

Closing the Gap: Pathways to Increase Funding for Volunteer Engagement Better Impact

June 25, 2025



Welcome



Beth Steinhorn, President



Connect with me at:



[linkedin.com/in/BethSteinhorn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/BethSteinhorn)



[facebook.com/VQVolunteerStrategies](https://www.facebook.com/VQVolunteerStrategies)



[VQStrategies.com](https://www.VQStrategies.com)

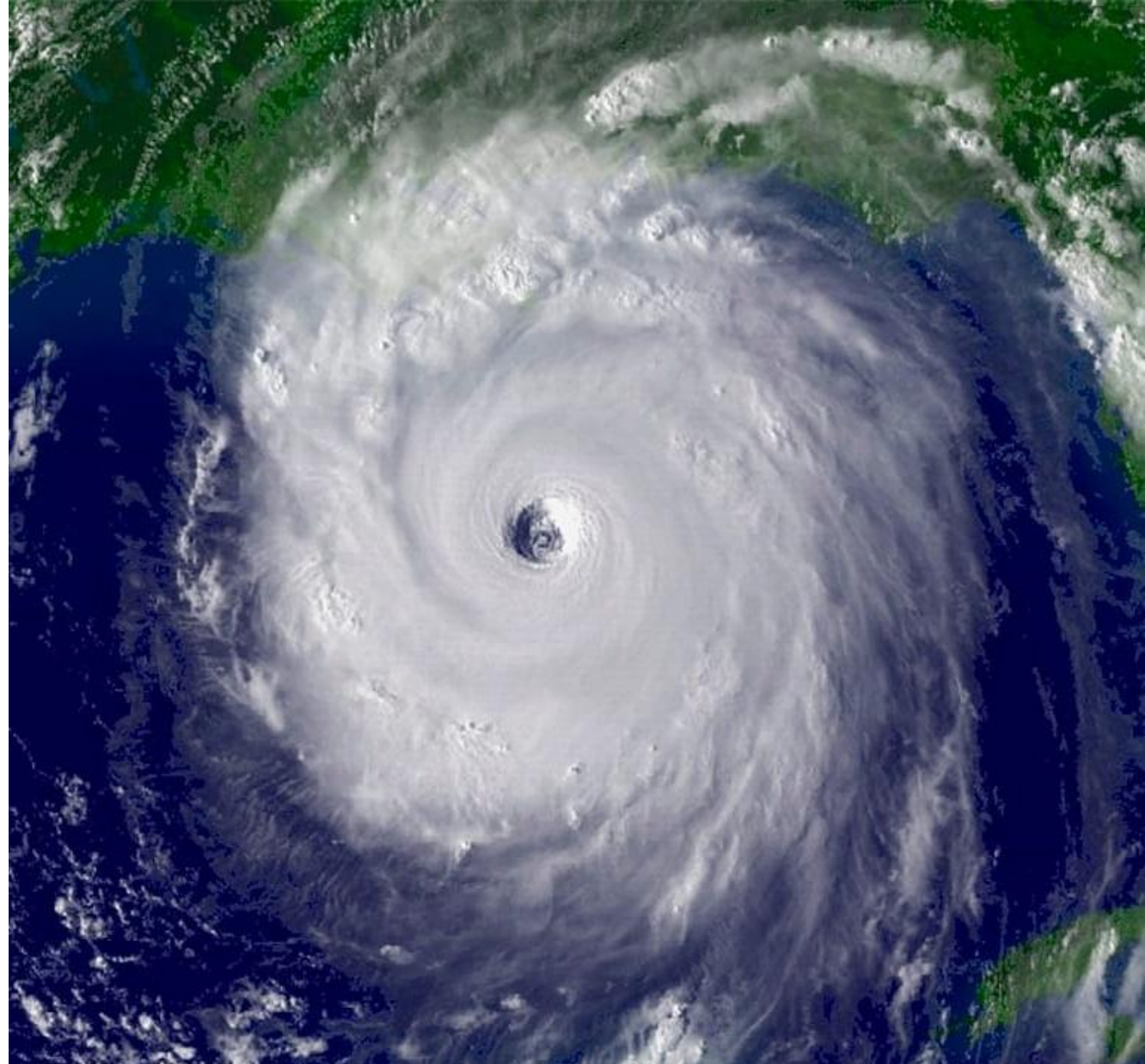


Challenge at Hand




A Perfect Storm

- Staffing workforce challenges coupled with widespread funding cuts.
- There is a critical need to build capacity to strengthen program and mission delivery.
- Yet too many organizations lack the understanding, skills, and resources to engage volunteers effectively.



Support & Buy-in



Fewer than 1 in 5 volunteer managers (18%) rate the buy-in among co-workers for involving volunteers as very high (Fewer than half give it 4 or 5 stars out of 5).

Leadership support correlates with higher co-worker support.

Budget Matters



"Even though outside costs are going up, [our] budget is stagnant, so we are having to do more with less. This has direct impact on morale, adding new recruitment strategies, and other items. There were just job cuts at our organization, so it is challenging to both wonder if your job is safe and increase your volunteer impact."

Progress Report, VolunteerPro January 13, 2023

Budget Matters



More than ever before, volunteer engagement holds the power to help organizations achieve mission. Yet, funding directly for volunteer engagement remains the exception rather than the rule.

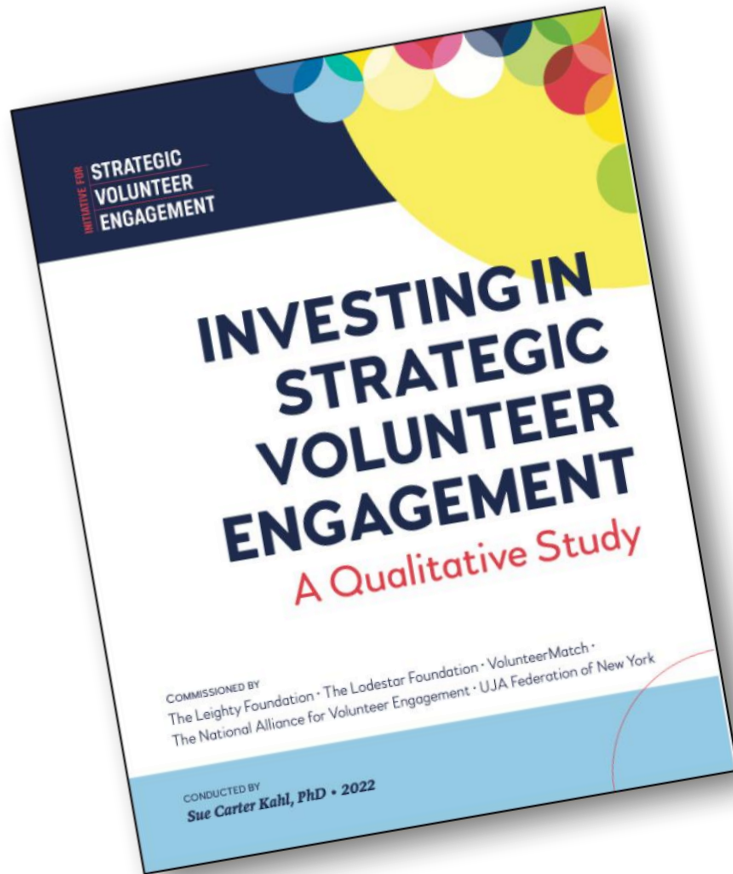
POLL

What do you think is the top barrier to funders investing in volunteer engagement?

- Agencies and organizations do not request funding specifically for volunteer engagement.
- Funders consider volunteers “free,” so volunteer engagement doesn’t need funding.
- Funders do not understand what investments could enhance engagement.
- Other



Common Challenges



Not a priority

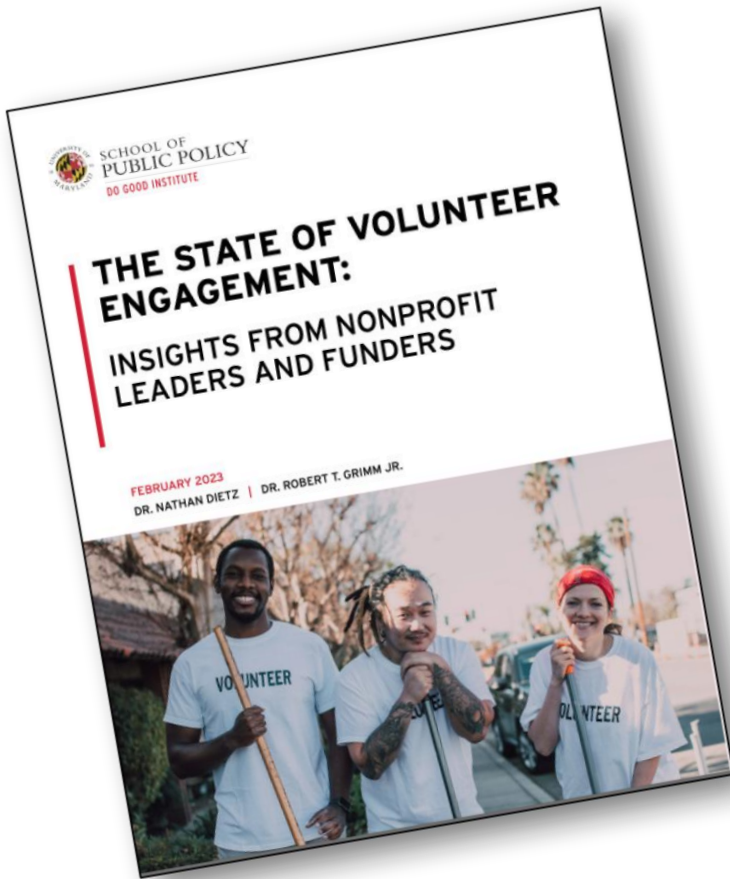
Resistance

Considered a “program” rather than a “strategy”

Lack of understanding

Misleading terminology

Funder-Perceived Barriers



Volunteer engagement lacks accountability and control

Agencies lack capacity, infrastructure and sustainability

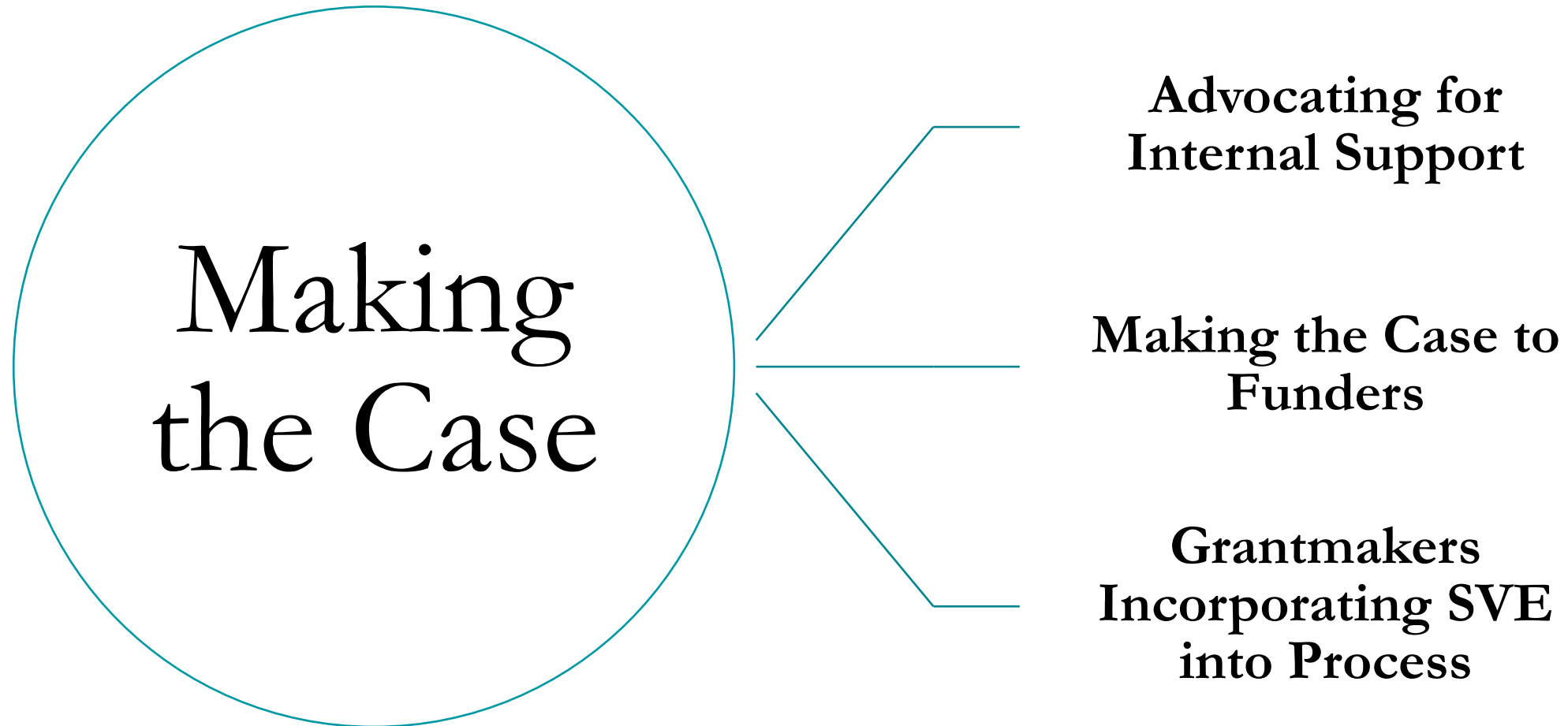
Volunteers demonstrate low retention

Volunteer engagement has uncertain benefits and results

Funders prefer to support programs

Volunteer engagement is not a nonprofit priority

Case Studies



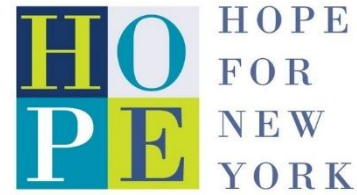
Advocating for Internal Support

City of Fort Collins, CO

- Citywide Engagement Commitment and Accreditation
- Leveraged data points – including ROVI (nearly \$8) – to make case to sustain engagement amid COVID pandemic
- Rapid Response Plan with Infrastructure
- New Volunteer Roles



Making the Case for SVE to Funders



- Volunteer service is vital, but most volunteers were one-time; the organization envisioned a different future.
- As an affiliate of Hope for New York, they sought funder support for an assessment and volunteer strategy.
- Hope for New York covered half the cost, results were shared with the funder, and the process strengthened their relationship.



Funder Integrates SVE into Process

Time For Good

- Assessment, training, coaching, funding through cohorts:
 - Service Enterprise
 - Volunteer Accelerators
- Follow up grants



**VOLUNTEERISM IS A LOW-COST
INTERVENTION TO SUSTAIN AND SCALE
THE WORK OF NONPROFITS ADDRESSING
PRIORITIES TODAY AND THE NEEDS OF
THEIR COMMUNITIES TOMORROW.**

Build Your Case!



INITIATIVE FOR
**STRATEGIC
VOLUNTEER
ENGAGEMENT**

Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World

A Conversation Starter for
Funders and Nonprofit Leaders



Action Steps for Nonprofits

Set the
Foundation

Integrate
Volunteerism
Throughout the
Organization

Prioritize the
Strategy

Build in Volunteer
Engagement to
Funding Requests

Start a Dialogue

Revisit
Recruitment and
Retention
Strategies

Demonstrate and
Communicate
Impact

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023

Action Steps for Nonprofits

Set the Foundation

- Formalize volunteer engagement as an organizational priority by building it into the strategic plan, hiring a volunteer engagement professional, and creating volunteer engagement policies and procedures.

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023



Know Yourself



What are your strengths?

How are volunteers
increasing your impact
already?

Where do you have
opportunities to enhance
practice?

What steps can you take
and where would you
benefit from investing in
volunteer engagement
infrastructure, practice,
and more?

Action Steps for Nonprofits

Integrate volunteerism throughout the organization

- Train staff and volunteers. Brainstorm how strategic volunteer engagement can help address organizational challenges.

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023



Action Steps for Nonprofits



Prioritize the Strategy

- Include your volunteer engagement professional on the organization's leadership team.
- Dedicate resources to volunteer engagement, such as staff, technology, training, and recognition, so that engaging volunteers is supported across the organization.

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023

Action Steps for Nonprofits



Build SVE into Funding Requests

- Explicitly request funding for SVE in grants. Share ways that volunteers contribute to success.

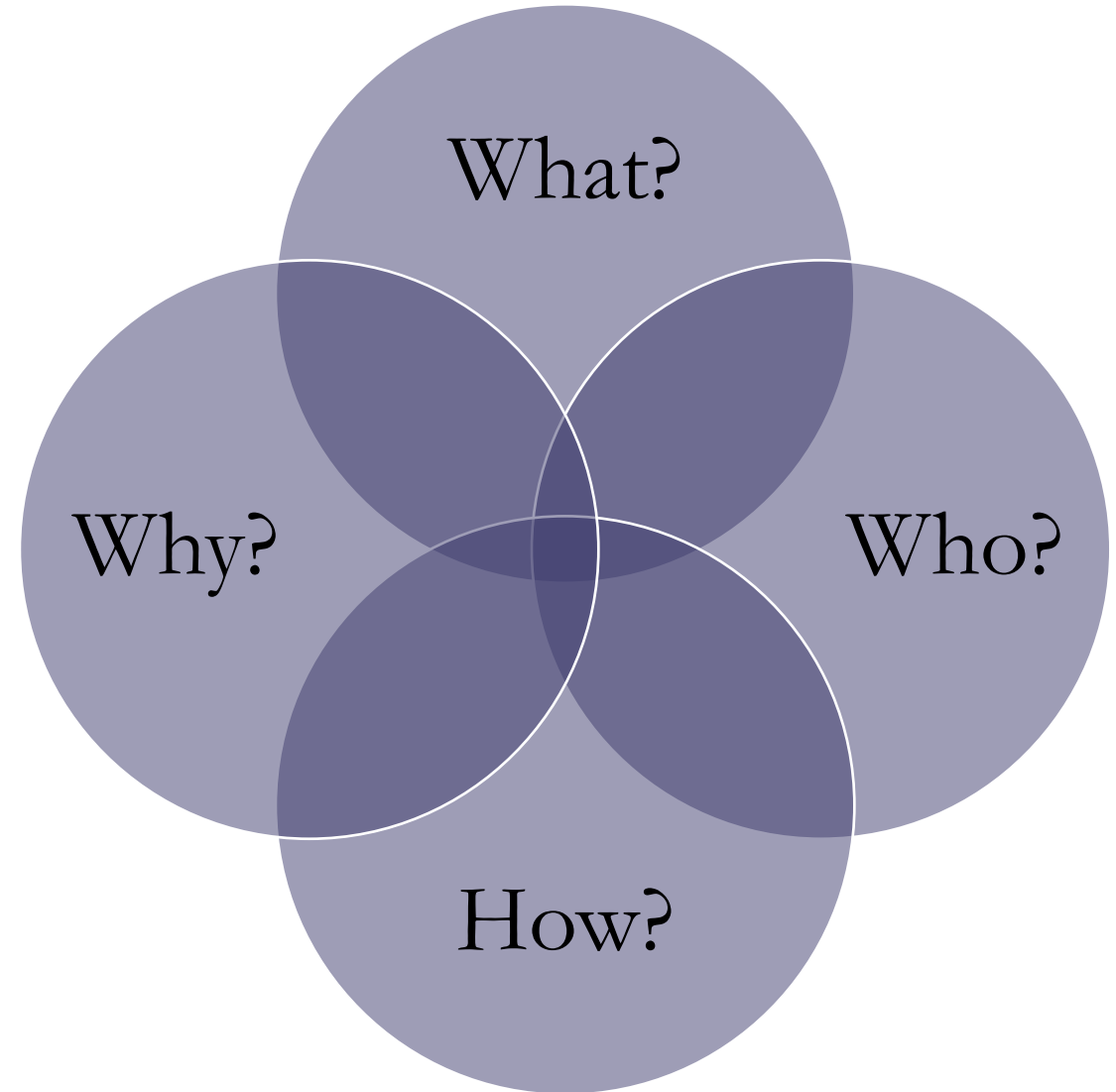
From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023

Know the Research

Compelling reasons to invest in volunteer engagement infrastructure and support include:

- Leverages and increases the impact of grant making
- Linked to stronger, more effective, and more efficient organizations as a whole
- Occurs when there is strong organizational and community infrastructure
- Occurs when board and staff at all levels are adequately trained
- People give their money where they give their time

Key Questions to Consider Before Contacting a Potential Funder



Action Steps for Nonprofits



Start a Dialogue

- Facilitate conversations about the benefits and challenges of volunteer engagement.

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023

Seven Key Messages about Effective Volunteer Engagement



1. Leverages and improves grantmaking.

2. Can support business objectives.

3. Strengthens ability to deliver services and meet needs.

4. Is linked to stronger, more efficient organizations.

5. Occurs when there is strong organizational and community infrastructure.

6. Occurs when staff and board members are trained and supported.

7. Contributes to maintaining a civil society.

Action Steps for Nonprofits



Revisit Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- Assess which strategies work or not and for whom. Adapt and align to current needs of the organization and the community.

Action Steps for Nonprofits

Demonstrate and Communicate Impact

- Move beyond tabulating # of volunteers and logged hours. Instead, demonstrate impact that includes quantitative and qualitative data around how volunteers contribute to organizational goals.

From *Activating the Power of Strategic Volunteer Engagement for a Better World: A Conversation Starter for Funders and Nonprofit Leaders*. Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement, 2023

Track and Share Your Results



Measuring
impact

Counting
Hours

Improve programs

Build staff buy-in

Communicate to
funders, donors, and
the larger community

Tracks quantity...
not quality

Conversation Starter



Next Steps



Discussion



VQ Resources

VQStrategies.com



Downloadable tools and templates



Books and tool kits



Webinars



VQ Blog



VQ Impact e-Newsletter

Sign up for our
e-Newsletter



Thank you.

VQStrategies.com
info@VQStrategies.com

