Developing Resources within a Grassroots Nonprofit: The Journey from Volunteer to Financial Donor

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DEVELOPING RESOURCES WITHIN A GRASSROOTS NONPROFIT: THE JOURNEY FROM VOLUNTEER TO FINANCIAL DONOR

AFTON S. DEVOS
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Abstract

The United States of America has a rich tradition in philanthropy. Originating with industry titans in the late nineteenth century and embraced by everyday citizens of today, nonprofit organizations benefit from individuals who volunteer their time, make financial contributions, or both. As evidence points to a new generation of donors who value volunteer involvement prior to making a financial gift, nonprofit organizations must employ specific strategies and tactics to cultivate their volunteers into financial supporters. Literature findings demonstrate that individuals are motivated to volunteer and give financially due to organizational efficacy, values, personal benefit, and reputation. Additionally, empirical studies show that stewardship systems, inclusive communications, an invitation for a financial gift, and thanking donors well are all important tactics to engaging volunteers into financial donors. This study takes both the motivations for volunteering and giving financially and tactics used by West Michigan nonprofits, and concludes with recommendations for implementation by grassroots nonprofits that are interested in cultivating volunteers into financial supporters for the long-term sustainability of the organization.

Keywords: philanthropy, charitable giving, volunteerism, motivations, determinants of giving

INTRODUCTION

Medical missionary and Nobel Prize winner Albert Schweitzer once said, “At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.” The national anthem of the United States declares we are the land of the free and home the brave. Both stories and statistics tell us that we freely and bravely care for one another and the systems that serve us: our healthcare, our religious institutions, our education, and even our fellow citizen in peril. In the United States, the spark that often rekindles a light is ignited with a single gift of time or money.

The United States has a rich tradition in philanthropy. In his book Philanthropy in America: A History, Oliver Zunz (2012) argues that modern American philanthropy emerged in the late nineteenth century as industry titans, with unprecedented wealth, established foundations to embrace philanthropic projects for the improvement of mankind (Zunz, 2012). Such projects included museums, libraries, universities, and hospitals, as well as projects that improved lives of recently freed slaves who suffered under the Jim Crow segregation system. Zunz concludes that this dynamic age of philanthropy created an ethic of giving that has now become a routine part of American life (Zunz, 2012).

Fast-forward from the early nineteenth century to the present, and we see philanthropy as rich today as ever before. Philanthropic endeavors no longer rest solely on the shoulders of business titans, but rather are the shared and embraced burdens of everyday American citizens. In 2010, $286.91 billion dollars were donated to support causes in the United States (Giving USA, 2010). Of this total, $211.77 billion (73%) came from individuals, $15.29 billion (5%) from corporations, $41 billion (14%) from foundations, and $22.83 billion (8%) from bequests. In addition to gifts of money, the Independent Sector’s 2001 report Giving and Volunteering in the United States showed forty-four percent of adults over the age of 21 volunteered their time in 2000. Of these volunteers, sixty-three percent reported they volunteered on a regular basis, monthly or more often (Giving and Volunteering, 2001). Of those surveyed above, forty-six percent of adults over the age of 21 gave financially, forty-two percent gave and
volunteered, and twelve percent volunteered without making a financial gift (Giving and Volunteering, 2001). The statistics are telling: we give our time and money generously and at times in concert with one another.

Many directions could be taken when exploring the data shared above. While recognizing that both volunteerism and financial support are important for nonprofit mission delivery, the purpose of this study is to explore theories on giving and volunteering, apply these theories to four nonprofit settings, and conclude with recommendations on how best to engage the twelve percent of individuals stated above who are volunteering, but have not yet chosen to give financially.

Understanding what causes a volunteer to become a financial supporter is paramount, as we look at generational giving trends. The Frey Chair for Family Philanthropy program at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, and 21/64, a nonprofit consulting practice specializing in next gen and multigenerational strategic philanthropy, engaged in a study of next generation donors and reported their findings in #NextGenDonors. They report, “The next generations of major philanthropists, who fit into “Gen X” (born 1964-1980) or “Gen Y/Millennial” (born 1981-2000) generational cohorts, will wield more philanthropic power than any previous generation. With an unprecedented amount of wealth, these donors hold the future of philanthropy in their hands” (www.nextgendonors.org). Whereas the generations before may have given without a personal connection to a cause, the next generation is not likely to do so. “Once engaged, these next gen major donors want to go “all in.” Giving without significant, hands-on engagement feels to them like a hollow investment with little assurance of impact. They want to develop close relationships with the organizations or causes they support; they want to listen and offer their own professional or personal talents, all in order to solve problems together with those whom they support” (www.nextgendonors.org).

Therefore, it is not only beneficial for organizations to pay attention to those who are both volunteering and giving, but in the future, it will be a matter of sustainability. And so the question arises, what strategies and tactics can a nonprofit organization employ to cultivate volunteers into financial donors?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linking Charitable Giving and Volunteerism: Motivations, Attitudes and Practices

In order to demonstrate the linkage between charitable financial giving and volunteerism, we must uncover what those who give their time and those who give their money have in common. Several authors outline how the various motivations, attitudes and practices of financial givers are directly in line with volunteerism.

Motivations for Making a Financial Gift

First, many motivations exist for making a financial contribution and have been demonstrated over the past century. In the 1990s Schervish and Havens developed one of the most well known theories of giving, called the Identification Theory of Care. It suggests that individuals are most likely to give to issues with which they identify (Lindahl, 2010) They rationalize that individuals typically can recall a specific moment in time when the identification with another was a life-changing event, motivating a caring response, and leading to a longer term commitment to philanthropy (Lindahl, 2010) Additionally, each financial gift is made due in part to a public or private benefit, the public benefit most often being that of organizational efficacy (Vesterlund, 2006). The savvy donors of today pay close attention to whether or not an organization has a proven track record of effectiveness within the community, nation or world. Donors are motivated by more than just how an organization does its work, but also why its work is important and what the direct impact is on mankind. In particular, prior to making a gift, potential major donors may review financial statements, annual reports and/or listen to anecdotal data and stories to determine if an organization is worthy of their support (Vesterlund 2006, Bekkers and Wiepking 2011, Amos 1982, Warwick 2009).

In addition to organizational efficacy, many donors are motivated by private or personal benefits they receive by making a financial contribution to an organization. For instance, many donors are motivated by the intrinsic
desire to do good in and beyond their community. Also, they may make a gift to express their own personal and/or religious values. Research continues to demonstrate that those who attend regular religious services are more financially philanthropic than those who do not (Warwick, 2009). Donors also make gifts due to the fact that they have been—or may in the future need to be—directly impacted by the organization themselves (Amos, 1982).

While the “warm glow” of making a donation can be a motivator, the onset of cause marketing in business today demonstrates that individuals, corporations and foundations alike make financial contributions because it heightens their reputation within the community. This heightened reputation often comes in the form of marketing perks, including but not limited to sponsorship benefits at an organization’s fundraising event, tickets for clients and employees, or memberships. When community members see that a business is philanthropic, there is the common belief that citizens are more likely to want to do business with them (Lim, 2009).

In collaboration with the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy, Terence Lim, Ph.D. published a report entitled “Measuring the Impact of Corporate Philanthropy” in 2009. Interviewing Chief Giving Officers and Chief Executive Officers of worldwide companies, Lim asks the question, “Why should companies engage in philanthropy?” He states, “Philanthropic programs are an investment in both the longevity of the business and in the communities in which they operate. This concept is often referred to as “enlightened self-interest” – without healthy communities healthy companies cannot exist. Community involvement is especially critical in today’s competitive business environment, where no company can afford to be insular” (Lim, 2009).

Statistics support the “enlightened self-interest” concept: ninety-five percent of Americans agree that U.S. companies should have more than one purpose (profit), and that they also owe something to the communities in which they operate. Additionally, customers with a favorable impression of a company’s philanthropy are three times more likely to be loyal customers than those who have less favorable perceptions about a company’s philanthropic efforts (Lim, 2009). A summary of these financial giving motivations is found in Table 1.

Motivations for Making a Gift of Time

In tandem, the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly published a study conducted with the results of the Independent Sector’s 1992 national survey on giving and volunteering in the United States. Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) investigated the motivations of volunteers, posing the question, “Why do people choose to spend some of their free time performing unpaid work as a volunteer?” Subsequently adopted as the Functional Volunteer Approach, volunteering serves six categories of motivations or psychological functions: values, understanding, enhancement, career, social and protective functions (Clary et al., 1996).

First, similar to those making a financial gift, volunteers are motivated by their own personal values or beliefs. The #NextGenDonors report emphasizes this finding (Next Gen, 2013). While these donors, as previously discussed, will face complex challenges on what to do with their inherited wealth, they are driven by values, not valuables (Next Gen, 2013). They also want to have close, meaningful relationships with the organizations they support, doing significant on-the-ground tasks, including volunteering. Therefore, their gifts of time, which will often be followed by gifts of money, will be values-based (Manes, 2013).

Secondly, volunteers are also interested in gaining understanding by increasing the knowledge and skills in areas that may otherwise go unpracticed. This was demonstrated with vigor during the economic downturn in 2008. Since this time, the nation has seen a dramatic increase in volunteerism. Thousands of individuals have lost their jobs in the United States, and many continue to turn to volunteerism to remain connected to the community, build their personal networks, and learn new skills so they can further market themselves to potential future employers (Blum, 2010).

Thirdly, volunteerism can allow an individual to enhance his or her esteem, utilizing volunteerism for personal psychological development. Furthermore, as mentioned previously in the discussion of understanding, volunteerism can be viewed as a mechanism for enhancing ones’ career by preparing for or maintaining ones’ career-related skills. Additionally, as demonstrated in the reputation category under financial giving, volunteerism can be associated with social approval; volunteering is often connected to an individual’s primary relationships with others, facilitating face-to-face social ties, and has demonstrated to be a greater predictor of volunteering than even the culture of helping others (Jones, 2006). This social function also allows an individual to escape any negative feelings, which are exemplified in the sixth protective function (Clary, Snyder, and Stukas 1996).
Table 1: Motivations for Making a Financial Gift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Benefit</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefit</td>
<td>Efficacy: output of the organization demonstrates a tangible societal benefit, and has a demonstrated track record of effectiveness</td>
<td>Vesterlund 2006, Bekkers and Wiepking 2011, Amos 1982, Warwick 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Benefit</td>
<td>Values: express and act on values and beliefs, rooted often in spirituality</td>
<td>Warwick 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Benefit</td>
<td>Direct Impact: The potential personal need for services provided by the charity in the future</td>
<td>Amos 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Benefit</td>
<td>A Gift in Return: from the charity in return for contribution i.e. membership, tickets, or recognition</td>
<td>Vesterlund 2006, Bekkers and Wiepking 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Benefit</td>
<td>Reputation: elevation amongst peers and/or business associates</td>
<td>Vesterlund 2006, Bekkers and Wiepking 2011, Amos 1982</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the Functional Volunteer Approach, Manes shares that in order for the next generation of donors to get involved, they will need to see a demonstrated impact and efficient use of resources entrusted to them. Therefore, organizational efficacy is also important to those who volunteer their time. The motivations for making a gift of time/volunteering as outlined above can be found in Table 2.

Motivating Gifts of Both Time and Treasure

Gifts of time and money represent two distinct forms of civic engagement. One’s propensity to give of their time is often indicative of an interest in public concerns, whereas one’s propensity to give financially is more contingent on personal resources (Jones 2006). We must connect these forms of civic engagement and their motivations to conclude on how best to simultaneously motivate someone to both volunteer time and money, encouraging the forty-two percent of the country who both give and volunteer to continue to do so, and prompt the twelve percent volunteering without making a financial gift to become motivated to do both.

Several key themes in motivating behavior are outlined above, however, when cross-referenced, can be categorized in a new way as it concerns motivating volunteers to not only give of their time, but their money as well. Table 3 outlines these themes including Efficacy, Values, Personal Benefit and Reputation.
CASE ANALYSES

Healthcare, Homelessness, Housing and Hunger Nonprofit Organizations in West Michigan: Best Practices for Cultivating Donors into Volunteers

The theories previously outlined provide us with a launching pad for further discussion as they relate to the day-to-day tactics of nonprofits. West Michigan has long been acknowledged as an exceptionally philanthropic area of the United States.

Table 2: Motivations for Making a Gift of Time/Volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values: express and act on values important to self</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996, Manes 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding: increase their knowledge of the world and develop and practice skills that might otherwise go unpracticed</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996, Manes 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement: psychological development of his or her esteem</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career: gain experiences that will benefit their careers</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996, Manes 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social: fit in and get along with social groups that are important to them</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996, Manes 2013, Jones 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective: cope with inner anxieties and conflicts, thus affording some protection for the ego</td>
<td>Clary, Snyder and Stukas 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy: output of the organization demonstrates a tangible societal benefit, and has a demonstrated track record of effectiveness</td>
<td>Manes 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2010, the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy estimated that donors of all types living in Kent County, one of several in West Michigan, gave a total of $601,658,407. Of this total, gifts from individuals accounted for the majority, at fifty-eight percent (Johnson Center Data Brief, 2012). It is for this reason that Kent County was chosen for the study of four nonprofits that are driven by both volunteerism and charitable donations.

Case Analysis 1: Habitat for Humanity of Kent County

Habitat for Humanity of Kent County’s vision for the world is one where everyone has a decent place to live, breaking the cycle of poverty through neighborhood revitalization and homeownership. Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization of 1,500 international affiliates, and Habitat for Humanity of Kent County is largest affiliate
in the state of Michigan. Further, it is in the top 20 affiliates in the country, based on the number of houses built or rehabilitated and overall families served. With well over a 90% success rate working with very low-income families, Habitat Kent County has successfully demonstrated a commitment to the long-term sustainability of families, to their economic success, and to the neighborhoods where they live (Benda, 2013).

Table 3: Motivating Gifts of Both Time and Treasure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Financial Giving Category</th>
<th>Volunteerism Motivation Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy: organization's proven track record of impact</td>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values: express and act on values important to self</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Benefit: What's in it for me?</td>
<td>A Gift in Return</td>
<td>Understanding, Social, Enhancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation: Elevation amongst peers and/or business associates</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2013, Habitat for Humanity of Kent County celebrates 30 years serving the West Michigan community, doing so with tremendous community support in a variety of ways. With a seven million dollar annual budget, funds come from a variety of sources including government grants, profits from two ReStores, and mortgage payments. Additionally, $1.5 million comes to the organization through private giving, including individuals (22.1%), foundations (24.2%) and corporations and community organizations (53.7%).

In addition to monetary donations, over 9,000 volunteers donate their time to help the local affiliate with their work. Volunteers work on job sites, in the office, in the warehouse, in the two re-stores, and via the carpenters club – a weekly repeating volunteer group. Demonstrating the value of social connectedness through the Functional Volunteer Approach, Habitat Kent County is largely staffed by volunteer groups (Benda, 2013).

Barbara Benda, Director of Development for Habitat for Humanity of Kent County, joined the staff three years ago. Prior to her arrival, the development staff consisted of a full-time Director of Development and one part-time database manager. Today, as Director of Development, Benda also has the support of four additional full-time staff focused on individual, corporate and foundation giving, as well as database management. Admitting that their systems of volunteer and donor gift entry were antiquated when she arrived, Benda set out to improve how information was tracked and volunteers and donors were stewarded annually.

“We want to invite our volunteers, who are already invested in our mission, to make a financial gift,” Benda shared. “But we had to start by developing a better system for tracking our volunteers, particularly those that come in groups. We had the main contact of the group, but weren’t tracking each individual that came and volunteered.” Without the knowledge of who is volunteering, it is impossible to steward them as a volunteer, let alone as a financial supporter.
From 1995 through 2010, 8.82% of volunteers also made a financial contribution to the organization, based on their best estimates. “Over the past three years, we’ve worked to better our systems, including implementing the use of a new database,” Benda said. “Making an investment in a database system and the staffing to manage it is hard to justify upfront, because you cannot show that it immediately brings in money. But without it, you cannot build on the relationships you have.”

Once the database system was implemented, an improved system for communication was Benda’s next step. “Prior to three years ago, we weren’t including our volunteers in our communications,” she said. “They never received mail from us and weren’t included in our appeals.” She immediately set out to change this. Now, volunteers receive various communications keeping them connected to the organization throughout the year, such as monthly e-news updates that always include a project to which one may make a financial gift; a semi-annual appeal letter; and two newsletters with a remittance envelope included. They also include volunteers when inviting their supporters to annual events.

Benda knows that it takes time to reap the benefits of these new systems, and in just two years since implementation positive changes have begun. Since the implementation of a new database and streamlined communications, there has been an increase of 12% in volunteers who have made a financial contribution to the organization.

**Case Analysis 2: Saint Mary’s Foundation**

Saint Mary’s Health Care is an integrated network of health care offering a unique combination of capabilities to deliver a health care experience that is complete and personally satisfying for their patients. Focused on excellence, they are committed to offer the latest technology and most highly skilled physicians in a holistic, patient-centered environment, which makes them a progressive leader in cancer care, neuroscience, orthopedics, diabetes and endocrine care, kidney transplants, and integrative health care (Klinske, 2013). In the July 2012 U.S. News & World Report, Saint Mary’s Health Care, a member of the Mercy Health network, ranked #23 in Michigan, placing it in the top 13% of the nation’s healthcare systems (Klinske, 2013).

Through philanthropy and stewardship, the Saint Mary’s Foundation raises money for Saint Mary’s Health Care. The mission of Saint Mary’s Foundation is to build relationships that inspire financial support from the community to advance the mission of Saint Mary’s Health Care. Since the Foundation’s inception in 1964, great additions to the Saint Mary’s Health Care System have been funded, including the Wege Institute for Mind, Body and Spirit, the Lacks Cancer Center, and the Hauenstein Neuroscience Center. Each of these major projects, as well as many others, have made Saint Mary’s Health Care the leader it is today in its field.

As the Foundation has continued to raise funds throughout the years, they, like other nonprofits, have had to develop creative strategies to attract and cultivate donors. With 87% of Foundation giving coming from individuals, one prospect area had largely been overlooked until recently: financial gifts from volunteers.

“(Two years ago) our organization made a conscious decision to move our volunteer program from Human Resources to now being under the Foundation, and the whole purpose was about building relationships,” Michelle Rabideau, Executive Director of the Saint Mary’s Foundation, said. “Under Human Resources the focus was more
on employment - completing a role or responsibility within the organization. Under the Foundation, we’ve distinguished ourselves from other organizations by making our volunteers feel like they are a part of the family.”

Through this shift, Rabideau directly enhanced the “joy of giving” motivation for her volunteers by embracing them as members of the Saint Mary’s Foundation family. This change required very intentional tactics on the part of the Foundation. Both Rabideau and Selgo stated that while volunteers received communications prior to this shift in mentality, they were not included in donor communications or viewed as prospective financial givers. Today, volunteers are included in all organizational communications from the beginning of their engagement, and are also asked to make financial contributions in various ways throughout the year.

First, during volunteer orientations, the Foundation emphasizes the need for financial gifts as well as gifts of time, and encourages participation in the Foundation’s annual campaign. Secondly, the Annual Campaign conducted each spring is truly “family-focused.” This campaign reaches out to all staff, physicians and volunteers, inviting the “family” to make a financial gift. The campaign includes a letter from the Hospital CEO and Foundation Executive Director specifically thanking them for their volunteerism and requesting further investment in the organization with a monetary gift. As a follow-up, they receive an email invitation to participate, as well as potential contact from Foundation staff encouraging a gift (Rabideau, 2013).

In addition to volunteer orientation and annual campaign invitations, volunteers now receive every communication a top prospective donor would receive, including bi-monthly newsletters geared toward volunteers that include a special section on foundation giving and impact, as well as other hospital and Foundation communication pieces. This also includes an annual year-end appeal letter. Through these communications, the Foundation is able to fully communicate their organizational efficacy and need for support. Additionally, Saint Mary’s knows that, as outlined in the Identification Theory, an individual’s giving directly reflects their ability to relate to the services provided by the organization. Through their communications, they keep volunteers and donors informed in a way that may potentially allow them to connect with the organization on a deeper level. That identification leads to more dollars, which leads to more community impact.

Rabideau believes this strategic shift has made an impact. “When we look at associates, physicians and volunteers, if you help them understand and make them feel that they are part of that inner circle, there’s a stronger propensity for them to make a (financial) gift,” she said. That’s the kind of cultivation strategy that we’ve just started to do. It’s only been two years, but we have seen an increase in giving.”

Fundraising theorist and writer Mal Warwick believes it takes six to thirty-six months to cultivate a donor before they make a monetary gift (Warwick, 2009). With their new strategy in place, Rabideau and Selgo recognize they need a long-term view. However, steady progress has been made. In 2009, only 4% of volunteers made a monetary gift to the Foundation. In 2010, it was 6% and in 2011, 7%. Last year, in 2012, 10% of the Foundation volunteers had made a gift, more than doubling three years prior. As the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan was laid out, the focus on volunteer cultivation remains (Rabideau, 2013).

Case Analysis 3: Degage Ministries

Serving 400-500 individuals daily, Dégage Ministries offers help and hope to homeless and disadvantaged individuals in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The organization’s programs are numerous. When you first walk in the door, the dining room offers low-cost and free meals seven days a week, and serves as a safe alternative to the streets for those seeking to build community. On the second floor, you find the hygiene facilities to take care of basic needs and a resource office for one-on-one support for individual needs such as employment, medical care, and community resources. The second floor also includes the ID Office, assisting individuals in securing state ID and/or birth certificates. On the third floor, Open Door provides a safe space for women in crisis, offering a place to sleep, shower, and attend support groups. Dégage’s responsive programming is designed to address immediate and long-term needs with a special focus on the attention given to each individual, their circumstances, and each success in their lives.
With a budget of just over one million dollars, Dégagé Ministries is funded solely by charitable contributions. Fifty-three percent of that funding comes from individual supporters, 17% from corporations, 10% from churches or community groups, 15% from foundations, and an additional 5% comes from other sources of income (Mulder, 2013). As a faith-based organization, many of their supporters give time and money due to the fact that the organization demonstrates Christian values in all it accomplishes. Additionally, because of their charitable nature, their personalized approach to ministry does not end with their patrons. Their interactions with donors and volunteers model the same behavior of giving special attention to each individual and group that supports the organization on an annual basis, and this includes their volunteers.

In 2012, 536 individuals logged volunteer hours at Dégagé. Of these individuals, 16.6% also donated financially to the organization, with an additional 6% donating gifts in-kind. Additionally, 54 groups served the organization, including churches, schools, businesses and other community groups. Of these groups, 37% donated financially, and 67% donated gifts in-kind (Mulder, 2013).

Bonnie Mulder, Dégagé’s Volunteer Coordinator, joined the organization two years ago after serving as a volunteer for six years. She shared that while volunteers have never been specifically targeted as a group to cultivate into donors, they’ve never been left out either.

Dégagé is constantly emphasizing their organizational efficacy through ongoing communications. “Our volunteers receive everything that our donors receive,” Mulder said. “These communications include our quarterly newsletter, email updates, and volunteers also receive monthly updates from me on what’s going on in the ministry and volunteer-specific information.” Volunteers also receive all financial appeals throughout the year, just as donors do. A volunteer orientation is also offered monthly, where volunteers are made familiar with the building, the ministry as a whole, and how they can effectively serve the organization as a volunteer. “(During orientation) we make them aware of all of the ways to support us,” Mulder said. “We thank them for volunteering, and we remind them of our needs, including hygiene products that are helpful donations, food pantry items that are difficult to come by, and how to get their church involved.” Dégagé always makes a conscious effort, during orientation, to share that they are 100% funded by charitable donations, and that every gift makes an impact (Mulder, 2013).

Mulder has found that her volunteers love to know a specific need the organization has, and help meet that need. “It’s looking at a group of people who already have a heart for what we do, and saying, ‘Together, here are the things we need and we want you to be involved!’” Mulder said.

One way the organization has reached out to their volunteers to personally engage them is an effort made in conjunction with their annual fundraising event, Celebrate Dégagé. Mulder shared that leading up to the event, rather than just sending an invitation to their entire mailing list, she and her team pull out and hand-deliver invitations to each of their 30 daily volunteers who volunteer on a weekly basis. She believes many volunteers attend this event—and bring their peers—because of the personal approach.

Dégagé Ministries underwent a database change in 2011, and therefore are unable to track the change in volunteer financial giving. However, Mulder believes that continuing to track and engage their volunteers in all communications will be key in increasing their financial support for the organization (Mulder, 2013).

Case Analysis 4: Kids’ Food Basket

With one in four children in Michigan living at or near the poverty level, Kids’ Food Basket exists to ensure children do not go to bed hungry. Food insecurity is one of America’s most pressing problems and Kids’ Food Basket began 10 years ago by serving 125 kids each school day through their Sack Supper program. Celebrating their tenth year of service, the organization now serves 5,100 kids each weekday through their Grand Rapids and Muskegon programs. Sack Suppers are evening meals that provide five food groups—nutrition that is critical to the development of kids’ brains and bodies. Currently serving 30 schools throughout Grand Rapids, eight remain on the waiting list. Additionally, they serve one school in Muskegon, with eight on the waiting list there as well (Clark Whitney, 2013).
In scanning the nation, the Kids’ Food Basket model is unique. With these evening meals, they attack childhood hunger by:

- **Serving kids directly.** Sack Suppers are distributed within classrooms or at local parks, meaning every child who needs one can get one easily and safely.

- **Creating an engine for volunteering.** Kids’ Food Basket’s work is driven by the support of the community, with over 175 volunteers packing and delivering sack suppers every day. Many more lead juice box and snack drives and hold fundraisers.

- **Empowering kids to help each other.** Through volunteering and educational programs, they help kids understand hunger and lead projects to end it. Over 25% of hours volunteered at Kids’ Food Basket come from youth under age 18.

Kids’ Food Basket’s budget of $3.4 million is made up of roughly $900,000 in volunteer hours, $750,000 in in-kind food donations, and $1.6 million in cash contributions. Of the cash contributions, 25% comes from foundations, 14% from corporations, 7.5% from community organizations, 37% from individuals, and remaining 16.5% from events (Clark Whitney, 2013). As an organization that is 100% charitably funded, Bridget Clark Whitney, founding Executive Director, shares that community engagement has been key to the success of the program.

“What’s been absolutely critical to our success are our volunteers,” Clark Whitney shared. “Every day from 9am to 9pm, volunteers from all walks of life, ages 5 through 95, come to Kids’ Food Basket to make sandwiches, decorate bags, drop off food donations, deliver food to our schools where they are placed in the hands of a child who depends on us for their evening meal. A nonprofit organization has got to make community engagement easy. It’s been our vehicle to reach a community of volunteers and has led to over 75% growth over the past ten years.”

Kids’ Food Basket volunteers deeply demonstrate Manes’ Functional Volunteer Approach, joining the attack on childhood hunger to express their values, gain understanding and experience, enhance their esteem, and socialize. Because volunteers are the heart and soul of the organization, they are included in all communications sent out by the organization, including quarterly newsletters and e-newsletters, semi-annual appeals, and additional online communications. However, one area of needed improvement was identified just over two years ago: the database used for tracking financial contributions was not being used for tracking volunteer hours. Therefore, the organization was unable to seamlessly measure whether or not volunteers were giving their funds, time, or both. And, many volunteers were not receiving communications that demonstrated the organization’s efficacy and the importance of their contributed time and energy to the overall mission. Therefore, over the past two years, Kids’ Food Basket has spent time refining their stewardship systems, and inputting all volunteer hours and financial contributions into their database.

In their Fiscal Year 2012, 808 volunteers logged time with the organization, 191 of which made financial gifts, representing 23.6% of the volunteers. This calculation demonstrated an obvious area for needed growth, and one that the organization has placed special attention for the 2013 Fiscal Year.

To begin, Kids’ Food Basket began sending a welcome letter for all first-time volunteers, which is mailed out to them after they log their first volunteer hour with the organization. They have also worked to better acquire volunteer information, particularly surrounding individuals who serve with groups. By doing this, the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 2013 have shown an increase in both volunteer support and the capacity to end the year on June 30 with a rise in giving among volunteers – with 939 volunteers who have logged hours, already 190 have made gifts to the organization, representing 20% of the volunteer population (Clark Whitney, 2013). Clark Whitney shares that she believes their spring fundraising campaign will grow this group by at least 5-7%, with roughly a 17% growth over last years’ rates.

“Our sustainability comes from the 175 people who walk through our doors each day. They are the future of Kids’ Food Basket,” Clark Whitney said. “We know if we can engage them in giving of their time, track who they are as individuals, and invite them personally to give of their money as well, we will continue to remove schools off our waiting list.”
It is for this reason, Clark Whitney shares, that a new focus on volunteer stewardship has become a goal of the entire staff at Kids’ Food Basket. In the coming Fiscal Year, Kids’ Food Basket will work to not only engage volunteers, but also ask them for a financial contribution. “It’s an invitation to an opportunity to make a difference,” Clark Whitney shared. “While we are proud that 23-25% of our volunteers are giving to Kids’ Food Basket of their hard-earned dollars, we know if we do a better job of inviting a financial gift at every point of contact, in non-invasive ways, they are more likely to give.”

In the coming months, Kids’ Food Basket will launch a monthly giving program, inviting all volunteers who have logged two or more volunteer hours with the organization over the past year, to sponsor one child for the year. Each Sack Supper costs approximately $1, and sponsoring one child through Kids’ Food Basket costs $20 monthly or $240 annually. Volunteers will be invited via a new “volunteer corner” board placed in the organization’s lobby, through a mailed invitation, and a follow-up phone call. Additionally, all newly-oriented volunteers will be made aware of the program in their volunteer welcome letter and interactions with staff members during trainings.

“We believe if we can engage them, and invite them to invest further, this is only going to increase our impact in the attack on childhood hunger,” Clark Whitney shares.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the knowledge that our ability to engage volunteers as financial supporters is not only important, but also essential to future organizational sustainability, the findings demonstrated must be summarized and implemented. Based on both literature and empirical evidence, the following four points outlined below will increase a nonprofits’ likelihood of cultivating their volunteers into future financial supporters.

*Invest in Stewardship Systems*

As demonstrated by each nonprofit studied above, nonprofits cannot fully engage their volunteer base without proper tracking and data entry systems. A system for tracking volunteer hours, and the individuals who contribute to each of these hours is essential. In addition, when tracking volunteer hours and financial donations within the same system, organizations have the ability to fully communicate with their volunteer base throughout the year, engaging them in every opportunity to get involved.

*Include volunteers in all organizational communications*

It’s all in the family. Volunteers and donors are an organization’s family, and the organization must treat them as such. By including volunteers in all organizational communications, they remain engaged and made aware of opportunities to give financially. That being said, how an organization communicates is equally as important. Demonstrating organizational efficacy throughout communications is paramount (Vesterlund, 2006). Both volunteers and donors want to see that the organization is making an impact in areas that they value (Warwick 2009). It is critical that organizational communications include stories of impact, info-graphics, and statements of “why” the organization is needed within the community to do the work it is doing. We must engage our supporters in our efficacy and illustrate for them exactly how their gifts of both time and money are being used.

*“Ask” – Invite volunteers to make a financial contribution*

If we track our supporters and regularly communicate with them, it is easy to believe they will automatically be inclined to make a financial contribution. However, when individuals are asked why they did not make a gift to an organization where they are investing their time, the frequent response is, “Because I wasn’t asked” (Warwick, 2009). At every point of communication, an organization has an opportunity to clearly represent their need. However, most people must be invited to attend a party – and that is what funding an organization should be like; it’s a community party of supporters to solve a community problem. Include volunteers in appeal letters and specifically thank them for their gift of time while requesting a gift of funds. Invite volunteers to fundraising events. Ask volunteers to join a giving club that is specific to volunteers and which funds a tangible project. By providing a
personal benefit for the donor, whether it is simply the personalization of the request or a perk for joining the club, the ask feels more like an invitation than a demand (Vesterlund, 2006).

Additionally, be mindful of laying out a communications plan with volunteers and donors that is informative but not intrusive. Over-communication and solicitation is now the most common reason why donors say they stop giving. Volunteers and donors want to know what has been done with their money before they are solicited again (Hall, 2013).

*Invest staff time in personalizing donor communications and recognition*

Organizations must thank donors promptly, often, and in unique ways. Tokens of thanks and special appreciation make a huge impact, as does public recognition (Mulder 2012 and Vesterlund 2006). At Kids’ Food Basket, corporations and community organizations that raise $500 or more in cash or in-kind food contributions for the organization receive a thank-you board with a letter from a child who received a Sack Supper. Personally delivered to them, the board can be displayed in their place of business to demonstrate their charity to clients and patrons (Clark Whitney, 20130). Additionally, Habitat for Humanity of Kent County highlights corporate and community organizations donating time and money via their Facebook page (Benda, 2013).

Using every available opportunity to thank and recognize our donors is essential, whether through social media channels, website, annual reports, e-reports, within operational spaces, via plaques, etc. And nothing compares to a personal phone call or handwritten note of appreciation (Mulder, 2013).

Once an organization has implemented the first three steps, and a volunteer has made a financial contribution, step four is critical for keeping that volunteer as a monetary supporter. How an organization thanks and recognizes a donor, and demonstrates the impact their gift has made, is the strongest determinant of whether or not that donor will give again (Hall, 2013).

In conclusion, as evidence points to a new generation of donors who value volunteer involvement prior to making a financial gift, nonprofit organizations that employ the specific strategies outlined will forward their efforts of cultivating their volunteers into financial supporters, increasing their sustainability and overall impact on the community at large.

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Afton DeVos is the Associate Director for Kids’ Food Basket, a Grand Rapids, Michigan-based nonprofit that strives to attack childhood hunger so that young people can learn and live well. Graduating from Butler University with a degree in Integrated Communications, DeVos then went on to complete her Master in Public Administration at Grand Valley State University. With over eight years in the fundraising field, and four years in a nonprofit leadership role, DeVos’ passion is making the community and world a better place. As a mother, the mission of Kids’ Food Basket is particularly personal for DeVos, who believes every child has the right to proper nutrition and brain development, which is why Kids’ Food Basket is working to attack childhood hunger by providing Sack Suppers to children living in poverty. She feels both proud and privileged to work each day to engage the community in solving one of our nation’s most pressing problems.

DeVos is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the West Michigan Planned Giving Group, and the Economic Club of Grand Rapids. She serves on the Advisory Board for Children’s Healing Center, on the J-Board for Van Andel Institute, and runs the Meals Ministry for Grand Rapids Central YoungLives. In 2013, DeVos was recognized as one of the Grand Rapids Business Journal 40 Under Forty Business Leaders. She is a member of Ada Bible Church. She, her husband, Aaron, and their two boys Zachary and Colton, live in Grand Rapids.