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Editorial

When I was in high school, I loved math. I loved my statistics courses at university. And I loved the accounting courses I enrolled in later at college. I loved the way the numbers worked so well together and how they told a story. But I also learned that numbers need to be interpreted; otherwise they are just numbers. To tell the whole story, I discovered, you need a combination of numbers and words.

The nonprofit sector often tries to emulate the business world, as evidenced by our attempts to measure what we do. Clichés like “it’s the bottom line (dollar) that counts” do not usually work in our sector. Why not? Because the bottom line in our “business” is really the impact that we make. And it is difficult to measure impact.

We are fortunate that we have access to ongoing statistics about volunteering in Canada. Beginning in 2004, and every three years since then, Statistics Canada has provided information and statistics about giving, volunteering and participating in Canada. Volunteer Canada is part of the steering committee that ensures the data is accurate. For more information about the surveys, along with details of the findings from each survey, visit <https://volunteer.ca/gvp>. You will be able to see how a combination of numbers and words tell many stories about the voluntary sector.

This issue of the Journal addresses measurements and impacts within the nonprofit sector. We lead with an article by Paula Speevak of Volunteer Canada, which clearly outlines the benefits of measuring impact, along with what we should be measuring and how to measure it. This is followed by Heather Hardie’s account of how the publication “The road to measuring volunteer impact” came to be. Tony Goodrow joins us for his second in a series of three articles that outline the Relative Impact Model. This time he focuses on assigning real values to our programs and details how to use numbers and statistics in a way that most accurately captures the outputs of our volunteer programs. Recognizing that numbers do not always provide the whole picture, Vanessa Chase Lockshin shares with us the value of telling stories to express the impact of volunteer programs, and provides tips on how to do this to our best advantage. This is followed by a real-life experience where the numbers did not provide a true



report, but the story of what happened did. This issue is rounded out with an article in which Chris Martin explains how to measure the impact of a corporate employee volunteer program in a qualitative manner.

I hope that each of the articles in this issue will provide some tangible ideas about how to use measurements – both numbers and words – to tell the world about the impact of volunteering. Every organization needs to do this, whether they are pitching to potential investors, validating the existence of a program to their community or board of directors, or identifying whether they are effectively working toward their organization's mission.

I have always loved numbers. But then again, I have always loved telling stories. The two are definitely not mutually exclusive. In fact, I think they are inseparable.

Ruth Vant

Editorial Team

Measuring the social and economic impact of volunteering

by Paula Speevak, Ottawa, Ontario

The pursuit of measuring the social and economic value and impact of volunteering is fraught with philosophical, practical and technical challenges.¹ Some volunteers find the very notion of measuring their compassion downright insulting.² Others claim that we are attempting to measure the unmeasurable. Still others argue that the value of volunteering in society will only be recognized if we can demonstrate its impact in measureable terms. This topic has captured the attention of policy makers, funders, practitioners, academics and volunteers around the world. Let us explore the potential benefits of measuring the impact of volunteering, what exactly we might measure and how we might actually measure it.

What are the benefits of measuring?

As we sort through the perspectives of the various players in the volunteer engagement landscape and trace the history of measuring volunteering, we can observe four main intended benefits:

1. Calculating the return on investment for volunteer resource management infrastructure

For those organizations that have paid staff who manage the volunteer program or are applying for funding to hire such staff, being able to demonstrate the value of the volunteer time that these financial investments support is important to maintain budgets or acquire grants.

2. Capturing total organizational resources



When organizations produce annual financial statements that list their income, many have started to include a calculation of volunteer time by using a wage replacement method (multiplying the number of volunteer hours times a mean wage). This allows organizations to capture the total resources or inputs that were allotted to provide their programs and services.³

3. Listing volunteer time as in-kind contributions to projects

Several funders⁴ require the identification of matching funding (which includes both cash and in-kind contributions) as part of the grant application process. Volunteer time is now explicitly listed as an eligible in-kind contribution.

4. Demonstrating to volunteers the impact of their efforts

Recent studies have shown that volunteers are highly motivated to make a difference and that the greatest form of recognition is to be shown the impact of their volunteering. Some organizations have replaced volunteer appreciation certificates with impact statements. Complementing this statement with a measured value of their contribution is a meaningful way of recognizing volunteers.

What should we measure?

Volunteering has multiple benefits for organizations, the people they serve, the neighbourhoods and communities they work with, society at large and volunteers themselves.⁵ In the case of employer-supported volunteering (ESV),⁶ there are also benefits for the business, the workplace and the individual employees. It is important to capture and measure these benefits as they can directly correspond to the social and economic value and impact of volunteering. Examples of benefits that can be captured and measured include:

- increased capacity an organization gains by accessing volunteers' skills and expertise (eg. after a volunteer facilitates a strategic planning session or designs a communication plan)
- improved quality of life of clients, members, patients or participants of programs and services that involve volunteers (eg. someone who receives comfort during end of life)
- long-term socio-economic prosperity of children whose literacy skills increase as a result of programs and services facilitated by volunteers
- increased ability of a business to attract and retain talent through their ESV program
- ability of employees to increase their productivity and mobility through volunteering
- enhanced resiliency of a community that has a high level of volunteer engagement
- improved public policy that is created as a result of volunteer social action (eg. volunteers advocating for improved impaired driving legislation)
- skills and experience gained by volunteers through volunteering, and the educational and career opportunities that open up to them as a result
- a heightened sense of belonging and connection to community that volunteers experience
- a sense of self-worth and purpose derived from having a voice in shaping the community through volunteer engagement



How should we measure?

The approach to measuring the value of volunteering often involves assigning a fair-market value to either the time or the task that the volunteer performs. For example, by using wage-replacement, organizations can assign an hourly rate to hours volunteered. This rate could reflect the mean wage of a province or territory, or it could reflect the going rate for a particular occupation that is most closely related to the task the volunteer performs. Organizations measuring the value of a volunteer's experience could, for example, compare the cost of a leadership program to the value of skills acquired by leading a fundraising campaign.

Approaches to measuring the impact of volunteering tend to involve gathering perceptions and opinions from various stakeholders as to what has changed over time as a result of the volunteer efforts. For example, you may ask a teacher if a student's participation, confidence and achievements have improved since being mentored by a volunteer. While it is difficult to directly attribute any changes to the volunteer with certainty, corroborating research can help support these claims. Regarding the impact for volunteers, organizations could survey them to see what benefits they have experienced and how these relate to their personal goals. Measuring impact can prove more difficult because impact generally becomes more evident over longer periods of time. Nevertheless, at least some evidence of change can be tracked in most cases, even in the medium term.

The starting point for finding a method and tools to measure the social and economic value and impact of volunteering is to identify the benefactors of volunteering and the social and economic benefits accrued to them, such as those outlined above. While there is no single tool that integrates all of these players and benefits, there has been tremendous progress in the past decade.

In March 2016, Energize published "Measuring the Impact of Volunteers: A Balanced and Strategic Approach."⁷ This resource offers the Volunteer Resource Balanced Score Card (VRBSc) and a Standardized Volunteer Opinion Survey (SVOS), which are useful tools for organizations to collect data from various stakeholders to quantify the impact of engaging volunteers. This resource followed a foundational framework, "The Expanded Value-Added Statement"⁸, which provided templates and language to include the economic value of volunteers in financial statements. [Editor's note: for more information about the publication, see "The road to measuring volunteer impact" by Heather Hardie, in this issue of the Journal.]

Before deciding on an approach to measuring the social and economic impact of volunteering, it is helpful to clearly identify the intended purpose, stakeholders and key audiences for the measurement. An essential part of the process is gaining input from and regularly communicating with volunteers regarding the process. Equally important is the intentional connection between motivation and measurement.

There are many possible examples to illustrate this connection. More people would be motivated to volunteer with the knowledge that children in a mentoring program increase their attendance and grades within three months of the program than with the knowledge their time is valued at \$17.34/hour. Boards would better understand the importance of allocating sufficient budgets for



volunteer engagement activities if they saw their capacity to serve isolated seniors nutritious meals increased by 30% and that elder malnutrition has decreased in the neighbourhood since their volunteer management program was augmented. A community investment director would have an increased ability to influence employee volunteering policies if they could demonstrate that employees who volunteered stayed longer and performed at a higher level than those who did not. Cities would be more likely to support volunteer promotion if they saw that residents felt safer and more connected to their communities in neighbourhoods with high levels of volunteering.

Harnessing and consolidating the knowledge of the benefits of evaluating the impact of volunteering, the factors to measure and a clear way of measuring would allow us to demonstrate more concretely that volunteering builds strong and connected communities. This, in turn, may contribute to an increase in public policy that is more enabling, to facilitate volunteering across all jurisdictions.

Paula Speevak serves as President and CEO of Volunteer Canada and is an Adjunct Professor with Carleton University's School of Public Policy and Administration. Her applied research in volunteer engagement has produced several tools, guides, and resources in the areas of screening, employer-supported volunteering, volunteering and older adults, and trends in citizen engagement.

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- 3 Mook, L., Quarter, J., & Richmond, B. (2007). <https://sigelpress.com/product/what-counts>/What Counts: Social Accounting for Nonprofits and Cooperatives, Second Edition. London: Sigel Press.
- 4 Examples of funders include the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, and several departments in municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal governments.
- 5 Volunteer Canada's policy statement on <https://volunteer.ca/value> Economic Value of Volunteering, October 2010.
- 6 ESV is any activity undertaken by an employer to encourage & support the volunteering of their employees in the community. (Global Corporate Volunteer Council, IAVE, 2012).
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The road to measuring volunteer impact

by Heather Hardie, Port Hope, Ontario

“How do you know you are making a difference? How do we move beyond satisfaction surveys and counting activities and attendees to show real impact? How do you tell the story of success? How do we capture the impact of an organization on clients, volunteers and the community beyond the dollar value? How can we most effectively show that to potential funders? How do we capture unintended but powerful benefits and unintended negative consequences? What do we do when we have great numbers but no real results?”

These questions were put forward by the CJVRM editorial team to initiate discussion for this issue of the Journal,. But they are also questions that a group of five colleagues in the field of volunteer management have been asking themselves for several years.

It all began as one member of our group was presenting the annual statistics for her organization’s department of volunteer resources. She wondered if the hospital’s board of directors would really be able to understand the impact of their volunteer department, based on the figures she was about to present. She knew that they had had a great year and had made a huge difference for the organization, but the measures she was reporting on were flat and did not speak to the impact of the great work volunteers were doing or the work of the volunteer department.

Once she finished the presentation using traditional tools that illustrated how many volunteers there were, the hours they contributed, their turnover rate and the types of volunteer activities performed, the board members politely nodded their heads and applauded. That is when she took a chance: “Well, we have 800 volunteers; so what? What does this actually mean? Out of those, 795 could be stuffing envelopes. How does this help the organization?”

How does the number of volunteers, the number of hours they contribute or the length of time they have been with the organization get to the root of how volunteers really contribute meaningfully to accomplishing goals and delivering services?

This experience with the board prompted her to approach some trusted colleagues in the field of volunteer management. It appeared that she was not the only one who had trouble figuring out measurements, statistics and indicators that told a meaningful story. They all agreed that they needed to come up with consistent measures that would take them beyond counting activities to truly measuring the impact of volunteer engagement. Recognizing the need to promote the outcome of volunteer work, our group collaborated to find a way of capturing data and information that would identify where volunteers had the most impact and show how the work of the volunteer department aligned with and supported the needs of the organization.

Numerous articles have articulated the importance of evaluation from an outcomes-based perspective to address the question, “What kind of impact have our volunteer efforts made and are we being



effective?” Yet managers of volunteers still lack a standardized tool for assessing the impact of volunteers in supporting an organization’s mission and goals.

As a group, we needed to find a fundamental basis from which to create valid measurements that showed volunteer progress and outcomes. As we began looking for an evaluation tool we could use, we identified that all our organizations had implemented the “balanced scorecard” method as the preferred measurement tool at the senior level. Developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton in the early 1990s, the balanced scorecard is “a strategic planning and management system that is used to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organization performance against strategic goals.” It made sense to create a balanced scorecard specifically for volunteer engagement that aligned with how our organizations, and many others, already measured success.

Through numerous consultations, we identified the following key objectives and outcomes as a starting point for developing a balanced scorecard for volunteer engagement:

- to ensure that volunteer resources initiatives are aligned with the organization’s mission, goals and strategic plan
- to measure and evaluate volunteer contributions
- to measure and evaluate volunteer management effectiveness

Years later, after many arguments, lots of mediocre coffee, and countless brainstorming sessions, our process was born. We developed a framework to accomplish our key measurement objectives: the Volunteer Resources Balanced Scorecard (VRBSc). The VRBSc, with its accompanying Standardized Volunteer Opinion Survey (SVOS), would work as a set of tools to provide us with the ability to measure volunteer impact and effectiveness over time.

We have four main goals that we believe are vital to any volunteer involvement strategy:

- to ensure that the contribution of volunteers is aligned with the goals of the organization
- to identify and provide a broader and more meaningful approach to measuring outcomes
- to establish more relevant reporting measures
- to promote greater understanding and support within our organizations for professional management of volunteers based on recognized standards

Based on the positive feedback from colleagues and the continued interest in this topic, we saw potential for this scorecard beyond healthcare settings and decided to bring the VRBSc and its methodology to a broader audience by publishing a book. Our lens for this book widened in hope of being relevant to anyone interested in measuring the impact of volunteer engagement, regardless of setting.



The book entitled “Measuring the Impact of Volunteers - A Balanced and Strategic Approach” is published by Energize, Inc. www.energizeinc.com and has been favourably reviewed by Paula Speevak, President and CEO of Volunteer Canada:

“A terrific contribution to answering the question that has remained elusive for years: How do we fully capture and demonstrate the social and economic value and impact of volunteering? Impact is seen in the capacity of an organization, their services and programs, the quality of life of those they serve, the links to and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods, and, of course, in the growth and wellbeing of volunteers themselves. This book provides a guided tour through the theory and models of measuring the value and impact of volunteering with a step-by-step approach to creating a Volunteer Resources Balanced Score Card.”

For twelve years Heather Hardie was responsible for the strategic leadership and management of all volunteer activities and programs at Canada’s largest Cancer Centre This included developing and implementing policies and procedures that addressed all quality improvement and risk management issues around the integration of volunteers into placements and programs throughout the hospital. All this is to be achieved within the “reality” of a “workforce” with diverse motivations none of which were financially based!

The Relative Impact Model – Assigning real values to our programs

by Tony Goodrow, Burlington, ON

In the December 2015 issue of the CJVRM I wrote about the philosophy of spending volunteer time as if we were spending money. Spending more volunteer time just for the sake of greater hours reported looks completely different through the lens of spending volunteer time as though it is money. Many funding grant organizations, boards and management unintentionally suggest this. Spending more is okay but only when the value of what gets accomplished is greater than the value of the money and the volunteer time spent. This article is part two of the Relative Impact Return on Investment (ROI) model and looks at how we can place values on those accomplishments.

This article proposes ways that some basic outputs can be valued and explains how to use those values to calculate an ROI. More complicated examples of valuing outputs will follow in a future article. You may be thinking that this could not possibly apply to your organization. But it has been my experience that it may take a little time to make the connection.

The easiest things to put a value on are the things for which some benchmark value exists. Typically, this is the price of purchasing a product or service. Consider a nonprofit which provides rides for seniors to get to their medical appointments. One can argue that the value of getting someone from their home to an appointment is comparable to the cost of a taxi. If the average cab fare is \$30, then that figure can arguably be used to calculate the total value to the community of all volunteer driven rides.

This value is an output (got to the appointment) versus an outcome (healthier life, did not end up in the ER, etc.). Understanding the outcomes derived from an organization’s existence is very



important, but it is not a part of using this ROI model as a management tool. The same outcomes listed above could occur if a cab fare was simply paid on behalf of the senior rather than a specialized volunteer service.

You may also see another output value that potentially exists over and above that of a cab fare. We all know that a cab ride and limousine ride have completely different values to the passenger. Similarly, a cab ride and a ride from a volunteer can also have different values. In certain circumstances, the additional value of the friendly visit component of the volunteer-driven ride can be added to the average cab fare. Putting that extra value aside for a moment, think about how this scenario looks when pitching to a funder.

The old way:

- average volunteer time for the drive to the appointment: ½ hour
- average volunteer time for the drive back from the appointment: ½ hour
- assumed average wage (or whatever other cost you like to use): \$20/hour
- number of rides per year: 1,000
- total value of this service: 1,000 rides x 1 hour x \$20/hr = \$20,000
- The Relative Impact Model:
- average cab fare to the appointment: \$30
- average cab fare back from the appointment: \$30
- number of rides per year: 1,000
- total value created of this service: 1,000 rides x \$30 x 2 = \$60,000

Not only does the Relative Impact Model more accurately depict the value of what your organization contributes to the community, it also presents better in funding applications. When presented this way it is difficult for a funder to argue that the value of this service is anything less than \$60, even if they do not agree with the value of a friendly visit.

If you were requesting a funder to support you with \$30,000, which method would you rather use? Which one better reflects the value of your service?

In the Relative Impact Model, the \$20/hr calculated in volunteer time is still important, but it is considered part of the <u>cost</u> of providing the \$60 service. To that \$20 in-kind cost (even though we are not paying cash for it), one should add a mileage cost and portion of the overhead required to manage the volunteers and to run the organization.

What outputs (products or services) does your organization create that are similar to ones that businesses are already selling? Their prices are a great benchmark for placing a value to the community on what your volunteers accomplish.



For example:

Output	Value Benchmark
Houses built by organizations such as Habitat for Humanity	The average price of similar houses in the same neighbourhood
Little booties and hats crocheted for babies in a hospital	\$12 to \$40 based on what is for sale on 1
Meals delivered to people's homes in a Meals-on-Wheels model	The cost of a nutritious meal delivered by a local restaurant
Tax returns for seniors and newcomers	45 to \$65 (Google search)
A free music festival	Find the ticket price for a comparable event. Multiply the number of attendees at your concert. Ticket price x number of attendees = community value

There are two points of critical importance when you apply values to the outputs:

5. Only place a value on things that have a direct and measurable benefit to your organization's mission statement.
If you have volunteers engaged in an activity that benefits them as volunteers but does not benefit the organization's mission, those related outputs do not count. While the many personal benefits of volunteering are worth understanding, if they are outside the mission of your organization, they should not factor directly into your management decisions. Those who fund your organization do so with an understanding that they are funding a specific mission. Great organizations stay true to this and focus all resources, both paid and unpaid, on their mission. For example, it is wonderful that a volunteer learns new skills but if this is <u>not</u> part of your organization's mission, the personal value should not be included when measuring your organization's ROI. As a side note, volunteers gaining new skills can <u>indirectly</u> increase your ROI as the volunteer's skills improve.
6. When multiple roles contribute to a resulting output, only the end result requires a value.
The efforts of some volunteer roles might need to be combined with the efforts of others to produce the measurable outcome, and we do not want to double dip. Take a kitchen serving free meals as an example. Different volunteers are involved in planning, cooking, serving and cleaning up. While all are very important to the whole, it is only the number of meals served that needs to have a value attached (the price of a comparable meal in a local diner).

The value of the outputs created by volunteers, along with the cost value of their time combined with cash-based costs is all you need to calculate the ROI of your volunteer engagement.

Regardless of any lack of passion you may have for economics and accounting , you will find it comforting to know that ROI is actually not a difficult concept. It is simply a comparison of what you spend or invest on something (the inputs) to the value of what you get in return (the outputs). Bigger is better and negative is bad. It is really not any more complicated than that!



If you have \$100 worth of inputs and end up with \$102 in outputs, the ROI is 2%. The value of what was created was the same value as the investment, **plus** an additional 2%. If you had \$100 worth of inputs and end up with \$110 in outputs, that is an ROI of 10%.

Consider the situation where you have \$100 worth of inputs but are only creating \$75 in outputs. That is an ROI of **negative** 25% and means that for every \$100 donated in time and money toward something, only \$75 of value to the community is created. The community is arguably worse off overall because of the existence of this program. How does this happen? In most organizations, volunteer time is not counted as something spent so the real tally of the inputs is understated. Have you ever come across a fundraiser that appears to have shown a decent profit, but if you factored in the cost of volunteer time it would not be nearly as attractive or possibly even be operating at a loss?

The Relative Impact ROI Model can be used to compare programs in your organization to identify those with the greatest impact or a negative ROI. This allows you to apply more resources to successful programs and identify where you are sending resources down the drain.

The formula for calculating return on investment is:

$$\text{ROI} = (\text{Outputs} - \text{Inputs}) \div \text{Inputs} \times 100$$

If you are starting to see how important this could be but would like some help navigating through all of the values and calculations, recruit someone with a management accounting or cost accounting background. This is the kind of work they do and it would be a great opportunity for them to apply their skills in ways that will truly help your organization. Just ensure that their contributions are included in your ROI calculations!

Tony Goodrow of <http://www.betterimpact.com/> Better Impact Inc. is the founding Chair of the Carpenter Hospice in Burlington, Ontario and has been recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, received the June Callwood award for volunteerism and is one of only three recipients of the designation of Patron of Burlington.

1 https://www.etsy.com/market/crochet_newborn_hat)

Telling stories to demonstrate your organization's impact

by Vanessa Chase Lockshin, Vancouver, BC

Impact is a word that is often tossed around the nonprofit sector. Donors want to know the impact of their gift. Volunteers want to feel their hours are impacting the community. Organizations often say, "We are making an impact."

But what, exactly, is that impact?



Many organizations immediately turn to statistics and facts. The problem here is that the average person may not be able to make sense of them or understand why the numbers are significant. Statistics are often very complicated. Why are numbers so important? Do numbers tell the whole story?

This is where storytelling comes in.

Storytelling is a valuable tool that nonprofits can use to demonstrate their impact. By sharing a narrative about one person or one project, nonprofits show their impact in action and give their audience a better understanding of why the impact is significant.

The value of stories for nonprofit organizations

Stories are one of the many tools that nonprofit organizations have in their communications toolbox. At their core, stories are a series of facts told with details and emotions. These details and emotions are essential to storytelling. Without them, we simply have a bunch of facts that are not very compelling.

The challenge that nonprofits often face when communicating their impact is over complication. Given that their intended audience is not as well-versed in the work as the organization, the audience may quickly feel overwhelmed and confused by all the information.

The antidote to this is to tell a single story, which simplifies impact to one example and allows the audience to connect emotionally or experientially. Stories naturally communicate universally understandable emotions and experiences, which people can relate to. This makes the impact tangible and understandable, even if your audience has not personally experienced that impact.

How to tell a story about impact

Organizations often struggle with determining what story to tell. Here are three steps to help you define your impact and tell a story about it.

Step 1: Define “impact”

One of the biggest mistakes organizations make when talking about impact is not defining what they mean. Often organizations will default to using a dollar value. But what does that dollar value really mean?

For instance, if an organization calculated that volunteers gave the equivalent of \$25,000 of time last year, what did they do during that time? What were some of the significant projects volunteers worked on? How did volunteers help the organization move closer to its mission? These are key questions to consider and will help determine what story to tell.

Step 2: Focus on one thing

As an organization moves through the process of defining their impact, there will likely be a plethora of ways the organization makes an impact. Ultimately, they may want to communicate all of them, but it is best to talk about one at a time.



My recommendation is to pick the impact that is most related to the mission of the organization. The mission is why you exist and do what you do. It is terrific to demonstrate that the organization is actively delivering on its mission.

Let us say the organization that had the equivalent of \$25,000 of volunteer time last year lists some of their impacts as: volunteer support allowed the summer camp program to grow, volunteers helped make more than 3,000 donor thank-you calls and volunteers read books to 250 children. These are all great impacts, but we want to choose just one. Select one – volunteer support allowed the summer camp program to grow.

Step 3: Find a story that reflects that one thing

Once you have selected the single area of focus, find a story that shows the impact in action. For example, with the support of ten volunteers, we were able to welcome an additional 100 children to our summer camp program.

We demonstrate that without volunteer support, 100 children would not have been able to attend summer camp. The impact of those volunteers and their time was that more children were able to participate in the program.

Expand on your story. The organization could talk to one of the children who attended summer camp, or they could have the child's parent tell a story about the camp experience. A second option is to have a staff member talk about the importance of summer camp and what it means to help more children. Or ask a volunteer to describe what it was like to help so many children.

There are always a number of perspectives from which we can tell stories and it can be helpful to consider many options before pursuing one.

These three steps are just the starting point for your organization's storytelling and a way to go beyond the numbers of your impact. Keep exploring and imagining what is possible for your organization when you tell stories.

Vanessa Chase Lockshin is President of The Storytelling Non-Profit, and author of *The Storytelling Non-Profit: A practical guide to telling stories that raise money and awareness*. Vanessa's fundraising career started at The University of British Columbia, her alma mater, and since then she has helped organizations in North America raise over \$10 million through storytelling.

A story that shows the impact

by Ruth Vant, Ottawa, Ontario

For several years, I worked at Parkinson Society Ottawa. Frequently, our organization was called upon to provide presentations about Parkinson's disease. I would prepare according to the audience, most often personal support workers or residents of long-term care facilities. On one such occasion, I was asked to



speak at a community centre that catered to our senior citizen population. When I arrived, I was greeted by the organizer, who apologized to me because she had accidentally booked my talk at the same time as their bingo game. There were three individuals who were still interested; however, I was free to back out because of the poor turnout.

Since I was already there, I decided to stay. But instead of the normal setup with chairs set in rows and me standing in front of everyone, I asked for a more intimate setting. So the three interested individuals and I sat around a table, shared a pot of tea and talked about Parkinson's. I managed to impart all the information I had intended, but I also fielded many more questions than usual. Without lots of people present, each person sitting with me seemed to feel more comfortable asking what was on their mind.

When our time was almost up, I asked each of the participants why they had chosen to attend my presentation instead of the bingo game, and what they achieved from our time together. I was overwhelmed by their answers. The first person told me she had been diagnosed with Parkinson's, but was unaware of the services my organization provided and of the importance of exercise to her wellbeing. She planned to become involved and to begin an exercise regimen right away. The second woman said she often wondered what had been wrong with her father before his death. She realized all his symptoms pointed to the probability that he had Parkinson's, and she felt better knowing this. The third woman shared that she was concerned about symptoms she had been experiencing over the past few months, and after hearing me speak about Parkinson's, she decided she would see her doctor to ask for a referral to a neurologist who specialized in Parkinson's.

I returned to my office to record the number of participants, as I did after every presentation. This was to indicate the success of our community education program. Imagine my chagrin this time, recording such abysmal participation numbers, knowing that the impact of my presentation was really 100%.

Numbers do not always show our success: sometimes stories need to be told to show the impact we make.

Ruth Vant is a member of the Editorial Team. She has worked and volunteered within the voluntary sector for over 40 years, including a period as executive director for Parkinson Society Ottawa.

The human side of ROI: How to qualitatively measure your corporate volunteer program's impact

by Chris Martin

Reprinted with permission from Charity Republic (December 2015), Kitchener, Ontario

The era of employees clocking in at 9 a.m., completing their daily tasks, and then heading to physically clock out – and cognitively check out – at 5 p.m. is over.

Work is intertwined with home life, and home life is carried into work each day. Technology has contributed to blurring the lines, but that seems to be the way we want it. Why? Maybe because more



individuals are investing in their employer and taking pride in their organization's brand – people actually **want** to be at work.

A **huge** contributor to this trend is employee volunteerism, which has risen steadily over the last decade. It is a known fact that if you want the best talent you have to offer the best work environment, and lately, that means building an Employee Volunteer Program (EVP). People want to believe in what they do and more often than not this means giving your employees a chance to give back to their communities.

Now that EVPs are becoming a norm, the big question is: How do you measure ROI? Well, that depends largely on who you ask.

If you ask a handful of senior accountants to measure your EVP, they are going to calculate every piece of data and crunch every number they can get their brilliant, mathematical hands on. This is important to a certain degree, but it only tells a portion of the story – the story of business logic. But to truly measure ROI from an EVP, you must also measure human emotion.

Why is human emotion so important when discussing employee volunteerism? Because the majority of volunteers have chosen where they wish to get involved (and where they work!) based on emotional and personal attachment, which far supersedes any type of measurement a quantitative assessment can show.

When you build an EVP, you (should) always include a piece about “movement”: Where you start and where you end up. The goal, in other words. This lets you easily “see” the difference your program has made.

And the **difference** is the key ingredient to a wholesome EVP that not only rewards your community and your organization, but also employees.

So, if numbers alone are not enough to show the true ROI of your EVP, then what else is there?

Partnering with a nonprofit and building an EVP brings huge branding wins for your organization, such as being seen as a responsible corporate citizen, increasing community exposure, and your employees who are also viewed as caring individuals. But that is old news.

How about the other major way of surveying things: qualitative measurements?

In case you are of the old mindset that thinks businesses should not care about emotional and intrinsic motivations, consider that the qualitative ROI is heavily concerned with your employee retention. It is the part that makes your employees more engaged; the part that builds on their productivity-related skills sets; and the part that lets management know who the real leaders are.

The best part is that it is not difficult; all you have to do is answer three simple questions.

- 1) What difference has it made in your employee's attitudes?



Ask your supervisors, and if you do not have a direct supervisor who could easily speak to the uptake in positive office atmosphere, then make a point of contacting the employees directly and finding out – people respond well to honest questions. If you are concerned that their responses might be skewed because of “Speaking to Management” syndrome, offer an anonymous survey. If you are still worried people might think it is not anonymous, then you have to revisit the drawing board and build trust with your employees. If they will not open up and provide you with qualitative data, you are missing half the ROI picture.

2) Who is volunteering the most?

Time to find your leaders, both current and future. Ninety per cent of human resources professionals say that pro-bono volunteering is an effective way to develop leadership skills. You want your employees to constantly be improving and learning. People seeking to continue building their skills are natural go-getters. Identifying the individuals who are excelling in your EVP is a great start to assessing who is going to be a long-term, ready-to-promote employee.

3) Do your employees feel that volunteering is making a difference?

The in-house goal of staff members, gaining the multitude of benefits that volunteering brings, results in:

- fewer sick days
- increased productivity
- enjoying time at work as they would time away from work, which loops back to less time off and more productivity

Yes, your PR and marketing efforts will also benefit (and that is great news!), but the ultimate tell of whether or not your EVP is bringing in a positive ROI is whether or not your employees are on board.

If they are, they will stop their constant job search and start investing in your organization.

There is no need to fret if your EVP has not been measuring qualitative ROI yet. Remember that you are still one of the wonderful organizations that is working to build stronger communities and happier employees. Then send this article to your HR department so they too can realize the benefit that qualitative assessments can bring.

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