

## **NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS**

**Moderator: Michele Higgs**  
**September 9, 2008**  
**3:00 p.m. EDT**

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call. Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the conference over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, James. Welcome everyone to the Neighborhood Networks September Conference Call.

As you heard, I'm Michele Higgs and today I'm joined by Gloria Uchegbu. We represent the technical assistance team that works with you to address the needs of the various Neighborhood Networks centers around the country.

Since Neighborhood Networks is a non-funded Initiative, center directors must be creative about how they staff their centers and how they provide services for their users. That also requires the use of volunteers. A volunteer is someone who works for a community or cause because they choose to, because they feel their efforts can make a difference whether or not they receive compensation. So that's why today we're saying, "Volunteers Rock!" Volunteers may not be able to give their money but they will be able to give of their time.

Now let's talk about the dollar value of a volunteer's time. According to a recent report issued by the Independent Sector, which is a premier forum of leaders and thinkers in the charitable and philanthropic sector, the estimated dollar value for an hour of a volunteer's time for 2007 was \$19.51. Independent Sector makes this information available by state on their Web site, which is [www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org). Having this estimate available gives significance to the hours that are dedicated by the millions of individuals who give of their time, talents, and energy to make a difference in their communities. Organizations can use this estimate to quantify the enormous value volunteers provide for their organizations when they are preparing grant applications or approaching funders.

Today we have a number of speakers to address this topic for you. So I'm going to make my comments brief and do a little housekeeping so we can move along with our presentation for today.

We have nine centers to welcome to the neighborhood this month. They are: Azure Heights Neighborhood Networks Centers in Michigan, Assist Homes of Downer Place Neighborhood Networks Center in Illinois, Aurora Senior Housing Neighborhood Networks Center in Illinois, and Meadow Ridge Neighborhood Networks Center in Illinois, well, Illinois centers are cutting up out there, aren't they? Wylie Street Station Neighborhood Networks Center in Idaho, Dillon Hall Neighborhood Networks Center in Michigan, New Beginnings in Virginia, Wesley Heights Computer Center in Connecticut and Grey Eagles Neighborhood Networks Center in Nebraska. Nine centers! Welcome to you all.

Let me tell you about our Neighborhood Networks resources. First, there is the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START business plan. START is an online resource that helps you to contemplate the needs of your residents, determine what resources in

your community can speak to those needs, and keep track of the partnerships that can attend to them. It is useful when developing partnerships because it creates an organized plan that strengthens a center's profile as a business and makes the center more attractive to potential funders and well as donors.

START also serves as the institutional memory for your organization and helps you build a foundation upon which you can organize your activities. If you have any questions about the START business plan, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, you can call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks Information Line at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). Don't forget online networking with your peers through the Neighborhood Networks online message board. You can share information with other centers, post news, and ask questions. Be aware that this is not a real time resource but you can post your information then revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you've received. Just go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org) and click on the Neighborhood Networks Online Networking link to the right under the green banner labeled "Helpful Tools."

Let me also remind listeners that a transcript of today's call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now, to our topic for today, "Volunteers Rock." As I mentioned before, Neighborhood Networks is an unfunded Initiative but it is chock full of talented folks who want to see good things happen. Many of these people are volunteers. I often talk about when I was a kid growing up there was a lady on our block who knew all the kids and all their parents. None of us could get away with anything because our mothers would learn about it as soon as, well, no, before they got home from work. Her apartment was always neat as a pin and she took time to sweep up her property and everybody else's. Well, she was a volunteer. She cared about what was going on around her and would be happy to do something else if asked to take on a project. But I'm not going to

use up your time with my warm memories from childhood. Today we have a group of people who can talk with you about the real benefit volunteers can bring to your center and how you can find them, tap into their strengths, and keep them happy.

Let me tell you who they are. We're very fortunate to have with us Susan J. Ellis who is the President of Energize, Inc. a firm that specializes in volunteerism. Ms. Ellis will paint the broad picture for us and talk with us about the accidental volunteer leader. Energize Inc. is based in Philadelphia and has clients across the US and throughout many parts of the world. The Energize Inc. Web site, which I'm sure she'll tell you a little about, has won international recognition as a resource for volunteer program leaders. Next we'll hear from Ms. Jennifer Bennett, resident volunteer program manager with VolunteerMatch. She's based in San Francisco and manages VolunteerMatch opportunities around the country. She'll be followed by Billy Fettweis, volunteer services coordinator with Greater D.C. Cares, a leader in coordinating volunteering and philanthropy in the Washington, D.C. area. Finally, we'll hear from Monica Stith who came to the Rosa Parks Apartments armed with a license as a real estate broker. But she was very interested in the changes that technology can bring to a HUD multi-family property and has been with Rosa Parks for nine years. The Neighborhood Networks Community center at Rosa Parks Apartments has a number of programs to serve its residents and a well-organized group of volunteers, some from the property and others from the surrounding community, who help with the delivery of their programs.

Susan, as the energy behind Energize Inc., will you get us started in this discussion please?

Susan Ellis: Thank you, Michele and hello to everybody out there. I am certain that your work with the Neighborhood Networks centers is very important and keeps you very busy and now "boom," all of a sudden we're talking to you about being a leader of a volunteer effort. Or as Michele puts it, the "accidental volunteer leader," which I like a lot.

The first thing I want to tell you is you're not alone. There are a whole lot of people out there who wake up one morning, go to work, and are told, guess what? We think you're such a nice person and you smile so much and you do so much volunteer work that you should also be our volunteer coordinator. I call them the "anointed" volunteer coordinators.

But the point also is that volunteers are everywhere in many, many kinds of organizations. You might want to know that the vast majority of people run volunteer programs on a part-time basis. What I mean by that is that they've been hired to do full-time jobs and then someone assigns them to work with volunteers in addition to everything else they're doing. So they never really can devote the full time to it. I understand that that's the situation many of you are in.

I can only hope, for your sake, that you actually are looking forward to this and are going to enjoy it because what you bring to it is, as with everything else in life, what you'll get out of it and it is a potentially exciting and fun part of work. It does take work though; I'm not going to minimize it in any way. What I do want to tell you is that you're not alone in this. There are resources.

The other problem with being an accidental volunteer leader is that frequently your bosses or the administrators to whom you report are not able to help you very much. They know they want volunteers but you're going to be left to your own devices. So I'll start by offering sympathy but I hope that I end by offering some help.

The first thing I want to talk about is the word 'volunteer.' I like the word volunteer and I use it a lot. I want to note, however, that the word volunteer repels as frequently as it attracts. If you have any resistance whatsoever about utilizing the word volunteer, or if the people with whom you work in the neighborhood don't relate to it, don't worry about the word. For instance, if they see it as something that only women do and you really want to get men involved, or they think only wealthy people do it and you're dealing with people of low income, don't worry about the word volunteer. It does not matter what word you use.

What you're doing is coordinating, mobilizing, and tapping into the skills and talents of people in your community without paying cash for those skills and talents. So they're people who help you without being on the payroll; there are things you need to do to support them, but if you look at this as community resource mobilization, you might have a much better perspective on the activity on the whole.

I also want to tell you that you are entering work for which an actual professional field exists even though most people don't realize it. When you think about it, you'll see that volunteers are active in many, many different kinds of settings and that in each of those settings; they have to have a leader, a coordinator, a manager, a facilitator. You know there are volunteers in every hospital in the country so obviously there's going to be a director of volunteer services there. If you think about places like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, the YMCAs; they all involve volunteers so there are people there who are knowledgeable about it.

For that matter, alumni coordinators at universities or volunteer fire chiefs in the smaller communities around this country are all working with volunteers so there are counterparts. The reason I'm mentioning this to you is that one of my first recommendation is to sit down at your computer and Google the phrase "volunteer management" or "volunteer leadership." I can lessen that effort for you because, as Michele said, my company, Energize, has the largest Web site in the world specifically for leaders of volunteers. We'll make sure that you get that link.

When you go on the site, you will find an entire library in volunteer management by topics that you can browse that link to other sites. There's a whole referral network that will tell you about the organizations; you can search by your locale to find what's near you in terms of resources to help the manager of volunteer programs. You see, when you visit VolunteerMatch, it's really designed to help individuals find places to volunteer. We're concerned about the people who are asking people to volunteer. So that's the twist on it.

In addition, many of you are in communities that have a volunteer center or a hands-on network affiliate. It might be called a City Cares affiliate. For example, here in Philadelphia our hands-on affiliate is called Philadelphia Cares. But the point is that if you do have those groups in your community, you want to get involved with them and get on their mailing list and the list within their lists because that's where you're going to find local information on working with volunteers. You can usually find it through your volunteer center, hands-on affiliate, or Directors of Volunteers in Agencies (DOVIA), as these are the local professional associations. There will be someone from the Girl Scouts, from each of your hospitals, the library, or the school system where you can share and get information.

By visiting online with Energize, Inc. you'll find an education area where you'll learn the schedule for workshops and conferences. Because this field doesn't generally have a lot of funding, most of those meetings are quite affordable to attend; you might be surprised that one is right near you.

I've got a couple of practical things to tell you. The first is that I highly recommend that the first volunteers you recruit are people to help *you*. Often, volunteer leaders feel so guilty about helping themselves they want to help everybody else first. This is comparable to those situations in the airplane, when they tell you "if you need to use your oxygen, put on your own mask first and then help the person next to you who needs help." That's what I'm talking about here.

If you can get even one, two, or three people who really are interested in helping you build a volunteer network or a community resources network, it is a great benefit. First of all, it will give you some people to brainstorm with because there's not always a right way to do something, it's what's best for your situation. You can ask these volunteers to read the books and journals in this field, and bring the information back to you. You can ask them to go out and talk with some of the other volunteer leaders; this is a very collaborative field that is happy to help you. I highly recommend getting some of those folks to develop a steering committee; that way, you're not alone and you're proving by that you value volunteers by involving them in running the program.

The last thing that I want to say, which directly bridges to Jennifer's presentation about recruiting online, is please do not recruit any volunteer until you are clear on what it is you want them to do. The inexperienced person thinks the problem is getting people to join up and puts out that "please help us," before they're really ready.

The problem is not recruitment. People will help you, they will want to help you; what brings them to you is understanding and being attracted by the particular activities and roles in which you want them to engage. Don't start by issuing this "please we need help, we need volunteers." What you want is a volunteer program coordinator, a youth leader, or whatever the role, and that's the way you begin your recruitment. Remember, volunteer is a pay category, not a title.

Michele Higgs: I think you did a great job. Before we move on to Jennifer, I want to give you an opportunity to give us your Web site address.

Susan Ellis: OK. It's [www.energizeinc.com](http://www.energizeinc.com).

Michele Higgs: Terrific, terrific. Thanks so much. Jennifer, would you like to get started?

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely. Thank you, Susan for the great introduction to the topic. Let me first say that online recruiting is really just one more tool. I think Billy is going to talk a bit more about some of the other tools you have to spread the word about your program and the work you're doing in your community.

The problem with recruiting online is more often than not the people who see your listings on VolunteerMatch or Idealist or Craigslist may not know anything about your organization. So they don't know what kind of impact you make in the community and what kind of work you do. You

need to be sure that the message you're getting out there to these potential volunteers is the best representation of your organization or program.

Make sure that you have a clear opportunity posted; I can talk a little bit more about how to get started on Volunteer Match. But essentially the way VolunteerMatch works is similar to other online volunteer networks. Nonprofit organizations visit the site and they post their opportunities. Someone looking for a volunteer opportunity visits the site, inputs some search criteria, and receives a set of search results. In turn, they browse through those search results, find something they're interested in, and make the connection with the organization or the program.

One of the first things that a potential volunteer will see about your program is the title of your volunteer listing. You really want to make sure that the title is compelling, catchy, a call to action and makes people think they want to help the organization or want to learn more about the opportunity. We use the example of, "Unlock the World, Teach a Child to Read." That's compelling, it explains the opportunity in the title, and it also makes someone want to learn more. As opposed to something like "Volunteers Needed," or "Help Needed. "

Of course, as Susan was saying, volunteer is not a job title, it's a pay category. So what you need is someone to help do something. Determine what that activity is. If you need help setting up your program, set it up just like you would if you were going to pay someone. What would those job responsibilities look like, how long should it take, what do you need help with? Outline the program, the responsibilities, and the daily tasks or weekly tasks of the position and craft your message. Use clear, concise statements, ensuring that the message is brief; that you are able to get your message across with the fewest words possible.

We did a study and found that the highest referring opportunities on VolunteerMatch have a volunteer message of 100 words or less. Make sure that you're crafting your message and you're including a call to action. If someone doesn't know about your program, tell them what helping

you can do for them and their community. If something that they do will impact the life of your residents or their network or the neighborhood, how does that impact and connection come about? Make sure that you are using that message and the things that you are passionate about to pull other people in.

You also want to make sure that your message has correct grammar and spelling. According to the research that we did, our lowest referring opportunities all have spelling and grammar errors. Make sure that you take this opportunity to make that best first impression and that you've reviewed the opportunity. What does it look like? Is it visually appealing? Are you speaking to an audience? Are you giving them a call to action so that they can come to you and help?

So as Susan was also saying, we have a lot of resources available to accidental volunteer leaders. It's free to sign up; we have a learning center on our Web site, which is [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org). We have trainings next week on creating opportunities online, and how to start thinking about volunteer opportunities, and coming up with opportunities that are meaningful and impact both the organization and the volunteer.

So I would love to have any of you to join us and learn a little bit more about how we do things here at VolunteerMatch. There's no charge to set up an account. I can talk about that more if that's of interest to the group.

Michele Higgs: Jennifer, I had one quick question. Is there anything in the way of templates? In these classes, would there be instruction on creating these opportunities, and making the call to action concise and meaningful. Is there a class that actually addresses this issue?

Jennifer Bennett: There is; that class will be next Tuesday at 11 a.m. Pacific time. That's available on VolunteerMatch in our Learning Center. You can sign up. You just need to input a few pieces of information. You'll need to have access to a computer and access to a phone and it may be a toll

call depending on where you're calling from. There's no fee to register; the class takes you step-by-step through what we call, the Eight Simple Steps for Creating a Great Opportunity Online. Michele, if you'd like to send that out to the participants, I'd be happy to put that together.

We don't have any actual templates because each opportunity may be slightly different. The class does, however, does walk you through how to brainstorm a good title, how to craft a description, what kind of information to include, all of those key points that I discussed, in 100 words or less. You know better than anyone else what the call to action is. You run your program and you're passionate about it. So use that enthusiasm to inspire other people.

Michele Higgs: I see, OK, well that helps. Are you done with your comments?

Jennifer Bennett: I am, I can dig in, but I know we're short on time so I want to make sure that everyone has a chance to talk as well. And I'm happy to take any questions that people might have.

Michele Higgs: Well, what I would like to do is open the line for questions. James, are you there?

Operator: Yes, I am.

Michele Higgs: Hi, can we see if we have any calls on the line? Calls for Jennifer and for Susan?

Operator: Yes, at this time if you do have a question or a comment, you may press star one on your touchtone telephone.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Operator: Once again, that's star one.

Michele Higgs: We'll just see if anyone's on the line. If not we'll move on.

Operator: We do have a few questions. We have a question from Patricia Savage.

Michele Higgs: OK, hi Patricia.

Patricia Savage: Hi this is Patricia Savage from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Could you tell me the time on Tuesday for the VolunteerMatch training?

Jennifer Bennett: Sure, it's at 11 a.m. Pacific time. So, is Albuquerque Mountain or Central?

Patricia Savage: We're Mountain.

Jennifer Bennett: OK, so it would be at noon your time.

Patricia Savage: OK. Then another question that I had, for either one of you, is do you use or do you suggest that we use a volunteer handbook once we get these people in the door and give them their job description?

Jennifer Bennett: My short answer is absolutely. Susan, do you want to dive into that?

Susan Ellis: Well, actually, I don't have a short answer and I'm not sure I'm in total agreement. What I think is that a volunteer handbook, it sounds like it's a thing. There's a real template. We sell a book in our online bookstore called Developing a Volunteer Handbook that walks you through the items you may want to include in your volunteer handbook. What's really important is that you decide the most important things you want volunteers to know. The truth is you can spend a whole lot of time writing a handbook but half the people are going to do temporary jobs or help with a special event and the handbook might not be useful for them.

I'd rather see you create a Web listing where you can post all kinds of instruction sheets. I think you should do what's needed. The other thing is, if there are rules you have to explain, absolutely, write them down whether you call them a handbook or not. Also, be sure that you are also welcoming. I've seen organizations create a handbook that's a set of rules and by the time the volunteers are done reading it they might say, "I don't want anything to do with those people." So be welcoming.

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely, but make sure the potential volunteer is aware of any sort of agreement or background check before they get too into the program.

Patricia Savage: That's one of the things we do offer. We provide them, we meet with them; one-on-one or in a group, depending on how many people we have interested in the activity for which we're recruiting. We distribute each person a volunteer application; down at the bottom it asks their permission and signature, stating that they understand we will do a background check. The volunteer handbook is something that they're working on but we haven't really brought it out. I'm really undecided about the whole thing.

For that same reason, it's like a rule book. It seems as though we're telling them, okay, this is what you've got to do. It's more of a punishment, but if you don't have a handbook, it seems like they won't know what they're getting involved in.

Michele Higgs: It sounds like a 50/50 proposition. It's something that you have to make another decision on. Is it going to create the welcoming, here's the way we do things around here, or is it going to be a hammer?

Patricia Savage: Right, exactly.

Billy Fettweis: This is Billy from Greater D.C. Cares. I'm going to be speaking in just a second, but on this topic, I think it's definitely a good idea. I think that the warnings that are being echoed here are good ones. It's not an either/or proposition, it doesn't have to be. I think it's something that sets realistic expectations in the beginning for anything that you have at an organization. That'll be something that will be valuable for retention and managing that volunteer throughout their time with your organization.

Susan Ellis: It's more important to me that you write volunteer job descriptions first. That's really what you need before the other things. Again, I'm not against codifying and writing anything out. But I do think we get hung up on what on mental images of what a handbook is, right?

Patricia Savage: It can possibly, like you said, be a handout specific for that job description for that one person. Then you can just have a smaller typical rule book that's for the company and each property.

Susan Ellis: Exactly.

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely, I think what Billy said is key. You need to manage expectations. So if it's a position where someone's coming in and doing a few hours of work, sweeping up or doing landscaping, that may not be necessary. If you have someone who's actually creating intellectual property for your organization, you want to make sure that information is going to stay with your organization and you're not going to have a volunteer who walks away with a copyright for your Web site or something like that. So really it would depend on the opportunity and the position.

Patricia Savage: Exactly. And what was the name of that book that you offer on energizeinc.com?

Susan Ellis: It's available at our bookstore; it's a book by Bill Wittich, W-I-T-T-I-C-H and it's called Model Volunteer Handbook.

Patricia Savage: Model Volunteer Handbook?

Susan Ellis: Yes, it's in our book store.

Michele Higgs: Thanks so much, Susan. Patricia is that it on this question?

Patricia Savage: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: OK, thank you. James, we're going to take one more and then we'll go to Billy.

Operator: OK, we'll take a question from Tommie Love of Galveston.

Tommie Love: Hi, this is Tommie Love and I have a question. When you recruit your volunteers, what incentives or rewards do you offer?

Susan Ellis: May I start on that, Jennifer?

Jennifer Bennett: Sure.

Susan Ellis: Let me begin by saying you are injecting some self-fulfilling prophecy that I want to try to avoid, OK? Because you're assuming you need incentives and that people will not want to do it generally. Therefore you've got to tease them into it or give them a gift and that's just not the way it works. That's why I started with your decision about what you want people to do. If you have interesting things for people to do, things where they can learn, the incentive is "ooh, I'd *like* to do that; that would be fun. Or I like the people, or I'll have something to put on my resume," There's a whole long list of things of what people want from volunteering. So the incentive or the motivation is that you're helping meet one of their needs while they see that the work is meeting

your needs. Later, in recognition and appreciation, you might want to do something to thank them, but it's the work itself that attracts people.

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely. When you're crafting your description and you're thinking of your projects or your jobs, you need to identify in the impact on your community, your program, and your organization, and make sure that you've clearly stated that message in a compelling way. This will identify what this person will change by helping your organization.

Tommie Love: All right, thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thanks so much. Thanks, Jennifer and thanks, Tommie, for your call. I am going to cut the questions at this point and let Billy Fettweis talk with us from Greater D.C. Cares. Billy?

Billy Fettweis: Thank you very much, and thank you all for participating on the call today. Today I'll talk about recruiting volunteers and once you have them, how to retain them and reward them for all their good work. I think a lot of the key points in recruitment have already been talked about by the speakers this afternoon; some great advice. Points like making sure you know exactly what they're going to do, before you ever recruit someone, where they are going to sit, will they need a computer, is their space for them, logistics, and who's going to manage them. This should all be done ahead of time before you ever announce a need.

Then creating a job description that's very specific and that emphasizes the duties and the benefits of the task. The duties might be one-on-one swim lessons with a child at the YMCA, the benefits, getting exercise and getting to know a child. Make sure you emphasize the benefits as the crux of your selling point.

There are a lot of great online tools that we've talked about today. VolunteerMatch; we use VolunteerMatch at Greater D.C. Cares and I know a lot about what our partners do. You also

probably have a local volunteer center or something like a Greater D.C. Cares that you can contact in your jurisdiction. They can advertise for you as well.

Also, word of mouth is a compelling recruitment tool. You don't really think of it as a strategy because it happens on its own, but you can do things like encourage people to bring their friends. That'll not only increase the number of volunteers you have and the number of people who are investing in your organization but will also make their experience more pleasant. People like to do things with people they know, it makes the activity social and constructive as well.

Think about the different populations that you need for different tasks. There is a generation of Baby Boomers who'll be retiring over the next 10-15 years; how are we engaging their skills? A lot of research shows that they want to tackle high level activities. Something like creating a marketing campaign to sell your organization, or helping you to build your technology infrastructure. Do you need college students who have flexible schedules for daytime volunteer roles? Think outside the box about who you can find to for these roles and then how you can contact them.

But we've talked enough about recruitment today; I'll move on to retention and recognition. I think a lot of retention begins right off the bat, when volunteers walk in the door. Make sure that they're greeted, that they feel welcome, and that there's some sort of orientation for every volunteer. The orientation is different for someone who is volunteering every single week for the next year, versus somebody who is just coming in for one time. But all people want to know the impact of what they're doing; that's the key of retention, impact. Studies show that 25 or 30 percent of volunteers participated only once and didn't return. The main reason is because they didn't understand the impact of their actions. The more you can make that completely obvious to your volunteers, the more they'll realize they made a difference and want to do it again.

That orientation can seem mundane; chopping this up, or sweeping this or cleaning that or whatever it is that they're doing. Show them how their activity fits in the bigger picture. Tell them that what they're doing increases the capacity to affect social change in the region. That's something that you can communicate in the orientation and moving forward. Also include in the orientation clear expectations so that they know exactly what they're getting themselves into and they don't have some grand and unrealistic idea, something like "I'll be fulfilled, I will change the world through my hour this morning." Make sure that they know exactly what they're going to do and what they can hope to achieve.

It also could be a good screening tool as well, to make sure they're the right fit for the post. Once you've met and spoken with the volunteer, it may become clear that this individual would be better suited in another position or in another department or organization. You can facilitate a better fit.

Training can take the form of a handbook, it might be a conversation that you have depending on what you decide to do. I recommend a handbook but they can be a little time-consuming and it might make more sense to do something more informal. Make sure that they know the dress code, the time commitment, the consequences of skipped days, and what kinds of procedures there are in place. It's also important to make sure that there's somebody who can support them throughout their time with your organization.

Particularly for somebody who's a repeat volunteer, make sure that you share the exact outcomes of their efforts in addition to what the organization is doing. Make them love what you do and they will love to come to you. Think about ways that you can communicate that, maybe through some sort of volunteer newsletter. Recognition and retention go hand in hand. You might do something like promote a volunteer who consistently performs well to a higher level of responsibility. That makes them feel good, that makes you feel good, and you're getting the most

out of what they're able to offer to your organization. That's a reward, that's recognition for what they're doing.

You might maintain a relationship with them. You might offer small gifts of appreciation; I know that if you're like me, your recognition budget is almost nothing. But you can print out a certificate saying "Volunteer of the Month to Joe Smith, you did great work". If your organization is doing some sort of training the volunteer could benefit from, you can invite them. You can offer to provide a letter of recommendation for them if they're applying for a job or applying for school. You also could think about featuring the volunteer on your Web site, and seek their input. Ask them what they think about how you're doing things. The volunteer probably has ideas about how things can be improved from an outsider's perspective that would be valuable to you. You benefit from what they think and also they would feel like you're invested in them and what they have to say about this.

Finally, you could also consider having a volunteer recognition event. That's a little more complicated; you have to be pretty creative especially when you're on a shoestring budget, as I'm sure many of us are. But think about what they like to do, for free food, maybe you get something donated from the local restaurant or grocery store. Or maybe you can host an educational speaker or a dance. It's more complicated in that takes a lot more work but those are just some retention recognition ideas that I have to offer and I'll wrap up.

Michele Higgs: Billy, those all sound wonderful. Your enthusiasm in presenting them is infectious. I'm going to ask Monica Stith to tell us how things go at Rosa Parks Apartments in Columbus, Ohio.  
Monica.

Monica Stith: Good afternoon, everyone. This is a great opportunity for me to tell of the struggles working with nothing to start with to give to the people here at Rosa Parks Apartments something

that we never had. This goes back to 2004; I feel great about all of our accomplishments up to the present.

I started out working with Barbara Bickman, our HUD Coordinator here in Ohio, by getting ideas from her of what we should do. I contacted state community colleges, churches, and the local school to get the art teacher and some of the PTA people involved. I told them of my ideas for getting recognition. So we got everybody together for a Christmas raffle. One year we had a team of 10 people who put fruit baskets together and sold them for \$10. We undersold ourselves but it was a success and it gave recognition to the Rosa Parks Neighborhood Networks Resource Center.

Of the speakers that I have heard so far, it gives me great satisfaction to know that I have pursued all your ideas. When the volunteers came aboard here we had a task description for them. Even though they are volunteers, I don't want to overtax anyone because it is their time and time is money. They're coming here to do something for the center. I asked them, "How much time would you like to volunteer?" I don't want them to feel like it's a job even though they are doing a job. I want them to feel that they are giving us a service that promotes our center.

I find that putting volunteers in shifts works best. That way they don't get over-stressed. We have different programs here. We have the young people here and the young mothers that may have gotten off of their assistance and need to go out and find a job. I went through Franklin County job force and asked them about the services they could offer our center.

We have seniors programs here. Some of our seniors aren't comfortable with young children in the resource center so I may pair a person with a senior during the hours of 10 to noon. I try to keep everything separated. It's a great feeling to have the art teacher and members of the school PTA involved with the center. The art teacher donates one day a week to work with the children on arts and crafts.

I've conducted research on the VISTA volunteers through the OCC Network. Even though they don't get paid for that service, it is a great opportunity to have a volunteer on staff here eight hours a day to promote the center.

If have questions, feel free to ask; I just wanted to let everyone know that it's a great opportunity to have these people help you accomplish your goals. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Sounds great, Monica. Thank you so much. You sound like the ultimate accidental volunteer leader. Let me ask you one quick question. In regards to the VISTA volunteer you mentioned an acronym, OCCN. What does that stand for?

Monica Stith: It's Ohio Community Network Resource Center. I also connected with the Ohio State University, the Black Studies Department of our University. They were able to send interns who understood our needs, finished up their program and earned credit to graduate. As I said, most of my volunteers were short term, so if I had two Ohio State students as interns, may have only been at the center for six to eight weeks, but their accomplishments were great. You can also go online for VISTA. We were awarded our Vista volunteer to help with our resources center. It's called "Connect Ohio: Leave No Child Offline." Our center was also chosen to receive 15 new Dell computers for families to help their children.

Michele Higgs: Excellent, excellent. That's another one of those benefits.

Monica Stith: Yes.

Michele Higgs: I thank you for your contribution. I am going to open up the lines now. James, are you with us? Do we have calls for Monica and Billy and Jennifer and Susan?

Operator: Yes, once again, that is star one if you have a question. We'll go to Dorothy Hudgen.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Dorothy.

Dorothy Hudgen: Here at the Villas, we're concerned about the confidentiality and what do we do about it?

Billy Fettweis: What about confidentiality of your clients?

Dorothy Hudgen: With the volunteers?

Susan Ellis: You mean for volunteers to learn something about your clients? Is that what you're worried about?

Dorothy Hudgen: The paperwork.

Jennifer Bennett: Yes, that is important.

Susan Ellis: It's important but I want to remind you that this is far from a new subject for this country. For example, I should tell you about my own background. The Philadelphia Family Court System and Juvenile Court is closed to the public; yet I was able to start a volunteer program there.

The issue of confidentiality is one of training, making it very clear to people what they are and are not allowed to look at, locking records up and things that people shouldn't see whether it is the janitor, a volunteer, or maybe even your board members. It's a matter of what people should have access to.

You should be conducting background checks if you have vulnerable populations. But, you teach people about confidentiality and volunteers are no more prone to gossip than anyone else.

Another option is to ask the client to sign a permission form asking if they are willing to have a volunteer work with their child or whatever.

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely. If you have policies and procedures for your paid staff, such as confidentiality agreements that are signed, or non-disclosure agreements, you should be asking your volunteers to sign those as well if they'll be having access to sensitive documents or information.

Michele Higgs: Does that take care of your question?

Dorothy Hudgen: Yes.

Michele Higgs: That's OK. James, is there anyone else on the line with a question?

Operator: There are no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. That was an excellent question about the issue of confidentiality and I'm glad you were able to address that because I would expect in some situations, say if you have volunteers working in the office, they could be working around sensitive documents.

Now about the question of background checks; is there anything, and Susan, I'm going to direct this to you because I went through your Web site, is there anything specific that addresses the background checks?

Susan Ellis: With background checks, any organization that is working with vulnerable populations has got to be conducting background checks on paid staff. There are some, again this is too big to

talk about right this second, but there are some programs out there and it depends on different states where you can get some help in getting volunteer background checks at less cost.

But the idea is that there's a lot of information about it, there are people like Linda Groff in Canada who has written several books and articles about screening and background checks. Also, the Nonprofit Risk Management Center is very much on top of the issues related to risk management with volunteers because it's not just confidentiality, there are numerous risk issues. None of us want to make it sound like there are no issues, there are, but in almost every case it's one of thinking through your plan, having policies, and then sticking to them. But I encourage people to talk to others who are working with volunteers because they've been through this, I promise you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much.

Jennifer Bennett: Absolutely. If you are in a major metro area, you may want to check with your local bar association or lawyer's group because a lot of them have pro bono services for this kind of program. They help you evaluate the kind of documents that need to be in place and if you are asking your volunteers and your staff to go through appropriate background checks and confidentiality agreements.

Michele Higgs: Great. Thank you much. Now I'm going to ask a quick question for Monica. I think I understood that you had volunteers that were residents at your property. How did you recruit those folks? Were they just interested in what was going on?

Monica Stith: They were interested, but our VISTA coordinator would publish monthly newsletters and get them involved with potluck dinners. We had about four volunteers from the residents that came in and worked shifts to answer phones, helped keep the center open, and made donations. I've even had one resident, who has been involved since I started out, who was always there to

either give money or food donations. The residents help out with the Neighborhood Networks Celebration we host every year at the Kiwanza Park. In fact, this year the largest amount of volunteer residents participated. Also, our teens would get involved as well.

Michele Higgs: I also noticed that you had volunteers from the community as well. Where did they come from? And did you recruit for them? Or were they just interested? Did you have to advertise for them?

Monica Stith: Well, they were happy to participate because we had more or less cleaned up the property about four years ago. As I cleaned up the property, it became more inviting and it helped with revitalization. Also, I got the children involved with planting flowers and shrubs and taking care of them. It helped stimulate everybody in the community and I started getting calls about the positive changes.

Michele Higgs: Sounds great. Now let me just make one quick announcement, we are running right up at 4pm, which is ordinarily our cut-off time and I think I made an announcement earlier that we could run just a couple of minutes over. So I am going to open up the lines, see if James has any more questions, if he does not, then we will go ahead and shut down. James? Got any?

Operator: Yes, we do have a question from Veronica Sanders.

Michele Higgs: OK, thank you. Jonathan?

Veronica Sanders: Yes, this is Veronica Sanders. I'm also a technical assistance coordinator calling from Neighborhood Networks. I was wondering how to get disinterested residents to volunteer.

Michele Higgs: Hmm, OK, I'll throw that out for everybody. If you have folks who are not interested, and Monica you might have a take on this, how do you get them to volunteer? Is that possible?

Monica Stith: Yes, it is possible. I have seniors at my scattered site, so I have a little mixture of everything from singles to my oldest resident who is about 85 years old. What I do is, host workshops over at my senior complex which has 18 units. This Friday we're hosting a seminar on how to save if you receive Medicaid or you're on a fixed income and how to understand all the prescription plans. Then they see an opportunity that will help them and we serve them refreshments and they're delighted. So in return they say, well, is there something that you would like for me to do. That's how I usually do it.

Michele Higgs: That's your opportunity to jump in and say yes, we've got something.

Susan Ellis: Monica, you are a real natural at this. It's terrific to listen to you talk because you're absolutely right. The first thing is again, back to self-fulfilling prophecy, why would you assume people don't want to get involved? What you're assuming is because in the past they've had bad experiences, maybe they don't trust the facility or something like that. But when somebody offers them the opportunity to do something that they like and then as you said, don't use the word volunteer, say we're going to have a class, we're going to get together, or something like, "By the way, if you come, do you want to help, would you bring cookies with you?" That's how you begin to get people engaged. It doesn't matter whether they think they're being recruited as a volunteer. It takes off from there and then suddenly they own it.

Monica Stith: Right. I had a question for Susan as well. I want to be able to take my program to the next level to promote Rosa Parks so everybody could see us online here. How do you do that?

Susan Ellis: You're asking me, Susan, right? Okay, well, first of all, you are way in to the next level, let me just tell you that.

Monica Stith: I hope.

Susan Ellis: And secondly, I'm more than happy to talk with you offline because there's some input I'd be happy to give you personally. But first of all, I think what you want to do is get yourself engaged more in what else is going on with volunteers in your community because you may be ready for some collaborations. You may be ready to find out about some of the other groups. Maybe some of your volunteers want to go help in another group and maybe they can come back and help with you. And then I would look around and see what other people are doing; there are lots of ideas out there. But I have not one iota of worry that you're going to move to whatever level you want to. Because you got it lady, you do.

Monica Stith: Oh, thank you very much. I'm just taking little baby steps and working toward the bigger steps. To be able to see ourselves on the city news, you just can't imagine how my heart was beaming with that progress because people want to see progress.

Susan Ellis: It's empowering, is what it is.

Monica Stith: Exactly. That's the mindset that I had; to change these residents here. They had a bad self-concept. But they were given an opportunity to improve themselves and their families. I raised my children, the board has helped me and I had to reach back and help. I guess that's the reason I got into the subsidized housing in 1999, to learn more about that.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Monica. And congratulations, it sounds like you have so much enthusiasm for what you're doing and you're doing such a great job of it.

Monica Stith: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Well, we have come to about five minutes past the hour which is where I promised our speakers that we would close down. I'm going to see if you all don't mind, if there's anyone else on the line. James?

Operator: Just as a final reminder, that is star one if you have a question. And we do have a follow-up question from Jonathan Rogers.

Cheryl Dixon: This is Cheryl Dixon. I just wanted to ask if anyone has had experience approaching corporations for their volunteer help. Are there any names for nationwide companies that you can recommend? Or any approaches for company volunteers?

Billy Fettweis: That could be more than an hour. Greater D.C. Cares does work with a lot of corporations. There are many, many, many national corporations that have a corporate philanthropy component.

The trick that we've experienced is to make sure that you can maximize their return on investment. Make sure that they're getting not only the community impact but also the branding that they want or the community visibility, the team building among the employees or the increased employee loyalty for working at a company that cares. Catering whatever you're doing with the company is key, making sure that they know ahead of time that whatever they do with you will not only do good things for the community but will also be good for their bottom line.

Michele Higgs: OK, that sounds like a great question and a great response. Let's take another question.

Gloria Uchegbu: Hi, this is Gloria Uchegbu, a technical assistance coordinator. I have a question with regard to recruiting teenagers specifically. Are there other strategies that you use particularly for that group?

Susan Ellis: This is the difference between strategy and tactics. The principle that we've been talking about is to define the work and think of what people will enjoy doing as a generic principle. So the question is what are you and what do you think? I would recruit one or two teenagers, even if they're your own kids, to talk to about what would make something appealing. Then you design work that you think focuses on what they might be interested. Or start some kind of a youth group and get them to think with you about what they might be able to do. So, on the one hand, it's very tailored to what youth might want but the steps of doing it repeat themselves from the way you would get any particular group to get involved.

Michele Higgs: OK, sounds good.

Gloria Uchegbu: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. We're going to close the call out. I thank you so much. We have had a wealth of information from Susan and Jennifer and Billy and Monica. I thank you so very much for joining us. I'm going to remind you quickly of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative.

If you still have a question after the call concludes, you can go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site and post that question on the Neighborhood Networks online message board where staff or even your peers will see to it that your question gets attention. You can always call the toll-free Neighborhood Network Information Line at 888-312-2743 or find resources and current information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

We want to extend our heartiest thanks to those of you who participated in this year's Neighborhood Networks Week. There's a scrapbook of photos from your events and there's room for more at [NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov](mailto:NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov). Let me repeat that address for you, [NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov](mailto:NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov).

Watch your e-mail for details on our October call and be prepared to check the Web site in October for our list of conference calls for the year.

Thanks so much to our speakers, Susan Ellis, president of Energize Incorporated, Jennifer Bennett from VolunteerMatch, Billy Fettweis of Greater D.C. Cares, and Monica Stith of Rosa Parks Apartments Neighborhood Networks Community Center in Columbus, Ohio.

You've given us a lot of great information today. Thank you so much for joining us today. Take good care, everyone and we'll talk to you next time.

Operator: Thank you; that does conclude today's conference call. Thank you for your participation and have a nice day.

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