



Michigan Voices for Volunteerism Sault Ste Marie – April 26, 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 Sault Ste Marie, 19 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 Sault Ste Marie’s 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.

- Poverty related issues
 - Housing, basic human needs
 - Transportation for all, especially elderly (“Quality of Life” rides)
 - Unemployment
 - One-on-one consulting/mentoring around financial literacy
 - Services to low income families
- Fundraising for organizations
- Health issues, including substance abuse
- Youth Services
 - Mentoring & tutoring
 - Playgrounds, school services
 - After school programming
 - Utilizing young people as volunteers, including service learning
- Cultural Needs
- Concern about Animal Welfare
- Services in out-skirts of larger communities
 - How to reach out-lying communities

2. Successes

How are volunteers currently addressing critical challenges in your community?

- Volunteer mechanisms
 - 211 – for housing and transportation, volunteers, Volunteer Center
 - United Way Volunteer Center – 1-800-Volunteer
 - Great Lakes Center for Growth Development
 - Newspapers
 - Websites, social networking
- Volunteer & Service Organizations
 - Project Hope
 - Habitat for Humanity
 - Rotary, Kiwanis, Elks, Lions
 - LSSU – Michigan Campus Compact (promote service-learning)
 - Thrivent – funding source for Habitat
 - United Way
 - CHAC/SHACC
 - Red Cross
 - Salvation Army
 - Hospice
 - Head Start

- Sault Tribe
- Faith-based community
- MSU Extension
- High School service organizations
- Scouting
- Great Start collaborative
- Eastern U.P. ISD
- Other
 - Prison crew – local
 - United States Coast Guard
 - State Correctional Facilities for constructing portions of homes (prison builds)
- Specific Efforts/Actions
 - Businesses are proactive – not just re-active to needs
 - Clean Ups through City
 - Mediators (to negotiate debt)
 - Fine Arts
 - Lunchtime learning series through Volunteer Center
 - Recreation groups
 - Municipal services
 - Project Connect/homelessness-provides services for 1 day/year
 - Transportation
 - Volunteers (Girl Scouts) addressing financial, science, technology, health and fitness
 - VITA – Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

3. Resources

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

- Technology
 - Internet – 211 not being utilized enough
 - Universal broadband
- Individuals, Groups, and Resources
 - Weak communication links with service organizations – Elks, Lions, Rotary weren't available for discussion
 - Elected officials
 - Mandated service (probation/parole)
 - Media
 - Educators
 - Retirees/elders – not engaged enough – not available
 - Use of public library
 - Unemployed
 - Youth (K-12 and higher ed)

- Young adults (20-30 yrs) – want to connect to communities but unsure of what to do
- Barriers/Challenges
 - Promotion of existing resources lacking
 - Paid administrative support – lack of time to properly coordinate volunteers
 - Public transportation – not available
 - Insufficient grants/money

4. Capacity

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

- Organization
 - Clear, concise volunteer opportunities for people to see what worked for them (includes clear “job descriptions” for volunteers)
 - Staff to manage volunteers (frequent comment that more staff is needed),
 - Need sufficient funding for staff to manage volunteers and administrative staff
 - Training and Guidance for staff
 - Recognition & Incentives, including word of mouth
 - Match people with their interests
- Utilize both social and traditional media
- Community collaborative
 - Look for mutual benefits
- Communication
- Trainings/webinars
 - How to work with volunteers
 - How to recognize volunteers
 - Must be accessible to geographic areas
 - Marketing and know how to ask
- Barriers
 - The dependability of a volunteer hinders the organization
 - Requirement/guidelines for grant opportunities

5. National Service

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

- Current Benefits of National Service
 - Marketing to younger students

- They pay to give you help – such as AmeriCorps, brings youth in with fresh ideas
- Skill building aspect is very beneficial
- Michigan Service Scholars
- Service Learning in EUP is a great example
- AmeriCorps – hands-on...able to bring more volunteers
- Current Strategies by Organizations
 - Know networking (national service)
 - VISTA – builds capacity of volunteers
 - Stretch organization (esp. host organization) – organization needs to serve as mentor role
 - Volunteers themselves = perfect examples
- Suggestions to utilize National Service
 - Start a RSVP – have a ready “pool” of volunteers for project connect, financial literacy, career fairs
 - Do not know enough – use media
 - Highlight education award
 - Publicize opportunity to serve more
 - Bring programs to communities/organizations that would not otherwise have time to bring those programs

6. Impact

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

- When planning events and opportunities:
 - Ensure they are well-organized
 - Create family friendly opportunities to “groom young volunteers”
 - Be sure to offer a variety of opportunities to suit volunteer interests with skills (individual, group, etc.)
 - Be sure that volunteers are utilized, appreciated, organized, coordinated—and that they feel useful
 - Remove barriers i.e. transportation
 - Show volunteers that they are accountable for their roles and responsibilities
 - Make it fun!
- “Ask” and INSPIRE people to get engaged and volunteer
- Utilize media to get the word out; build stronger relationships with media, social networking, and church bulletins
- Offering incentives may help but it will cost
- Market...market...market
- Provide volunteers a recap of what happened at service projects, and what’s coming up; demonstrate the economic worth of service (personally and to communities)
- Accountability of volunteers for roles and responsibilities