

Non-profits: Recruit next-generation volunteers

By **JIM EBENHOCH** and **MELANIE BARNAS-SIMMONS**

Rochester is ripe with a rich philanthropic history, evident in the sheer number of non-profits in our area and a broad network of passionate citizens who advocate daily for causes they care about.

At the same time, it's no secret that many non-profits continue to struggle with underfunding and an overall lack of resources. For these to thrive long term, we must look to the future of succession planning. This begins with volunteers. As the Association of Fundraising Professionals' National Philanthropy Day approaches, we must seriously reconsider how we approach and engage this next generation.

Accordingly, this time of year is a reminder of the immense responsibility that non-profit professionals have: building on the positive results of their philanthropic efforts and recruiting others to support their cause. An enormous untapped opportunity remains in young professional volunteers. Millennials, those between ages 18 and 34, account for 74 million Americans. Recent studies show their growing interest in giving back. The 2014 Millennial Impact Report, "Inspiring the Next Generation Workforce," shows 87 percent feel encouraged to volunteer or participate in their organization's cause and community initiatives.

To help shape this next generation and redefine volunteer recruitment efforts, we encourage local leaders to take action. We also encourage young professionals to strongly consider the benefits of volunteering for a non-profit.

Local non-profit leaders must first consider their current network base—those who know the organization well and can articulate its needs. Once candidates are identified, the next step is working with each individual to unlock talents, combined with adequate training and skills development. Additionally, tapping into more seasoned volunteers will help to further define what is needed to fill gaps.

Taking a page from national employee engagement strategies is beneficial. The Society for Human Resource Management's Foundation Executive Briefing outlines these steps: defining job and task design; seeking candidates who perform duties well, with a willingness to take on voluntary tasks; and professional training opportunities that yield engagement and encourage individual dedication/productivity.

From there, we must follow through. Ensuring regular meeting attendance and accountability, defining specific project goals and objectives, and pairing a new volunteer with a seasoned mentor are among the top actions for this. Seasoned professionals, who

may have broader working or volunteer experiences, can take a more active role in mentoring, developing or recruiting newer volunteers. Conscientious recruitment is paramount. Inviting someone to join a committee, meeting informally for coffee and even assigning a short-term project are all effective ways to nurture new volunteer engagement. Overall, the focus must remain on an individual's interests and helping her recognize where her skills align with an organization's underlying needs.

Likewise, we offer this advice to young professionals considering the volunteer path:

■ Volunteering is an incredible networking opportunity. Participating on a small board of directors or a non-profit committee allows you to meet well-connected, influential people in the community with like-minded approaches to helping a cause. Beyond that, the relationship-building may help down the road in your career.

■ Volunteering gives you experience that you may not get during your day job. If you're seeking to learn new skills or gain leadership experience, many non-profits are happy to help you do that and provide opportunities beyond fundraising.

■ Many businesses are keenly aware of the benefits employees gain by volunteering on non-profit boards and may even encourage senior management to do so. Take initiative early on. Many business relationships are nurtured through non-profit participation, whether as an actual volunteer or through one of the many philanthropic events in our community.

This National Philanthropy Day, we challenge non-profit and business leaders to recruit three to five aspiring volunteers to assist with a local organization in need. Providing this type of organic recruitment is beneficial on many levels. For business owners, devel-

oping the next generation of volunteers is also key to harnessing engaged and happy employees who give back to your community.

For young professionals, we challenge you too: Research one new organization to give your time to over this next year, and make a commitment.

Working together, we can generate new ideas and connections and make our area's non-profits more productive—and more sustainable.

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