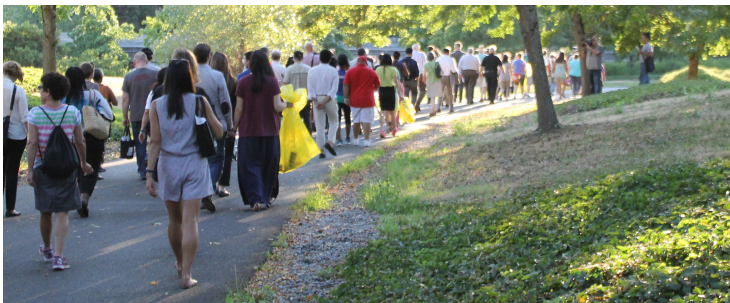


IMPACT VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR CITY



Impact Volunteering in Your City

Impact Volunteering is a strategy that engages citizen volunteers to identify and solve public problems alongside municipal government. It is a participatory process in which citizens and city officials develop a shared vision, set short- and long-term goals for their community, and then work together to achieve those goals. As partners, they communicate throughout the process and reflect on their work—discussing and evaluating what they have done and holding themselves accountable for results.

Experience shows that Impact Volunteering initiatives are most successful when they include the key elements set forth below. This worksheet is designed to help you think through each element so you can incorporate them when planning your Impact Volunteering initiatives. The elements are not listed in any set order—for the most part, you will not focus on one at a time, and they will fold into and flow from one another. What matters is that each element finds its way into the initiative planning process.

IMPACT VOLUNTEERING IS “CITY LED.”

Impact Volunteering is rooted in the belief that the city’s chief executive—be it the mayor or city manager—is uniquely positioned to engage citizens to help solve public problems. As the city’s chief executive, they can:

- Identify key public issues the city is committed to addressing;
- Command a bully pulpit and shine a light on particular problems to rally citizens to the cause;
- Convene cross-sector gatherings where citizens and city leaders can talk and learn from one another; and
- Access resources — people, expertise, data, legal authority, funding — to share with volunteers helping to solve the problems.

We are often asked if Impact Volunteering can work and/or be implemented if the city’s leadership is not engaged. Our answer is “no.” Our experience indicates that the most successful cities are those in which the chief executive understands and appreciates Impact Volunteering and deploys city resources to ensure its success.

In thinking about the executive leadership in your city, consider the following questions:

- 1) Will the chief executive naturally embrace Impact Volunteering or have to be convinced of its value? If so, what is the plan for getting them to embrace it?
- 2) Who around the chief executive, e.g., Chief of Staff, Director of Communications, Director of Neighborhoods, etc., needs to embrace and lead the work?
- 3) Are there things happening in the city that could side track this work, or on the other hand, create opportunities for it?

IMPACT VOLUNTEERING TARGETS PUBLIC PROBLEMS THAT ARE A PRIORITY FOR THE CITY.

Whether it's improving educational outcomes, increasing disaster preparedness, fighting neighborhood blight, or any number of important challenges, city leaders have prioritized the public issues they are committed to addressing. Impact Volunteering initiatives should target problems within those issues. For example, let's say eliminating neighborhood blight is a priority issue for the mayor. A key problem associated with neighborhood blight is the large number of abandoned lots in the city. To target that problem, the Impact Volunteering initiative would engage community volunteers to repurpose these lots for positive use (by creating community gardens or other safe, clean gathering spaces), thereby reducing the number of abandoned lots.

To help you identify a public problem to target, consider the following questions:

- 1)** What public issue does the chief executive focus on or seem most passionate about?
- 2)** Does the city have a current strategic or master plan that can help identify priority issue areas?
- 3)** Where are city resources already being directed by the chief executive? Are there ways to make those resources go further by adding citizen volunteer power to address the problem faster or tackle more of it?

IMPACT VOLUNTEERING DOES NOT DUPLICATE EFFORTS — IT PILOTS NEW IDEAS AND AMPLIFIES SOLUTIONS THAT WORK.

Once you have identified the public problem, the next step is to understand the scope of the problem, the people and communities most affected by it, the players working on it, and who might be motivated to help solve it. We call this the “landscape analysis” — a process to help you understand the broader context in which you are working. This is a critical first step toward bringing work that might otherwise be happening in isolation and without coordination into alignment, creating opportunities for greater impact. This will also ensure that your project is necessary and not duplicating efforts.

Your landscape analysis should answer the following questions:

- 1)** Who/what organizations or city agencies are currently focused on the issue?
 - a)** What problems within the issue are they tackling?
 - b)** What are they doing to address those problems?
 - c)** Where have they had success?
 - d)** Where have they faced challenges?

- 2) Are there successful programs and initiatives that could be amplified and/or replicated for greater impact?
- 3) What problems are not being addressed by all of this activity?
- 4) Who else should you be talking to?
 - a) Who has assets and skills they can bring to this work?
 - b) Who might benefit from this work?

IMPACT VOLUNTEERING CALLS FOR THOUGHTFUL DELIBERATION WITH THE COMMUNITY.

One of the most distinctive and powerful elements of Impact Volunteering is community deliberation — bringing people together to talk about issues of shared concern. Community deliberations provide you with an opportunity to check your assumptions and clarify your thinking with the key people who may be impacted by this work and/or have been working in this area for years and have real experience, assets, and resources to contribute. These are the people who can help you determine whether the public problem you have identified is the right problem. And if it is the right problem, can volunteers help solve it? What resources can everyone bring to the effort?

It is important to cast a wide net when reaching out to key people in the community for this work. Such people might include city agency and department heads, citizen groups, neighborhood groups and block associations, nonprofit organizations, schools and universities, faith groups, local businesses, the community foundation, and local philanthropies. It is very important to identify and reach out to those who may not consider themselves “stakeholders”, but who have experience and insights to share.

To facilitate community deliberations, you can host a series of roundtables or focus groups, administer surveys or questionnaires, or simply structure a series of individual interviews in order to gather the input you need. Make sure that you clearly set expectations from the beginning, so that people who are participating in the deliberations understand what they are being asked (and not asked) to do and the extent to which you will be able to incorporate their feedback. Throughout this process, listen closely to what people have to say. Pay particular attention to people and organizations who are frequently left out of municipal conversations, including representatives from and key influencers within marginalized communities.

Finally, community deliberations will not only help you identify what work needs to be done, but also identify who is best positioned to do the work, and what volunteer resources need to be leveraged. While there is no “right way” to do this work, there are wrong ways. For example, volunteers should never “parachute” into a community without being asked into the community, or at the very least coordinating with the community.

Questions and suggestions to consider as you engage in public deliberation with the community:

- 1) How do the various stakeholders define the problem?
 - a) Do they define the problem the same way that city leadership does? If not, how do they differ?
 - b) What solutions are they proposing?
- 2) Is the Impact Volunteering initiative you are proposing one that will tackle the problem?
 - a) If not, why not?
 - b) What other factors need to be considered?
- 3) Are there existing programs or efforts that could benefit from the Impact Volunteering initiative, either through an infusion of volunteers, increased support from city agencies, and/or other resources?
- 4) Are there specific communities (neighborhoods and/or groups of people) that should be the focus of this work?
 - a) If so, what's the best way to reach those community members to engage them in this work?
- 5) How will you circle back with the community? What feedback process do you have in place to ensure that the community understands the part they played in the process and how it will help move the needle on the issue?

IMPACT VOLUNTEERING IS DRIVEN BY CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS.

Citizen volunteers must be at the heart of every Impact Volunteering initiative — they are the ones who know what works in their communities, who provide their time and talent, and who will be tasked with sustaining the initiatives for years to come. The city cannot do this work without them.

Every city approaches Impact Volunteering in its own way, and different initiatives call for different types of volunteers.

- In some cities, the Impact Volunteering initiative is led by a city agency or department; for example, in City X, the Parks Department recruits, trains, and manages volunteers to help bring summer meals and programming to children who need them. Other cities choose to play more of a coordinating and supporting role; for example, in City Y, the Parks Department plays a supporting role, providing resources such as connections to summer day camps and space at neighborhood recreation centers to a coalition of community-based organizations that are leading the summer meals effort.

- Some Impact Volunteering initiatives benefit from, and often require, volunteers from the same community that will benefit from the program; [Love Your Block initiatives](#), for example, are built on resident engagement. Other initiatives benefit from volunteers with special skills who may or may not live in the community. The key is understanding the volunteer assets in the community and recruiting others if that would be helpful.
- Certain activities are not appropriate for volunteers and certain problems require solutions beyond what volunteers can do. For example, repurposing abandoned lots is one strategy for eliminating blight, and demolishing abandoned buildings is another. The former is a suitable activity for volunteers; the latter is best left to experts.

Some questions to consider when getting ready to deploy citizen volunteers include:

- 1) What activities are associated with solving the problem?
- 2) Is the desired solution something that volunteers are capable of achieving? If yes, then ...
- 3) What types of volunteers are best suited for this work? Consider:
 - a) Skills needed for the initiative
 - b) Physical ability
 - c) Age of the volunteer
- 4) What is the appropriate mix of volunteers for a particular activity? How important is it to have volunteers from the community?
- 5) What is a realistic timeline for this initiative? In other words, how long do you anticipate it will take to achieve the desired outcome?
- 6) What is the time commitment for volunteers? This can range anywhere from an hour in total to several hours a week or more, depending on the initiative and the volunteer.
- 7) Are there multiple types of activities for volunteers in this initiative to accommodate diverse volunteers?
- 8) Does the same person need to be the volunteer or can that position be shared with others? For example, for repeated activities, it may not matter who cleans the park but it does matter who shows up to mentor the child.
- 9) Which partners are best able/willing to recruit, train, and manage the volunteers? One partner may not be able to do all three, so think about dividing the tasks.

**IMPACT VOLUNTEERING IS DATA DRIVEN
AND CAPTURES OUTPUT AND OUTCOME METRICS
TO TRACK PROJECT SUCCESS.**

At the core of Impact Volunteering, volunteers are working to address serious public problems and achieve real results for communities. Staying with our summer meals example, if the problem is that too few children who are eligible for summer meals receive them, key output metrics might be the number of summer meal sites operating and summer meals served. The key outcome metrics might then be the percentage increase in summer meals served

and children taking part in the program compared with previous summers. Collecting and analyzing outcome data is critical for understanding the impact of the initiative. Sharing that data with key partners is critical for ensuring transparency and building sustainable relationships.

Questions to consider as you decide on outcome metrics:

- 1) What is the goal of the initiative?
- 2) What are the metrics you are using to track the initiative's progress in achieving the goal?
- 3) What kind of data already exists that tells you this is a problem?
 - a) How often is that data collected?
 - b) Who collects it and will they share that data with you?
- 4) What would progress on the problem look like?
- 5) If the data you need to collect is new, what is your plan for collecting it?
 - a) Who can help you?
 - b) What method/tool will be used to collect the data?
 - c) How often should you plan to collect it? It's useful to have access to the data on a regular basis so that mid-course corrections can be made if necessary.
- 6) What other variables affect the problem? Is it possible to collect that data as well?
- 7) What are the best ways to share the data with your key partners?

FINAL THOUGHTS

All of your thoughtful work will pay off when the Impact Volunteering initiative launches and the city, citizen volunteers, and community partners are getting things done and solving problems together. Two more things to think about after you launch:

Plan for sustainability of the Impact Volunteering initiative from day one, if not earlier!

Impact Volunteering initiatives that are not sustainable do not solve problems. Think about sustainability holistically, in terms of how you keep the effort going not just financially, but through the stakeholder buy-in and support needed to keep the effort going. And it is important to think about sustainability from day one. Here are some questions to help you consider the sustainability of your initiative:

- 1) What resources — volunteers, money, partnerships, political support — are needed to support this initiative?
- 2) Who can help capture stories of impact to share with stakeholders? What are the events you need to document?
- 3) Are there “champions” of the initiative and if so, how can you best deploy them?

- 4)** Is there a natural home for the initiative? A city agency? A community-based organization? A block association or neighborhood group?
- 5)** If continued funding is necessary, where will those funds come from?
 - a)** What can the community itself do to fund the initiative?
 - b)** Are there other likely funders?
 - c)** Can the initiative be incorporated into the city budget?
 - d)** Is there a role for the community foundation or other philanthropy?
- 6)** How will you keep key people and organizations engaged and interested in the initiative in the long run?

Plan to stay in touch. You will need a plan for communicating with key people and organizations throughout the initiative, keeping them up-to-date on:

- 1)** The final design of the initiative and how their good ideas helped inform its framing.
- 2)** Opportunities for further engagement.
- 3)** Progress and “stories from the field.”
- 4)** Lessons learned and ways in which the initiative is evolving.
- 5)** Successful impact and outcomes.
- 6)** Plans to sustain the initiative.

Ultimately, Impact Volunteering is not only about making progress on solving city problems, but also about creating social capital and increasing social cohesion. The benefits to the city and the community will be tangible and powerful. Connections between people — and with local government — will feel authentic. Collaborations between community groups and with local business and nonprofit organizations will become the norm. Resources will be leveraged and used more effectively.

By utilizing the Impact Volunteering model, you will engage city stakeholders — citizens, elected officials, and community leaders — to work toward a common goal and solve public problems together. When each of the key elements outlined above are exhibited in your implementation, Impact Volunteering will help create a stronger and more vibrant city.