



Activate Good Community Partner Coronavirus Challenges Report

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Introduction

In April 2020, the Activate Good team conducted interviews with 45 local nonprofits to take the pulse on our community partner network. The purpose of these interviews was to assess how Activate Good can be impactful and effective in our work to mobilize volunteers to support the community, both in the coming months and long-term. These interviews allowed us to understand our Community Partners' needs and explore the possibilities of how volunteers can be a part of helping the Triangle become stronger during the Coronavirus pandemic and into the future.

Our Approach

The Activate Good team reached out to individual contacts at our community partner organizations to either 1) set up a call to discuss the interview questions, or 2) allow the contact to respond to our interview questions in survey format, online, themselves. The questions in our interviews with Community Partners included the following, but many of our conversations evolved into deeper discussions about topics related to COVID-19, volunteerism, partnerships, nonprofit challenges and stories.

Community Partner Interview Questions

- 1) Do you believe the community understands the problem / issue that your organization tackles? Why or why not? What is one thing you wish community members knew about the issue you tackle?
- 2) What is the most impactful thing an individual volunteer or a group of volunteers has done to help your organization accomplish its mission? Why was this the most impactful thing they could have done?

- 3) What do you predict will be the biggest challenge for your organization after the outbreak of Coronavirus slows or stops? Is this different from the biggest challenge you faced before the outbreak? What do you think it would really take (in time, resources, staffing, leadership, etc.) to move the needle on the issue your organization tackles?
- 4) What do you hope the world will look like / be like / act like after the Coronavirus outbreak is over?

What We Learned

Through these interviews and discussions with 45 of our Community Partners, Activate Good gained insights into 1) how the work of these organizations is understood by the community, 2) how volunteers bring great value to their work, 3) what resources may be needed to “make a dent” in the issues they work to address, and more. These responses informed Activate Good’s strategic plan, developed to enable us to focus our work in the most effective way as we recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Here is a summary of our findings:

Insight #1: There’s room for improvement regarding the public’s understanding of community issues

When asked whether they believe the community understands the problem/issue that their organization tackles, **53% of respondents replied no**. While 47% said they do think the community understands, there was a general consensus that there is room for improving the community’s awareness of their work.

How this Insight is shaping Activate Good’s path forward:

We know that for community members to be effective volunteers and problem solvers, they need to understand the issues our community faces. As a result, over the next year, Activate Good will work to integrate more educational elements into volunteer activities and training. By pairing education with volunteer action, we can help lead community members towards a better understanding of the causes in the area - which in turn inspires higher levels of involvement.

How The Community Can Help:

- **Individuals:** Spend time getting to know more about the causes in your community. Read articles on local issues, review organizations’ websites, and attend informational meetings and events on these subjects. You can even be a part of gathering information about local issues through Activate Good’s [Triangle Cause Wiki](#), where we invite community members to be “virtual researchers” by crowdsourcing facts, data, and stories about Triangle issues such as homelessness, education, human trafficking, and more.
- **Businesses and Funders:** Amplify knowledge of the issues by sharing educational content with your teams and incorporating educational components (presentations,

post-event discussions, etc.) into events or volunteer activities your teams engage in. Encourage your team members to join Activate Good’s volunteer team of “virtual researchers” researching and contributing content to our public Triangle Cause Wiki!

Insight #2: Nonprofits rely heavily on volunteers to accomplish their missions, especially those who show up to one-time or high impact projects and make regular commitments.

When asked what the most impactful thing an individual volunteer or a group of volunteers has done to help their organization accomplish its mission, **51% of the respondents noted:**

- **one-time volunteering/events**
- **ongoing/trained/committed volunteers**

*“The same group that came during the 9/11 [Day of Service] with Activate Good **came back** to refurbish our computer lab. Another group gave us brand new monitors for all of those computers. Having groups help keep the facility upgraded and working with teams with **experience** has been great.”*

- Betsey McFarland, Executive Director of Wade Edwards Learning Lab

*“It is most impactful when riders work with the **same volunteers** week after week so the **committed** volunteers are very special to the organization.”*

- Carmalee Scarpitti, Vice President of Board at Horses for Hope

*“We are an all volunteer organization so we cannot attain our mission without the work of our volunteers. We cannot single-handedly care for 75 cats. Our **volunteers are the lifeblood**. We wouldn’t be able to stay open without them.”*

- Elizabeth Towns, Volunteer Coordinator of Cat Angels

Special projects volunteers were impactful for **35%** of Community Partners who responded, followed by skills-based/pro bono volunteering and other types of volunteering (**14%** of respondents).

How this Insight is shaping Activate Good’s path forward:

Activate Good is working to streamline efforts to focus more on short-term, outcomes-based volunteer projects and high impact “campaigns” with scheduled volunteer actions, like the campaign we completed in April 2020, Operation Access. Operation Access was a high-impact campaign completed in partnership with the Wake County Public School System that mobilized 210 volunteers to configure hotspots so 10,000 students without internet access could learn remotely during the Coronavirus shutdown.

Additionally, we're working to expand our project leader program. Placing trained Activate Good leaders at the helm of volunteer projects improves the service experience for volunteers while lessening the burden on nonprofit staff to manage volunteers at host sites.

How The Community Can Help:

- **Individuals:** If you are an individual interested in volunteering, start by reflecting on your interests, skills, and availability. Understand what you are seeking in a volunteer experience so that you will know if you are a good fit for a particular volunteer activity or project! Not sure where to start to find a volunteer activity that matches your interests? Check out regularly updated volunteer needs around the Triangle at ActivateGood.org.
- **Businesses and Funders:** Lack of staff capacity, proper materials, or equipment can prevent nonprofits from engaging volunteers in a deeper way. If you are a decisionmaker at a business or funding organization, consider how your team can not only volunteer their time and talents, but also how you can provide additional resources, such as funding or equipment, to bolster volunteer service.

Insight #3: The biggest challenge to nonprofits is funding, not only during times of crisis, but always.

When asked what it would take to move the needle on tackling the issue their organization addresses, the majority of respondents stated a variety of answers, but overall, **the vast majority stressed funding**, followed by advocacy/awareness, consistent and trained volunteers, and leadership.

The majority of nonprofits predicted the biggest challenge for their organization after the outbreak of Coronavirus slows or stops **will be financial in nature** (budget restrictions, lack of available funding, and / or a shift in their donor base). Community Partners also noted concern about their volunteers' comfort level in returning and volunteers or donors not coming back. They also voiced concerns over staffing and adjusting to whatever "the new normal" may be, an increased influx of clients due to growing needs in the community, and their inability to host large-scale events due to social distancing requirements and public fear.

How this Insight is shaping Activate Good's path forward:

Activate Good will continue to encourage our volunteers and other community members to contribute to the causes they care about. We will also continue to promote volunteer roles that help our Community Partners utilize local talent to execute and boost their fundraising.

How The Community Can Help:

- **Individuals:** If you have the capacity, please give financially to nonprofits in your community! Encourage your friends and coworkers to give. Ask your employer to match your donations. Whenever possible, make ongoing, sustained monthly commitments to organizations you care about.
- **Businesses and Funders:** Consider examining and replicating recent trends in philanthropy by relaxing strict restrictions on the use of funding, making funding request

processes shorter and more streamlined, and increasing funding to causes you support during this challenging time. Expand employee matching programs and other programs that encourage employee giving.

Insight #4: This is our chance to (re)build a better world, together.

Despite the challenges they face, Activate Good's Community Partners are hopeful and optimistic about our chance to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger. They had so many great answers to the question about what they hope the world will look like / be like / act like after the Coronavirus outbreak is over!

Brace Boone, Executive Director of the **Women's Center** said: "Hardship can shine a light on the good these organizations are doing, bringing awareness which may result in more donations or donations from different donors. There may be some good that can come out of this challenging time - people recognizing the efforts of overlooked workers and organizations."

Utica Cason, Founder/Executive Director of **SOAR Outreach**, said: "I think the world will have more appreciation, gratitude and kindness since we have all been affected by this. We take things for granted, and this has made us stop and given us time to self reflect."

Lauren Foster, Executive Director of **HopeLine**, shared: "I am hoping that people really understand the importance of connection and the value of our mental health for productivity and prosperity of our communities."

Clay Ragan, Volunteer Manager of the **Ronald McDonald House of Durham/Wake**, stated: "I would hope this is creating more patience and understanding as there's so much unknown. It could create a more compassionate world. I hope it's uniting everybody as we often feel divided over everything."

Allison Strickland, Chief Development Officer of **InterAct**, insightfully declared: "I hope we will all remember that hope is greater than fear."



In conclusion

We are so grateful to provide support for our Community Partners, who are doing good work on issues that matter in our community. These interviews reminded us why we do the work we do, because local nonprofit organizations rely on Activate Good and will continue to utilize our services throughout this trying time and beyond. Our 517 Community Partners consistently post a variety of volunteer needs on the Activate Good website, rely on Activate Good's help to recruit volunteers throughout the year, and have shared their satisfaction with Activate Good's ability to respond quickly to fill urgent volunteer needs.

What's next? Join us to (re)build a better world, together

Over the next few months, Activate Good will announce our plan outlining how we will adjust the scope of our mission during and after a pandemic. We will place a greater emphasis on educating the community about the issues local causes tackle across the Triangle, expand recruitment efforts for volunteers to fill critical needs - especially those that support recovery and resilience-building after the Coronavirus - and develop training programs that equip community members to lead and create a bigger impact through service.

Activate Good improves our community through people-powered projects for good. Learn more at ActivateGood.org.

We envision a world in which all people realize and act on their power to improve their communities. We believe we all have a responsibility to work towards a better world - that's why Activate Good improves our community through people-powered projects for good. Our vision for a better world is, ultimately, the same, and we're more invigorated than ever to make this vision a reality.

We hope that you'll join us in this quest:

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