The Challenge:

In 2004, the Green Valley and Sahuarita communities expressed the need for increased awareness of volunteering and recruiting more volunteers. The all-volunteer team came together under the auspices of the Green Valley Community Council and PCOA. They began by canvassing local organizations to gather and catalogue their agency volunteer needs. They held a luncheon for volunteer coordinators to identify their common interests and to set up a network of coordinators who could learn from each other.

Why Volunteers Were the Solution:

PCOA has a long history of leadership in developing volunteer programs for seniors, and recognized that volunteers can contribute much more than we typically ask of them. In addition to recruiting other volunteers for the 83 partner agencies, the GVSVC volunteers arrange for volunteer management workshops for the partner agencies’ volunteer coordinators.

A unique aspect of the GVSVC project is that it is based in a separate location in southern Pima County and is 100% volunteer run, with minimal participation from the Community Initiatives Director, who sits ex-officio at the Clearinghouse meetings. GVSVC is in response to community input, which identified the need for the presence to be located within and run by community members (as opposed to being organized and run out of Tucson) and of a “volunteer referral” and “volunteer coordinator training” program.

How Volunteers Help Carry Out Our Mission:

From the beginning, the volunteer team identified annual goals and objectives. Initially, they were logistical, including locating an office and sufficient resources to begin to function. The Green Valley Community Council provided temporary space. Then the team secured the office space, office furniture, computers, and phone from a local agency that saw the team’s purposes as most compatible with their own.

The team met with the local newspaper editor and secured a column to highlight volunteering. At the recommendation of the volunteer coordinators, it organized a Volunteer Showcase where the coordinators meet with prospective volunteers. The
showcase was so successful that it has become an annual event that celebrates volunteering and recruits new volunteers.

These early stages taught the team the value of setting goals and objectives and also that the need was real and worth the effort. Over the years, the team continued to identify strategic goals and objectives, especially through the leadership of an Advisory Board composed of volunteer coordinators and community members.

Now, the Green Valley-Sahuarita Volunteer Clearinghouse is an all-volunteer team of 25 older adults that links prospective volunteers with community-based agencies. Through their efforts, 83 agencies and thousands of volunteers have signed up. The Clearinghouse volunteers provide these services:

1. Meet with prospective volunteers to help them learn about volunteer opportunities and help them reflect on their skills and interests in volunteering.
2. Serve as liaisons to agencies that the Clearinghouse currently serves to enhance communication.
3. Develop and regularly update a web site, www.gvsvolunteering.org, and Facebook page that advertise partner agencies and their volunteer needs. Place volunteer ads in VolunteerMatch.org (national), United Way’s Volunteer Center (Southern Arizona), PCOA’s Never Too Late newsletter (Pima County), and GVSVC’s Hot Opps (local).
4. Maintain and develop databases on volunteers and volunteer organizations.
5. Organize and host the annual Volunteer Showcase, now in year 8.
6. Write, edit and produce quarterly Giving Service newsletters.
7. Increase volunteering awareness through the following:
   - Writing and producing monthly announcements that appear in the local newspaper, on the web site, in the libraries and e-mails of volunteers;
   - Writing Volunteer Corner columns for the newspaper;
   - Creating public service announcements for the local radio station;
   - Staffing booths at health fairs and other events; and
   - Giving presentations to church groups and civic organizations.
8. Develop and present Volunteer Coordinator workshops.
9. Maintain and stock the local libraries’ brochure holders with volunteer opportunities flyers.
10. Collected data and created a report used by the Chamber of Commerce showing 6,845 community-wide volunteers donated the equivalent of $15,171,800 in time for 2011.
11. Develop strategic plans and proposals to secure sufficient funding.

Impact:

For the Organization: As a project of PCOA, the GVSVC all-volunteer team has established PCOA as a major recruiter of older adult volunteers and trainer of volunteer leaders in southern Pima County.
Using the 400 volunteers recruited in FY2013-14 at four hours a week and $22.52 per hour, a conservative estimate shows the program’s return on investment as $1,873,664. This number does not include ongoing work done by volunteers recruited by GVSVC in prior years.

**For Volunteers and People Served:** Several of our achievements in 2013-2014 demonstrate our impact on volunteers and the community:

1. Referred nearly 400 prospective volunteers to many of our 83 partner agencies, including 120 volunteers for the new hospital, 170 attendees at the 2014 Volunteer Showcase, and 40+ enrollees through booths.

2. Promoted volunteering through four e-mail newsletters, six “Volunteer Corner” columns in the newspaper, and monthly publication of the “Hot Opps” volunteer notices.

3. Staged the 7th annual Volunteer Showcase with more than 45 agencies. The showcase was on Martin Luther King Day, the designated National Day of Service.

4. Developed the skills and capabilities of volunteer managers and coordinators through five workshops, with total attendance of 153:
   - Social Networking and Volunteering,
   - How Volunteer Coordinators Link Volunteers to Outcomes,
   - Leading a Multi-Generational Volunteer Workshop,
   - How to Develop an Outstanding Volunteer Orientation Program, and
   - Communicating Difficult Messages to Volunteers.

5. Helped nine local religious organizations develop and operate a “Mitzvah Day” program where more than 200 volunteers did specific projects for 10 nonprofits in the community.

**Funding and Resources:**

Annually, the Green Valley-Sahuarita Volunteer Clearinghouse writes grant proposals to local funding agencies. PCOA provides computer and technical assistance, administers the grants, and administrative leadership and guidance. Friends in Deed provides office space.

The GVSVC project runs independently, requiring a minimal investment of approximately 60 hours of PCOA staff time. Last year’s expenses totaled $4,630 and were raised via grant funding.

The resources needed to maintain the project include the partnership of the many agencies, donated office and meeting space, shared utilities, speakers for workshops, a website, and a computer.
Value:

Perhaps the most vivid proof of the value of the Clearinghouse is contained in true stories. An elderly man, who had taken care of his dying wife for two years, found new purpose in volunteering with the local sheriff’s auxiliary. Interacting with other volunteers, he has become the head of a project called “The Scam Squad” that alerts Green Valley citizens to scams undertaken against the elderly. A teenage girl volunteered with the local performing arts center and as a result grew in confidence. A volunteer coordinator left the Volunteer Showcase saying she had four interviews with volunteers, with all four being scheduled at her agency for the following week.

Sustainability:

The Clearinghouse is sustainable for the following reasons:

- It has secured the continued financial support of two community funding organizations, both of which emphasize the value of agencies working together.
- It is a project of Pima Council on Aging in collaboration with four local community organizations, two libraries, two newspapers and our local radio station. Each has a sense of ownership and pride in the role it plays.
- It has established partnerships with 83 community organizations with which it attempts to connect volunteers to meet critical community needs. These organizations have signed memoranda of understanding with the Clearinghouse.
- The Clearinghouse’s volunteer recruitment focus ensures ready access to volunteers, including those attracted to the Clearinghouse’s mission.
- The Clearinghouse’s team based structure encourages cross training. Collectively, each team contains the skill and knowledge needed to sustain their activities until a departing team member can be replaced. Teams are website & database, grant writing and finance, marketing, booths and special events, and workshops.
- Most of all, it is sustainable because of the outstanding efforts of Clearinghouse volunteers who live the value of volunteering.

Replicability:

Over the years, the Clearinghouse volunteers have shared their structure, design, and strategic plans with other communities. The Clearinghouse uses Dropbox, an internet service that enables it to post all of its working documents including has a five page description of how the Clearinghouse is organized, the ways the volunteers work in teams on each of its projects, its board composition, strategic plans, and grant requests.

Some of the lessons we have learned are as follows:

- PCOA can work with many other agencies to develop and facilitate programs where seniors help seniors.
• Involve your organization’s leadership. PCOA’s CEO and Services Director have been essential from the beginning in seeking and securing vital resources such as office space, computers, and internet access. PCOA’s Development Director and CFO secure and manage outside grant funding. PCOA’s Community Initiatives Director provides sits on the Advisory Council. RSVP provided a structure for recruitment.

• Your employees can contribute greatly to the success of your project. The leadership of so many employees throughout PCOA who respect the volunteers and encourage them in their efforts has been highly effective. They consistently make the volunteers feel welcome and valued. PCOA’s credibility went a long way in helping the groups’ establishment and acceptance.

• Explore the possibilities of volunteering in your own area. GVSVC is a highly successful model for tapping community volunteers who work independently to resolve issues identified by the community members themselves. Area agencies on aging could host a “volunteer summit” to explore community issues involving older adults and areas where older adults could volunteer.

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