Volunteer Engagement:
Strengthening our Community’s Capacity
Executive Summary
The Issue

Volunteering has numerous intrinsic benefits ranging from developing friendships, personal independence, skill-building, and creating community cohesion to an overall enriched sense of purpose and satisfaction in life both inside and outside of one’s workplace. Substantial research and testimonials confirm that volunteerism is on the rise in companies thanks to a growing emphasis on mission-based collaboration. Based on trends, it is expected that requests for volunteer opportunities by companies and employees are only going to increase.

We also know that there are approximately 64,000 Dane County residents living in poverty, 15,000 of whom are children. United Way of Dane County currently reaches just one third of these individuals, and we know that we can do more. Despite increased interest and requests to get engaged, there is a disconnect between these requests and the true need of the community. This is where opportunity lies.

“Throughout the years I’ve grown mentally; I’ve gained skills that only life can teach you. By volunteering, not only is the person impacted, but so am I.”

– Kimberly Leon Teran, Community Volunteer
According to a 2018 survey, Volunteering in America, by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the rate of volunteering had been declining slightly over the last 10 years but is on an upward swing again in terms of number of volunteers. Similarly, volunteering reported by United Way partner agencies is beginning to depict the same upward trend.

With this expected increase in community volunteerism and a concerted effort by corporations to further engage employees, United Way of Dane County needs to implement a new approach to volunteer engagement in order to help shape the future of volunteerism in Dane County.

Though it is easy to assume that volunteering benefits both the community it serves and the volunteers themselves, minimal data currently exists to inform and validate our approach to volunteer engagement. As one of the premiere volunteer resources in the community, we have a responsibility to play a leadership role. We aim to work with our community to find a consistent, relevant, reliable measure while telling the story of volunteerism, recognizing the tremendous impact volunteers make and inspiring others to get involved. The Volunteer Engagement Mobilization Plan aims to do just that.

To accomplish this goal, we recommend the following strategies:

**Strategy 1:** Increase collaboration with agency partners to leverage United Way of Dane County’s ability to effectively convene volunteers.

**Tactics:**
- Align with partner agencies on needs and resources to maximize community impact
- Serve as a resource and the thought leader in volunteerism

**Strategy 2:** Cultivate relationships with corporate partners to capitalize on employee volunteerism demands and utilize existing platforms/activities to educate partners on the ways to increase the impact.

**Tactic:**
- Create and execute a Corporate Volunteer Engagement Plan to target companies and drive activities

**Strategy 3:** Increase awareness of the impact of volunteerism to multiple audiences to match volunteer experience and desire to community need.

**Tactics:**
- Develop a recruitment strategy based on community needs
- Create and execute a content and media plan to show the impact of volunteerism

**Strategy 4:** Consistently measure and track volunteerism to demonstrate the impact (on both United Way of Dane County and the greater community) in order to further increase volunteerism and the overall impact work of the Agenda for Change.

**Tactics:**
- Identify mechanisms for reporting volunteer activities
- Measure the impact of these activities on volunteers, partner organizations, and the communities that they serve

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In 2018, United Way of Dane County embarked on a strategic visioning process with the goal of representing both the corporate and nonprofit sectors to assess our current volunteer strategies, measurement methods, the need in our community, and best practices.

Key learnings from this year-long process affirmed the importance and benefits of civic engagement. Volunteerism is a strategy in uniting the community and a fundamental building block toward changing lives and achieving our vision of a Dane County where everyone can succeed in school, work and life.

Volunteers help agencies provide the wide range of services that are available in our community; nonprofit agencies and community organizations would not be able to provide the breadth and depth of services they offer if they didn’t involve volunteers.

As the intersection where the community meets, people call on United Way of Dane County to provide opportunities to volunteer directly through our signature initiatives, connect individuals to opportunities through partner agencies, and provide more tailored corporate engagements.

"Providing paid time to volunteer in the community helps UW Credit Union stay connected in important ways and is valued by our employees as an important benefit and confirmation of our company values."

- Paul Kandert, President and CEO of UW Credit Union

"I would love to be able to offer businesses ongoing opportunities that fill an actual need and allow employees who are involved to engage in team building around a shared experience."

- Ellen Carlson, Executive Director of Middleton Outreach Ministry (MOM)
Why it matters

We know that volunteers are doing a lot of great things in Dane County, but we also know that individual volunteers and corporate partners want to do more with their time to truly make an impact. Additionally, the more that volunteers relate to the work, the more likely they will find their experience to be rewarding and satisfying\(^2\). It is imperative that we gauge what is important to various stakeholders while also determining how we can shift from reactive to purposeful volunteering. The end result will lead to more efficient coordination and alignment of needs in the community with appropriate volunteer engagements.


If you want to volunteer, please call 608-246-4380 or visit www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/get-involved/volunteer

Full mobilization plan is available at www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/mobilization-plans