INDICATORS OF INCLUSIVE SERVICE AND VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

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Suggested audience for this brief: *Nonprofit Agencies, National Service Programs and Grantees, Civic Engagement Organizations and Programs Committed to Building Inclusive Communities.*

The inclusion of people from all backgrounds and of all abilities is a federal mandate for nationally funded volunteer service programs. However, state and national service organizations are still working to accomplish this goal. Over the past ten years, the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) has worked as a disability inclusion training and technical assistance provider for non-profits and organizations funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In this role, NSIP has taken note of regulations, promising practices, and trends in disability inclusion.

Through a review of existing literature and assessment tools, NSIP developed key indicators and a planning and assessment tool to increase the successful inclusion of people with disabilities. **The tool is called Planning for Inclusion: Indicators of an Inclusive Service and Volunteer Organization. Its major components are summarized in this brief, available at www.serviceandinclusion.org.**

The tool is organized into six categories:

1. members and volunteers
2. leadership and program and site staff
3. policies, procedures, and key documents
4. program monitoring and evaluation
5. community partners
6. administration and finance

Planning for Inclusion uses a self-assessment method to assist service organizations through each of the six categories, with an end goal of more inclusive organizational culture, policies, and practices. In each of the indicator categories, NSIP identifies best practices, as well as federal guidelines and regulations in regards to disability inclusion.

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Organizations can become more inclusive by using a cyclical process for assessment and planning proposed by the inclusion indicators. This approach recommends analyzing current practices; identifying priority areas and key players; creating an action plan; implementing changes; and, after implementation, assessing new practices.

For disability inclusion to become an organizational norm, analysis and change must encompass all facets of an organization. The standards laid out by the inclusion indicators identify a baseline of activity, and can allow organizations to analyze year-over-year as well as long-term and short-term progress and needed changes.

The lessons outlined in this brief have been learned through the collaborations, partnerships, and dedication of experts and programs across the national service field. To highlight the work of many, the brief will focus on the successes of service organizations across the United States in each of the six inclusion indicator categories, while bearing in mind that many of these organizations excel in more than the selected category.

1 MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Attracting, selecting, and supporting both members and volunteers of all abilities and backgrounds requires attention to many areas of program and volunteer management. Indicators in this category address outreach and marketing, recruitment and selection, training and supervision, and support and evaluation.

NEVADA: PREPARATION PLUS FINE-TUNING EQUALS INCLUSION

Fine-tuning enhances even the most prepared service programs. Nevada Conservation Corps (NCC) developed resources and practices to include all potential service volunteers, yet over the course of a few years discovered room for fine-tuning in order to create the best service experiences possible. As with many other service programs, NCC staff are aware of the special support

volunteers need to thrive. *"Our program is a very physically and mentally demanding, and so it does take a special individual to come in and to be successful,"* said former program director, Kevin Dose.

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Recently, NCC had two different service volunteers and volunteer accommodation experiences. One volunteer disclosed his disability during the recruitment process, by letting staff know that due to his disability he might need assistance in a given situation. The second volunteer did not disclose his disability prior to staff needing to take action to assist him.

In both cases, NCC turned to Nevada Volunteers, which directed them to NSIP. By consulting NSIP, NCC discovered that many of the needed accommodations were already in place, or could easily be provided through small adjustments. Dose said of working with NSIP, *"We didn't really have to make any elaborate or drastic changes. We just had to fine-tune what we already had in place."*

Through this collaboration, NCC trained key players to address the expected accommodation needs of the first service member. NCC was also able to redirect expertise and existing practices, such as a medical leave of absence, to create the unexpected accommodation for the second service member. All the while, the organization was able to move both volunteers toward successfully completed service terms.

NCC was able to succeed because of their existing infrastructure, willingness to seek guidance, and ability to adapt to new situations. Staff worked together to provide accommodations for these volunteers by being flexible to changing circumstances, and by creating supportive networks of supervisors. In these ways, NCC seamlessly integrated volunteers of all abilities while adapting and growing to support them.

Members and volunteers indicators in action in Nevada:

▶ Members and volunteers represent various disabilities.
▶ Members and volunteers with disabilities participate fully in all programs and activities alongside people without disabilities.

2 LEADERSHIP AND PROGRAM AND SITE STAFF

Members and volunteers either interact with staff and/or leadership in the roles they play, or are affected by decisions that leadership and/or staff make. All leadership and staff should be aware of and educated around the legal and programmatic requirements and best practices around inclusion. The indicators in this category address those practices and procedures that can ensure all play a role in creating a diverse pool of members, volunteers, and staff.

MISSISSIPPI: A PEER EXCHANGE TO SHARE EXPERTISE

Changing times and budget reductions prompted Volunteer Mississippi to reevaluate how leadership and program and site staff are trained. Without renewed funding for in-person training and technical assistance, the organization realized that dramatic shifts needed to occur to keep, maintain, and grow exemplary leadership and staff.

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In previous years, Volunteer Mississippi had developed a deep network of partnerships and connections with disability organizations across the state through mini-grants. It also had a wealth of staff disability inclusion knowledge through training and technical assistance from NSIP. However, while established programs' leadership and staff were well versed in disability inclusion, budget reductions did not leave room for training new programs.

To remedy the situation, Volunteer Mississippi decided to create a peer exchange among programs for disability inclusion training and technical assistance. Volunteer Mississippi program inclusion specialist Sadelle Sweet said, *"The relationships that we've built over the years have been helpful in order to keep the flow going. The newer programs need more one-on-one and by teaming them up with previous programs...They can talk with each other about 'What did you do, and what were some of the best practices'."*

Volunteer Mississippi is also relying on existing relationships with disability organizations to provide broader training to staff through webinars, which occur at little to no cost. By developing these knowledge exchanges, leadership and program and site staff are still receiving valuable training and technical assistance during a time of transition.

While older programs leadership have bought into disability inclusion, Sweet said, "With the newer programs that are coming in, this is about educating them and helping them to see the value in [disability inclusion], and also to see that it can work for them."

Leadership and staff indicators in action in Mississippi:

▶ All program staff members know where to go to get assistance in identifying and providing appropriate accommodations and resources for providing accommodations.

▶ Leadership and staff participate in awareness training on how to include and meet the needs of volunteers and members with disabilities.

▶ Consultants or other non-staff with disabilities are asked for input on application development, program implementation, accessibility monitoring, and evaluation.

3 POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND KEY DOCUMENTS

Having written policies, procedures, and documents that staff and leadership understand, have access to and are familiar with are important to ensuring people with or without disabilities feel welcome, supported and accommodated. The indicators in this category represent the practices that make this possible.

Illinois: Strategies To Increase Inclusion

In the past five years, a wealth of information around national service inclusion has been accumulating in Illinois. This has happened under the direction of two staff members from Serve Illinois: its director, Brandon Bodor, and its deputy director, Scott McFarland. Lois Barnhart, the inclusion officer on the Illinois State Diversity and Inclusion Team, has also provided guidance.

These champions are careful to ensure the long-term sustainability of inclusion efforts, while working diligently to identifying new avenues for inclusion through their

strategic plan. Taking their recommendations in hand, Serve Illinois is able to provide service programs with key documents on how and why service inclusion matters, procedures and protocols on ways to implement inclusive practices, and information on policies around the inclusion of people with disabilities in national service.

> *"We are evolving and we are becoming more inclusive of people who have more impactful disabilities..."*

Through state and NSIP surveys, training opportunities, and procedures tracking accommodations, Serve Illinois staff have learned that more and more individuals with disabilities are participating in service. "*We are evolving and we are becoming more inclusive of people who have more impactful disabilities,"* Barnhart said. She believes that this change is due to strengthened program recruitment and outreach that is inclusive of people with disabilities. This is a result of maintaining inclusion of people of all abilities in the forefront of the Illinois commission's strategic plan.

In Illinois, disability inclusion documents are easily accessible to programs and partners through the Serve Illinois website, and are distributed during state trainings. The website offers a guide to creating inclusive volunteer programs. It will also soon include an inclusion resource/partner directory, an accessibility toolkit, a disability training module for use by all streams of service, and a document to report no-cost accommodations.

Policies, procedures, and key documents indicators in action in Illinois:

▶ Organization has documented procedures and guidelines for handling requests for reasonable accommodations, including modifications in policies, practices, or procedures.

▶ Reasonable accommodation procedures are widely disseminated and included in outreach materials and member/staff/volunteer orientations.

▶ Organization makes known their equal- opportunity policies and procedures, including equal opportunities, and nondiscriminatory practices.

4 PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Evaluating inclusion and accessibility efforts requires ongoing assessment that involves a diverse group of stakeholders, both those with and without disabilities. The indicators in this category represent practices that, if followed, result in regular feedback that represents all voices.

TEXAS: CREATING INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

Leaders at the OneStar Foundation, the national service state commission in Texas, understand that mandates and checklists do not change organizational culture. Program monitoring and evaluation can show increased inclusion of people with disabilities when programs understand the importance of opportunity and access for people of all abilities.

Suzanne Potts, senior program manager at OneStar, said, *"Those programs that participated in our inclusion team, that came to trainings, and or had a leadership council member that had trainings showed tremendous changes in their numbers of people with disabilities. We were so excited: 'Look, these folks that were engaged with us got it!'"*

OneStar takes a multi-pronged approach to monitoring and evaluating the inclusion of people with disabilities in national service. Early in recruitment, the organization begins by offering training programs on inclusion, as well as hosting a panel of people with disabilities to answer questions and dispel misconceptions. Potts pointed out that establishing a common language among programs, including common definitions for terms such as "disability" and "reasonable accommodation," is crucial to success.

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OneStar then requires all programs to submit service position descriptions for an inclusive language review. Potts said, "Some of the things that came up from our programs were, 'They must be able to drive to the site,' and the response to that was, 'Do they need to drive, or need transportation?'" Service descriptions are then shared with the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, which provides vocational services to over 17,000 Texans.

By the spring and early summer, OneStar begins on boarding, program review, and staff training. In early fall, the commission trains new volunteers on reasonable accommodations and inclusion. During the following spring, OneStar surveys volunteers on service inclusion experiences as a way capturing participation of people with disabilities and accommodations provided.

OneStar uses survey results as well as program reviews to provide programs with year-over-year reports. In 2012, the commission saw a 3% increase in volunteers with disabilities reported. In Texas, most programs that are willing to participate in trainings and utilize resources show an increase in participation of people with disabilities.

Program monitoring and evaluation indicators in action in Texas:

▶ Data is collected anonymously and confidentially regarding accommodations requested, provided, and evaluated.

▶ Organization solicits feedback from members and volunteers, including those with disabilities, in program planning, operation, and evaluation.

▶ Data is collected anonymously regarding number of members who disclose disabilities, and used in planning.

5 COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Creating mutually beneficial relationships with community groups, organizations, and associations that work with or for people with disabilities is key to ensuring that people with disabilities see service and volunteerism as an opportunity to benefit the community and themselves. Indicators in this category represent the activities and practices that are required for true partnerships to exist where both parties benefit from exposing people with disabilities to service and volunteerism.

COLORADO: PARTNERING TO INCLUDE VETERANS

Starting in 2012, Colorado state and national service organizations were approached by NSIP and its partner, Rocky Mountain Human Services, to collaborate on a new project focused on including returning veterans in national service: Operation ABLE Community. After months of planning, the partnering organizations met and developed a database of available national service positions in Colorado.

For partner organization, Serve Colorado, a primary goal of the cross-stream database is to break down the need for a middleman to connect veterans to service opportunities by creating resources and developing relationships between military transition coordinators and service programs. Serve Colorado AmeriCorps VISTA Kimberly O'Donnell took the process a step further by developing a geographic map of opportunities for veterans.

With the basic content developed, the group met with leadership at Fort Carson, located near Colorado Springs, and began growing a knowledge exchange with military transition coordinators. Serve Colorado then began prepping and encouraging service programs on NSIP's Operation ABLE Community in monthly calls, as well as laying the foundation for relationships with transition coordinators through site visits.

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Colorado's partnership to include veterans in national service is still in its infancy. However, the strengthening relationships and widening knowledge base will allow future iterations of the project, and will enable service programs and transition coordinators to become stakeholders as the project grows.

Operation ABLE Community exemplifies the "community partners" indicators by uniting a diverse base of organizations to reach a common, inclusive goal. Operation ABLE Community is broadening transition options for returning veterans in Colorado, as well as providing an avenue for national service programs to strengthen communities by incorporating service-minded volunteers.

In the words of Jeremy Gaskill, deputy executive director of Serve Colorado, *"It's really a win-win…We want more returning vets utilizing national service in a way that benefits the community and allows them to transition into meaningful work."*

Community partners indicators in action in Colorado:

▶ Organization consults with disability groups and associations about ways in which the program can improve its outreach and services to people with disabilities.

▶ Organization develops the capacity with the disability community to embrace service and volunteerism as a valued choice for people with disabilities.

▶ Builds knowledge of and develop relationships with a variety of disability community resources.

6 ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

Organizations that receive funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) are required to adhere to certain regulations and guidance related to people with disabilities, civil rights, and equal opportunity. Indicators in this category represent the administrative and financial practices that ensure compliance with these laws.

WASHINGTON, D.C.: SHARING COSTS AND CREATING SUCCESS

At Serve DC, the mayor's office on volunteerism, disability inclusion takes priority due to administrative action. As national funding sources and guidelines have changed in the past few years, Serve DC has been quick to adjust and to create pathways for their programs to adhere and to succeed.

Serve DC's national service director, Kristen Henry, said of her organization, *"There is this commitment to 'everyone can serve,' and what we are really looking to do is establish strong partnerships and infrastructure through developing tools and resources to really make sure that we are addressing the authentic needs of the community."*

The organization has taken several key steps toward fulfilling national regulations and guidelines while also considering financial resources. Serve DC developed a memorandum of understanding with the DC Office of Disability Rights, to provide expert technical assistance and training on disability inclusion to service programs free of charge.

Serve DC also encourages AmeriCorps state programs to include reasonable accommodation funding as a line item in service program grants. Henry said, "It prompts the applicant as they are developing their budget to have

that as a consideration when they are thinking about other program operating costs that may arise." Along with these measures, Serve DC has a disability inclusion advisory committee, and incorporates disability inclusion in the District of Columbia state service plan.

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Organization leadership leverages resources through partnership and delegation to achieve national mandates. Serve DC is quick to adapt to change, and provides resources and training to service programs as a way of ensuring success. In this way, the organization is able to administratively oversee service program adherence to national disability inclusion requirements, related to civic rights and equal opportunity as well as to proliferate organizational its core values.

Administration and finance indicator in action in DC:

▶ CNCS disability requirements, related to civic rights and equal opportunity are disseminated and reviewed by all staff and leadership.

▶ Programs are encouraged to include line items for reasonable accommodations

Successful inclusive national service experiences are a culmination of planning, training, management, and collaboration. Changing national mandates and funding sources compel national service programs and commissions to reevaluate core values, as well as resource allocations. Many of the organizations highlighted in this brief are able to meet and excel in the inclusion indicators and more importantly successfully engage more people with disabilities in national service because they leverage existing resources and form mutually beneficial partnerships. What may be seen as constraints and barriers forced many of these organizations to seek innovative ideas that bear quantifiable results.

This issue brief shows a small sampling of the groundbreaking work toward inclusive national service occurring across the United States, and only reflects a portion of the work being undertaken at each of the highlighted organizations. To learn more about how your organization can benefit from and expand the capacity to support the inclusion of people with disabilities, contact NSIP . This brief and the Planning for Inclusion: Indicators of an Inclusive Service and Volunteer Organization tool are available on our website. Alternative formats of all documents are available upon request.

The Institute for Community Inclusion provides training, technical assistance, and product dissemination for nonprofit organizations interested in including and supporting people with disabilities within all their activities. For more information, contact us using the information below.

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