

Volunteer Program Assessment at the University of Nebraska at Omaha: A Metropolitan University's Collaboration with Rural and Spanish-Speaking Volunteers

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Abstract

The Volunteer Program Assessment at UNO (VPA-UNO), a faculty-led student group, partners with nonprofit and governmental agencies to provide free assessments and consultations to enhance volunteer engagement, organizational commitment and retention. Three recent initiatives are discussed representing an intentional effort of a metropolitan university to extend love of place to love of state through outreach efforts to rural volunteers and to promote inclusivity to Spanish-speaking volunteers by translating the VPA assessment into Spanish.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a case example of volunteer efforts of students participating in the Volunteer Program Assessment at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (VPA-UNO) to make their community a better place. The initiatives described demonstrate how students and faculty at a metropolitan university can provide much needed service to the community while at the same time enhancing student professional development and civic-mindedness. This narrative will first provide a context for VPA-UNO's efforts, highlighting the important role of UNO and the Omaha community in supporting meaningful collaborations between students with the community. Second, VPA-UNO's process will be described along with client and student outcomes. Next, we will describe VPA-UNO's effort to extend love of place to love of state through outreach efforts to rural volunteers and to promote inclusivity among Spanish-speaking volunteers. Finally, these highlighted VPA-UNO projects will be reviewed, noting key findings and underscoring the reciprocal benefits accrued to both the clients and to VPA-UNO through these collaborations.

Importance of Place

The importance of place cannot be under-emphasized as UNO nurtures a university culture that through policy and action promotes student-centeredness, academic excellence, and community engagement. Specifically, UNO administration at all levels support curricular and co-curricular programming efforts that encourage and support relationships between students and community partners. Furthermore, the establishment of the UNO Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center has reaffirmed UNO's commitment to engagement, highlighting the importance of facilitating meaningful collaboration, by bringing community partners directly onto the UNO campus. The building provides free space for campus and community events, as well as office space for thirty-three community and university partners. VPA-UNO is one of the university partners housed in the Community Engagement Center, benefiting from this collaborative space within a supportive metropolitan university culture.

Community Problem Addressed

A major problem confronting our communities is the struggle of nonprofit organizations to recruit and retain volunteers who are critical to their success and sustainability. Nonprofit organizations have experienced a 25 percent growth rate within the last decade (Urban Institute, 2014), which has positively influenced society by advancing charitable causes, defending human rights, relieving the distressed, and preventing cruelty to vulnerable populations. With the downturn of the economy leading to budget cutbacks and an increase in demand for services (DeVita, 2012), nonprofit organizations depend heavily on volunteers now more than ever.

National trends in volunteering paint a disturbing picture of an increasing gap between the need and the availability of volunteers. In 2012 alone, volunteers contributed 15.2 billion hours of work and saved \$296.2 billion to nonprofits (Blackwood, Roeger, & Pettijohn, 2012), yet only 25 percent of Americans volunteered at least once, the lowest volunteer rate since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting volunteer data in 2002 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Further alarming is the relatively low percentage of young adults volunteering, with those between the ages of twenty and twenty-four being least likely to volunteer (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

At the local level, Omaha, Nebraska is ranked first among the fifty-one largest metropolitan areas for community service (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2013). However, the 35.4 percent of Omaha citizens who volunteered between 2011 and 2013 fell far short of the needs of nonprofit organizations serving those in the community. Thus, despite Omaha's relatively high level of volunteering compared to national norms, volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention remain top priorities.

VPA-UNO's Response to Volunteer Challenges

The primary goal of VPA-UNO is to serve governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations that utilize volunteers by providing a high-quality online assessment of volunteers and consultations to help organizations know how to best enhance volunteer engagement, commitment and retention. VPA-UNO is one of six Volunteer Program Assessment (VPA) chapters in the United States. VPA began in the fall of 2009 at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte by Dr. Steven Rogelberg with the support of his graduate students, Joseph Allen and Daniel Bonilla. In June of 2013, Dr. Joseph Allen joined Dr. Lisa Scherer at UNO, and VPA-UNO was created. Since the start of VPA-UNO in June 2013, VPA-UNO has served over eighty organizations and benefited more than 33,500 volunteers across the United States. Many of these organizations have received VPA-UNO services annually across multiple years, and the diversity of the organizations and the community issues they address is considerable. As a result of this broad spectrum, Scherer (2014) developed a taxonomy of twelve different volunteer contexts to organize the community efforts of VPA-UNO, consisting of the following areas: (a) youth mentoring and development, (b) arts and entertainment, (c) police, fire and EMT support, (d) eldercare, (e) medical, health, and well-being (f) sustainability, (g) global and international services, (h) religion and spirituality, (i) animal welfare, (j) legal and advocacy, (k) literacy and education, and (l) poverty.

The VPA-UNO process is streamlined to minimize the time investment of its nonprofit clients. The volunteer coordinator or executive director invests approximately three hours to perform the following functions: (a) signs a letter of commitment, (b) completes an online screening questionnaire for background information on the organization and its volunteers, (c) emails the web link to the VPA-UNO assessment to volunteers accompanied by explanatory emails provided by VPA-UNO, and (d) attends a face-to-face or technology-mediated consultation with the team based on analyses of the assessment results. The VPA-UNO survey assessment includes quantitative and qualitative feedback from the

volunteers. Further, clients' quantitative feedback is accompanied by information regarding how their results compare with data annually aggregated from the six VPA chapters, thus providing them with a national benchmark. Analysts synthesize this information to serve as the basis for the consultation report and the recommendations. Clients repeat the VPA-UNO process annually to monitor their progress in improving their volunteer experiences and ultimately their engagement, commitment and retention.

Through this process, VPA-UNO's clients have the opportunity to get an inside look at the organization's volunteer program from the perspective of their own volunteers. The results of the survey reveal how their volunteer program compares to other volunteer programs across the nation. National norms have been created for specific non-profit areas, such as animal welfare and volunteer police programs. Variables that are measured include volunteers' satisfaction with communication by the organization, volunteers' engagement levels, what constraints the volunteers face in their roles, and demographic information such as volunteer tenure, employment status, number of hours worked per month, and frequency of volunteering. Non-profit organizations can use the information provided by VPA-UNO to highlight the programs successes and inform business decisions to improve organizational effectiveness and volunteer productivity.

Love of Place = Love of Nebraska

Because VPA-UNO is the only VPA chapter in the state, the program serves non-profit organizations across the state of Nebraska. We recognize that there are many organizations in Nebraska that serve both rural and urban areas, and many non-profit organizations exist in rural areas. Volunteers are necessary in rural communities and a great resource especially to areas that may have less access to resources. Therefore, VPA-UNO has made a commitment to serve rural as well as urban clients in order to provide them with resources to maximize non-profits' impact through their volunteer workforces.

Three VPA-UNO Initiatives to Reach Underserved Populations in Nebraska

Three initiatives were pursued to target rural Nebraska and Spanish-speaking volunteers. Rural Nebraska was the focus of two projects, with the Nebraska Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association and 4-H of Nebraska partnering with VPA-UNO, and both efforts assessing volunteers across the entire state. As no VPA assessment initiatives among VPA-USA chapters had ever explicitly compared results for urban versus rural volunteers, the results of these two projects highlighted commonalities and differences between these two groups. The Spanish-speaking project is ongoing and includes both urban and rural Spanish-speaking populations and included translating the VPA-UNO assessment into Spanish. Results and insights offered to the nonprofit clients as well as lessons learned by the VPA-UNO team will be highlighted for each project to further emphasize the reciprocal benefits of these collaborations.

Background for Rural Initiatives

Rural communities face distinct challenges, including low employment growth and population decline (ERS, USDA, 2014). Nationally, rural employment growth remained stagnant since the 2007 recession; from 2010 to 2014 employment grew by only 1.1 percent in rural America, compared with 5 percent in urban areas. Two-thirds of non-metro counties experienced population loss from 2010 to 2013 due to outmigration, low birth rates, and an aging population. Many young adults leave rural America to attend college and remain in urban areas due to the substantially greater pay rates for college graduates in urban versus rural areas.

Beyond these barriers faced by rural communities, a shortage of volunteers, inconsistent volunteer infrastructure, and high prevalence of informal volunteering (Points of Light Foundation, 2004) is particularly problematic. Rural families experience isolation and poverty issues, such as lack of transportation, affordable and reliable child care, health care, and living wage jobs, which hinder their ability to engage in volunteer activities. Rural communities tend to lack resources, collaboration, and investment in rural volunteer organizations, thereby impeding the capability for these organizations to thrive. Further, the out-migration of young people in particular is straining the number of volunteers available and threaten the economic viability of many rural communities. To elucidate, 80 percent of students in rural Nebraska rated their hometown as an average or above average place for a young person to live, yet barely half picture themselves living in the area in the future, even if career opportunities are available (Nebraska Community Foundation, 2015).

Although urban organizations experience many of the same challenges regarding access and capacity, all indicators suggest that rural organizations tend to experience these hindrances at a greater magnitude.

VPA-UNO Collaboration with the Nebraska Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association

The Nebraska CASA volunteer represented one of our two state-wide clients. CASA volunteers interview foster children and families, review police and child welfare reports, and advise the court on decisions regarding placement all while remaining a stable adult figure in troubled youth's lives. Nationwide, there are nearly 1,000 CASA programs in forty-nine states with more than 76,000 volunteers. The Nebraska CASA Association consists of 656 Nebraskan volunteers advocate for over 1,500 abused and neglected children in the twenty-two local Nebraska CASA programs. Because over 2,000 children in Nebraska still desperately need an advocate, CASA's goal is to retain and recruit volunteers and VPA-UNO has helped by providing improvement feedback directly from volunteers. All twenty-two Nebraska CASA programs, which serve thirty-eight counties, participated in the free VPA-UNO volunteer engagement survey. Analyses were conducted to identify meaningful similarities and differences between rural and urban programs. Specifically, the analyses focused on how the Omaha and Lincoln urban areas compared with the rest of the state. Thus, the urban programs included the Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster county programs and rural programs comprised of the remaining nineteen counties. Using this classification, the urban category included ninety volunteers and the rural group included 104 volunteers. Both urban and rural volunteers were mostly college-educated females. Urban volunteers tended to be younger, more racially diverse, and were more likely to have an advanced degree, whereas rural volunteers were more likely to be retired and to have more years volunteering with CASA.

Results: What Nebraska CASA Learned from VPA-UNO. Based on VPA-UNO assessment data, t-tests were used to compare CASA volunteers with all VPA volunteers in the U.S. and to compare CASA volunteers in urban and rural contexts. All data are presented in Table 1. Compared to national norms, CASA volunteers in both urban and rural contexts were at or above national norms for the following dimensions: satisfaction with paid staff, satisfaction with communication from the organization, and a high perception of voice (e.g., extent to which volunteers perceived they were "heard" when communicating to higher levels of management). In contrast, CASA volunteers in both contexts reported less competence and higher burnout compared to volunteers in other contexts across the U.S.

Although urban and rural CASA volunteers shared many similarities, they differed in some key areas. T-tests confirmed that the ratings for burnout, organizational constraints, and satisfaction with the volunteer coordinator and other volunteers were statistically significantly different between the two groups. Specifically, burnout levels were substantially higher for rural volunteers, meaning that they felt more emotionally drained and frustrated by assignments than urban volunteers. Second, rural volunteers

reported slightly more constraints than urban volunteers. Third, rural volunteers reported even higher satisfaction with their volunteer coordinator than their urban counterparts, whereas urban volunteers were more likely than rural volunteers to report higher satisfaction with paid staff. The open-ended responses confirmed the pattern of results for satisfaction with coordinator and satisfaction with paid staff. , Rural volunteers were more likely to list the director or volunteer coordinator as one of the top three strengths, whereas urban volunteers were more likely to list paid staff more generally as a top strength. Fourth, the most striking difference between the two groups were the ratings of satisfaction with other volunteer colleagues; rural ratings were much lower than urban ratings. However, this result is less surprising when considering that 85 percent of CASA rural volunteers reported their organization hosted social gatherings to promote volunteer interactions compared with only 62 percent of urban volunteers.

Table 1

Strengths and growth areas relative to national norms and differences for urban and rural Nebraska CASA volunteers.

	VPA-USA National Norm	Urban CASA	Rural CASA
CASA Strengths Relative to National Norms			
Perception of Voice	54%	78%	83%
Satisfaction with Paid Staff	79%	93%	92%
Satisfaction with Volunteer Coordinator	86%	87%*	91%*
CASA Growth Areas Relative to National Norms			
Competence	92%	82%	80%
Burnout	3%	5%*	11%*
Differences in Rural Versus Urban CASA Volunteers			
Satisfaction with Other Volunteers	84%	67%*	84%*
Organizational Constraints	6%	1%*	3%*

Note: * indicates a significant difference between urban and rural volunteers at the $p < .05$ level.

Recommendations to CASA Nebraska were based on the observed similarities and differences observed between rural and urban volunteers. Because both urban and rural volunteers noted a critical need for more volunteers, VPA-UNO recommendations focused on marketing efforts targeted to different age groups and volunteer location. Because urban volunteers were more likely to list a need for increased interactions with other volunteers, the urban CASAs were encouraged to provide more opportunities for volunteers to socialize and become better acquainted with one another—adding social time following or

prior to required training and hosting celebratory events was suggested. Due to rural volunteers concerns regarding the perceived lack of communication from court and other agencies (e.g., Department of Health and Human Services, guardian ad litem) to them, it was recommended that the CASA local and state-wide board examine methods for enhancing communication and determine accountability mechanisms to ensure better connections and cooperation between CASA volunteers with child welfare and court employees to better serve the children in need.

Results: What VPA-UNO Learned from CASA Volunteers. In addition to providing the survey results to CASA, the students working on this project learned about the Nebraska CASA Association and better understand the role of CASA volunteers in children's lives. For example, prior to this research the team did not realize that over 2,000 children in Nebraska still needed a volunteer advocate. Although they may receive paid representation from a guardian ad litem, these professionals are often overwhelmed with cases and rely on CASA volunteers who are able to provide a more individualized experience with the child. The dire need for CASA volunteers across the state, in both rural and urban Nebraska was sobering, highlighting the importance of volunteer recruitment and retention efforts. Finally, through this research, the students witnessed the incredible dedication of CASA volunteers to the organization's mission. Results clearly indicated the volunteers identified with the children they were helping and took their role very seriously.

VPA-UNO Collaboration with the 4-H of Nebraska

The second rural VPA-UNO outreach project focused on 4-H of Nebraska. VPA-UNO has supported 4-H of Nebraska, which empowers youth to reach their full potential across ninety-three counties. 4-H programs across the nation have served youth for over 100 years through partnering young people with adult leadership. Their symbol is the four-leaf clover, and the leaves represent four H's: Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. 4-H approaches youth development by teaching practical skills such as first aid, woodworking, fitness, and gardening, as well as life skills such as serving others, critical thinking, and managing change. This vibrant youth mentoring program is offered in all ninety-three counties in Nebraska and is served by 12,000 volunteers. Statewide, they reach more than 140,000 youth each year, with one in three age-eligible youth in Nebraska participating in a program.

Results from urban and rural volunteers were assessed to compare and contrast the samples and assess differences between the two groups. We found that urban volunteers reported significantly higher satisfaction with their contribution to the organization, higher satisfaction with their volunteer colleagues, higher satisfaction nature of their volunteer work, and greater feelings of competence compared to their rural volunteer counterparts. Because these factors drive volunteer engagement, organizational commitment, and ultimately retention, it is critical to consider specific, targeted approaches to volunteer management in rural versus urban volunteer contexts. Possible explanations for these differences in addition to implications for research and practice will be discussed.

In partnership with the Nebraska Extension Office, data from 4-H volunteers from ninety-three counties in Nebraska were collected. Urban volunteers were considered to be any volunteers serving in Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward, or Washington counties, with rural volunteers classified as serving in all other counties. Rural volunteers made up the majority of the sample with four-hundred and three volunteers responding from rural counties and fifty-three volunteers responding from urban counties. Urban volunteers were 83 percent female and 17 percent male, with 77 percent of volunteers between the ages of forty-one and sixty. Similarly, rural volunteers were 82 percent female and 18 percent male, but with a greater proportion of younger volunteers, as only 60 percent of volunteers were between the ages of forty-one and sixty.

Results: What 4-H of Nebraska Learned from VPA-UNO. The VPA-UNO team compared the results for the Nebraska 4-H volunteers with national VPA norms for all volunteers in addition to comparing and contrasting results for urban and rural volunteers. T-tests were used to examine these differences and all results are reported in Table 2. Consistent with national norms, 4-H volunteers in all contexts reported a similar level of constraints, recognition, satisfaction with contribution, and satisfaction with the nature of the work. Differences between national volunteer norms and 4-H volunteers were revealed for satisfaction with paid staff and satisfaction with volunteer colleagues, with 4-H volunteers reporting significantly greater satisfaction than the national volunteer sample. In contrast, responses from 4-H volunteers concerning satisfaction with communication and role clarity were both slightly lower than national norms.

Regarding the comparisons between urban versus rural 4-H volunteers, some key differences emerged despite many similarities. Specifically, urban volunteers reported feelings of greater competence and higher levels of engagement than rural volunteers. However, rural volunteers reported experiencing slightly higher levels of role ambiguity than urban volunteers. Other significant differences included that urban volunteers felt more satisfied with their contribution to the organization, more satisfied with their volunteer colleagues, and more satisfied with the nature of their volunteer work.

To further examine differences in the sample, open-ended responses were evaluated to identify trends. The main strengths reported by volunteers serving in urban areas included positive relationships among volunteers and generally enjoying their volunteer work. The most salient growth areas indicated by volunteers were a desire for more training and a pressing need for more volunteers. Responses from rural volunteers were also examined more closely, with rural volunteers reporting that the greatest strength of the organization was the mission itself. That is, they were drawn to the organization and continued to stay because of its focus and commitment to developing youth. Main growth areas reported by volunteers included that they needed more resources to complete their volunteer jobs, they desired increased communication from the organization, and they, like their urban counterparts, felt a desire for additional training opportunities.

Table 2

Strengths and growth areas relative to national norms and differences for urban versus rural 4-H volunteers in Nebraska

	VPA-USA National Norm	4-H Urban	4-H Rural
Nebraska 4-H Strengths Relative to National Norms			
Satisfaction with Paid Staff	79	83	82
Satisfaction with Other Volunteers	84	93*	87*
Nebraska 4-H Growth Areas Relative to National Norms			
Role Ambiguity	84	82	74
Satisfaction with Communication	80	74	75

Differences in Urban Versus Rural 4-H Volunteers

Perception of Competence	92	94*	83*
Role Ambiguity	84	82	74
Satisfaction with Contribution	93	94*	90*
Satisfaction with Other Volunteers	84	93*	87*
Satisfaction with Nature of Work	95	96*	93*

Note: * indicates a significant difference between urban and rural volunteers at the $p < .05$ level.

These results provide the basis for further assessment to ‘drill down’ and examine not only why rural volunteers reported greater difficulty fulfilling their volunteer roles, but also what can be done to improve the experiences of both urban and rural volunteers in Nebraska. Specific recommendations to assist all volunteers with 4-H of Nebraska included: (a) to help volunteers feel more confident in their roles, it is recommended that greater consistency in training opportunities, both individualized and general, be offered to all volunteers, (b) due to the many diverse and dynamic roles of volunteers serving 4-H, it is recommended that some flexibility in the training structure be kept, as a ‘one-size-fits- all’ approach is not realistic, and (c) to address volunteer communication concerns, it may help to use multiple forms of communication to keep volunteers informed (e.g., e-mail, newsletters, social media).

Results: What VPA-UNO Learned from 4-H Volunteers. Partnering with 4-H of Nebraska provided students with opportunities to learn not only about consulting, but also about similarities and differences in urban and rural volunteers. Some of the specific lessons students learned focused on volunteer needs and motivations. First, volunteers serving 4-H clubs tend to be incredibly skilled and are passionate about sharing their knowledge with youth. They are devoted to developing young people and in spite of constraints, continue to volunteer at a high rate to facilitate learning in their communities. A prevalent issue facing volunteers in 4-H is recruitment. That is, the recruitment of more volunteers to help out is especially needed in urban areas. Although rural volunteers cited that they would welcome more volunteers into 4-H, it was identified as less of a concern. Finally, 4-H volunteers on average find a high degree of meaningfulness in the work they do. Although comprised of women and men, the majority of 4-H volunteers have children participating or who have participated in the organization in the past, and enjoy volunteering in particular because it allows them to spend time with their children.

VPA-UNO Collaboration with Nebraska Spanish-Speaking Volunteers

Translation of the VPA-UNO survey into Spanish was pursued to better serve any nonprofit organization with Spanish-speaking volunteers, regardless of urban or rural location. Of the 62.8 million people who volunteered last year, 15.5 percent of them were Hispanics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Though many among this group are bilingual, many still struggle with English and other prefer to talk, read and write in their native tongue. Thus, to be inclusive and to give voice to this large group of volunteers, VPA-UNO felt it imperative to start providing a Spanish alternative to the English VPA-UNO assessment.

The VPA-UNO Spanish translation team consisted of three undergraduate student analysts, who spoke various dialects of Spanish. Students met twice each week for five weeks, first translating the survey into

Spanish and resolving discrepancies. The survey was then retranslated into English, students meeting again to resolve discrepancies. The translation process was supervised by the faculty advisor and a graduate student assistant director to maintain the integrity of the survey meaning. To further validate the translation process, two Spanish-speaking experts were consulted outside of UNO to provide insight and check the survey for accuracy.

Two nonprofit organizations from rural Nebraska that use Spanish-speaking volunteers to better serve the Spanish-speaking community are the Platte Valley Literacy Association (PVLA) and the Community Center for Hispanics (El Centro Hispano Comunitario), located in Columbus and Schuyler, rural cities that have seen a 10 percent increase in the number of Spanish speakers in their community over the last ten years. The PVLA provides citizenship classes, family and adult literacy classes, Spanish-language classes, and English as a Second Language classes. Their mission is to improve literacy in their community. They utilize Spanish-speaking and bilingual volunteers to work as interpreters, teaching assistants, and care for children. El Centro helps Spanish-speaking immigrants find an affordable path to citizenship by providing services at low costs to obtain the services they need. In order to provide these services, they rely on volunteers who are able to communicate in Spanish. As many volunteer organizations across the country, PVLA and El Centro participated in the VPA-UNO process in order to target their efforts going forward, ensure volunteer satisfaction, and improve volunteer retention.

Results: What VPA-UNO Learned from Spanish-speaking Volunteers and from the Translation Process. During both the survey translation and the ongoing data collection, several lessons emerged, highlighting the need for more targeted volunteer research. First, Spanish-speaking volunteers were more likely to participate in informal volunteering, which includes participating in activities that directly affect their family and friends, such as school or church functions. They are committed to helping their communities, but do not consider their experiences assisting other community members to be ‘volunteer work’. Thus, clarifying the definition of volunteerism was an essential first step in order to properly survey Spanish-speaking volunteers. During translation, three Spanish-speaking undergraduate analysts worked together to translate the survey. Although all three students spoke Spanish, the diversity of Spanish dialects quickly became apparent as students worked to reconcile differences and improve question clarity. Finally, when administering the survey to organizations with large populations of Spanish-speaking volunteers, we discovered that although many volunteers speak Spanish, the number of bilingual volunteers serving these organizations is increasing, and some Spanish-speaking volunteers actually preferred to take the survey in English.

Data collection from Spanish-speaking volunteers based on the VPA-UNO assessment continues, but discussions and interviews with Spanish-speaking volunteers and their leaders have also mirrored trends in the literature. Consistent with VPA-UNO’s qualitative findings, Safrit and Lopez (2001) found that volunteering among Hispanic Americans was driven by multiple factors including the influence of family, friends, community, and personal satisfaction and growth. Other themes emerging from VPA-UNO discussions are the importance of inclusivity and engagement of Spanish-speaking people to promote volunteering and civic engagement. For example, Nesbit and Brudney (2010) found that engagement of young people, particularly Hispanic and African-Americans was associated with increased volunteering, civic and political engagement, and interest in a career in government or nonprofit service. Similarly, a recent study by Bortree and Waters (2014) found that racial and ethnic inclusivity predicted the enhanced quality of volunteer relationships and a greater willingness to engage in future volunteerism.

Respectful dialogues between VPA-UNO and partners with Spanish-speaking volunteers and/or those serving Spanish-speaking clientele are ongoing to better appreciate their perspective. Though this quest is never really a stage one passes through, VPA-UNO’s continued willingness to listen and try to better serve their needs have consistently resulted in positive steps towards greater understanding and collaboration.

Conclusion

VPA-UNO continues to dialogue with community partners in both urban and rural contexts and embraces a mission of respect for diversity and inclusivity. Though the VPA-UNO assessments and consultations with nonprofit and governmental agencies are effective tools for improving volunteer engagement and retention, the team has learned that the most sophisticated technologies and metrics cannot supplant the importance of building relationships based on trust and reciprocity. Moreover, VPA-UNO's goals of helping our community and enhancing deep knowledge cannot be realized without the support of a vibrant metropolitan university such as UNO.

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Victoria Graeve-Cunningham, MA, MS, MBA, is an Industrial-Organizational Psychology doctoral student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha whose research supports organizational effectiveness and employee engagement, satisfaction and retention. Through her philanthropic work and service to VPA-UNO as an Assistant Director, she strives to enhance nonprofit organizations and foster community engagement.

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