**Volunteer Engagement Strategic Plan Ad Hoc Group Narrative**

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This ad hoc group met three times: January 22nd (Jake and Janna), April 22nd (Jake, Janna and Judy), and May 1st (Jake and Judy). A final meeting attempt was initiated but members were unable to attend. In the interim Jake had conversations with Edward Brewington, chair of the Membership Committee to provide feedback of progress and solicit input. Edward endorsed our direction and encouraged the ideals that volunteer engagement should be a substantial part of programming, should encourage and maximize diversity and may or may not appropriately be the responsibility of the Membership Committee or possibly exist as a stand-alone committee. The plan remains in an evolutionary stage considering a final meeting was not realized and Jake and Janna have concluded their roles as steering committee members.

Though the group used the Volunteer Engagement Cycle (provided by AARP) as framework for the task, there was some question about its applicability for the coalition and difference of interpretation of the steps. The draft plan is reflective of these differences and compels more questions than answers at this point.

Overall the group found different priorities for different levels of volunteer engagement e.g., at the coalition level the priority needs were felt to be communications and funding. The coalition currently utilizes three separate websites for conveying and soliciting information, which, though effective for communicating amongst coalition members and housing information, is ineffective at promoting the Oregon Action Coalition (OAC) and the activities thereof. The national website exists to do this however is not frequently updated by the OAC. Volunteer engagement for the task of information technology, website management and streamlining was thought to be a priority, especially as the coalition grows its need to solicit new members and potentially advertise volunteer opportunities. There are numerous volunteer management software platforms on the market that can help with the latter and assist with the logistics of managing volunteers but their appropriateness of use for the action coalition is unclear and should be further explored. This [link](http://www.capterra.com/volunteer-management-software/) shows some of the most popular programs. The group further understands that realizing this priority depends upon funding.

It is the belief of the group that the organization will not realize the ultimate goal of implementing the IOM report recommendations without funding. Volunteer engagement for grant writing and fundraising is imperative. Opportunities for funding exist but the necessary time and effort for securing it must be effectively delegated. One idea for doing this is engaging Portland State University Masters of Public Administration students who have education in grant writing and who are frequently looking for volunteer internships with local organizations (S. Gelmon, personal communication, May 20, 2015). Though great accomplishments towards the OAC’s efforts may result, we believe it is unlikely that the national targets will be met without sufficient financial support.

 At the workgroup level the priority needs were sufficiently specific to the groups that prioritizing their volunteer needs was beyond scope of this group. This however informed the process as it will be important in the future to consider the evolving needs of multiple areas and levels of coalition engagement, from workgroups to the steering committee to the coalition as a whole, in order to most effectively and efficiently solicit and utilize volunteers. On that note, reflecting on conversations with Edward Brewington, volunteer engagement training materials, and a brief review of the literature several ideals are considered imperative and serve as recommendations for the OAC.

The United Way of Dane County’s (n.d) Volunteer Engagement Mobilization Plan itemizes the top reasons why volunteers do not participate, they were never asked. The plan goes on to list reasons for not participating including poor volunteer management. Further, the plan is explicit in the ideal of value in the statement, “in order for volunteers to continue volunteering they must feel valued, see results of their work, and be respected” (UW, n.d., p.3). This sentiment is echoed in the other literature and in volunteer engagement training and informs the primary recommendation of this group; a formal mechanism for valuing, honoring and providing positive feedback to volunteers is imperative (S. Hassmiller, personal communication, January 12, 2015; FFixler Group, 2012; Rehnborg, n.d.; UW, n.d.). There is currently no formal mechanism for recognizing volunteers of the OAC. Considering each member is a volunteer, the coalition is at great risk for burnout and early attrition.

 Another ideal considered to be a priority by this group is clear expectations of volunteers. The literature, the training and communications with Edward Brewington, one of the coalition’s newest members, have validated this view. As the OAC moves forward and increases the scope of need it will be imperative to have and document clear expectations and roles prior to soliciting new volunteer members or else further increase the risk of volunteer burnout.

In summary, drafting a sustainable and realistic volunteer engagement strategic plan is an evolutionary process and one that relies on the input of a sustaining leader of the charge i.e., those who will ultimately be tasked with carrying out the plan should be part of the drafting process. The plan is one potential draft example of how the Oregon Action Coalition might utilize the Volunteer Engagement Cycle and achieve some of the aforementioned recommendations.

References

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