

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY 50+ VOLUNTEER NETWORK
STATUS REPORT
JANUARY 2018 – JANUARY 2019**

In 2017, the Montgomery County Volunteer Center proposed a unique new program focused on leveraging the County’s rapidly growing population of retired professionals as a valuable resource for nonprofits and government agencies. The 50+ Volunteer Network officially launched in January 2018, and, one year later, is having a profoundly positive impact by helping scores of older County residents find meaningful community service opportunities, as well as improving the ability of numerous agencies to expand their resources by recruiting and using skilled volunteers.

BACKGROUND

This new initiative resulted from Age-Friendly Montgomery County Civic and Social Involvement Workgroup’s goal to “harness the experience and skills of older adults to strengthen the community by matching them with volunteer opportunities.” Demographic studies confirm that the coming decades will see a drastic increase in the number of professionals exiting the workforce as the baby boomers reach retirement age. Moreover, research shows that members of this generation want to maintain an active and fulfilling lifestyle, including volunteer work that utilizes both their professional skills and personal interests. The nonprofit community also has started to rethink its vision of volunteering and consider how to capitalize on the reservoir of talent offered by this population. The challenge arises in identifying and connecting these two groups to meet the dual objectives of community service: providing meaningful experiences for the volunteers and supporting nonprofit/government organizations in a human resource effective manner.

The 50+ Volunteer Network is designed to meet this challenge. Unlike strictly web-based matching services, this program employs personal consultations and ongoing relationships with partner agencies to help each volunteer find an opportunity that fits individual passions and skills while meeting the organization’s needs.

The County Executive proposed, and the County Council approved, funding for this initiative beginning in FY 2018. The Volunteer Center hired two Senior Fellows (part-time temporary County employees) to establish the program. Deborah Missal and Gretchen Zekiel, both of whom previously served as volunteer Program Managers at the Volunteer Center, were hired in August 2017, and spent the initial months developing the program and planning for the January 2018 launch.

In the months leading up to its official launch, the Program Managers:

- Conducted extensive outreach into the nonprofit community to identify and register partner organizations, along with appropriate opportunities, while gaining knowledge about best practices in utilizing skilled volunteers
- Created an Advisory Committee of stakeholders from the nonprofit, volunteer, county government, and senior communities
- Established the necessary infrastructure, policies, and procedures to implement the program
- Developed positioning, branding, and marketing plans
- Actively recruited both volunteers and agencies, as well as promoted the overall program, through numerous targeted vehicles
- Recruited and trained two volunteer Advisors to assist the Program Managers with interviewing potential volunteers and matching them with agencies, in order to increase the program's capacity

The 50+ Volunteer Network officially launched at the Volunteer Center's Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event on January 15, 2018.

HOW THE 50+ VOLUNTEER NETWORK WORKS

Any agency registered with the Montgomery County Volunteer Center may become part of the 50+ Volunteer Network. The Program Managers meet with the staff person responsible for managing volunteers, either in person or by phone, to learn about the organization's mission and structure, volunteer programs, and opportunities for skilled volunteers. (For purpose of the 50+ Volunteer Network, "skilled volunteer opportunities" include direct services to clients, ongoing organizational support, and short-term consulting projects). This information is critical to ensuring successful volunteer placements. After this discussion, the agency completes a registration form, and their information is entered into a database of opportunities. (See pages 8-9 for the Agency Registration Form.)

Potential volunteers must submit an application and a resume or brief description of their professional, volunteer, and educational experience. Program staff conducts an extensive, in-person interview with every volunteer. The goal of the interview is to elicit exactly what the volunteer is seeking and which opportunities best fit with his or her skills, interests, and preferences. (See pages 10-11 for the list of interview questions). A detailed email outlining potential opportunities follows the interview, and the volunteer may select one or more possibilities to pursue. The program staff facilitates e-introductions and continues to follow up with both the volunteer and the agency to determine if a match is made and gain additional feedback about the volunteer experience once placement occurs.

PARTNER AGENCIES

Currently, registered agencies reflect a broad array of causes, structures, and needs). The opportunities they have sent are similarly diverse in terms of the activity involved, skills needed, and time commitment required. Most, however, are ongoing, involve multiple volunteers, and fall into the following categories:

- Finance/Accounting/
Bookkeeping Services
- Administrative Support
- Advocacy
- Business Development
- Board Membership
- Communications
- Counseling
- Marketing
- Graphic Design
- Computer Training
- Event Planning
- Grant-writing and Fundraising
- Legal Assistance
- Mentoring
- Program Evaluation
- Program/Project Management
- Translating
- Tutoring
- Volunteer Management
- Workforce Development
- Writing Projects

This diversity in organizations and opportunities helps ensure that volunteers' varying interests and needs are met. Thus far, the 50+ Volunteer Network has *placed* skilled volunteers engaged in various capacities at the following agencies (with many other organizations *registered* with the network):

- A Wider Circle
- Arts on the Block
- Asylum Seekers Assistance
Project
- Bernie Scholarships
- Bethesda Green
- Bethesda Help
- Bone Builders
- Brookside Gardens
- Call for Action
- Career Catcher
- College Tracks
- Community Health &
Empowerment through
Education (CHEER)
- Community Ministries of
Rockville
- Conflict Resolution Center
- Court Watch Montgomery
- Empowered Women
International
- EveryMind
- Fairytale Brides on a Shoestring
- Future Link
- Gilchrist Center
- Ghandhi Brigade
- Girls on the Run
- Habitat for Humanity Metro MD
- Holiday Park Senior Center
- JCA Interages
- JCA SHIP
- Junior Achievement
- KindWorks
- Literacy Council
- Lutheran Social Services
- Meals on Wheels of Takoma
Park
- Mentor Prize
- Metropolitan Washington Ear

- Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless
- Montgomery County Council Grants Advisory Group
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services: Aging and Disability Services
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services: Planning, Accountability, and Customer Service (PACS)
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services: Healthy Montgomery Initiative
- Montgomery County Volunteer Center
- Montgomery History
- Montgomery Housing Partnership
- Montgomery Parks
- National Institutes of Health
- Oasis
- PetConnect Rescue
- Phoenix Computers
- RSVP/AARP Tax-Aide
- Rukundo International
- Senior Connection
- Senior Planet Montgomery
- Sierra Club
- Tacy Foundation
- Upcounty Community Resources

THE RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

In proposing and funding the 50+ Volunteer Network, County officials set an ambitious goal of 100 volunteer placements in the first 12 months post launch. The personal, time-intensive nature warranted a reasonable target, ensuring that the new program would deliver on its promise. Subsequent years were to focus on expansion.

In its inaugural year, the 50+ Volunteer Network exceeded its set objective, with a total of **185** individual assignments, including those through Senior Corps RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) which is part of the 50+ Volunteer Network:

- **209** volunteers were interviewed by program staff and received suggestions of possible volunteer opportunities based on their interests and skills
- **147** of these volunteers have been placed and are actively volunteering
 - Note: **29** volunteers accepted *more than one* assignment, resulting in a total of **185** volunteer placements.
- **34** of those interviewed have been introduced to agencies or are in the process of deciding which options to pursue.
- The remaining **28** potential volunteers interviewed are either no longer interested in volunteering or involved with other activities.

The program has placed these volunteers with a broad variety of agencies in a myriad of opportunities. The 50+ Volunteer Network currently has **109** nonprofit and government agencies registered as partner organizations, and **56** of these have received at least one skilled volunteer who is actively working with them as a result. (Program Managers constantly pursue new agencies to meet volunteers' diverse interest.) Volunteers are presently engaged as tutors, courtroom monitors, professional coaches, counselors, communications and marketing specialists, grant writers, IT consultants, board members,

attorneys, event planners, intake coordinators, mediators, mentors, program managers, strategic planners, tax preparers, and more. Many organizations submit multiple opportunities, including several that agency staff had not even considered until they learned that volunteers may be available through this program.

Because of the rich diversity in opportunities and relative newness of most positions, accurately measuring outcomes of each individual placement is particularly challenging. The program staff intends to develop a mechanism to quantify its results in its second year of operation. However, based on the feedback of both volunteers and agencies, the impact of this program has been significant in short time period.

IMPACT

Even in its relatively short period since launch, the 50+ Volunteer Network has had a significant effect upon both potential skilled volunteers in Montgomery County and the nonprofit/government agency community needing assistance.

During interviews with prospective volunteers, program staff consistently hears:

- “This is an incredible service.”
- “I just didn’t know where to begin before meeting with you. I felt overwhelmed by the options.”
- “I want to feel like I am making a difference, and now I know I can.”

And, the feedback from agencies -- impressed by the caliber of the volunteers, the benefit of the initial screening, and the ability to rethink their use of this demographic -- is equally affirmative.

The Network has placed volunteers with various organizations as tutors, courtroom monitors, professional coaches, counselors, communications and marketing specialists, writers, board members, attorneys, event planners, intake coordinators, translators, greeters, grant writers, mediators, mentors, program reviewers, program managers, and more. When volunteers have been interested in organizations where posted opportunities are not a good fit, the Program Managers have facilitated successful introductions that resulted in effective use of the volunteers’ skills.

Here are a select few of the many 50+ Volunteer Network evolving success stories:

- A small, young nonprofit serving adults with special needs and their families requested a volunteer to help with fundraising. After Program Managers learned more about the organization’s overall needs, the agency was matched with a volunteer who is a retired special education professional. He has taken on the role of Executive Advisor and is working with the Executive Director and Board of Directors to help structure the new organization. The agency reported, “**He’s**

- wonderful and smart. Everything he says is so thoughtful, a definite voice of experience.”*
- An attorney specializing in low-income housing with substantial grant writing experience met with Program Managers in anticipation of his retirement. He wasn't sure what he could do as a volunteer in his next phase of life that would utilize his professional skills. Given his high level of very specific expertise, Program Managers researched and reached out to housing agencies to arrange meetings. When the volunteer received his follow-up email outlining opportunities, he responded, "***WOW, these potential options are great. Retirement is now much easier knowing about these possibilities!***" He ultimately committed to an affordable housing organization excited to capitalize on his skills, and currently is working on special projects.
 - At different times, three nonprofit Executive Directors indicated that they were struggling with significant personnel and strategic issues impeding their organizations. All three were matched with the same volunteer professional coach who guided them through a short-term process to successfully resolve these challenges. The first Executive Director reported, "***We could not have achieved such an effective (or smooth) organizational transition without his help. And, without your program, we would never have thought to -- or been able to - - engage the services of a professional coach.***" The second Executive Director commented, "***Things are going well given his guidance, and I am extremely grateful!***" And, the third Executive Director commented, "***I am new to the world of nonprofits and am so grateful for his help in effectively navigating strategic and management challenges.***"
 - A retired architect was interested in helping at-risk youth but didn't know where to find such an opportunity. The 50+ program connected him with an organization where he not only mentors a young woman but also used his professional contacts to identify several corporate sponsors. The organization recently highlighted him in their "Mentor Spotlight" column for "***jumping in with both feet, serving as a mentor and advocate for the program in his community.***"
 - A volunteer who recently retired from a career in international finance assumed she would be doing "traditional" volunteer work, although she preferred to use her professional skills. Upon learning about her experience working in Africa, the Program Managers introduced her to the Executive Director of a local nonprofit that supports women's educational programs in Uganda. She revamped the organization's budget process and is now serving as finance manager. She credits the 50+ Volunteer Network as "***an enormous help in finding a rewarding volunteer engagement for me by identifying a small nonprofit doing great work that could benefit from drawing on my skills. You are doing a great service for the community.***" The agency added, "***Thanks for this awesome program that linked us!***"

NOTE: The 50+ Volunteer Network is in the process of creating more detailed, comprehensive stories as they unfold from its diverse group of volunteers and agencies.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The ability to leverage the Volunteer Center's resources, database, and relationships is critical to the program's effectiveness.
- Volunteer opportunities that program staff anticipates the volunteer will be interested in based on a review of the application are often different than the ones selected by the volunteer. The interview is KEY to ascertaining volunteer preferences and making a successful match.
- Developing relationships with agencies often leads to identifying opportunities beyond those initially requested, and prompt responses to 50+ Volunteer Network inquiries and matches.
- Advisors who interview volunteers and connect them with agencies are vital to bringing the program to scale, which has always been the goal. However, recruiting, training, and retaining top-notch candidates who can operate independently is far more challenging and time consuming than anticipated, but well worth the effort required.

WHAT'S AHEAD

In the next year, the program will focus on expansion. Specifically, Program Managers will add new partner organizations and increase the number of volunteers served through:

- A major marketing initiative
- Directed outreach to the community, businesses, and professional associations
- Enhanced social media coverage
- Additional volunteer Advisors and satellite interview sites at targeted locations throughout the county
- Developing and sharing best practices to help agencies make the best use of skilled volunteers

This growth, however, will be accomplished without sacrificing the personal attention to each agency and volunteer that is the hallmark of the 50+ Volunteer Network.



50+ Volunteer Network Agency Registration

The 50+ Volunteer Network connects skilled volunteers with nonprofit and government organizations that need help with:

- Direct service to clients (such as tutoring, mentoring, or teaching)
- Organizational support (may include administrative tasks, intake services, or program management)
- Pro Bono Consulting Project (short-term projects requiring professional expertise such as strategic planning, grant writing, accounting, IT assistance, marketing or public relations)
- Board Positions

To register, please complete the form below and return it to 50plus@montgomerycountymd.gov. Feel free to add any other information that will help us find you volunteers who will be a good fit.

Name of Organization:

Address:

Contact Name and Title:

Contact Email:

Contact Phone number:

Issue Area/Population Served:

Does your organization provide training for volunteers? Yes __ No __

How many volunteers do you hope to recruit?

Is there a designated staff person to manage volunteers? Yes __ No __

Do you have an office other than a home office? Yes__ No__

Is volunteering on-site, virtual, or other?

Please include a separate description of each 50+ volunteer opportunity. If you already have these opportunities listed on the Volunteer Center database, please indicate so below unless you want to add additional information. For any opportunities not currently listed, please provide or attach a brief description of each, including required skills, availability, time commitment, and other specifics.

While the 50+ Volunteer Network will actively recruit, and advise potential volunteers about opportunities, it is the sole discretion of the individual volunteer whether to pursue an individual activity, thus we cannot guarantee that all requests for volunteers will be filled. We may require references for certain positions, but the agency is responsible for background checks, confidentiality agreements, or any other required documentation for volunteers. Organizations must be currently registered with the Montgomery County Volunteer Center.

50+ Volunteer Network Interview Form

Background

Date:

Name of Volunteer:

Advisor:

How did the volunteer hear about us?

Familiar with MCVC? If not explain about MCVC database, how 50+ came about for those who wanted more help, personal consultations with both agencies and volunteers; email opportunities; vol selects; e-introduce; follow up on both sides

MAY WE SEND YOUR RESUME WHEN WE E-INTRODUCE YOU TO AGENCY?

Are you on Face Book? Instagram?

What type of volunteer work?

Direct service to clients (tutor, mentor, work directly with an organization's clients)?

Short -term consulting project for organization (grant writing, strategic plan website, etc. - has beginning and end)?

On-going organizational support (anything from working in the office to managing a program to being on a board)?

Do you want to use your professional/volunteer experience, and if so what?

What causes/areas of interests appeal to you?

What is most important to you in a volunteer job? How do type of work, skills needed, and cause balance in terms of importance?

Virtual or on-site?

Large established nonprofit or startup?

How much time per week? Any times you are not available?

Any location preferences?

Suggested opportunities:

Action items:

Follow up date (two weeks from interview date):

Comments: