

2014 UPDATE: PIKES PEAK VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

PIKES PEAK VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

In its third year, the Pikes Peak Volunteer Engagement Initiative continues to build the capacity of local organizations to expand their impact through the effective engagement of volunteers. Through its annual investment of \$50,000 (\$10,000 for operating expenses and \$40,000 for volunteer impact grants), The Leighty Foundation has seen tremendous growth in participating organizations' attitudes toward and engagement of community volunteers. After two years, the Foundation continues to work with 20 of the original 25 organizations that participated in the convening and training portion of the initiative.

In particular, notable growth has been measured in the following areas:

- Increased organizational understanding of the value of and commitment to the empowerment of volunteer resources;
- Expansion of grantees' current work – more organizational capacity to meet organizational mission; and,
- Addition of critical programs created and managed by volunteers.

As Jane Leighty Justis of The Leighty Foundation notes, "2014 marks the third year of the Pikes Peak Volunteer Engagement Initiative, and awarding Volunteer Impact Grants to partnering organizations. We have seen evidence of powerful impact in our community and the participating organizations. We will continue this work in our local community and encourage other funders to participate in building this important capacity in their grantees".

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

During the fall of 2014, executive directors from organizations participating in the Pikes Peak Volunteer Engagement Initiative were asked to reflect on how their organizations' participation in the initiative has changed organizational practice in three key areas:

- Organizational view of volunteers;
- Role of the executive director in instituting organizational changes; and,
- Impact of changes in the organization as well as those served by the organization.

A sample of these reflections are included below:

ORGANIZATIONAL VIEW OF VOLUNTEERS

The Leighty Foundation's work to strengthen organizations and maximize organizational impact by leveraging volunteers has not only changed the way we look at our volunteer force, it has inspired us to totally renovate our program! Because of the resources provided by The Leighty Foundation, we have been able to evaluate our existing program and identify key growth opportunities. We've also developed talent within our volunteer force and have added two volunteer positions to our staff: volunteer coordinator and operations coordinator. We've developed an orientation and position descriptions and we've fleshed out volunteer acquisition and retention plans. As a result, our impact has expanded and our volunteers and paid staff alike are able to accomplish more than we were before.

--- Kristy Milligan, Citizen's Project (promotes equality, religious freedom and diversity)

The volunteer program at Care and Share Food Bank for Southern Colorado has evolved into a much more robust program over the past few years. It started with an acknowledgement by our staff and board of directors that volunteerism was not incidental to our organization. Volunteers are critical to our ability to meet our mission and our volunteer program needed to be well-designed and managed by a professional. As a result of our efforts:

- We are engaging many more volunteers;
- Volunteers are participating in every department and in many roles (not just sorting food);
- We have developed ways to recognize and reward volunteers;
- Experienced volunteers are encouraged to be lead volunteers with greater responsibilities; and,
- The staff has learned to respect the value that volunteers bring; they are not just "free" labor.

---Lynne Telford, Care and Share Food Bank for Southern Colorado

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROLE

As executive director, I sought to create the vision of an energetic, well-trained, committed pool of volunteers that would ease the workload of an exhausted staff. Some employees were skeptical – they had the mindset that volunteers were often more trouble than they were worth. We discussed what we were doing wrong by putting ourselves in the position of a volunteer. We asked ourselves, "Would I enjoy volunteering at this agency? Why or why not?" We also asked our volunteers about their job satisfaction. Once we began to identify our opportunities for improvement, everyone got invigorated thinking of creative ways to address the issues.

---Janet Kerr, TESSA (serves victims of domestic and sexual violence)

One of the big changes we've made as an organization was to develop the paid employee position of volunteer manager. This has helped to offer relief to our staff while providing stability to the volunteer program and a contact person of support for our volunteers. Helping the board to see the value in this position was difficult at first as there is no direct link from this position to serving the clients or bringing in revenue but rather an indirect link to both of those. Investing in this paid position was a culture shift for us and is proof that our organization is really seeing the value this staff support would provide.

---Haley Chapin, Tri-Lake Cares (community resource center)

ORGANIZATIONAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Our expanded role in the use and coordination of community volunteers has strengthened our relationships in the conversation community and provided us leverage with our local land management agencies and decision makers. It has also helped us support our mission by actively addressing the needs of our open space properties and engaging community volunteers. These volunteers are also our community voices for improved and sustainable parks. Our role with volunteers has also influenced our City Parks Department and has led to plans for a new “Partnership for Parks” program within the Department. We will be working with the City to expand our capacity building services to regional friends groups in order to elevate their ability to provide stewardship resources.

---Susan Davies, Trails and Open Spaces (conservation)

We are serving 100 more children than in 2012. Our last staff survey shows more than 80% satisfaction and the court surveys show 100% satisfaction. The outcomes for children that we tracked from our core cases without peer coordinators (control group) against the “Peer Coordinators” coached volunteer cases show improved case outcomes on all three indicator levels. The value of this new level of volunteer leadership is immense and will allow us to serve 500 more children by the year 2020.

---Trudy Strewler Hodges, CASA (child advocacy)

I feel more than ever before that the volunteers feel empowered and have expanded their ways of donating their time. Activities have included: a volunteer led mural project involving agency youth, coordination and overseeing a youth field trip to access workshops on mental health issues, and coordination of a clothing closet for agency youth.

---Eric Pizana, Inside Out Youth Service (serves LBGTIQ youth)

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Funders interested in replicating the Pikes Peak Volunteer Engagement Initiative should contact Jane Leighty Justis – jane@leightyfoundation.org – for further information.