Good Ideas and Strategies for Enhancing Volunteering and Philanthropy

From November 2017 FCA Summit Table Rounds

The wide range of ideas generated in Table Round discussions fell into the following overall themes:

These included
A. Strengthening Volunteering- Organizational and Management
B. Framing the Challenge and Developing Metrics on Success
C. Making Cultural Civic Connections
D. Engaging Millennials
E. Social Media
F. Ideas Mostly Related to Philanthropy

A. Strengthening Volunteering- Organizational and Management

- Need technology, applications, resources, and interpreting and using the data
- Make process of volunteering easy to do and not complicated
- Develop leadership skills to build trust with prospects
- Clearer communication needed around the benefits a volunteer gets through the work
- Use the “Give Miami Day” and other cities to generate a directory of every non-profit in the community.
- Encourage nonprofits to do “open house” (e.g. SPCA, United Way, etc.).
- For local govt., make volunteer recruitment part of long-range planning/urban planning/comprehensive planning, and review it annually. Think: what kind of citizens are we going to have in 20 years?
- Include development of leadership skills in the process.
- Pitch to a prospect’s skills, interests and passions. Volunteers want to feel that are contributing to achieving successful results.

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1 Thanks to David Klement, Executive Director, Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions, St. Petersberg College, who compiled the “good ideas” generated at Summit roundtables for each of the 4 civic practice areas.
• Central database with tools is needed to ensure volunteers are connected to opportunities they are interested in working on and they can achieve results.
• Launch a general leadership class with a volunteer requirement, but start by bringing in organizations to give students an understanding of the wide variety of opportunities.
• Need organizational and management skills to ensure volunteers have tasks to do and can see the positive results.
• Effective management and marketing of opportunities to volunteer so an individual can apply skills, interests and the passions that they have to offer, and feel that are contributing to achieving successful results.
• Develop a volunteer requirement for “Bright Futures”.
• Add a civic award for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.
• Research shows the mental health benefits of volunteering and giving – emphasize the understanding of these benefits.
• An operational definition of volunteering and philanthropy is necessary. Most have no idea there are different systems. Define each tier.

B. Framing the Challenge and Developing Metrics on Success

• Focus on achievable outcomes - understand how prospects’ experience helps address the issue - provides more meaning to the experience
• Contextual social impacts/results needed.
• Metrics in non-profit should not be money spent relational to money spent on cause.
• Identify the right metric to measure - if it is the wrong measure then you may be solving the wrong issue
• Seeing/understanding impact is vital to recruiting volunteers. People want to know what impact they are making in the long run.
• Connect resources of government and colleges to develop or use existing models to measure results. Academics might jump at chance to research this – especially at graduate level.
• Need to better frame the problems/challenges of why Florida is civically unsuccessful. (e.g. communities are homogenous in terms of age, race etc. and a tendency to seek an escape from reality with no sense of place.
• Need to tap into people’s core values so people want to do it, can get the skills needed to do it and have the opportunity to do it.
• Need a migration/integration plan.
• “Nonprofit showcase”- bring potential volunteers together with non profits- list of openings. “Job fair” for volunteers (being done by Encore Tampa Bay)
• Need to create a scorecard of what has been accomplished civically, but also need to have compelling stories connected to those accomplishments.

C. Making Cultural Civic Connections

• Recognize cultural nuances. The concept of volunteering when you have no assets is a hard sell. People struggling economically often don’t have time and resources to volunteer, also may not see a pay-off.
• Need to emphasize connection to place that includes aesthetics, social offerings and general tolerance for differences.
• Create a “conversation corps” of volunteers trained as facilitators for dialogue with the community.
• Help integrate the new concept of volunteering to immigrants when they come from another country with a different context.
• Find a common goal mission/issue/thread that connects people.
• Try to approach people from another culture with someone from that culture to gain initial trust. Work with groups you are part of.
• Be sensitive to subculture identities and embed in those subcultures.
• Personal asks are more effective and build trust. Cater to their personal interests. Develop training and skills for making asks.
• Think in terms of a “social contract”—how to make service into a lifestyle.
• Respect—feel like you’re trusted at the table, your opinion matters, and it is respected.
• Avoid being partisan; everyone should be free to contribute regardless of politics.
• Don’t alienate others, all should be at table to change minds, even those we don’t agree with.
• Institutions are the connections for bringing people together.

D. Engaging Millennials

• They tend not to join organizations but be more single issue focused in their donations and volunteering.
• Develop a marketing strategy to show students/millennials that volunteering has value and benefits their future. Need to recruit and engage, they need to see results (contextualize).
• Millennial are results-oriented, time is precious. Understand that if they give their time they want to know it makes difference and effective impacts/metrics.
• Establish millennial giving circles.
• Target people’s interest but then move them into advocacy.
• Identify existing network/organizations that millennials engage with.
• Organizations need to focus on presenting data at the front end vs. flowery “feel good” reasons for volunteering.
• Speak the language of your population. Students may want to help at a soup kitchen, but maybe developing a web or Facebook page rather than serving food.
• Hard to recruit students to volunteer – always tap same small pool. Young students don’t know about the opportunities. Also, problem of institutional memory as students are gone every two to four years. Establish better scaffolding to develop what they can and will do after college.
• Focus on campus: feeling entitled to something, less focused on doing for others.
• Do what makes them happy.
• Offer more scholarships.
• Utilize audiences at college sporting events—calls to give, etc., via text.
• Understand differences between students at four-year and community colleges.
• Be able to show more about how millennials are getting engaged.
• Use other vehicle to get people to volunteer or give—parties, youth groups, social opportunities, service-based sororities.
• “Social entrepreneurs.” Contests/Shark Tank-like for causes/nonprofits.
• Hang out at places they’re hanging out.
• Push back on the assumption that young people are just disengaged and examine why they aren’t engaged:
  i. Background conditions (economic, social, psychological, etc.) that foster lack of engagement or greater engagement
  ii. Not just about messaging
  iii. Holistic approach
iv. Develop opportunities at younger ages to develop good habits; create building blocks at early ages, perhaps through schools
v. Work with the business sector to create programs in our city to bring a broader sector of the community together
vi. Involve younger more diverse volunteers on civic issues - but follow up with actually carving some of the issues out and show that something will and does happen
vii. Importance of clubs and organizations in providing opportunities - start young - get them into a club to learn how to volunteer
viii. Look for platforms like New Tropic to pull together the social and civic events in one place
ix. The building blocks for civic engagement begin at a young age. Programs within schools to teach children the importance of volunteering not only for the betterment of the community but also for social well being. A “trickle up” effort, if you will. Return to the basic importance of “it takes a village”.
x. Local government an strengthen this through initiatives starting in grade school.
xi. Engage millenials in real problem solving exercises and invite them to invest in the outcome.

E. Social Media

- Study the power of newer, social-media based philanthropy like GoFundMe and apply it to philanthropy
- Need to make an informed decision on metrics of success for whom you contribute to.
- How do we target social media to provide accurate information and not serve as platform for disinformation?
- Social media has created a free market for soliciting funds; there are inequities in distribution of funds through social media, wealthy political interests are effective at controlling the message.
- Media tells you what to think about, not how to think about it. Media controls the top issues that get the coverage.

F. Ideas Mostly Related to Philanthropy

- Turn smaller donors into more engaged volunteers. Consider the value of non-financial support as important as financial support.
- Use volunteers as a source for giving.
- Hone in on the vision and mission for giving for both organizations and individuals (applies to both volunteerism and philanthropy)
• Strategic emphasis in efforts in these areas
  • Prioritize investing in public resources to the areas that prevent problems from arising rather than address the problem
    o e.g. education over incarceration
  • Consider new ways to engage people into philanthropy and volunteerism
    o Engagement that doesn't cost money
      • free family activities that incorporate volunteerism
  • The importance of institutional structures and building connections with them
    o local government
    o private sector
    o religious/social organizations
    o schools/universities
    o The importance of institutional engagement with philanthropic efforts
      ▪ The $1 check off on payroll that contributes to some identified cause by your employer
      ▪ The Publix fundraising efforts to which people freely give, because it's easy and blessed by a trusted institution
  • The importance of building and retaining trust in philanthropy
    o Does the money go where it is supposed to go?
    o Is the charity effective and efficient
  • Ref. to Bill Gates “targeted philanthropy.” With limited “charitable capital,” ensure money is being used well. Have answer for question: “What good is this doing?”
  • Supporting transformative change, which requires trust from philanthropy to service providers and the time to realize change
  • Need to distribute wealth more equitably to provide fair access and then folks will be able to contribute.
  • Creating public and private opportunities to develop and share data - create space in which you focus on source of issues rather than just symptoms - it is not just giving but show them the impact of the giving
  • Multiple philanthropies coordinate efforts through joint conversation to identify how to be more effective - collaboration among funders - example is housing providers in Miami and how better housing helps health, employment, etc.
  • Portfolio grant making
  • Education - put the jar out but provide info on why, what and how - why should they invest in the issue
  • Using research to make a convincing story - reach younger with effort can change problems further up the stream - define the problem
  • Address the source problem to be more effective, to avoid recurring problems
  • As was mentioned on today’s panel, grant makers are not the ones to make the decisions for the community but can work with the community to identify the source problem and begin to develop the solutions.
  • Public/private partnerships with measurable outcomes attract capital from all 3 sectors.
  • Create portfolios of nonprofits to solve or move the needle on issues. Invite investment.