

Volunteering in San Diego

A Needs Assessment

**Conducted by
Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research
University of San Diego**

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Executive Summary

Background

In Fall 2011, Volunteer San Diego closed its doors leaving a perceived gap in volunteer matching services in the region. Nonprofit and corporate leaders anecdotally indicated that the remaining volunteer matching services and programs were not meeting local needs sufficiently. The University of San Diego's Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research conducted a needs assessment with support from local funders to better understand the nature of San Diego's volunteer matching needs.

Needs

The researchers identified many local and national programs and services that offer volunteer matching services. However, a number of challenges emerged that include:

- A lack of awareness about existing resources.
- Many resources serve niches of the community making it difficult for those seeking services to find the right resource easily.
- A mismatch between organization needs for long-term volunteers and volunteer interests for short-term projects.
- A need for additional training and professional development in volunteer engagement.
- Group volunteering is a challenge for community organizations and corporations.
- Limited funding for volunteer engagement.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been identified as potential ways to address community needs for volunteer matching services:

- Establish a hub to connect constituencies with resources more efficiently and effectively.
- Establish one community volunteer opportunity database that meets multiple constituencies' needs and is informed by technology and volunteer engagement experts.
- Expand training for volunteer administrators and other staff members that engage volunteers.
- Augment local board development and skill-based volunteer programs with national programs.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

It has been two years since the Fall 2011 closing of Volunteer San Diego, which served as a local clearinghouse and capacity builder for volunteerism in the region. The organization helped fill more than 50,000 volunteer positions at 700 community organizations annually. Though a variety of volunteer engagement services and tools are available (e.g., volunteer databases, volunteer administrator training, and volunteer project calendars), nonprofit and corporate leaders indicate that a gap in volunteer matching and engagement services now exists.

In response, the University of San Diego's Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research conducted a needs assessment to better understand local volunteer matching needs and document gaps that may be inhibiting volunteer engagement. The needs assessment identifies which services are needed by nonprofits, businesses, and volunteers, as well as these constituencies' interest in financially supporting these services.

Study Design and Methods

The literature on volunteering typically studies volunteers or the organizations that need them rather than the interaction between them. Volunteer research focuses on volunteer motivation or benefits of volunteering. Organizational research emphasizes volunteer management practices and the challenges associated with recruitment and retention.

Although it seems obvious that getting the right people in the right volunteer positions is key to effective volunteering, very few studies - or organizations - examine the intermediary or "volunteer matchmaking" process and the extent to which the desires of volunteers and the needs of organizations are congruent. To explore this idea further, a needs assessment was conducted to gather information about the following research questions:

- What are the volunteer matching needs of nonprofits, corporations, and volunteers?
- What volunteer matching services exist in San Diego and by what organizations?
- To what extent are stakeholders willing to fund or pay for volunteer matching services?
- What gaps remain in volunteer matching services?

To begin to answer these research questions, several different data gathering methods were employed that included:

- In-person interviews, February-March 2013, with 19 key stakeholders such as corporate and nonprofit leaders who engage volunteers or observe volunteer engagement trends
- One focus group in February 2013 with nine corporate employee volunteer managers
- Two focus groups in March 2013 with a total of 17 nonprofit volunteer administrators
- Online surveys for nonprofits and volunteers to assess the scope of their volunteer engagement needs
 - The nonprofit survey received 166 responses in May 2013. It was sent to Caster Center contacts and through social media and listservs of The Fieldstone Foundation, YNPN San Diego, and the Volunteer Administrator's Network.

- The first volunteer survey received 114 responses. It was sent to individuals who registered with United Way of San Diego County and those who were followers of Volunteer San Diego's social media.
- The second volunteer survey received 280 responses. It was sent to a database of individuals by Luth Research.
- Community asset mapping informed by the interviews, focus groups, surveys, internet searches, and researcher experience.

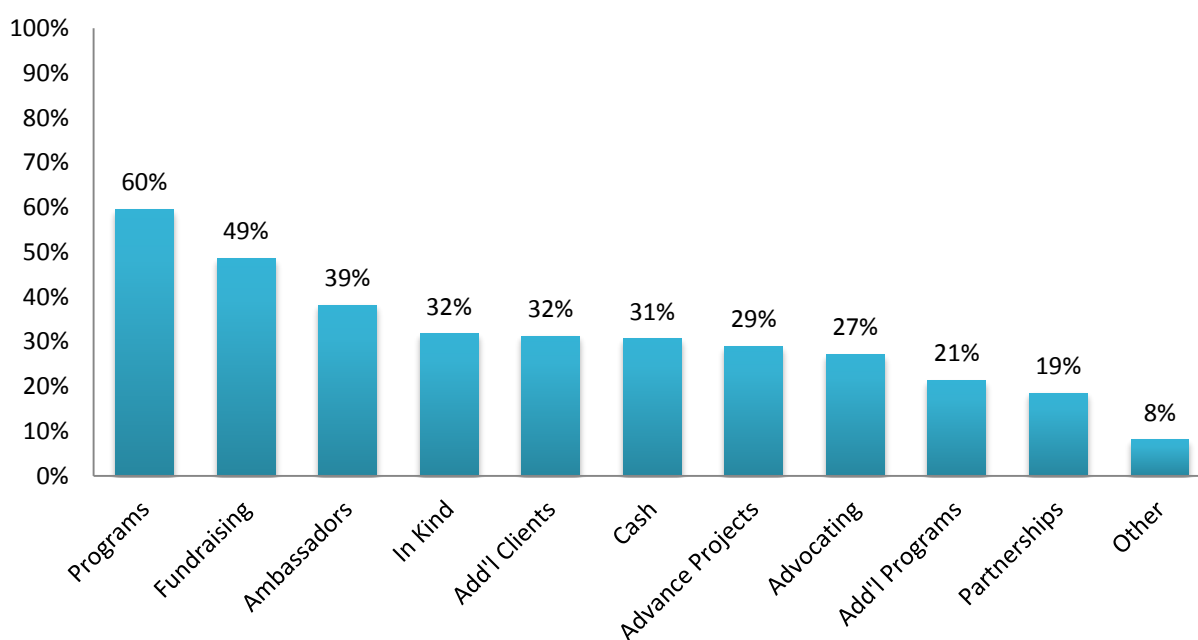
FINDINGS

The assessment findings are descriptive in nature and identify the key issues, preferences, and challenges in volunteering in San Diego. They are not analyzed to determine the statistical significance or causation. Additionally, respondents could select more than one response to questions. As a result, the percentages do not add to 100 percent and do not indicate priorities relative to other responses.

Volunteer Impact and Giving

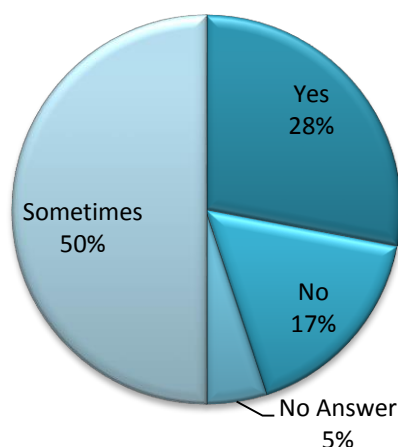
Figure 1 shows that nonprofit leaders identify many ways that volunteers make an impact on the organization, including: supporting the delivery of programs (60%), fundraising (49%), serving as ambassadors (39%), making in-kind donations (32%), helping the organization serve additional clients (32%), making cash donations (31%), advancing projects (29%), advocating (27%), adding programs (21%), partnerships (19%), and other (8%).

Figure 1. Volunteer Impact



Furthermore, 78 percent of volunteers donate, at least sometimes, to the organizations where they volunteer as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Volunteer Giving at Organizations Served



These findings are evidence that volunteers play critical roles at nonprofits. They counter the stereotype of volunteers serving in supportive roles (e.g., stuffing envelopes) that do not impact core operations.

Volunteer Matching Needs of Nonprofits, Corporations, and Volunteers

Though there is overlap in the volunteer matching needs of local constituencies, each one has unique needs as shown in Table 1.

Nonprofit leaders are seeking: volunteers who will be a good fit for available opportunities, a community clearinghouse to refer prospective volunteers who are not compatible with their volunteer opportunities, support for facilitating groups of volunteers, volunteer engagement resources and tools (such as policies, handbooks, and templates), and professional development and networking for volunteer administrators.

Corporations are seeking: group volunteer opportunities (particularly for department-wide or company-wide days of service), a community clearinghouse to refer prospective employee volunteers or their children, support for facilitating groups of volunteers, and resources and tools for managing employee volunteer programs (especially technology tools that integrate volunteering and giving programs).

Current and prospective volunteers are seeking: a simple way to find and sign up for volunteer opportunities, especially projects that are convenient to schedule and location and do not require a long-term commitment.

Table 1. Expressed Matching Needs of Nonprofits, Corporations, and Individual Volunteers

Nonprofits	Corporations	Individual Volunteers
Find volunteers who are a good fit to available opportunities	Find group volunteer opportunities	Find volunteer opportunities that fit their schedules
Refer prospective volunteers who are not compatible with current needs	Refer prospective volunteers	
Support facilitation of group volunteers	Support facilitation of group volunteers	
Find resources and tools	Find resources and tools	
Receive professional development		

Volunteer Roles

San Diego's nonprofits offer an array of volunteer roles ranging from one-time event volunteers to the long-term commitment required of board members. The most difficult positions to recruit are board members (47%), pro bono (25%), program (24%), and administrative volunteers (24%).

Volunteers indicate the most interest in serving as event volunteers (53%), mentors (29%), holiday volunteers (24%), program volunteers (23%), and disaster volunteers (20%).

Corporations are most interested in easy, one-time group volunteer opportunities. Projects that can be brought to the work site (e.g., care package or school supply assembling) are especially appealing.

Table 2. Volunteer Offerings and Interest

Volunteer roles	Offered by organizations	Most difficult to recruit	Most interesting to volunteers
Board member	79%	47%	13%
Event volunteer	79%	8%	53%
Committee member	68%	16%	16%
Administrative volunteer	63%	24%	17%
Program/ service delivery	57%	24%	23%
Pro bono/ professional assistance	50%	25%	11%
Volunteer leader	40%	8%	11%
Mentors	32%	10%	29%
Advocacy	30%	8%	12%
Virtual volunteer	22%	2%	8%
Holiday	16%	1%	24%
Disaster	5%	1%	20%

*Highlight indicates a top five response

Recruiting Methods

There are many options for recruiting volunteers and board members. The volume of choices itself poses a challenge as volunteer prospects try to identify the sources that will yield the best matches. Busy nonprofit staff struggle with finding time to post to multiple sources. A 2011 study¹ found that using many methods to recruit volunteers may be counterproductive. The authors suggest that identifying and focusing on the most effective recruiting sources for a given organization is more productive for finding enough of the right volunteers than posting to a large number of recruiting sources.

Volunteers appear to go to people or organizations they are familiar with to find non-board service opportunities. Forty-four percent use word of mouth and 27 percent visit the host organization's website. They also use relationships with their employers (17%) and places of worship (17%). When relationships do not exist, volunteers use clearinghouses such as Volunteer San Diego (12%-when it was operational), United Way (11%), Craigslist (11%), and VolunteerMatch (9%) to locate opportunities. (Because some respondents were affiliated with United Way or Volunteer San Diego, these figures may be skewed.)

Organizations use word of mouth (70%), their websites (39%), and partner organizations (29%) to find volunteers, suggesting that starting with existing relationships is the most effective approach to volunteer recruitment. Organizations increase exposure to opportunities by also posting with universities and colleges (24%), VolunteerMatch (12%), and Volunteer San Diego (9%). Other posting sources (e.g., other community databases, newspapers, bulletin boards) proved less successful in creating good matches.

The most successful board recruiting methods relied more heavily on existing relationships than non-board recruiting. Organizations tapped into current board members (67%), word of mouth (59%), current non-board volunteers (23%), and partner organizations (17%) to recruit new board members.

Volunteers found board positions by word of mouth (34%), the organization's website (20%), and current non-board positions (10%). United Way (12%) and VolunteerMatch (10%) were the most effective volunteer portals for board positions. (These figures are only from the United Way/Volunteer San Diego survey and may be skewed.)

Corporations identify current grant partners as the best source for finding volunteer and board opportunities. They also indicate success with employee-initiated projects and those that were sourced through Volunteer San Diego (when operational) or Points of Light (Volunteer San Diego's national parent organization.)

Table 3.

Best Non-Board Recruiting Methods	Organizations	Volunteers
Word of mouth	70%	44%
Organization website	39%	27%
Partner organizations	29%	n/a
Universities/colleges	24%	11%
VolunteerMatch	12%	9%
Volunteer San Diego	9%	12%
Volunteer fairs	4%	4%
Idealist	2%	2%
United Way	1%	11%
Craigslist	1%	11%
Newspaper	1%	8%
YNPN San Diego	1%	3%
Profits4Purpose	1%	n/a
KidsKorps	1%	2%
RSVP	1%	2%
Bulletin boards	1%	5%
Place of worship	0%	17%
Pennysaver	0%	2%
AARP	0%	2%
Employer	n/a	17%
Child's school/activities	n/a	9%

Table 4.

Best Board Recruiting Methods	Organizations	Volunteers
Current board	67%	n/a
Word of mouth	59%	34%
Current non-board volunteers	23%	10%
Partner organizations	17%	n/a
Organization website	9%	20%
boardnetUSA	2%	1%
LinkedIn	1%	3%
LEAD San Diego	1%	1%
Universities/colleges	1%	6%
Newspaper	1%	2%
VolunteerMatch	0%	10%
United Way	0%	12%
Craigslist	0%	2%
Idealist	0%	0%
YNPN San Diego	0%	2%
Profits4Purpose	0%	n/a
AARP	0%	1%
RSVP	0%	0%

*Highlight indicates a top five response

Although relationship-based recruiting is most successful, not every prospective volunteer has an existing relationship to tap. Volunteer-connector organizations like United Way, VolunteerMatch, or Volunteer San Diego (when operational) seem to play an important role for prospective volunteers who do not have relationships with organizations, do not know where to start looking for service opportunities, or are looking for a new organization, project, or cause.

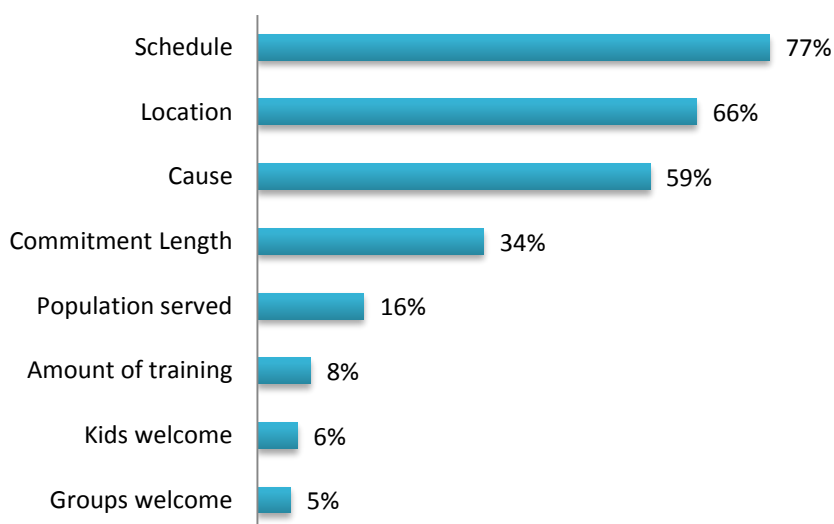
In addition, many organizations are looking to expand or diversify their volunteer pools, which may be difficult when relying on existing relationships, especially for smaller nonprofits. Volunteer-connector organizations provide a pool of external volunteer prospects to supplement internal efforts.

These findings suggest that nonprofits have a significant opportunity to consider people already associated with the organization as participants, participant family members, beneficiaries, and donors as volunteer prospects and prospects for longer-term service. They also indicate that volunteer-connector organizations are a key ingredient in further expanding the pool of “unattached” volunteer prospects.

Volunteer Opportunity Selection Factors

As Figure 3 demonstrates, the factors mentioned most often in selecting a volunteer opportunity relate to availability and cause (59%). The availability issues are schedule (77%), location (66%), and length of commitment (34%).

Figure 3. Factors in Selecting a Volunteer Opportunity



Challenges to Volunteering and Recruiting

Organizations and volunteers share challenges in the following areas: schedule, length of commitment, and how to find each other. Figure 4 provides an overview of volunteering challenges.

Seventy-seven percent of volunteers indicate that their schedules are the largest factor in selecting a volunteer opportunity. Likewise, 50 percent of organizations agree that the biggest volunteer-related challenge is that they are unavailable at the times required. Both volunteers (33%) and organizations (34%) note challenges with volunteer availability for the length of the commitment. Additionally, volunteers struggle with where to find volunteer opportunities (25%) and organizations are unsure where to find volunteers (22%).

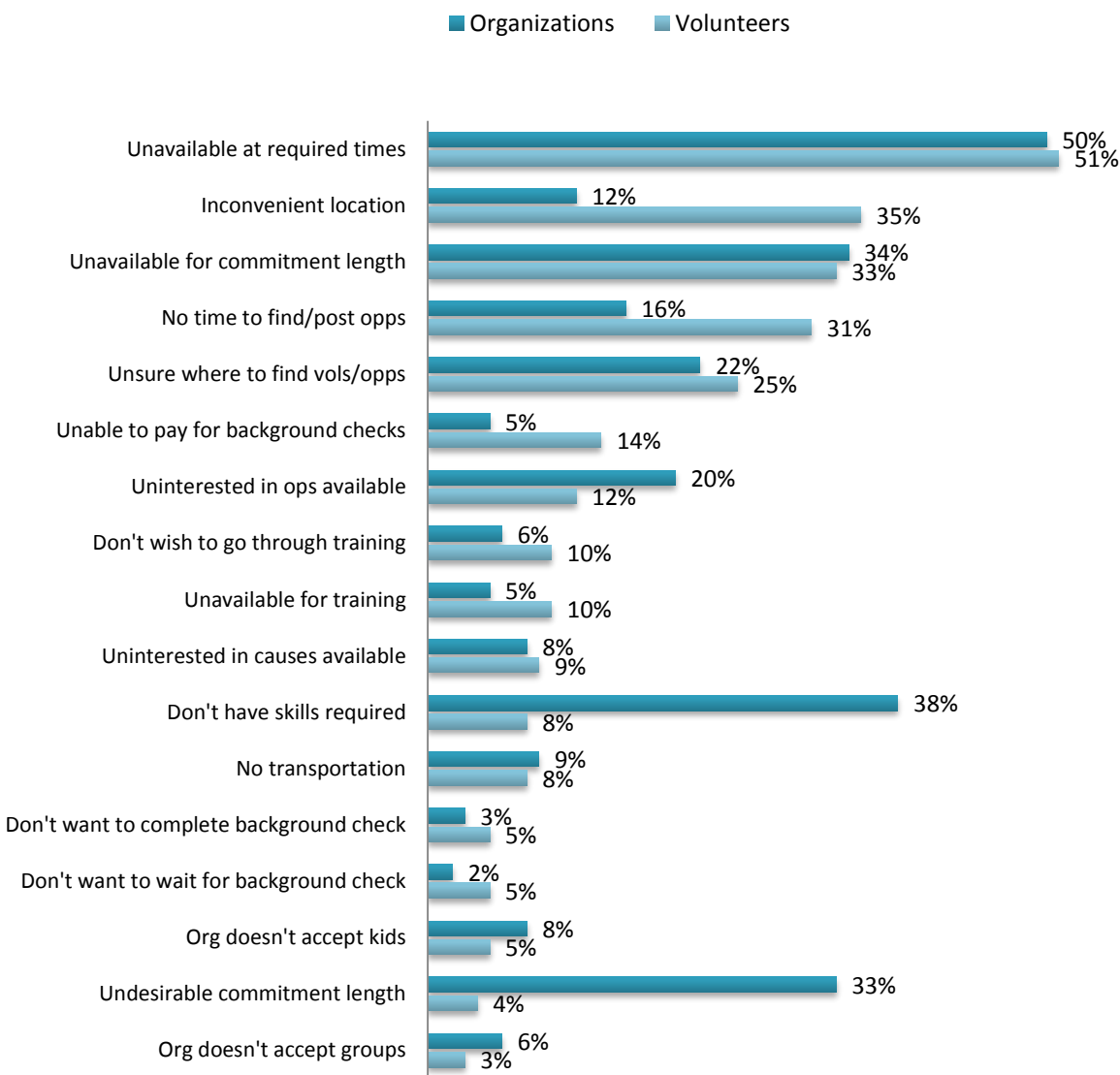
The most significant divergence between volunteers' challenges and organizations' volunteer-related challenges relates to volunteer skills. Thirty-eight percent of organizations, the second-highest amount, state that volunteer lack of skills is a challenge. Eight percent of volunteers cite a lack of skills as a challenge to volunteering.

Another area of divergence is location. Location is the second most important factor for volunteers in selecting a volunteer opportunity (66%) and the second largest challenge to their volunteering (35%). However, it did not seem to be as much of an issue for organizations. Twelve percent of organizations state volunteer unavailability at opportunity locations is a challenge.

Organizations and volunteers both cite volunteer *unavailability* for commitment length as a significant challenge. However, organizations (33%) indicated that prospective volunteers found the commitment length *undesirable* as opposed to four percent of volunteers selecting the same option. This may indicate that volunteers have an interest in longer-term commitments but are unable to schedule accordingly.

Cause is an important factor in opportunity selection (59%) but does not rate as a challenge to volunteering. Only nine percent of volunteers indicate they were uninterested in causes available and eight percent of organizations indicate lack of interest in their causes as a challenge.

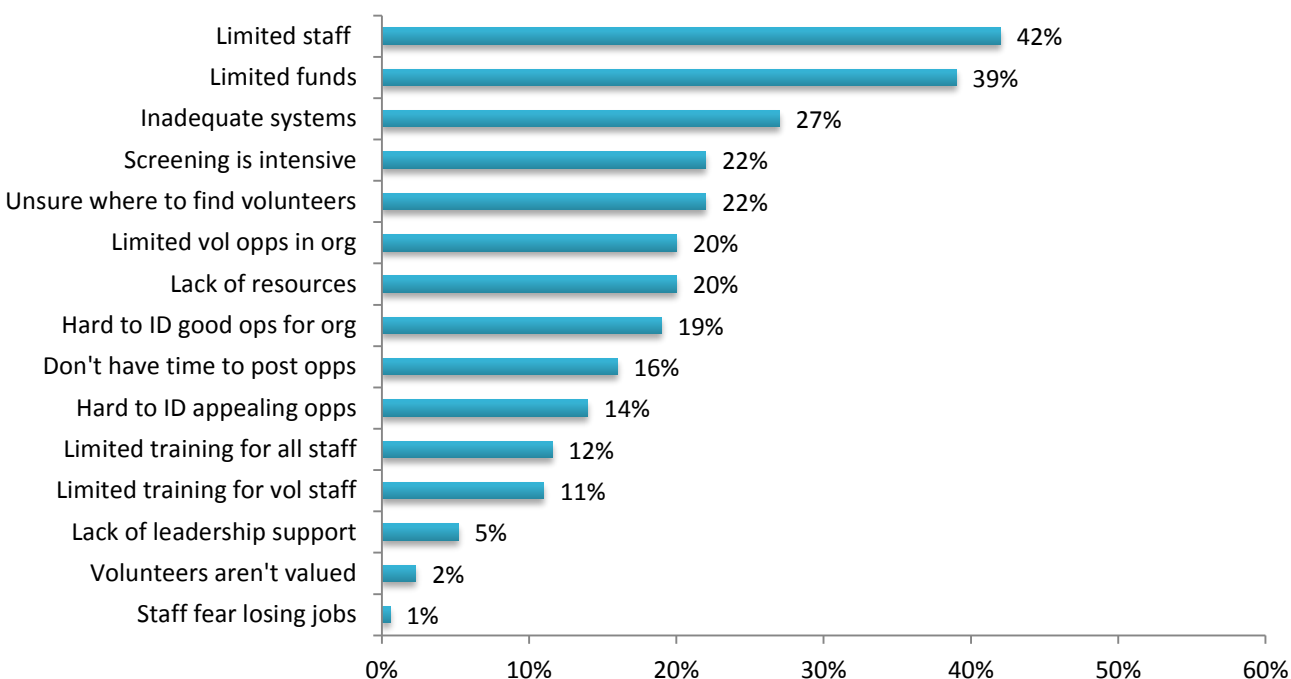
Although background checks came up frequently as a challenge for organizations in the focus groups, and screening was indicated as an organization-related challenge (22%), less than five percent of volunteer and organization survey respondents cite volunteer disinterest in completing or waiting for a background check as challenges. However, the inability to pay for a background check was a challenge for 14 percent of volunteers.

Figure 4. Challenges to Volunteering**Internal Organization Challenges to Recruiting Volunteers**

As indicated in Figure 5, organizations struggle with internal challenges for recruiting volunteers including: limited staff (42%), limited funds (39%), inadequate systems to coordinate volunteers (27%), and screening (22%). Each of these issues relate to organization infrastructure. Other challenges of significance were uncertainty about where to find volunteers (22%), limited volunteer opportunities (20%), and lack of resources (20%).

Corporate focus group participants, too, identify internal resources of staff and funding as the top two challenges for employee volunteer engagement. Other challenges include evaluating volunteer efforts, communicating about projects, and scheduling employee volunteer opportunities. For smaller companies, an issue is sourcing projects that are a good fit.

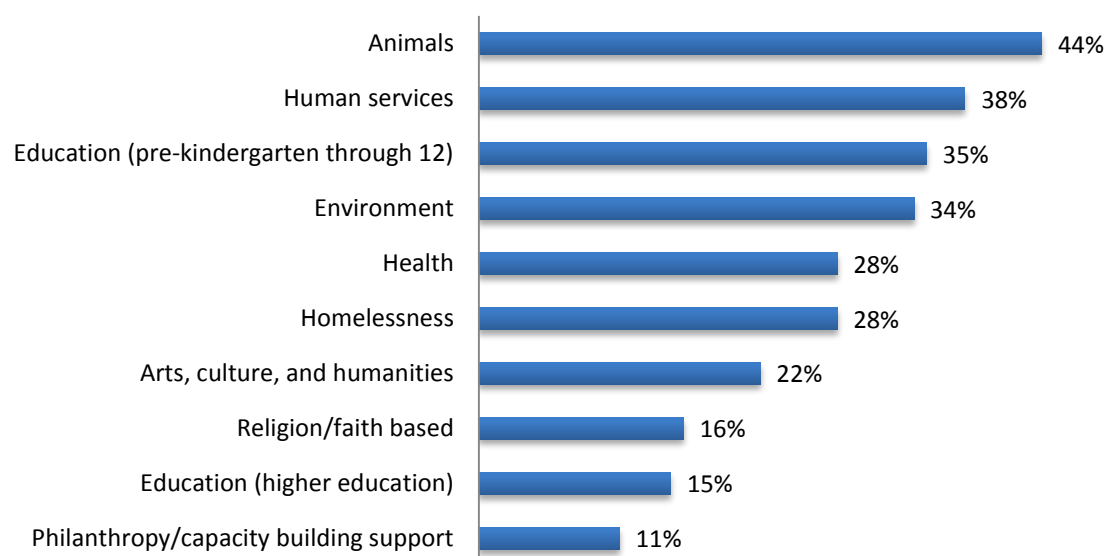
Figure 5. Challenges for Recruiting: Organization Related



Volunteer Preference for Cause

Volunteers who responded to this survey are interested in serving a variety of causes. The causes that were mentioned most frequently were animals (44%), human services (38%), education (pre-kindergarten-high school, 35%), and the environment (34%). According to the Caster Center's 2013 State of Nonprofits Annual Report, human services is one of the largest subsectors within San Diego representing 22 percent of the nonprofit sector. Education is 16 percent of the sector, and animals and the environment combine to represent only four percent of the sector.

Figure 6. Preferred Causes Most Mentioned by Volunteers



Volunteer Matching Services in San Diego

There are a variety of services, programs, and resources that support volunteerism in San Diego. The following list includes the most popular resources that appeal to the broadest segments of the community. There are frequent additions to resources as organizations create new technology systems, partnerships, or programs. For this reason, maintaining an exhaustive list is difficult and some resources are not included.

All of the local organizations listed here have indicated continued interest in supporting volunteerism and connecting with other organizations to enhance services and collaboration.

Volunteer Opportunity Databases

Volunteer opportunity databases provide a place for those seeking volunteers to post opportunities and for those seeking opportunities to search for them. One of the challenges for nonprofits is the time it takes to post to various databases. With the exception of AllforGood, which aggregates opportunities from Idealist, none of the other databases share or aggregate postings. Managing and updating postings takes significant time and represents an opportunity to consider a streamlined approach.

Local

- United Way of San Diego County (focus on education, income, homelessness, and health opportunities - vetted)
- 211 (focus on disaster volunteering - vetted)
- Corporate employee databases/listings (accessible only to the corporation's employees such as Qualcomm's listings – various vetting mechanisms)

National

- VolunteerMatch
- AllforGood
- Createthegood/AARP
- Craigslist
- Idealist.org (include volunteer, intern, and staff position postings)
- BoardnetUSA (board recruitment)
- LinkedIn (board recruitment)

*Professional Development*Local

- Volunteer Administrators Network (VAN – monthly roundtable discussions and networking)
- Cultural Volunteer Managers Council (CVMC – roundtables, training, and networking)
- Nonprofit Management Solutions (Volunteer Management 101 and learning circles for volunteer administrators)
- USD Governance Symposium (board governance professional development for board members and nonprofit staff)

National

- IdeaEncore.com (library of volunteer engagement tools and resources)
- BoardSource (training and resources for boards and committees)

Volunteer Project Calendars

- KidsKorps (available to youth 18 and under)
- United Way of San Diego County (projects can be filtered by date)
- HandsOn San Diego (in the start-up phase, expected to launch Fall 2013)

Group Volunteer Intermediary

- United Way of San Diego County (manages group volunteer projects for corporate partners)
- Right Hand Events (for-profit that manages group volunteer projects for corporate clients)

Corporate Employee Engagement Services

- San Diego Grantmakers (training, discussions, and resources on corporate volunteer engagement)
- University of San Diego (training and resources on employee board engagement)
- Profits4Purpose (technology platform for tracking corporate volunteer and giving activity that includes volunteer postings for the corporation's nonprofit partners)

Willingness to Fund Volunteer Matching Services

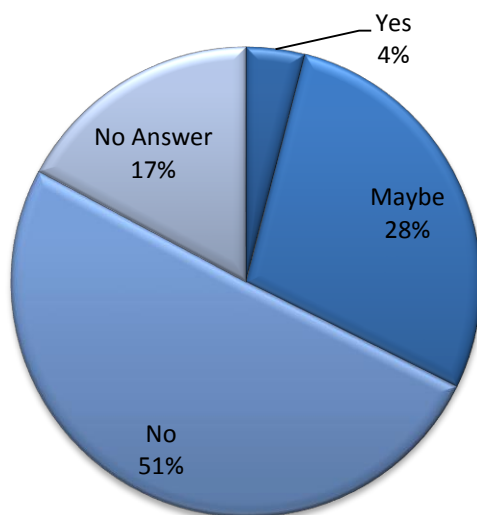
This needs assessment revealed three areas of possible funding sources for local volunteer engagement, all on a fee-for-service or membership basis, in the areas of: training for nonprofits, volunteer event group facilitation for corporations, and access to vetted volunteer projects for volunteers.

Some nonprofits indicate that they would be willing and able to pay for professional development in the form of volunteer engagement training. These nonprofit interview respondents note that they have larger budgets and more capacity than many organizations. One nonprofit leader suggested that a fee helps “legitimize” the value of volunteer engagement training and suggested that she could make a case for paying a consulting fee and/or an annual fee to participate in trainings and receive volunteer matching services.

Corporations are frustrated by the amount of staff time consumed by coordinating employee volunteer events. They indicate that they would be best suited to pay for services on a contract basis that would help connect them with vetted projects and provide the logistics and management support needed for successful projects.

Thirty-two percent of volunteers indicate they would consider paying for access to a project calendar with vetted opportunities on an annual basis. Seventy percent indicate they would pay \$15; 24 percent would pay \$25; and five percent would pay \$35.

Figure 7. Willingness to Pay for Project Calendar



Volunteer Matching Services: Identified Gaps

Though local and national volunteer matching services are available in San Diego, this assessment documented that gaps still remain.

- The San Diego community lacks awareness about volunteer resources. During interviews, focus groups, and an initial presentation of findings at USD's Nonprofit Summit, many participants were unaware of the resources available to them.
- Nonprofits, corporations, and volunteers struggle to find each other.
- Volunteerism resources serve niche populations and offer varying levels of effectiveness. In the absence of a central volunteer hub, each volunteer prospect or organization has to discover and track many resources. Additionally, no one resource meets the community's needs. For example, United Way vets volunteer opportunities, but only for causes in its focus areas. VolunteerMatch offers postings for any cause, but none are vetted. Corporate databases have some vetting, but are only available to their employees.
- Group volunteering is a challenge to all parties. Nonprofits struggle to identify and facilitate group volunteer projects. Corporations, and other groups, struggle to find one-day meaningful volunteer projects that are suitable for large groups. Both constituencies share that facilitating these projects takes too much staff time.
- Organization needs do not align with prospective volunteer desires. Organizations seek long-term volunteers to justify the investment it requires to engage them, but volunteer prospects are reluctant to make long-term commitments until they get to know an organization.
- Volunteer engagement training does not meet local needs. Beginning and advanced volunteer administrators indicate the need for more training for themselves and their fellow staff members.

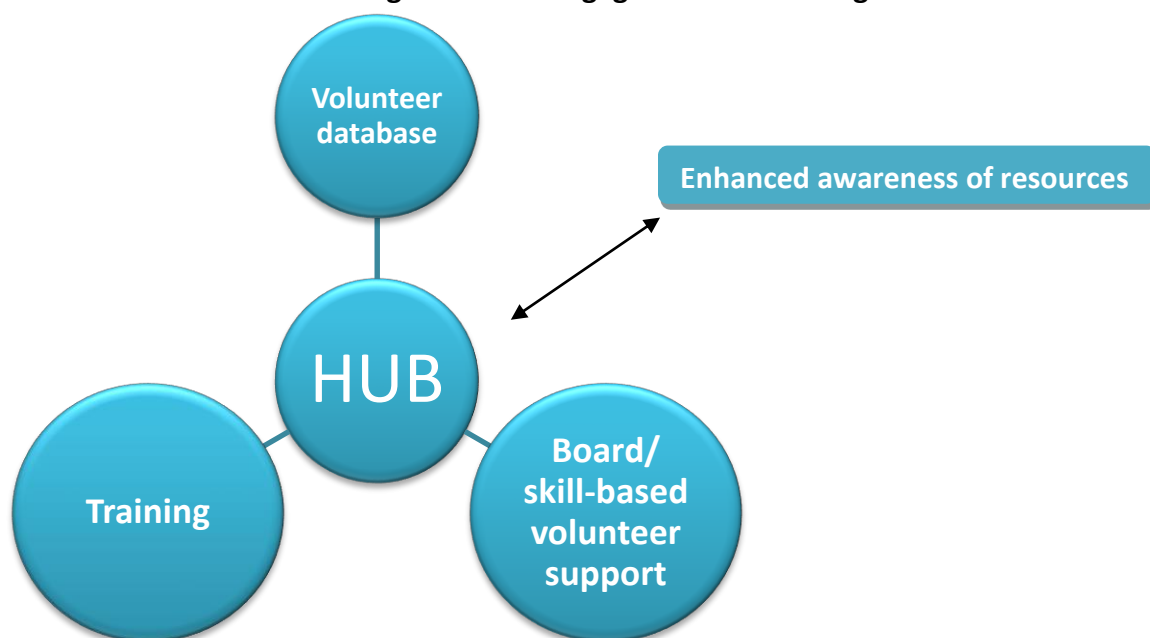
- Funding for volunteer engagement is limited.
 - Nonprofits lack funding for volunteer engagement resulting in a lack of staff for this function, which limits the organizations' readiness and ability to optimize volunteer involvement.
 - Successful business models for volunteer-connecting organizations exist. Developing local financial support requires education that volunteers are not, in fact, free and establishing the value of a streamlined resource that connects volunteers and the organizations that need them. Nationally, there is a trend toward volunteer-connector services being offered in organizations that provide other capacity-building services such as management service organizations, 211s, United Ways, or government departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this needs assessment, the research team has identified four specific recommendations designed to fill existing gaps, streamline services, and promote volunteering in San Diego County. These recommendations have been numbered in order of priority, however, costs and resource constraints for each require further exploration that is beyond the scope of this project.

1. Establish a central hub that connects and directs various constituencies to the resources they need.
 - The hub does not need to be a service provider. It can serve as a portal for the providers.
 - All providers should link to and help promote the hub.
2. Establish one community volunteer opportunity database that meets multiple constituencies' needs and is informed by technology and volunteer engagement experts.
 - This streamlined solution is not about empire-building, but creating efficiencies for every constituency that serves or engages with volunteers.
 - The more robust the database, the better it meets the needs of volunteer prospects and community organizations.
 - When possible, integrate and build on existing resources.
 - Explore options for community organizations to register group projects.
3. Expand training for volunteer administrators and other staff members who engage volunteers.
 - Increase the amount of sessions and promote existing resources.
4. Augment local board development and skill-based volunteer programs with national programs.
 - Review national programs for alignment with local needs and promote these as the San Diego resources.

Figure 8. Recommendations for Enhancing Volunteer Engagement in San Diego



¹ Brudney, J.L., & Hager, M.A. (2011). Problems recruiting volunteers: Nature versus nurture. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 22(2), 137-156.