

### Introduction

Oregon Volunteers serves as the Oregon State Service Commission for Voluntary Action and Service, a government unit established in accordance with the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Oregon Volunteers approached the Portland State Strategic Planning class after receiving word of funding cuts that reduced their organization by half and left many of their existing programs unsupported. Oregon Volunteers had conducted a strategic planning process earlier this year where they had identified the need to increase “organizational strength and capacity [for] robust resources to achieve its mission.” This goal moved from being their fourth priority to their number one priority. This group worked with Oregon Volunteers to address their new priority; to achieve greater organizational capacity and strength. A strategic planning process was developed in response to this need.

### Organizational Analysis

Oregon Volunteers is part of a system set up to deliver federal services on a national scale to state and local level organizations and must answer to multiple, often competing, forces. One way to look at this complexity is through the lens of organizational behavior theory. Bolman and Deal introduce a four-frame theory of organizations that explains organizational paradigms and instructs organizations towards efficiency and effectiveness.

To understand the organizational theories at work, it is first important to understand why and how the budget cuts that started this process came about. In early February of 2011, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) announced formal approval of their five-year strategic plan. This plan, developed with the Governmental Accountability office, focuses on accountability through performance measurement outcomes and support of evidence-based programs. The strategic plan addresses State Service Commissions as intermediaries saying they

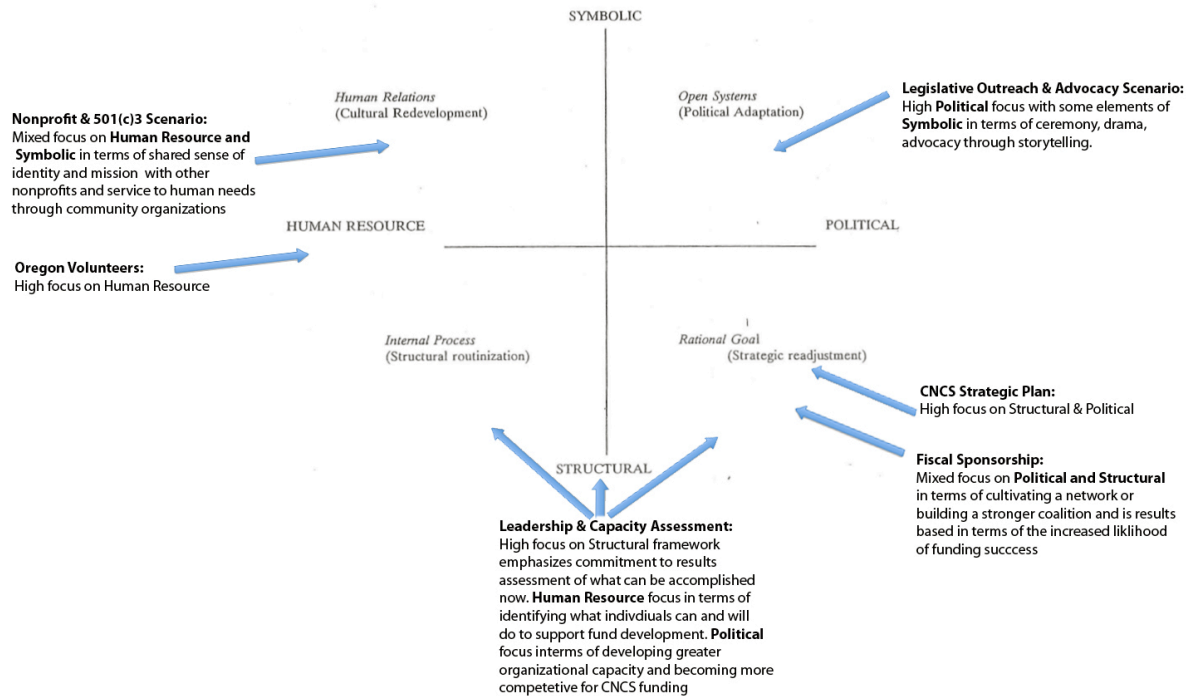
will support “intermediaries with strong skills and track records of success to do the critical work of selecting, validating and growing high-impact nonprofit organizations” (CNCS Strategic Plan, p. 17). The implication being that federal funding now comes with more demanding performance measurement outcomes and greater accountability expectations.

Following this announcement came large budget cuts to state service commissions from CNCS. This was partly due to the 2.3% congressional cuts in funding for the CNCS. The result of this funding was an almost 50% reduction in support to State Service Commissions. “The reduction in State Commission Assistance grants ... will result in nearly a 50 percent federal budget cut to state service commissions.” (Volunteer Tennessee, 2011). Oregon Volunteers was no exception. Shortly after the Commissioners completed their own strategic plan, they received word of a 40% reduction in their budget. The budget cuts resulted in staffing reductions causing a serious capacity shortage in staff time, program support, and communications with stakeholders and community programs and partners. They would need to revamp their own strategic plan to account for this.

In Bolman and Deal’s four-frame analysis, the emphasis on goals and efficiency and accountability and performance measurements in the CNCS strategic planning language is indicative of a strong structural frame paradigm. The strategic plan lays out CNCS intentions to analyze the data in order to support “evidence-based programs.” (Bolman, Deal, 1991). Given the political environment around budgets now and for the past few years, a strong political-frame paradigm drives focus on the bottom line as well. There is unarguable conflict over budgets and competition for scarce resources. In doing a strategic plan, leadership at CNCS can demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness towards achieving their purpose in order to build a network of support to better negotiate for resources (Bolman, Deal, 1991).

Meanwhile, Oregon Volunteers demonstrates the human resource-frame paradigm. Their mission statement, “Oregon Volunteers! promotes and supports AmeriCorps, volunteerism and civic engagement to strengthen Oregon communities” speaks directly to the human resource frame’s focus on human needs, empowerment, and relationships (Bolman, Deal, 1991). The values and guiding principles are further evidence of this: Community, Diversity, Effectiveness, Mutual Benefit, Integrity, and Partnership. Currently, CNCS and Oregon Volunteers sit on opposite corners of the four-frame spectrum, making goals and definitions of success very different. Unfortunately, though the political frame is not a comfortable fit with the stated values of Oregon Volunteers, their dependency on federal funding and the corresponding resource scarcity requires them to move across the spectrum and join their funder’s perspective by building coalitions and cultivating stronger alliances for a greater power-base. The emphasis on performance measurements and evidence-based program support also forces them to adopt a structural framework as well.

Though this forced theoretical framework adjustment may be uncomfortable, a study conducted by Bolman and Deal supports the idea that utilizing multiple theoretical frames, can strengthen organizations and improve effectiveness (Bolman, Deal, p. 529). The strategic scenarios developed for Oregon Volunteers strategic planning process reflect these theoretical framework shifts. The figure below diagrams where each scenario outlined in this strategic plan falls in Bolman and Deals’ four-frame theory.



## Organizational Research

Due to the federal budget cuts, Oregon Volunteers experienced a major staff reduction of 6½ to 2½ employees. Current staff includes Executive Director, Kathleen Joy; AmeriCorps Program Officer, Tim Foley; and a half time Finance Coordinator, Matt Westbrook. Kathleen has been with Oregon Volunteers for 12 years. She has extensive experience in disaster relief and program development through a 25-year career with Red Cross before coming to Oregon Volunteers. However, she is experiencing health issues and has been working half time. Oregon Volunteers is currently functioning with one full-time AmeriCorps staff member and two part-time employees.

The Commission is comprised of 15 individuals appointed by the governor. Six of the Commissioners are Executive Directors or CEOs, one is the Mayor of Fossil, OR, and the rest are employees of public or nonprofit organizations, students, or community members. The Commissioners meet quarterly and have several committees including: the AmeriCorps Program Committee, the Committee on Volunteerism, and the Committee on Civic Engagement. The

commission and staff have an amiable but limited relationship; staff doesn't attend commission meetings or join committees.

Historically, Commissioners have been most involved in programming. In our interview with the Executive Director, commissioner duties were described as: approving policy and choosing AmeriCorps programs with no fiduciary responsibility. The commission has not previously been engaged in fund development or legislative outreach, although their official duties and responsibilities do include the responsibility to "Ensure adequate financial resources for the Commission by pursuing grants, corporate sponsorships, and/or individual gifts," and "Educate legislators and other policy makers on Commission programs, projects and goals" (Commissioner Duties and Responsibilities).

Although AmeriCorps programs represent the majority of Oregon Volunteers' work, Oregon Volunteers partners with many other organizations. Some of the additional partners include the Seniors Serving Oregon Coalition, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Oregon Campus Compact, Northwest Oregon Volunteer Administrator Association, Oregon Department of Education, Portland State University, Education Northwest, Corporate Volunteer Council of Greater Portland, Mid-Valley Volunteer Managers Association, Court Appointed Special Attorneys, and the Corporation for National and Community Service, which includes AmeriCorps and SeniorCorps.

Prior to the retreat for Commission and staff to develop a strategic plan, Oregon Volunteers conducted two stakeholder surveys about the impact, needs, and challenges of volunteerism, as well as perceptions of Oregon Volunteers. The first survey was for 30 Oregonians who work for service agencies throughout the state that Oregon Volunteers supports. The second had responses from 100 Oregonians involved in national service, including Oregon Volunteers commissioners. Both

surveys revealed a need for the service provided by Oregon Volunteers, a need for additional programming not related to what Oregon Volunteers provides, and funding.

### **Critical Issue Identification**

Until the recent budget cuts, the commissioners and the ED had focused more on programming, rationalizing that it was important to have programs and direct services to highlight for funding purposes. Now they have identified funding as one of the most critical issue for Oregon Volunteers. If the organization is to succeed at fulfilling its mission, vision, purpose, and goals, finding the funding to operate is essential. With its 100% dependence on federal funding, Oregon Volunteers is quite vulnerable to budget cuts. A strategic plan to diversify funding sources is critical to future success.

### **Overview of Strategic Planning Process**

The strategic planning process is comprised of three basic steps: Leadership development, scenario planning, and organizational capacity assessment. These steps were identified through organizational research and environmental research. Organizational research began with an interview with the Executive Director of Oregon Volunteers, Kathleen Joy. Kathleen Joy shared organizational information and several relevant documents. Based on the information gained in the interview and from the shared documents, the need for additional information was identified for: foundations, corporate sponsors, other commissions, fiscal sponsors, legislative outreach and 501(c)3 classifications. From the environmental research, critical questions were identified. The critical questions were then broken into three strategic process steps. What follows is the key findings from the environmental research conducted.

### **Environmental Research: State Service Commissions**

From the American Service Commission memorandum, 12 commissions were identified as having a companion 501(c)3 or similar status. Initial information was gathered from the individual commission websites. After gaining preliminary information, all of the commissions were contacted via phone and email. Of the commissions contacted, six commissions were willing to provide detailed information about their commission.

From the information gathered from each commission, several trends emerged. Most commissions with a 501(c)3 companion used them in a programming capacity. For example, Iowa uses their 501(c)3 to manage their mentoring program. Two commissions, West Virginia and Nebraska have 501(c)3s that function in a non-programming capacity that would be relevant to Oregon Volunteers. Nebraska's commission, called Serve Nebraska, created The Nebraska Volunteer Foundation to support the growth of Serve Nebraska. West Virginia uses a three-pronged partnership. The West Virginia Business Volunteer Council (BVC), Volunteer WV, and the commission promote volunteerism across the state. Volunteer WV, the 501(c)3, acts as the fiscal agent or fiscal sponsor.

### **Environmental Research: 501(c)3 Application**

Applying for 501(c)3 status was mentioned as a possible scenario at the original meeting with Oregon Volunteers. It is important that the organization be able to complement Oregon Volunteers efforts and share resources. Our research focused on the 501(c)3 classifications in order to ensure that options laid out for Oregon Volunteers would comply with all state and federal regulations. After looking through the classification and applications process, it was determined that Oregon Volunteers could file a 501(c)3 under one of three possible classifications: charitable organization, educational organization, or supporting organization. In order for Oregon Volunteers

to determine whether they qualify for a supporting organization classification, they would need to complete the Publicly Supported Organization and seek consultant advice.

Filing as a charitable organization would be the easiest classification. However, this classification has some drawbacks. Under this classification, Oregon Volunteers would need to frame their nonprofit activity in terms of supporting other organizations to success through volunteer management support. Any funds obtained would be framed as indirect service helping other nonprofits succeed. Due to the indirect and broad nature of this service, it may be hard to attract funders.

Educational organization classifications are normally applied to schools or universities. However, Oregon Volunteers fits this classification because of their volunteer-manager training program. Also, because this is a direct service that Oregon Volunteers provides, funding may be easier to attract. While Oregon Volunteers does provide an educational service, a consultant or lawyer may be needed to assist in the process.

The supporting organization classification is the hardest to file and would require legal assistance. In order to qualify for this, “the supporting organization must be operated, supervised or controlled by or in connection with supported organization ... and must not be controlled directly or indirectly by one or more disqualified persons” (Oregon Nonprofit Handbook, p.103-4). Oregon Volunteer’s will need to complete the Publicly Supported Organization test to determine whether they for this classification. If Oregon Volunteers is able to qualify for this classification, a supporting organization could meet many of Oregon Volunteers needs. See Appendix E for more details and consult the Oregon Nonprofit Handbook chapter seven on Publicly Supported Organizations.



### **Environmental Research: Foundations**

Information was gathered about foundations and grant makers' funding priorities and processes through the use of the public library online foundation database. Twenty-seven foundations were evaluated and ranked by their relevance and applicability to Oregon Volunteer's organizational focus to identify the strongest potential candidates for funding a partner nonprofit of Oregon Volunteers.

Out of the twenty-seven foundations considered, eleven were identified as funders that were most likely to be interested in an application from Oregon Volunteer's partner nonprofit. The top five most compatible funders were closely examined and evaluated to determine if there is strategic value for Oregon Volunteers to create a partner nonprofit and submit a 501c3 application. The analysis is based on an assessment of the top five candidates: Meyer Memorial Trust, The Oregon Community Foundation, PacifiCorps Foundation, The JeldWen Foundation, and The Standard Charitable Foundation.

Each potential funder presents definite possibilities for an Oregon Volunteers partner nonprofit and there are other organizations not included here that may also be viable candidates. However, there are also challenges and limitations to these funding options that must be taken into consideration. Among the limiting factors that could present funding challenges are: the grant amounts typically awarded, the short-term nature of grants, and the specific limitations on duplicate services and organizations affiliated with governmental agencies. Oregon Volunteers should also consider the time-frame involved in applying for grants and the uncertainty of being awarded a grant in addition to the time to set up a nonprofit and receive notification of 501(c)3 status.

### **Environmental Research: Corporations**

Information about corporate sponsorship was gathered from online sources such as the Foundation Center and its list of resources as well as books like, “Fistful of Dollars: Facts and Fantasy about Corporate Charitable Giving.” An interview with Erin Graham, a former Corporate Partnership Coordinator was also conducted. From these sources three critical elements for a compelling corporate sponsorship proposal were identified: brand awareness, employee benefits, and workforce development. Of these, brand awareness came out as the strongest option for Oregon Volunteers. With its high visibility and website traffic, Oregon Volunteers could make a compelling case for brand awareness and positive public relations by adding a “Corporate Partner” page to its website.

Since corporate sponsorships differ from one business to another and are individually negotiated between business and organization, there is no strict rule that 501(c)3 status is required. However, nonprofit organizations are strongly preferred for corporate sponsorship. Obtaining nonprofit status would greatly improve Oregon Volunteer’s chances of securing corporate sponsorship, but they could still pursue it as a weak option if they do not obtain nonprofit status.

### **Environmental Research: Fiscal Sponsorship**

During the environmental research, fiscal sponsorship was identified as a potential vehicle for fund development. Fiscal sponsorship is a formal arrangement in which an organization with 501(c)3 status is a sponsor to an organization or project without 501(c)3 status. The organization without 501(c)3 status applies for funding through the sponsor 501(c)3 organization. Funding obtained through this partnership is managed and controlled by the 501(c)3. A legal agreement must be negotiated and signed by both organizations.

This is a good option for Oregon Volunteers for several reasons. It could increase their chances of getting funding if they joined forces with another well-known and respected nonprofit. Fiscal sponsorship could also conserve their very limited staff and financial resources, and strengthen another existing nonprofit through partnership. More about fiscal sponsorship can be found in Scenario 3.

### **Environmental Research: Legislative Outreach**

A number of organization in the United States and in Oregon have legislative outreach and advocacy programs, strategies, procedures, educational programs, publications, tools, and resources available to their stakeholders and the public at large. After examining many of these websites, a number of common themes and strategies emerged. The strategies commonly employed are best explained by the Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GFCP) writing about working effectively with policymakers identifies four strategies: constituent power, personal relationships, background knowledge, and “tell your story”.

These strategies are repeated on several different organizations’ websites and can be employed by Oregon Volunteers as well. “Constituent Power” is about understanding that legislators respond best to their own constituents; organizations must engage local community partners and members to influence legislators. “Personal Relationships” is about understanding how building a personal connection can determine whether one is heard. “Background Knowledge” is about credibility; individuals who are reliable and credible are relied on and listened to by legislators. Finally “Telling Your Story” is perhaps one of the most powerful strategies, “it can override party loyalty, ideology, and even constituent opinion” (GFCP, 2012).

These strategies are incorporated into a comprehensive, step-by-step implementation plan presented in a PowerPoint format by Bobbie Frank for the Wyoming Association of Conservancy

Districts. Wyoming Association of Conservancy Districts highlights four critical points to legislative outreach: building relationships, know the legislative process, know your issues, and follow through on the legislative process. This simple format is presented clearly and approachably and can be used as a basis for forming an educational legislative outreach and advocacy program for community partners served by Oregon Volunteers. By emphasizing engagement and empowerment of community members who speak to legislators, Oregon Volunteers can build powerful legislative coalitions and allies across all of Oregon.

Another approach is to look at the specific tools and resources other organizations are providing to their advocates. An excellent example of this is Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon's website, which has included PDFs with talking points with clear, specific goals and action steps, pictures, and stories. They have included the Oregon budget process, an advocacy alert about urgent action and current events, a newsletter, current legislative agenda action items, and educational PDF instructions to contact legislators and to testify before an Oregon state committee. These strategies and tools are elements Oregon Volunteers could adapt and implement for their own legislative outreach plan.

### **Strategic Planning Process**

The first strategy is Leadership Development: Establish Commissioner commitment to financial wellbeing of Oregon Volunteers. Oregon Volunteers needs to analyze commissioner leadership and commitment to the financial wellbeing of the organization. If any subsequent steps are to be successful, Commissioners must first commit to pursuing new funding options. Commissioners must determine how committed they are to this task and how much time and energy they are willing and able to commit. They must determine how involved they are willing to be in directly securing funding for the organization.

Once commissioners establish their level of commitment to fund development, Oregon Volunteers will need to review the environmental research provided in the form of three scenarios: Nonprofit/501(c)3 applications, legislative outreach, and fiscal sponsorship. Finally, Oregon Volunteers will need to conduct an organizational capacity assessment to determine what action steps they currently have to capacity to carry out. See Appendix B for more details about recommended action steps.

### **Scenario Planning**

Scenario planning is a strategic planning method that lays out multiple options to provide a realistic look at what each option entails. Scenario planning was utilized with Oregon Volunteers because there was no clear sense of how to implement their stated goal, to “increase organizational strength and capacity.” Oregon Volunteers needed to “chart a middle ground between under- and overprediction ... [while] expand[ing] the range of possibilities” (Shoemaker, p.27). Each scenario lays out the basic steps to implementation, an estimated timeline, a basic description of options within the scenario, resources required to implement the scenario, and an analysis of the scenario with practical considerations outlines. *For full scenario descriptions, see Appendix A.*

### **Scenario One: Nonprofit & 501(c)3 application**

Oregon Volunteers has considered creating a nonprofit and submitting a 501(c)3 application for some time. This option would allow them to apply for grants, seek corporate sponsorship, and solicit donations. This would also liberate some of their non-AmeriCorps programs from dependency on federal dollars; due to new performance measurements goals, federal money comes with stiff demands. Oregon Volunteers will have to choose what classification of nonprofit they wish to apply for as well. Three nonprofit classification options have been identified; charitable organization, educational organization, and supporting organization. Given their current program

structure, and fund structure, the strongest option is educational organization, followed by charitable organization. In order to determine whether they qualify for supporting organization classification, Oregon Volunteers will need to seek advice from a consultant and complete the Publicly Supported Organization test to ascertain whether they qualify.

The timeline to implement this plan is two years or more. They will need to complete nonprofit paperwork with Oregon, complete the 501(c)3 application, and wait for approval from the IRS, which can take up to a year. They will then need to apply for grants and begin the process of seeking other funding sources, which can take six months to a year as well. Some of these steps can be done concurrently, but this would require a greater time input, a resource they are currently short on. Other resources needed besides staff time include a \$150 application fee, consultant or legal fees, travel expenses, and volunteer time.

This scenario poses a long time-frame with no certain return on investment; the newly formed nonprofit has no guarantee of obtaining grants or sponsorships, and building a case for support to potential donors will take additional time. This process will involve a significant amount of ongoing work that will require considerable volunteer assistance, staff time, commissioner time, and consultant or lawyer assistance. The educational organization classification option has a stronger case for support because it focuses on the direct services and funders who want to support this work will give directly to the nonprofit. Because this option is usually for schools and universities, it may require consultant assistance to set up.

### **Scenario Two: Legislative Outreach**

This option was originally part of a different strategic goal and was included in the scenario planning because successful legislative outreach and advocacy could result in state level funding for Oregon Volunteers. State level funding would allow Oregon Volunteers continue and grow existing

programs with minimal structural change. Over half of all state commissions in the country already receive some form of state level support. Additionally, the state of Oregon stands to lose all AmeriCorps funding if the commission were to disappear.

The environmental research conducted for this scenario indicates that there are a number of common elements and strategies similar organizations utilize that Oregon Volunteers does not yet do and could easily duplicate. The steps to implementation involve identifying key strategies, creating an outreach and advocacy plan, setting clear goals and expectations for participating programs and community partners, obtaining volunteers or interns to assist with implementation, and monitoring and evaluating the plan.

This option is also the easiest to implement as the Commission is already set up to conduct legislative outreach and can leverage existing connections to begin immediately. Although the case for support is compelling, this option also presents the most uncertainty in returns. Legislative outreach and advocacy has the potential to be time consuming without any increase in funding, but more importantly, it can lay groundwork for future state funding if Oregon's financial situation improves.

### **Scenario Three: Fiscal Sponsor**

Fiscal Sponsorship is an arrangement in which an organization with 501(c)3 status is a sponsor to an organization or project without 501(c)3 status. This option was discovered during environmental research as something other state service commissions have already utilized. Though this is the least common avenue for support among commissions, it could present an easier route to nonprofit funding with more realistic resource demands on the part of the commission and staff.

The steps to implement this plan include: identifying potential fiscal sponsors with compatible mission and purpose such as The Northwest Oregon Volunteer Administrators

Association (NOVAA), The Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO), or Hands on Portland.

Commissioners will need to create a preliminary proposal and approach potential sponsors to find out what interest there may be. They will then need to negotiate an agreement with consultant and possibly legal assistance to finalize the agreement and determine what type of sponsorship arrangement would best fit.

This option presents the most benefit for the most manageable amount of effort. The primary challenge is to identify potential partner organizations and negotiate the agreement. This option is not likely to work as a long-term solution and should be approached as a step along the way towards financial sustainability. It is also important to keep in mind that this is not a pass-through option, the fiscal sponsor will have control and authority over: funds obtained with their 501(c)3 status, financial reports, expenditure approval for the project, and staff hiring & firing for the joint project(s). The sponsor may have to assume some liability for the project and both parties will have to consider what, if any, public relations they will have to navigate as Oregon Volunteers and the sponsor will be perceived as associated.

### **Capacity Assessment**

The third and final step in the strategic planning process came out of a growing concern that Oregon Volunteers may not have the overall organizational capacity to take any action to improve their financial situation. Taking the time to do a capacity assessment could assist Oregon Volunteers in identifying critical low capacity areas that need attention and immediate steps to take towards a long-term vision. A study conducted by McKinsey and Venture Philanthropy Partners states that conducting an organizational capacity assessment can enhance the capabilities of a large or small organization at all levels and can maximize social impact through more effective and efficient organizational systems and programs. Using the results of a capacity assessment to align strategic



planning can even turn crisis into opportunity. The study found that organizations that realigned their aspirations (or vision and goals) and strategy with their organization capacity made the most dramatic improvements to their organizational capacity (McKinsey, 2001).

An organizational capacity assessment of Oregon Volunteers is necessary because while the threat of funding shortages facing them could prevent them from taking any effective action, the assessment can help them identify areas of capacity for small short-term action towards long-term vision. An assessment could also increase the overall organizational strength and sustainability and maximize their social impact, which has critical long-term implications for Oregon Volunteers. The CNCS strategic plan has placed a greater emphasis on effective organizations that can maximize their social impact and will ultimately support “high performing organizations, rather than just strong programs” (McKinsey, p. 13). By taking the time to conduct an organizational capacity assessment and realigning aspirations and strategies with organizational capacity, Oregon Volunteers could achieve greater financial stability and maximize their organizational capacity. This in turn may open other opportunities such as CNCS funding increases, new allies and coalitions, and additional funding sources.

### **Conclusion**

This process must start with a clear level of commitment to making this process happen and end with a realistic assessment of what the organization can accomplish in the short term in order to select a strategic plan with the greatest chance of success. The Commissioners’ levels of support determine the amount of fund development work possible and the degree of success achievable. After determining how much energy Commissioners can contribute to the effort, they should review each scenario and determine which option is most realistic. Finally, commissioners and staff alike should complete an organizational capacity assessment to determine what action steps are most

realistic given the current capacity of the organization. Given all these factors, Commissioners should re-examine their goals, strategies, and decision to ensure that each is aligned with organizational capacity and levels of Commissioner support in order to succeed. If capacity allows, the Commission should employ multiple scenarios to achieve maximum success. Once this capacity alignment has been completed and strategies are agreed upon, the Commission and Oregon Volunteers can begin the implementation phase.

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