



## Michigan Voices for Volunteerism Grand Rapids – May 5, 2010

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
- Grand Rapids
- Online\*
- Houghton
- Lansing
- Muskegon
- Saginaw
- Sault Ste. Marie

*\*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.

In Grand Rapids, 40 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 themes that emerged from Grand Rapids’ stop are listed below.

*Note: Many bullets below may be accompanied by a number in parentheses. This indicates multiple individuals/groups responded with the same/similar thoughts.*

## 1. Challenges

What are the critical challenges or issues faced in your community? Please list.

- Apathy
- Lack of funding for critical services
- Conflict between haves and have-nots (livable wage/ income, affordable housing, transportation)
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Education/re-education
- Level of education in many communities
  - Illiteracy
- High school drop out rates
- Home foreclosures
- Hunger
- Awareness of health issues
  - Mental health
  - Generational issues
  - Obesity
- Violence and safety issues
- Youth engagement
  - Engagement of their parents
- Parent mentoring
  - Parent support
- Creating awareness (3)
- Infrastructure to recruit and train
- Matching needs to opportunities
- 211 awareness
- Meeting needs of developmentally impaired population
- Diversity – cultural representation

## 2. Successes

How are volunteers currently addressing critical challenges in your community?

- Youth engagement/service-learning (K-12 and college)
  - How can communities work together to meet needs across communities?
  - Student experience new communities/challenges/ways to impact
  - Issue/educational based approach
  - Teachers expose student volunteers to new issues
- Colleges and Universities

- Retirees
- Social justice faith-based programs
- Corporate volunteerism
- Professionals
- Social media
- On-line training
- Nonprofit agency addressing home foreclosure issues
- Transportation issues being addressed by some agencies
- Love, Inc. – offers financial classes
- Volunteers reading to/mentoring students in schools
  - Kids Hope
- Volunteer doing nursing home checks – Citizens for Better Care
- Various food programs providing resources
- Adopt-A-Park services and highway beautification
- Churches coordinate groups to assist with volunteers activities
- Red Cross provides immediate assistance with food, lodging, and clothing
- United Way
- VolunteerMatch.org
- Volunteer Management Association of Western Michigan trains volunteer coordinators and provides resources
- The Community Foundation initiatives are focused to the needs of the community
- Girls on the Run/Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Restorative justice programs for youthful offenders

### 3. Resources

What resources are not being tapped to support volunteering in your community?

- Neighborhood collaboratives
  - Take ownership of own issues – parks, crime
  - Need a “train the trainer” to help neighborhoods navigate
- Resident engagement/economic development that includes volunteer use
- Empowering service recipients increases skills, self-esteem, commitment to community
- Minority recruiting
- Teens
- Youth
- High School Guidance counselors should be at the table
  - Service isn’t embraced in the curriculum in public schools need; champions to drive this
- CEOs of smaller companies
- National Service Organization

- Ex: Red Cross
- National Fraternities
- Professional organizations
- Employers/small and large/staffing firms
- Media – positive press
- Programs designed to attract older adults to volunteerism
  - In-between jobs, near retirement, retirees
- Representatives of employers, staffing agencies
- Increase in skilled volunteering
- United Way and other volunteer match programs are underutilized
- Creation of short term volunteer opportunities to meet the needs of working adults
- Faith-Based organizations
- Community Foundations
- Michigan Works
- Health services community (doctors, nurses, mental health professionals)

#### **4. Capacity**

How do we increase the capacity of organizations to engage more volunteers and do it effectively?

- Training (5)
  - Recruitment
  - Volunteer
  - Capacity
  - Train-the-Trainer
- Centralize administration aspects of volunteerism
- We need a culture shift to see the value in volunteers
- Better job descriptions for volunteers
- Staffing that provides leadership and motivation
- Meaningful service connected to mission
- Board education so that they understand the importance of volunteers/recognition and investment. Create legitimacy to volunteer management profession, educating CEOs, boards, funders, and community
- Increase knowledge of marketing, social networking, social media and how to connect with volunteers
- Media use to publish events and volunteers
- Encourage employees to volunteer; provide release time for employers to allow employees to volunteer
- Having a system to identify skills and expectations to bring volunteer into nonprofits
- Volunteer tool kit
- Technology (3)

- Online apps, website
- Staffing
- Communication
- Funding
- Continual professional development/skill building
- AmeriCorps
- Baby boomers
- Advocacy
- Leadership
- Recognition

### **5. National Service**

How can National Service be used to enhance volunteer efforts and impact?

- Cross-stream collaboration
- Share best practices from successful experiences/programs
- Recognition of volunteers
- Coordination of training and resources
- Presidential Service Awards
- Help you engage different skill sets
- Working with kids or older adults go to Foster Grandparents – Kids – Senior Companion
- AmeriCorps knowledge of other AmeriCorps members – way to find each other and communicate
- Overlap in years of service (VISTAs training VISTAs)
- Focus on sustainability and capacity building

### **6. Impact**

How can we as a community maximize the impact of volunteerism?

- Need to measure impact accurately
  - Establish a baseline
- Strong evaluation
- Needs assessment (2)
- Pair up cities with similar issues/conduct a volunteerism challenge (3)
- Higher profile in the media (4)
- Collaboration with prisons, so that the prisoners can help/ they grow flowers/build free form walls
- Create volunteer communities
  - Bring a friend programs, make it social
- Focusing on councils/committees
  - People committed to cause then bring their own networks

- Correct impact reported to communities to recognize what is being done well
- Answer the “what’s in it for me” question – focus on skills, rewards, benefits – find the right fit
- Collaboration not competition (2)
- Prioritize based on community need – what are each communities needs based on their relevance? A stronger focus in a few areas might have a bigger impact
- Understanding your community – organizations and resources available
- Meet needs for all timeframes of volunteer service
- Volunteer campaign – show benefits
- City wide recognition
- Central location to log in volunteer hours
- Reduce duplication of efforts
- More organizations involved in planning
- Design committees to give feedback