

## Agency: Volunteer Center of Story County

## ASSET Evaluation

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**Need for the Program:** The VCSC organization serves individuals, nonprofit organizations, and other volunteer groups throughout the county. Its main focus is to connect these various volunteer groups and organizations with each other to amplify their effectiveness, reduce redundancy, and develop a better volunteer experience by bringing together the strong community of volunteers that Story County has. They help partner agencies (approximately 200 strong) identify volunteer needs ranging from administration, fundraising, community clean up, youth programs and social services.

**Program strengths:** The program is made up mostly of volunteers (there is one paid employee) who, together, shoulder the workload that would realistically require 3-5 paid full-time employees to do. They work as a team on their own time to administer and organize the VCSC in a manner that greatly enhances the ability of all partner agencies to be as effective with their own limited resources as possible. They have a number of very effective programs that are successful in attracting and engaging the volunteers from story county which run the gamut from ISU student body and faculty, local residents, as well as a growing number of youths and business participation.

- 1) Online referral system- Through their online database, their partner agencies are able to access on average 80 volunteer opportunities each week, greatly enhancing the efficiency with which volunteers can be deployed. This is a huge help when trying to reach out and get support from volunteers who can visit one portal to find volunteer opportunities instead of calling over 200 local organizations. It has also been expanded to include a module co coordinate finding and tracking involvement in volunteer services for Silver Cord graduation honors. Multiple schools are using this module
- 2) Story County Youth Volunteer Awards - This program recognizes and awards local youth volunteers who go above and beyond in their efforts. In 2017, 24 nominees were recognized, aged from 4 to 25. An example would be Natalie Tryon from Roland who was nominated and recognized for her efforts for her holiday gift drive for over 600 patients at Blank Children's Hospital for the second year in a row.
- 3) Service Learning - This has changed to Youth Engagement. This not only allows for volunteer placement, but also engages them in a learning component of WHY these services are so valuable and what needs to be done in the community. This is a county wide effort.

- 4) Days of Service- This is one of the best outreach programs the VCSC offers, and engages entire schools in efforts to improve the community. Students from all over the county participated in service events for the 9-11 Day of Remembrance and Service specifically designed to foster empathy, communication, and recognition of local and national heroes.

### **Days of Service:**

Winter weatherization- This service provides volunteers to help lower income or physically limited county residents in need of help with basic and necessary home care issues. In 2016, 47 homes were winterized with the help of over 100 volunteers. It is a nationally recognized program (Make a Difference Day, Tegna Foundation and Gannet Publishing). The 2017 program has 35 homes scheduled with 75 volunteers signed up (with many last-minute additions not yet tallied).

Stash the Trash- 2017 Stash the Trash engaged over 300 volunteers.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Family Volunteer Day, Giving Tuesday, and Random Acts of Kindness Week were also successful in bringing out hundreds of volunteers for these Days of Service.

### **Collaborative Efforts:**

Summer Enrichment Program- This has been a successful collaboration with participating agencies, though it has strained the resources of the VCSC due to the time and energy needed to recruit, screen, and place volunteers involved with the program. VCSC staff provided the support and resources to the other agencies participating in training volunteers.

The VCSC and its online referral system were used to organize volunteers for the United Way Day of Caring.

The Blast Back to School Fair is in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year and is a collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club of Story County as well as the Ames School District. It raised over \$50,000 worth of school supplies for students in need (over 700). It organized local healthcare providers who provided free dental and vision screenings, as well as sports physicals.

Rummage Rampage- The VCSC organizes the recruitment of the participating agencies as well as serves as its fiduciary agent. It is responsible for tracking the volunteers and their hours and distributes the funds raised accordingly. It is essentially a huge county wide garage sale which, in 2016, diverted over 2,200 lbs. of household items that were destined for the trash.

### **Service Enterprise Initiative:**

The Points of Light Foundation based initiative focuses on nonprofits becoming more effective and efficient, and the VCSC has received national certification in the top quintile of all applications received. This has resulted in additional volunteer positions being identified along with training and management. The VCSC now creates approximately \$5.50 in value from its volunteer placement efforts and training for every \$1 spent through its budget.

**Ames Repair and Care:** Not unlike the winterization program, this is a program that focuses on volunteers serving low income or unable residents to need help with maintenance and upkeep. This program used to be funded by the city of Ames and the State, but they have since ceased funding the effort. The VCSC has continued the program at its own expense and through the generosity of local groups and individuals, though this limits their ability to effectively help all those who apply for the service.

The greatest strength of the VCSC is its ability to create relationships and communication between agencies which allow for the resources and efforts of all involved to be utilized much more effectively. It is the hub for all volunteer organizations in Story County through which they can team up and find more efficient ways to utilize their people and funds. Social media has been a big boon to their ability to coordinate and communicate with volunteer organizations, with over 3,600 subscribers added to their Instagram account alone, though this adds another level of time and resources to manage effectively.

### **Needs/Weaknesses:**

As stated earlier, the VCSC has seen an increased demand on their funding through their efforts and role as a recruiter and trainer for volunteers for their many collaborative efforts, as well as their growing online presence. The need for an online portal that is effective and thorough is undeniable, and the participating agencies have responded overwhelmingly in the positive about the resource, but the need for additional funding to effectively utilize such a tool is pressing. Because the VCSC plays a largely “behind the scenes” role in volunteer organization, it rarely is on the receiving end of donations from many donors who prefer to fund the cause or the agency that are being referred through the VCSC.

### **Financial Outlook:**

The organization relies primarily on ASSET funds. Other fundraising avenues are being examined, including corporate sponsorship. An annual fundraising campaign has been established. The goal is \$11,500, as well as grant funding which is also being sought. The Federal Volunteer Generation Fund is one avenue, but requires a program to be growing.

Online fundraising through donation efforts are being increased (another reason for the funding on the new website to be done right), and a mailer is sent out yearly.

The budget for 2018-19 is growing by \$25,000 (approximately), but the ASSET funding of that is only approximately \$16,500. This increased difference is largely due to the higher strain on resources through collaborative efforts with other agencies in which VCSC resources are tapped, as well as the much larger demand for service opportunities for the ISU community. Further expansion of service and the efficient implementation of the processes now needed to support current levels of service will not be possible without further funding. If revenue does not increase, programs will need to be cut.

### **Internal Management Practices:**

The VCSC consists of one full time staff member, Anne Owens. There are two ISU part time work study positions and 14 volunteer positions. The one full time staff receives 10 days of PTO and 10 holidays. No other benefits are afforded.

The board has 10 members, and recruiting goals include finding several additional members that represent more diversity (ISU students, person of color, etc.).

### **General Assessment:**

The VCSC, like most organizations, relies heavily on the support of the communities it serves. The VCSC has a budget that is largely funded by ASSET, but a relatively small amount of that money comes from the ISU student Government. 8% of their budget comes from the ISU community, while a full 50% of the volunteers they serve (approximately) are from the ISU community, and 20% or so of them are students. The VCSC plays a vital role is connecting volunteers with service opportunities in the community, and there are no other organizations that serve the same group in this manner. For the continued success of this program as well as the hundreds of others that the VCSC puts to work, continued combined efforts with these agencies and organizations, as well as crucial financial support are key.

The "score card" assessment is of concern as well, as this metric does not accurately measure the effectiveness of the VCSC. As explained to me, a good analogy I came up with would be the VCSC acting as Incident Commander on the scene of a fire. He's not spraying any water, searching the building for life, or operating the pumps, but he is vital to the situation. If you were to grade him on his ability to put out a fire, he'd get an F, though his very job is to ensure everyone else is able to do their job effectively. It is the hope of the VCSC that this scorecard metric is not the only measure of their effectiveness.