



IMPACT

VOLUNTEERING



This Citizen Engagement Technique is part of a series that Cities of Service has created to help city leaders work with citizens to solve problems. To learn more and access additional techniques, visit citiesofservice.org.

Using the Impact Volunteering¹ technique, the city creates an initiative that mobilizes citizen volunteers in an ongoing effort to address a public problem.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Prior to implementing any citizen engagement technique, it is important to set goals and expectations, identify stakeholders, and more. For a checklist of steps you should take before you begin, please visit citiesofservice.org/techniques.

HOW TO LEAD AN IMPACT VOLUNTEERING INITIATIVE:

1. Select a public problem that is a stated priority of city leaders and can be addressed with volunteers. *You can find engagement techniques to gather citizen input about public problems at citiesofservice.org/techniques.*



2. If not already completed, assess which organizations and city departments are focused on the problem, identify existing programs and initiatives that are tackling the problem, and define gaps in existing efforts. This information will help you scope the problem.
3. Outline the parameters for an initiative that addresses the public problem at a scale that is achievable by citizen volunteers. As part of this step, identify a timeline, a target community, and volunteer activities that can help address the public problem.
4. Meet with external partners that are active in the target community and other city departments that can support an Impact Volunteering initiative. Determine how internal and external partners can support the program with outreach and promotion, cash and in-kind donations, skilled volunteers, complementary services, or other contributions.
5. Refine the parameters of the Impact Volunteering initiative and identify key metrics that will measure impact. Ensure that the city has the capacity — either in the community or in other city departments — to collect the data.
6. Make an outreach plan to promote the Impact Volunteering initiative within the target communities and recruit volunteers.
7. Once the initiative is underway, attend volunteer events to support the work, take photos, talk to volunteers, and gather stories to share later.

¹Adapted from "Impact Volunteering in Your City," Cities of Service, accessed October 8, 2019, <https://citiesofservice.org/resource/impact-volunteering-city/>.

8. Throughout the initiative, monitor progress using specific metrics and goals. If the initiative isn't having the desired effect, take the time to refine it to ensure its success.
9. At each step, thank citizens for their participation and tell them how they can stay up to date on the project's development.
10. Periodically, perhaps every six months, share the results with program partners and celebrate the accomplishments of the volunteers.

EXAMPLE:

In Norfolk, Virginia, a thorough deliberation process for the city's resilience strategy revealed that the financial instability of residents decreased the city's overall resilience. With nearly 40% of residents unbanked or under-banked, many people do not have reliable savings to count on if they need to evacuate the city due to a flood or other disaster, or recover from its aftermath. In this low-lying coastal city, residents are especially vulnerable to severe weather.

The city decided to address this problem by creating a financial empowerment course powered by volunteers. They selected Bank On as their model — a 10 month financial management program that educates participants on positive financial behaviors and provides access to traditional financial products and services, including an incentive-matched savings program.

The Bank On model provides a standard curriculum and framework that includes volunteer instructors that teach a lesson once a month. To help participants succeed in the rigorous program, the city added volunteer coaches to work with participants throughout.

The city recruited professionals from local banks, insurance agencies, accounting firms, and other financial industries to serve as volunteer coaches. Coaches received special training, and they generally worked with two or three Bank On participants in each cycle. The coaches met with participants weekly to serve as motivators, hold participants accountable to their financial goals, and troubleshoot specific challenges. At the end of a Bank On cycle, the coaches were invited to the Bank On graduation to celebrate participants' achievements, like reduced debt, improved credit scores, and increased savings. Due to the success of the program, many of the graduates volunteered to serve as coaches for future participants!

For guidance on using this and other citizen engagement techniques, or to learn more about customizing solutions for your city, contact Cities of Service at info@citiesofservice.org.