and easier to recruit for weekdays. It used to be the opposite.”</i>

Roles of paid staff and volunteers change as organizations expand volunteer involvement.

This survey addressed the dynamics between volunteers and paid staff during these changing times. The results were surprising and counter to commonly held assumptions.

Almost as many organizations reported staff taking on roles previously done by volunteers as the volunteers taking on roles previously done by staff.

- 20% of respondents reported their organization used volunteers in positions that were formerly paid positions in the past year.
- 17% of respondents reported their organizations used staff in positions that were held by volunteers in the past year.

“Volunteers have indicated they perceive additional temporary staff as a threat to their jobs. Even though that just isn’t true.”

Volunteer roles are different than those of staff.

Comments from organizations that reported they now involved volunteers in work previously done by staff indicated that volunteers were usually doing just part of the work a staff member used to do and/or doing it temporarily until funding to hire staff was available. Staff members’ reactions to volunteers taking on tasks that were previously in paid roles varied widely:

- *“Staff did not like it. They worked with too many [volunteers]. Wanted one regular person to work with.”*
- *“It was a blessing for all involved.”*

“Volunteers never did the same ‘position’ as paid staff, but perhaps would perform one or two of the activities/responsibilities.”

Few volunteer programs reported concerns regarding volunteers taking over staff positions.

Only 6% of respondents reported that program staff indicated they perceive volunteers as a threat to their jobs. Those that did indicate the concerns are complex:

- *“Staff in other programs are more reluctant to invite volunteers...I think one of the factors is fear of loss of their jobs.”*
- *“Increased demand has added stress to vetting volunteer opportunities so that they are not conflicting with former paid work opportunities.”*

Financial stress and the economic downturn continue to impact volunteer programs.

Fiscal stress is widespread.

Seventy-four percent of respondents reported organizational fiscal stress (decrease in revenues and/or increase in expenses) in the past year. This is down from the 86% that reported fiscal stress in 2009, but is still the majority of organizations.

Regarding **staffing** for the volunteer program:

- 20% reported that positions have been cut or hours of staff reduced;
- 64% reported no change;
- 16% reported an increase in positions or hours for positions.

Regarding the **budget** for the volunteer program:

- 27% reported the budget was cut;
- 35% reported the budget has not changed;
- 7% reported the budget increased;
- 26% reported they did not have a separate budget for the volunteer program.

Survey comments ranged from “*have had a better year*” to the “*volunteer budget was stripped altogether*” indicating a wide range of fiscal experiences in 2010.

Programs reported the economic downturn has increased demand for volunteers.

Eighty-one percent of respondents reported the economic downturn has affected the volunteer program in one or more ways.

The most commonly reported effects on the volunteer program were increased demand for volunteers.

- 37% of respondents indicated **increased demand for services has created new volunteer opportunities.**
- 36% of respondents indicated **staff in other areas of the organization have increased requests for volunteers.**

A smaller number of respondents reported negative changes in the volunteer program due to the economic downturn, although for those programs the changes were significant.

- 24% reported **program staff have less time to work with volunteers, or paid staff members' job uncertainty reduces their ability to involve volunteers.**
- 10% reported that **increased stress has made the organization a less rewarding place to volunteer.**
- 9% reported that **organizational cutbacks have decreased volunteer opportunities.**

These pressures are highlighted in an organization that reported, “*With major organizational staff cuts over the past two years, many of the staff who worked with volunteers in their departments are no longer here or programs were cut, reducing opportunities.*”

There is more demand for volunteer services due to increased community needs and increased organizational needs.

Due to the economic downturn, there is more demand in communities for services and internal requests for volunteers have increased for many organizations.

“As the economic downturn continues in our area, we experience more and more demand for our services. Since we’re an all-volunteer group, we will continue to need more assistance from our current volunteers as well as more volunteers.”

“Budgets get extremely tight and the standards of volunteer performance and excellence are ever increasing. In other words, the organization expects the volunteers to perform at or above the level of highly engaged employees.”

“More clients are asking for volunteers to perform services since many of the seniors we serve have had significant reductions in their incomes.”

“The more clients we serve daily, the more volunteers are needed to help in those program areas. We offer a community meal daily and more guests who come for

the meal means more cooking, prep, and clean up. As the economy makes people struggle each month, we see exactly how much by the people who turn to us for help.”

“There are many more last-minute requests and more urgent type requests with short timelines.”

The economic recovery has yet to benefit most volunteer programs.

Eighty-six percent of respondents reported they had not seen changes in their volunteer program due to the apparent start of the economic recovery. Fourteen percent reported that they had seen changes. The two sides of this perspective are reflected in these comments:

“We have not seen an economic recovery, certainly not reflected in the clients we serve, or the volunteers we engage.”

“We reduced staff by 20% in late 2008 in reaction to the turn in the economy. We have been able to increase all staff in early 2010 back to 2008 levels. We now have the staff to recruit and support more volunteers!”

Many are doing more with less.

Although half of organizations reported an increase in volunteer hours, only 7% reported an increase in the budget for the volunteer programs. Comments indicated programs were doing more with less, or are expected to do more with less.

“Hospital is expanding, so the volunteer program is expected to expand dramatically, but more volunteer staff will not be added.”

Volunteer programs develop new strategies to respond to the shifting environment.

Most volunteer managers have responded to the challenges of the changing times. Faced with fiscal stress and rapid changes in both volunteer availability and organizational needs for volunteer services, many volunteer managers have reacted proactively. Responses to the survey reveal creative and successful strategies were developed by volunteer programs to not only cope with changes, but to create stronger volunteer programs, using updated volunteer engagement practices.

Respondents were asked to indicate which strategies or ideas they used in the past year to make their volunteer program as effective as possible.

Involving volunteers in new ways

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

Increased use of technology and systems to streamline practices

- 54% used technology in new ways to communicate with and track volunteers.
- 44% streamlined or standardized practices for volunteer intake, screening, placement or training.
- 37% reported increased use of social media.

Enhancing volunteer recruitment

- 40% reinvigorated volunteer recruitment.
- 31% involved more student interns.
- 26% promoted volunteer positions to job seekers.

Building staff capabilities

- 42% built up staff capability to lead and support volunteers.

Advocating internally to better position the volunteer program

- 39% reported stepping up internal advocacy and attention to the volunteer program to garner continued support from other staff, administration and/or board members.

“As volunteer administrators we can see the value of adequate paid staffing levels, our efforts have focused on reminding senior management that volunteers could be more effective if we were able to increase staffing levels to where we were before the downturn.”

Increased collaborations

- 41% of respondents reported increased collaborative activities with outside partners.
- Regarding the type of collaboration or partnership that increased, 61% reported they collaborate with schools, 53% collaborate with corporations/businesses, 37% with churches, 23% with workforce centers and 23% with AmeriCorps, VISTA or other forms of national service.
- Regarding the purpose of the collaborations, 68% reported working on joint projects, 59% reported they are responding to increased community/client needs, and 58% reported they collaborate on volunteer recruitment.

Hundreds of strategies were suggested.

When asked to “share one strategy you have found to be most effective in engaging volunteers during the economic downturn” we received hundreds of favorite strategies. Here are some that were mentioned most frequently.

Designing Positions

1. Customize involvement to fit the volunteer's interests, talents and availability.

- Give volunteers opportunities to describe how they would like to help and then work with them to create new volunteer opportunities that fit their level and areas of expertise.
- “We continue to try to meet volunteers where they are at and create a customized volunteer experience for them whenever possible.”

2. Be flexible in response to the schedule and requirements of the volunteer.

- Listen to their needs and be flexible with volunteer position descriptions (e.g., the number of hours required, length of shift, time of day.)
- “Always listening to their needs and to be flexible in the schedule when working around school and jobs.”
- “Being very flexible, willing to change the volunteer position descriptions to fit what our volunteers want.”

3. Offer more short-term, weekend and evening volunteer opportunities.

- Find ways to engage volunteers during non-working hours, for one-time/short-term projects and events.
- “Allowed more short-term volunteer positions.”

4. Offer expanded roles for volunteers in the organization.

- Encourage volunteers to assist with the development or enhancement of new roles.

5. Offer opportunities to lead projects.

- Send the message that this is a community initiative and volunteering offers stakeholders a role in the development of the project.
- “Creating meaningful projects that are highly flexible.”

6. Provide volunteer opportunities that use professional skills and have higher levels of responsibility.

- Utilize volunteers for their expertise -- use the skills from their day job, what they are passionate about, or educated in.
- “Offered opportunities when able to use their higher levels of skills and knowledge.”

Recruiting

7. Involve volunteers in recruiting other volunteers.

- “We have turned to our current volunteers to help recruit and train new volunteers. They are our best advertising of our needs and what we look for in volunteers. They can state first hand how it is and are proud to be part of organization.”
- “We began an Ambassador Program where volunteers are more involved in capacity building and marketing.”

8. Increase involvement of student volunteers and interns.

- “We have personally connected with the colleges in the area and have presented in classrooms where working in our organization would be relevant to what they were learning.”
- “We are contacting potential students going into the healthcare field at our local community college via print media.”
- “We have involved youth volunteers who are home-schooled or being educated in non-traditional type schooling. These teenagers are volunteering during the weekdays.”

9. Increase use of technology in recruiting and communicating with volunteers.

- Use Twitter and Facebook to communicate with volunteers.

- “We are using technology to better communicate with volunteers in a timely manner.”
- “Our website!”

10. Form partnerships to recruit volunteers and to work on projects of joint interest.

- “We are forming more deliberate partnerships with other organizations serving the same type of clients, which helps us ‘compete’ less for volunteers and recruit together.”

11. Market volunteer positions to job seekers and support them to get the most out of the experience.

- Stress the fact that continued involvement in their community enhances the job seeker’s resume. Promote volunteering as a way to gain experience in a field where employment is desired.
- Talk up the importance of having current references in a job hunt, and that volunteering is a great way to add a reference.
- Suggest they get some experience with you to help them discern future job interests.
- “We worked with our Work Force Center and Work Training Center to assist people out of work to gain experience and remain purposeful.”
- “We provide constant reinforcement on how their experiences here will benefit their work in the future.”
- “We offer our volunteer placement services to clients of the Dept. of Jobs & Training.”
- “We find short-term volunteer positions for people who are hoping to get back into a paid position.”
- “We provide support to those volunteers who are job seeking and celebrate when they become employed.”

Matching and Training

12. Enhance strategies for matching volunteers.

- Take the time to make good matches, so volunteers and the staff who supervise them have positive experiences.
- *“I think it is really important for volunteers to help in areas where they have special skills and/or interest. People are looking for things that are affirming and fun.”*

- *“Conduct in-person interviews to identify skills and interests to match high level volunteers to specific projects or tasks.”*
- *“Once a staff person has seen a successful volunteer elsewhere, he/she is more willing to explore ways to use volunteers.”*

13. Streamline and standardize practices for intake of volunteers and running the volunteer program.

- “We have used new technology to train volunteers and staff to streamline the process and have more staff qualified to use volunteers.”
- “Staff don’t have the time to provide training to volunteers like they once did. We are looking at ways we can standardize training and putting some of it on-line.”

Support, Communication and Recognition

14. Increase communication with volunteers about the needs of the organization and clients.

- “We explain the work of our agency and why it is important, then inform volunteers about funding cuts and the need for community support to be successful so funds could be used for program needs.”
- “We share about the needs of our clients.”
- “Face time!”

15. Say “thank you” frequently and in personal ways.

- Pay attention to proper thank-yous.
- “We focus very strongly on volunteer appreciation at all times and teach all staff to have an attitude of gratitude for volunteers.”

Working with the Whole Organization

16. Involve staff throughout the organization in working with volunteers.

- Help other leaders and staff in the organization know how to recruit volunteers.
- *“Our most important strategy applies to every situation - we involve many employees in the day-to-day management of volunteers and keep our volunteer department very flexible so that*

we can match the needs of as many volunteers as possible.”

17. Advocate for and position the volunteer program effectively.

- “We’ve really worked hard at identifying all the benefits volunteers bring to us -- in services they provide, in donations from their corporate groups.”
- “One strategy that is still in process is producing a volunteer plan, created and envisioned by the volunteer coordinator, and then presented to staff for input and addendums. The plan will then go onto the Board of Directors for approval and then the new strategies addressed in the plan will be executed in the order proposed.”

Strategies to keep an eye on in the future

In addition to the commonly cited strategies above, there were several strategies mentioned that may be on the rise in volunteer engagement.

1. Remote volunteering

- Provide flexibility for volunteers to serve from their home, completing tasks such as data entry and tracking.
- For volunteers who serve from home, offer volunteer get-togethers every other month for training opportunities and volunteer networking.
- “People want to volunteer -- we just don’t have the internal capacity to support them. We have volunteers do things (fund raising, gifts, welcome baskets, etc.) at their place of work or school and bring it in.”

2. Low-cost volunteering

- Encourage no or low-cost activities between volunteer and client.

3. Offer benefits for volunteering

- Consider the use of interns and stipends for intern positions.
- Increase mileage reimbursements.
- “When a volunteer works over a lunch hour, we encourage them to have ‘lunch on us.’”

CONCLUSIONS

Trends from 2009 continue into 2010

The 2010 MAVA survey showed a continuation of many of the trends found in the 2009 survey.

- Job seekers are a large portion of new inquires about volunteering.
- Interest in volunteering up for many, but not all organizations.
- Volunteer hours and reliance on volunteers has increased for many organizations.
- Organizations are very resourceful in developing strategies and updating volunteer practices to meet the challenges of the times.

While there were more similarities than differences in the data reported across the two years, several new trends emerged in 2010: some are starting to see a slight tapering off of job seekers volunteering, and although fiscal stress is still present, more report coping with it rather than being overwhelmed by it.

Volunteers have a real impact in tough times.

The results contradicted a commonly held assumption that volunteers are “nice but not necessary.” The survey finding that 30% of organizations reported volunteers have preserved organizational services through their efforts highlights the necessity of volunteers. The vital role of volunteers is clear in the finding that 15% of organizations that had a decrease in inquiries about volunteering reported negative consequences: 26% reported cutbacks in services and 49% report that paid staff now need to do work previously done by volunteers. Volunteers are preserving and delivering services.

Volunteering plays an important role for the unemployed.

As our country focuses on getting the unemployed back to work, the study highlights the important role volunteering plays for job seekers. The study confirmed that job seekers are actively volunteering and are an important part of the current volunteer pool. Organizations spend time to see that job seekers gain opportunities for references, networking, and build skills. This highlights the important role volunteer programs play in supporting job seekers. MAVA is currently focusing on the question of how to enhance the role of volunteering in assisting job seekers, and is developing a tool kit on the topic for nonprofits, to be available by June 2011. More information will be at www.mavanetwork.org.

There is less concern over volunteers replacing staff than expected.

Some volunteer program leaders have expressed concern that there could be a perception that volunteers are replacing staff, as volunteer roles expand in some organizations. The survey results were surprising. Only 6% of respondents reported that program staff indicated they perceive volunteers as a threat to their jobs. Furthermore, nearly the same number of organizations (17%) reported staff were taking on roles previously done by volunteers as reported that volunteers taking on roles previously done by staff (20%). Several comments pointed to real concerns volunteers had about paid staff taking their position. The results of the survey point to a more fluid interplay between staff and volunteer roles than commonly thought. For those organizations that are concerned about volunteers taking jobs, however, the concerns were complex and serious. Volunteer managers reported being careful to design volunteer positions that did not raise concerns over replacing paid staff. Some reported that it was harder to involve volunteers because of a concern by staff that volunteers were a threat to their jobs. The finding that most volunteers only did parts of paid positions, or filled in temporarily, should help allay concerns that there is a one-to-one replacement of staff by volunteers.

Volunteerism practices are being updated for today's volunteers.

For about 15 years, the field of volunteerism has been aware of trends in changing expectations from volunteers. Counter to concerns that organizations have not responded to these trends, the survey found significant updating of volunteer engagement practices. About half of the organizations reported increasing flexibility regarding when volunteers can serve, involving volunteers in new roles, and asking volunteers to use their professional or workplace skills. Over one-third reported involving volunteers in leadership positions or project management. Comments indicated economic pressures helped move along changes in organizations that volunteer programs had been trying to make for years. The data provided an exciting picture of volunteer programs that are changing systems to better match today's volunteers' expectations. It showed leaders of volunteers are not caving in to the pressures of financial stress, but are resilient and are responding by creating strategies to move their volunteer programs forward.

Be ready for further changes in who is volunteering and their expectations.

Analysis of comments found 11 trends in who is volunteering, including growth in job seekers, students and new immigrants as volunteers, and an increase in corporate and group volunteering. Between 2009 and 2010 there was no indication there has been a slow down in the pace of change that volunteer programs experience. It is likely that volunteers' expectations will continue to change and organizations need to be ready to respond to those changes. It is not enough to update volunteer systems to meet the expectations of today's volunteers; effective organizations will become flexible learning organizations that are aware of and respond to changing trends.

There are serious consequences to cutting volunteer program resources.

Only 27% of respondents reported their volunteer program budget was cut in the past year, however, evidence was found throughout the survey responses that cutting staff for volunteer programs resulted in fewer volunteers and less service. The data showed a sharp contrast between volunteer programs thriving and growing in service delivery and programs where resources were cut and services shrinking. Volunteer programs are similar to the nonprofit sector where needs grow while funding sometimes declines. It is clear that less funding for volunteer programs results in fewer volunteers, less work for the volunteers to do, lower-quality work due to less training, and other impacts.

It is unrealistic to increase reliance on volunteers without investing more resources.

There was excitement throughout the responses that volunteers can provide increased capacity and that organizations are increasing their reliance on volunteers. The findings raise questions, however, regarding how sustainable this is. Only 7% of respondents saw an increase in the volunteer program budget in 2010, while 55% projected greater reliance on volunteers in 2011. Many volunteer programs are clearly doing more with flat resources, but the results of the survey confirm the value of increasing investments in volunteer programs so that the 55% that project increased reliance on volunteers can successfully do so.

It is important to pay attention to the volunteer program during organization change.

Organizations sometimes forget that change will affect the volunteer base if not proactively managed. Ten percent of respondents reported that increased stress made the organization a less rewarding place to volunteer. This highlights that the volunteers are not immune to what is happening in the rest of the organization.

Volunteer managers should be recognized for the new and more complex role they play.

Today's volunteer resources managers must be able to work with highly skilled volunteers, delegate projects to volunteers, involve volunteers in high-responsibility roles with high performance standards, have the capability to work with volunteers doing a wide variety of roles in organizations, and have the interpersonal skills to work with volunteers to design customized positions. They need the skills to market, delegate, inspire and sustain the organization's mission. Effective volunteer-management skills are more necessary than ever because volunteers deliver more services than ever, agencies rely more heavily on volunteers than in the past, and because volunteers have less time to volunteer. The expectations on these professionals are greater than ever before. They need support, organizational recognition, and pay that reflect their 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 at the end of the report highlights how widespread volunteerism is in Minnesota. Examples of volunteers preserving services and helping organizations meet increased demand for services were provided from the nonprofit and government sectors, at the policy and direct-service levels, and includes volunteers coming from corporations, schools, faith-based and community groups, in all regions of state. Volunteers work on improving K-12 schools, the environment, emergency services, and provide basic needs. The needs in communities are greater today than ever before. There are increased numbers of homeless youth and families, racial disparities in the criminal justice system, a housing crisis, increased hunger, etc. Given the trend this study found in growth of reliance on volunteers, there is promising potential for citizen volunteers to address key problems in Minnesota. As the Boomer generation starts to retire, investing even moderate amounts of additional financial resources in volunteerism can help move Minnesota forward.

Next Steps

Please share this data and use it to create change. Members of MAVA and users of this report are encouraged to share the results with executive team leaders within their organization and cite this data to support continued investment in volunteer leadership resources. The data in this report can also be used in public communications to indicate the challenges and opportunities facing the field today.

MAVA will be offering a webinar and programs to further explore these findings. MAVA is available to offer presentations based on this research. For more information contact mquirk@mavanetwork.com.

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents identified the size of their organization and volunteer program. Fourteen percent work for an organization whose annual budget is less than \$100,000; 13% have an organizational budget of \$100,001 - \$499,999; 13% have \$500,000 - \$2.5 million; 25% have over \$3 million; and 25% didn't know the size of their organization's budget. Twenty-six percent engage fewer than 100 volunteers per year; 39% engage 101-500 volunteers; and the remaining one-third engage over 500 volunteers per year.

Regarding geographic distribution, 50% of the respondents were from organizations that serve the Twin Cities Metro area, 19% serve central Minnesota, 16% serve northern Minnesota, 15% serve Southern Minnesota, 8% serve Western Minnesota, 12% serve statewide, 6% serve nationally and 13% indicated "other." Respondents represented a wide range of sectors, including social services, education, healthcare, the arts, and others.

THANK YOU

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Thank you, survey respondents, for taking time to share your struggles, opportunities and strategies.