

Engaging Volunteers in Rural Areas

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How we feel volunteer engagement is going...



How it really is...



MAVA

Rural Volunteerism Study

In 2012 the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) conducted its first study on volunteerism in rural Minnesota. The purpose of the survey was to learn what was changing in rural volunteerism, strategies being used to address the changes and current perspectives on rural volunteerism. With the importance of rural communities in Minnesota, it is important to understand the status of volunteerism in rural areas.

Six Key Themes

- Volunteers are a vital force in rural communities providing most of many community services.
- Volunteerism is currently strong with organizations responding that they have as many, or more volunteers this year than last.

"Alone we can do
so little; together
we can do so
much."

Helen Keller

Six Key Themes

- A large majority reported seeing one or more changes in volunteerism in rural areas.
- Most effective forms of recruitment cited were asking volunteers to recruit volunteers and asking people you know

**“NO ACT OF
KINDNESS
NO MATTER
HOW SMALL,
IS EVER WASTED.”
AESOP**

Six Key Themes

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

~Winston Churchill

- Concern over impact of higher gas prices dominated survey results.
- A strong sense of community was an important factor cited to volunteerism.

Key Findings

- 60%+ of emergency food, activities for youth, firefighting and transportation for older adults reported to be done primarily through volunteers in rural communities
- Volunteerism is currently strong with 88% of organizations responding that they have as many, or more volunteers this year than last.

Number of Volunteers is Up 41%

Number of Volunteers is about the same 48%

Number of Volunteers is Down 12%

Key Findings Cont.

98% reported seeing one or more change in volunteerism in rural areas.

The most commonly cited changes were:

- People seem busier (58%)
- Rising gas prices affecting how much people can volunteer (52%)
- Older volunteers no longer able to volunteer and no one to replace them (49%)
- Harder to find volunteers to take on main responsibility roles (43%)
- More use of the internet and electronic communication (39%)
- New people moving into the area are a new source of volunteers (31%)
- People care more about their community and are more willing to help (30%)

Strategies for Engaging Volunteers in Rural Areas

Many volunteer managers reported developing creative strategies to respond to engaging volunteers in rural areas.

Common suggestions included:

Provide assistance in transportation, such as resources for public transit, car pools, driving buddies. Look for funds to cover travel stipends or mileage reimbursement.

Be ready with short term projects, onetime events and projects that are specific and manageable.



ONE OF THE
GREATEST GIFTS
YOU CAN GIVE IS
YOUR TIME

#VOLUNTEER

Utilize community connections (churches, schools, friends and family) to spread the word about the work of the organization and how the volunteer has an impact on important community issues.

Emphasize the benefits of volunteering, such as better health, meeting potential friends or people with common interests; remind people what great new contacts they'll make.

Be flexible to work around their scheduling needs, such as offering longer volunteer shifts so the drive is worthwhile.

Place volunteers in situations that are rewarding to them. Monitoring the placement to ensure the placement is successful and highlight the important work through community recognition.

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands.

One for helping yourself, the other for helping others.

—Audrey Hepburn



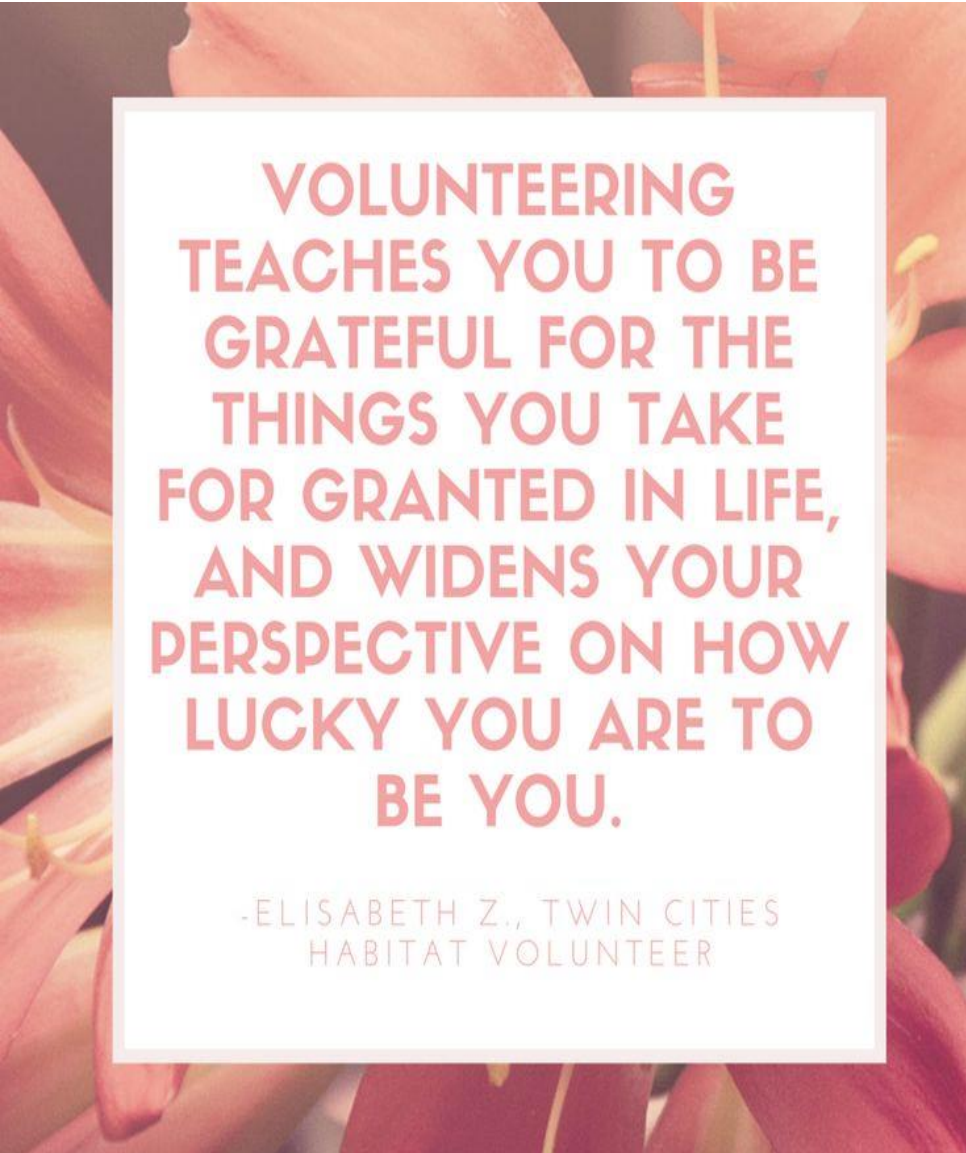
Conclusion

The survey results present a vibrant picture of rural volunteerism in a period of change, addressing and adapting to demographic, economic and other changes affecting rural communities.

Volunteers provide critical services in rural areas.

Volunteers provide the majority of a number of essential services such as firefighting, emergency food and youth activities that are typically done through staffed agencies in larger cities. In most rural communities, volunteers are a critical force for the life of the community.





VOLUNTEERING
TEACHES YOU TO BE
GRATEFUL FOR THE
THINGS YOU TAKE
FOR GRANTED IN LIFE,
AND WIDENS YOUR
PERSPECTIVE ON HOW
LUCKY YOU ARE TO
BE YOU.

-ELISABETH Z., TWIN CITIES
HABITAT VOLUNTEER

Currently, volunteerism appears to be strong in rural

areas, with most organizations reporting having as many or more volunteers as compared to the previous year. Although there was variation in reports, overall number of inquiries for volunteering was staying steady though organizations were quick to cite challenges in aspects of engaging volunteers.

Care needs to be taken not to consider “rural volunteerism” as one entity, as differences were cited between organizations, between towns and between regions in the state. As parts of Minnesota are experiencing different demographic trends, those trends also affect who is available to volunteer.

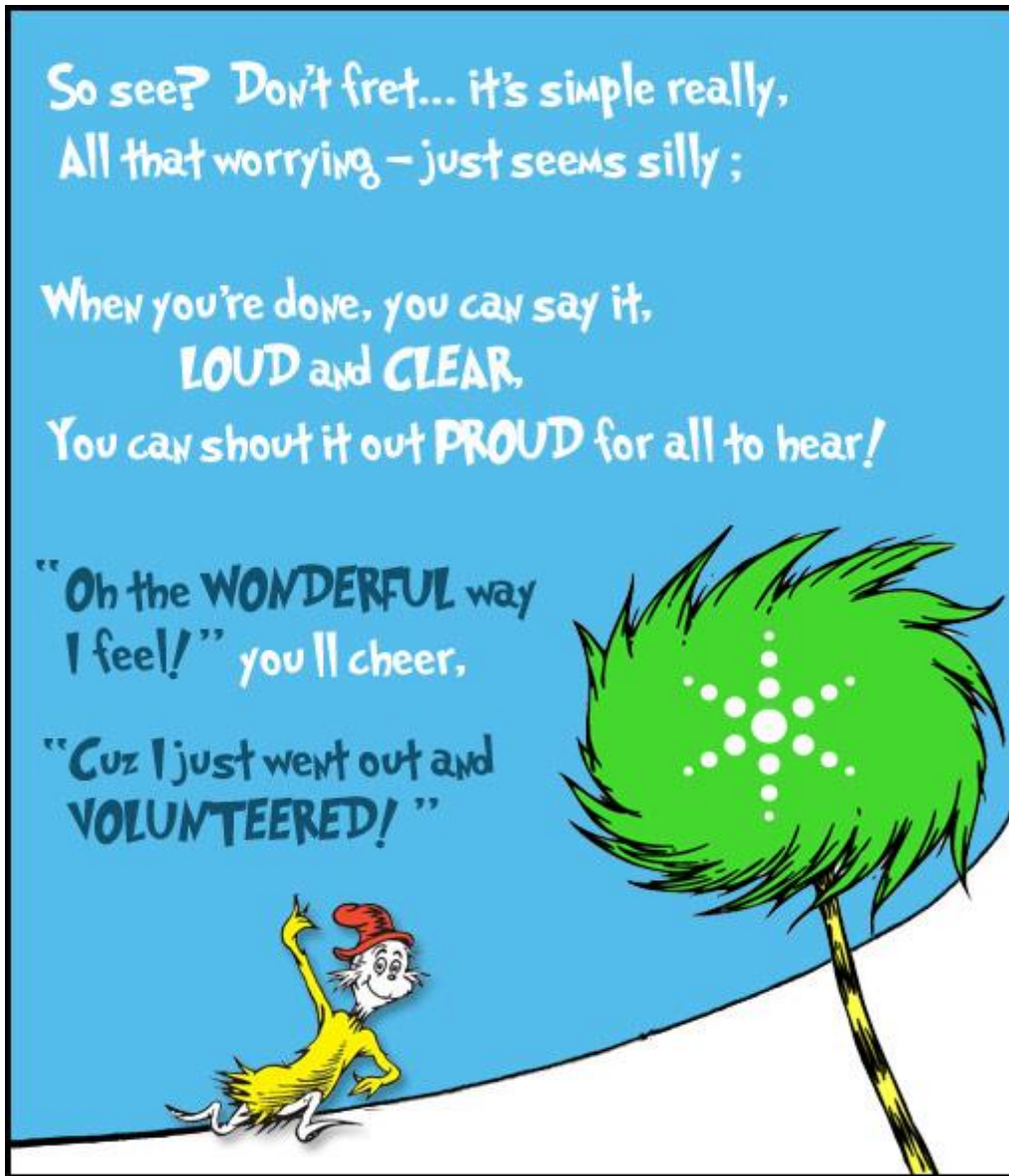
One trend that appeared in a number of survey responses was the opportunity in the lakes areas of Minnesota to engage seasonal and permanent residents, while other parts of the state were experiencing population loss and challenges in finding volunteers.

“Volunteers do not have more time – they just have more heart.”
anonymous

One of the most important findings of the survey was that

98% of respondents were seeing one or more change in rural volunteerism. Rising gas prices, aging of volunteers, changes in expectations of volunteers and other factors were making it clear that organizations could not rely on past methods for engaging volunteers for future success. Organizations cited many strategies that they were using to address what was changing in volunteerism





Given the importance of volunteers in rural communities and the rate that organizations are seeing changes in volunteerism, we cannot take for granted that vital volunteer services will continue without these changes being addressed. Rural volunteerism is a critical resource for rural Minnesota in a period of change. To keep the lifeblood of volunteerism strong in rural Minnesota will take resources, proactive thinking and a readiness to seize new opportunities.

Rural Summit Panel Participants

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