SERVICE ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE
OUTCOMES REPORT

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION AND HANDSON TWIN CITIES

OVERVIEW

In 2014, the national Points of Light organization selected the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) and HandsOn Twin Cities (HOTC) as hubs to provide a service enterprise certification program to Minnesota entities. This Service Enterprise Initiative (SEI) is a cutting edge national program designed to maximize organizational impact through best practices in volunteer engagement. Through this initiative, 28 Minnesota entities are now designated as certified service enterprises and many more are in the process of achieving certification.

To determine the impact of MAVA's and HOTC's work with entities working toward service enterprise certification, HOTC held a focus group with representatives from five certified service enterprise organizations and MAVA interviewed an additional fourteen staff and volunteers from four organizations that participated in the SEI. MAVA and HOTC gathered input for this report within six months to two years after the organizations had participated in SEI training.

The focus group and interviews were based on questions developed by Wilder Research with the goals of helping MAVA and HOTC to gather information to:

» Develop marketing strategies for Service Enterprise to recruit organizations to participate.
» Secure funding to support future Service Enterprise cohorts.

CAER, City of Roseville, DARTS, Hastings Family Services, Jeremiah Program, Lutheran Social Service, Maple Grove Hospital, Minnesota Historical Society, RESOURCE, and YMCA of the Twin Cities participated in this study. Interviews conducted with staff included a Supervisor of Volunteer Services, an Executive Director, a City Manager, a Director of Nursing, and a Head of Archeology. The staff had been in their positions for between 2 to 30 years. Three volunteers also provided feedback through interviews.

THIS IS A PROCESS THAT KEEPS ON GIVING.

FINDINGS

Motivation for SEI participation

Organizations were asked what made them decide to become involved in SEI. Each organization provided a slightly different reason for participation ranging from wanting to grow their volunteer program to the desire to be on the cutting edge. The reasons cited included:

» To be forward thinking and continuously improve.
» To grow the volunteer program.
» To develop the volunteer program model.
» To be on the cutting edge.

What separates SEI from other volunteer management trainings

When asked what separates SEI from other volunteer management trainings, the reasons cited included that SEI:

» Enabled them to make real progress unlike other one-time conferences.
» Builds consensus among staff from different departments.
» Focused on organizational development.

» Provided networking opportunities that helped them stay accountable.
» Had value by having both HOTC and MAVA involved.

How organizations got involved

Organizations indicated that they became involved through a staff person hearing about the initiative from MAVA and HOTC. The decision to get involved was usually made by the staff person bringing the idea to appropriate decision-makers in the organization.

Benefits of participating in SEI

Key takeaways that organizations cited from the SEI process covered a wide range of benefits, including:

» Realizing the importance of taking a strategic planning approach to volunteer engagement.
» Understanding that volunteers are not free and the need to think of volunteers as a program with a budget.
» Recognizing that there are systems and processes for volunteer engagement and that it is important for the organization to agree on the processes.

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" IT IS A PART OF WHO WE ARE AND OUR CULTURE.

» Increasing awareness of volunteers and broadening perspective on how volunteers can be involved, including the use of skilled volunteers.
» Building an understanding that a change management process strengthens volunteer involvement.
» Increasing buy–in from upper management.
» Moving organization along in the process.
» Recognizing other benefits such as the value of networking with other organizations and the recognition of what they are already doing well.

How entities have changed

Organizations indicated that they had implemented changes as a result of SEI, including:

» An increased focus on volunteerism.
» Identification of new roles for volunteers, including roles in leadership.
» Systematized processes and agreement on processes.
» Clarified roles.
» Training and orientation.
» Increased resources to support volunteers.

One staff person did report that they were not sure if there had been changes yet.

How volunteers have changed

When asked how changes have affected volunteers, organizations reported better training, improved utilization, and more integration and recognition. Three of the staff responded that volunteers were not seeing changes yet, or it was hard to say what changes they were seeing.

How staff and overall organization have changed

When asked how SEI has affected staff and the organization, entities reported a range of answers, including:

» Improved staff and the organization openness to volunteerism.
» Increased utilization of volunteers.
» Eased level of stress.

How has SEI affected the people, community, or clients served

When asked how it has affected the people, community, or clients you serve, the most common response was that it was hard to say, or too early to tell, though about a third of the staff interviewed cited changes.

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INCLUDES UNDERSTANDING THAT VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT A FREE MAGIC SOLUTION.

Visibility of changes

When asked if the implemented changes were visible or recognizable by board members, by people who did not know about SEI participation, or by outside partners, respondents answers ranged from yes, to not sure, to probably not.

Recognizing the difference in the volunteer program before and after participation

When asked about the volunteer program before and after participation, staff could identify a wide variety of changes, such as a switch from an informal to a systematic process to assess volunteer needs, more requests from staff, and positions that are more mission driven.

Perceptions of volunteers

Respondents revealed that the perception of volunteers has changed as a result of SEI. Once considered a burden or only considered for limited roles, volunteers are now viewed as assets that can be valuable for all departments.

Volunteer program resources

Organizations described increasing the resources allocated to the volunteer program. One organization reported increased volunteer management staff time and others reported increased technology, supplies or space budget, or increased time by staff in other departments"

Staff training and resources

The training and resources provided to staff working with volunteers was described as being in the process of increasing in three of the entities but most reported that it needs to be increased more.

Other changes

Other changes described included becoming more systematized in working with volunteers, being less siloed, and being more collaborative.

Organizational support for change

When asked if implemented or planned changes have been supported by all levels of the organization, two organizations reported the changes were support all levels in the organization and two reported there was some support, but not at all levels.

Certification

The organizations that have been certified as a Service Enterprise describe the benefits of certification as:

> ## LIFTED UP THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM. VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENT NOW SEEN AS A LEADER WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION.

» Validating and adding credibility to the volunteer program.
» Increasing awareness of volunteer and creating good experience for volunteers.
» Improving process.
» Providing public relations opportunities and is of interest to funders.

Return on investment

When asked about the returns on participating in SEI a broad range of returns were identified, including:

» Growth.
» Increased visibility.
» Progress.
» Encouragement and realization we are not alone.
» Excitement and pride.
» Overall health of the organization.
» A good investment.

Challenges

When asked about challenges in implementing changes, the main challenges identified were:

» Time and capacity.
» Worries about staff buy-in.
» Concern if volunteers will like the changes.
» Staff turnover.
» Concern over sustaining changes.

Recommendations to other organizations thinking about participating in SEI

When asked what they would say to other organizations thinking about participating in SEI, responses were mostly positive with the acknowledgment that organizations must be committed and prepared to invest the time.

The future

When asked where they saw their organization going in terms of their volunteer programs, respondents indicated positive expectations of growing volunteer involvement, having more staffing, a strong program, being more strategic, more systematized and more skilled based.

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> ## WE NEVER HAD A VOLUNTEERISM LINE ITEM IN BUDGET. NOW WE DO.

CONCLUSION

The interviews and focus group indicated wide–spread agreement about the value of being involved in the Service Enterprise Initiative. The organizations reported truly advancing in volunteer engagement as a result of participating.

There were only two areas where several organizations reported not achieving what they had hoped:

» Getting buy in from the full organization, especially line staff. All organization reported getting top management buy–in but two reported that they did feel had reached yet the full organization and line staff.

» Increase in resources for staff training on volunteer involvement. Three organizations reported more work needed to be done in this area.

These are two areas to look at for future improvement of the SEI process, however two years may not be enough time to assess improvement in this area.

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