



Michigan's Voices for Volunteerism A 10-City Listening Tour

SUMMARY

In April and May of 2010, the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC) hosted a 10-city listening tour, "Michigan's Voices for Volunteerism." The listening tour provided an opportunity for community stakeholders to share their thoughts on how to expand service and volunteerism to help address our state's biggest challenges such as: hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, high school dropouts, and the environment.

Tour stops included:

- Benton Harbor
- Cadillac
- Detroit
- Flint
- Houghton
- Lansing
- Muskegon
- Grand Rapids
- Saginaw
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Online*

**More than 70 people participated in the listening tour by responding to an on-line survey.*

People who attended the 10-city listening tour represented the following groups: K-12 schools; aging networks; colleges/universities; faith-based organizations; nonprofit agencies; public safety; community based organizations; community leaders; businesses; healthcare; elected officials; concerned citizens; foundations; corporations; service organizations; state government and; media.

Nearly 400 people lent their diverse voices and thoughts to discussions that centered around community challenges and how volunteerism and national service programs can be expanded and utilized more effectively to improve the quality of life for citizens in these and other communities throughout Michigan.

Listening tour participants were asked a series of questions related to communities, volunteerism, resources, capacity, national service, and impact. The common themes that emerged from the community discussions are listed below.

Critical Challenges – Communities in Michigan are facing critical challenges and they include:

- **Education** – mentoring, tutoring, early childhood/youth development, education funding issues (including after-school programs), educational preparedness, English as a second language, dropout rates, low literacy rates, parents/caregivers disengaged from the schools their children attend, low levels of education attainment, poor performing schools, lack of early childhood education
- **Health** – health services/awareness, access, mental health/depression, suicide, affordable medications, obesity, teen pregnancy, physical abuse, healthcare for uninsured, hospice care, public health, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse
- **Personal/Public Safety** – crime, gangs, violence, suicide prevention, domestic/child/elder abuse, environment/clean-ups, use of technology, limited city resources/loss of fire and police services, consistency of city services, more crime and unsafe situations created as a result of economy
- **Poverty** – basic human needs (food, shelter/housing, transportation)
- **Unemployment/Economy** – foreclosures, lack of jobs, jobs leaving community/state, increasing needs (decreasing resources), job re-training, loss of family income, losing unemployment benefits, using technology, under-skilled workers



Resources – We need to do a better job of tapping the following resources to support volunteering in communities:

- **Businesses/Corporations**
- **College Students**
- **Faith-Based**
- **K-12 Students/Youth**
- **Media/Social Media**
- **Seniors/Retirees**
- **Technology** – central portal for volunteering, technology lacking in rural areas and for low-income families, internet accessibility
- **Unemployed**

Capacity – What are ways to increase the capacity of organizations to engage more volunteers?

- **Collaboration** – how organizations, nonprofits, and other agencies communication, relate, plan, and share resources
- **Effective Volunteer Management** – staff and volunteer training, recruitment, orientation, retention, volunteer recognition, matching volunteer skills with opportunities, communication, supervision, volunteer management
- **Media/Marketing**
- **Technology** – software, increased computer access for low-income individuals, lack of technology, training, social networking/media, on-line resources
- **Training** – increase and improve the effectiveness, skills, and outcomes associated with being volunteer coordinator or an actual volunteer



National Service – National Service can be used to enhance volunteer efforts and impact in the following ways:

- **Build Volunteer Capacity**
- **Enhance Volunteer Recruitment**
- **Increase Program Capacity**
- **Program Sustainability**

A number of comments were received in regards to:

- Increasing awareness of National Service
- Making the National Service application, record-keeping, and reporting paperwork less burdensome

Impact – We, as a community, can maximize the impact of volunteerism by utilizing the following:

- **Benefits of Volunteering**
- **Communication & Collaboration**
- **Effective Volunteer Management**
- **Evaluate and Measure Impact and Report Outcomes**
- **Meaningful Volunteer Experiences**
- **Tell the Stories, Awareness, Media, Social Media**

Many comments were received about the importance of:

- Volunteer experiences being meaningful
- Effective volunteer management
- Telling/sharing the stories associated with volunteering
- Being able to measure the impact and report outcomes



How will input from listening tour be used?

The MCSC has been tasked with developing a State Service Plan aimed at utilizing service as a strategy to guide Michigan on its road to recovery. The valuable community input gathered from the listening tour will prepare the MCSC and its service partners for this task as it has ensured a diverse group of voices were heard and key issues have been identified and will be addressed in the plan.

Summary

The listening tour provided the Michigan Community Service Commission and its stakeholders an important opportunity to facilitate community conversations designed to generate discussion around how to expand service and volunteerism to address the challenges communities are facing. The information gathered from the 10-city listening tour will be utilized in the development of the state service plan.