

Proposal for a National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement

June 2018

Overview

During the closing meeting of the National Summit on Volunteer Engagement Leadership in July 2017, a temporary task force was appointed and charged with proposing a structure for a formal group that will leverage and convene existing networks, organizations, and individuals to elevate and drive a national conversation about the power and potential of volunteer engagement, as well as encourage collective action for nationwide engagement strategies.

This proposal is the result of six months of work by the structure task force and includes:

- Background
- Proposed Alliance, Guiding Principles, and Structure
- Next Steps

In short, we propose that a **National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement** be formed with the following mission:

The mission of the Alliance is to guide future collective action at the national level towards embracing volunteer engagement as an effective strategy to address community needs.

Background

In 2017, a National Summit on Volunteer Engagement Leadership convened in St. Paul, MN with the purpose of mapping the future of the field. Over the course of the Summit, more than 500 professionals and funders from across the nonprofit spectrum convened to assess the state of engagement and to identify key needs and opportunities to not only advance the field but also leverage engagement as a vital strategy to address community needs.

Summit programs explored the potential of increased, innovative, and effective citizen involvement in addressing today's social, educational, environmental, health, and community challenges. On the one hand, the volunteer rate among US citizens has declined significantly since 2004.¹ On the other hand, millions of Americans report a desire to serve meaningfully. As far back as 2007, research² showed that Baby Boomers' view of retirement includes meaningful ways to share their skills and give back through volunteering, while Millennials are out-volunteering any previous generation at their age.³ Clearly, there remains a disconnect between what volunteers want and how organizations and communities are tapping into citizens' interest and the abundant resource of skills that interest represents.

With pressing community and environmental needs, the potential for volunteer engagement to build capacity of organizations to address these needs is compelling. Research conducted by TCC Group in

¹ Corporation for National and Community Service, *Volunteering in America Report 2016*.

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/vcla/national>

² VolunteerMatch, *Great Expectations: Boomers and the Future of Volunteering*, 2007 (San Francisco, CA: MetLife Foundation), 11.

³ Corporation for National and Community Service, *Volunteer in America Report 2016*.

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/vcla/demographic/millennials>

2009⁴ reveals that organizations that leverage volunteers effectively are significantly more adaptable, sustainable, and better able to scale their work than are organizations that do not engage volunteers or that do not do so effectively. Yet, many engagement professionals remain siloed or work in isolation as engagement efforts are relegated to the status of a “program” rather than a mission-critical strategy. Furthermore, within the vast array of organizations that rely on volunteers, relevant fields are equally siloed, with collaboration across the sector and across industries the exception rather than the rule.

The proposed alliance has been designed to convene staff and volunteer leaders across many sectors – including voices from traditional nonprofit, faith-based, health, human service, government, and civic organizations, membership associations, and higher education, and representing volunteer engagement professionals, executive leadership, development and fundraising professionals, human resource professionals, funders, and beyond.

The proposed structure is in response to the key focus areas identified at the closing meeting at the Summit:

- Creating a Clear National Vision
- Developing a Communications Hub
- Convening a Future Gatherings
- Furthering Research/Accreditation

While the Alliance may evolve in structure over time to best achieve its goals, the Task Force developed this proposed structure as a framework to launch the critical work to come. As noted in the guiding principles below, the effort is designed to complement the efforts existing organizations supporting similar efforts, bringing together more voices to build united strength for collective action.

Proposed Alliance, Guiding Principles, and Structure

The mission of the National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement is to guide future collective action at the national level towards embracing volunteer engagement as an effective strategy to address community needs.

Guiding Principles for the Alliance

- **The Alliance strives for a balance of bottom-up/grassroots and national leadership** to ensure broad participation and a wide variety of voices.
- **The Alliance is, by design, structured, but the structure allows for flexibility.** The Alliance does not necessarily need to be permanent.
- **The Alliance encourages the freedom of individual voices while working to achieve shared goals** (participants still represent own interests)
- **The Alliance actively recruits a broad range of voices cross-sector** – both groups and individuals. The Alliance is not controlled by a few voices; rather it encourages changing participants/leadership overtime to keep fresh.
- **The Alliance will be clear about goals and expected impact** to attract funding.
- **The Alliance will develop operating guidelines to guide future work** – how many participants, representing what areas, etc.

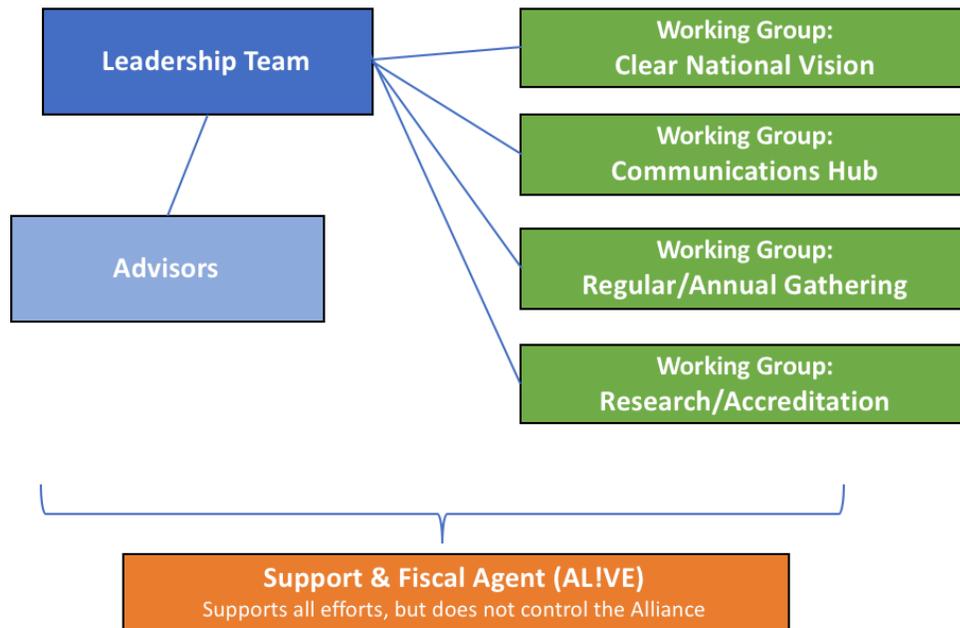
⁴ TCC Group, “Positive Deviants in Volunteerism and Service: Research Summary,” <http://www.pointsoflight.org/service-enterprise-initiative/research>

Composition and Structure

Under the support of a Fiscal Agent, the Alliance is comprised of the Leadership Team, Working Groups, Advisors, and community engagement efforts. A brief description of each entity follows. See the appendix for details on the purpose, composition, and responsibilities for each.

- **Leadership Team:** Comprised of 8-10 individuals, the Leadership Team provides overall leadership and oversight of the Alliance’s work while ensuring engagement of many voices into the process.
- **Advisors:** A team of experts and leaders in related fields, Advisors provide expertise, diversity, connections, and access to resources to support the success of the Alliance.
- **Working Groups:** Under the guidance of a working group lead who also sits on the Steering Committee, working groups are action teams that develop and implement goals and tactics in support of the overall strategy. The Summit results mandated that the following activities comprise the initial key focus areas for working groups:
 - Creating a Clear National Vision
 - Developing a Communications Hub
 - Convening a Future Gatherings
 - Furthering Research/ Accreditation
- **Fiscal Agent and Support Organization:** As the fiscal sponsor, the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) will provide administrative, fiscal, and logistical support to ensure success.

The National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement



Appendix: Detailed Overview of the Proposed Structure

Leadership Team

Purpose:

Provide overall leadership and oversight of the Alliance's work while ensuring engagement of many voices into the process.

Composition and Structure:

The Leadership Team shall be made up of 8-10 individuals that guide and is accountable for the work of the Alliance, representing key partners, groups participating in the Alliance, and heads of each Working Group. The Leadership Team will appoint a Chair to provide leadership to keep the group working efficiently. Leadership Team members may serve for up to two years, allowing for fresh voices and diverse participation over time.

Responsibilities:

- Provides overall leadership and oversight of work plan (ensuring that it aligns with the Alliance mission and vision).
- Defines scope of work.
- Develop recruitment criteria and process for Working Group participation.
- Holds Working Groups accountable for deliverables.
- Ensures effective communications with and between the Working Groups and ensures input is sought and shared with Advisors (is the liaison between the Advisors and the Working Groups).
- Provides input into the consistent selection process of participations for each Working Group.

Advisors

Purpose:

Provide expertise, diversity, connections, and access to resources to support the success of the Alliance.

Composition and Structure:

A team of experts and leaders in related fields. The Advisors bring deep experience in volunteer and civic engagement, representing a broad range of perspectives, as well, from the wider community. Advisors are from organizations across multiple sectors including nonprofit, philanthropy, government, business, faith, etc. who have participation within the Alliance and/or who represent one of the Alliance's networks, the broader volunteer and civic engagement community, or organizations with similar interests/objectives, etc. This group does not meet as often and is composed of key decision makers/leaders.

Responsibilities:

- Provides input to Leadership Team on direction and activities.
- Ensures the Alliance remains relevant and fosters "buy in".
- Supports efforts by making introductions or connecting the Alliance to resources.

Working Groups

Purpose:

As action teams, develop and implement goals and tactics in support of the overall strategy.

Composition and Structure:

Each Working Group has a lead who also sits on the Leadership Team. Working Groups offer larger engagement opportunities so more individuals can be involved. Participation should be driven by the needs of each working group to accomplish its goals.

Our mandate is to start with these five key activities that were developed at the Summit:

- Clear National Vision
- Communications Hub
- Regular Gatherings
- Research/ Accreditation

This Alliance structure leaves open the possibility of developing new Working Groups as needed to meet the goals of the Alliance.

Responsibilities include:

- Develops an action plan in support of the overall Alliance work plan.
- Implements the action plan.
- Communicates progress with the Leadership Team (including timelines, deliverables, challenges, and success).
- Engages people from across the field meaningfully.
- Working Groups review participant applications based on recruitment criteria and process designed by Leadership Team.

Support & Fiscal Agent

Purpose:

Provide administrative, fiscal, and logistical support to ensure success.

Composition:

AL!VE will provide support and serve as fiscal agent, without controlling the Alliance.

Responsibilities include:

- Manages finances.
- Collaborates with Leadership Team to secure resources to support ongoing work.
- Provides administrative support such as scheduling, meeting technology, documentation, and data management, without controlling outcomes.
- Provide facilitation support as requested.