Effective Strategies for Engaging Rural Volunteers in AML Reclamation

The Appalachian Coal Country Team (ACCT)
An OSM/VISTA Initiative
www.coalcountryteam.org

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Appalachian Coal Country Team (ACCT)

PA, OH, MD, WV, VA, KY, TN, AL
- Founded in 2002

Western Hardrock Watershed Team (WHWT)

CO and NM
- Founded in 2006

- Partnership between the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)
- Assist rural communities impoverished by environmental degradation and its consequences in making their watersheds healthier places to live and work
“Volunteers for Rural Watersheds” Research Project Background

- 3-year research project
  - Seeks to develop tools and resources to make volunteerism work better for rural community/watershed groups
- Started in Summer 2008
- Funding from EPA’s OWOW to explore:
  - Who are volunteers and what services do they provide?
  - What are the most effective ways to manage volunteers?
  - Why and where are these strategies successful?
  - How can we get these findings and effective strategies into the hands of as many people as possible?
Project Overview

- **Phase 1**: Collected and analyzed survey data from volunteer base of 16 organizations.
- **Phase 2**: Identified 25 volunteer management practices being done successfully by rural groups; transplanted and monitored trial practices.
- **Phase 3**: Outreach and dissemination of information through workshops, booklets, workbooks, websites, webinars, etc.
Phase 1: Volunteer Surveys

Survey instrument was constructed for volunteers with watershed groups.

It asked:

• How did these rural watershed volunteers get involved with their organizations?
• What are some of their personal characteristics?
• What capacity do they serve for their respective organizations and communities?
• How might they be further engaged in volunteer activities in the future?
• Practical issues such as volunteer availability and provision for follow-up interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In PA</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age (years)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average residence in watershed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got involved in organization (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through a friend</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through employer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At event</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most concerned about (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMD</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural pollution, pollution from wastewater, deforestation, illegal trash dumps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in activities (%)</td>
<td>In PA</td>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show up at events and do what is needed</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the newsletter</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave money to org, including membership dues</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in decisions about the org’s future</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made in-kind donations</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct environmental education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represent the org when meeting with other groups</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Believe that watershed organization (%)</th>
<th>In PA</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improves local environment (strongly agree)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces on-the-ground results</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings are conducted in efficient and productive manner</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings financial benefits to community</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
– Are highly involved in local organizations, most commonly: a conservation organization (48%); a church-affiliated group (46%); a civic or political organization (44%).

– Report high civic engagement:
  • 90% voted in the 2008 presidential election
  • 82% voted in a local election in 2006 or 2007
  • 79% voted in the primary election
  • 63% contacted a member of Congress or state legislature for any reason
  • 51% contacted a local government official about a policy issue
Phase 2: Testing Volunteer Management Practices

- Designed to identify successful volunteer management practices then monitor application by other organizations
  - Found practices or strategies being used with success by other organizations within the ACCT/WHWT
  - Transplanted 25 successful practices to the participating organizations that need them
  - Documented successes and challenges
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25 Volunteer Management Trial Practices

- Skills/needs spreadsheet for board recruitment
- Partnership with ATV groups
- Church partnerships
- Business partnerships
- Mandatory service volunteers
- Community service volunteers
- Student athlete volunteers
- Bi-monthly outreach meetings
- One-hour board meetings
- Volunteer contributions to newsletter
- Development of youth advisory board
- Formation of youth helper organization

- Wild and Scenic Film Festival
- Service learning projects
- Retired and Senior Volunteer Program
- Providing transportation
- Water monitoring through partnerships
- Water monitoring with individuals
- Volunteer appreciation picnic
- Constructing a rain garden
- Constructing wetlands
- Duck race
- 5k race
- Adopt-a-stream
- Fish fry
Water monitoring through partnerships
Water monitoring through individuals
Partnerships with ATV groups

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Using student athlete volunteers
Church partnerships
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Mandatory/community service volunteers
5k race
Phase 3: Creation of rural volunteer management resources

- Analysis of survey data
- Compilation of 48 trial practice case studies plus original best practices
- Outreach and dissemination of information through:
  - Workshops
  - Workbook
  - Website
  - Webinar
  - And more!
Questions?

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