

SMALL TOWN GOVERNANCE IN CHITTENDEN COUNTY, VERMONT



Produced by:

Leadership Champlain Class of 2003

For

*Leadership Champlain, The Town of Richmond, Vermont and The Lake Champlain
Regional Chamber of Commerce*



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Project Overview

The team was asked to study small town governance in the Chittenden County, Vermont, with an emphasis on the Town of Richmond with respect to:

- ✓ An increase of complexity of issues facing towns as a result of mandates from higher governments, increasing populations, etc.
- ✓ The tasks performed by elected and appointed “volunteers” and paid employees
- ✓ A decrease in the number of volunteers willing to serve in elected or appointed positions

After many meetings and careful consideration, the Team outlined the underlying objective for the project as follows:

- ① ***Evaluate the enlistment and retention of qualified volunteers to serve in small town government using the Town of Richmond as a model.***

The following report is the final product of nine months of independent study, meetings with officials from the Town of Richmond, Village of Essex, Norwich, Colchester, Milton, Underhill, and Williston, a public forum held in Richmond and research regarding the trends in volunteerism.

Respectfully Submitted,

Eric Berliner
Dan Couture
Lauri Fisher
Patrick Gibbons
Robert Hopwood
Ken Mincar
Candice Parker
Mike Sacco
Karen Taylor-Mitchell

Section III: The Volunteerism “Trend”

"Once Volunteering Was for Dreamers"

*Once, volunteering was for dreamers....
We were – and some still are – pioneers in compassionate enterprise. It was the way we got good things
done before there were big budgets or bureaucracies.
Once, volunteering was a legacy....
It was an inheritance from family, friends, or faith, an unself-conscious way of living out basic values.
Volunteering was just the way we were, a private matter of public consequence.
Once, volunteering was a power....
We didn't react to trends, we CAUSED them.
We didn't supplement staff, we CREATED them.
Politicians didn't use us; we used them.
And we made dreams happen.
Once, volunteer was for dreamers....
May it soon be so again.*

*Ivan Scheier
1988*

Americans have been involved in politics and government since before General George Washington was elected the first president of the United States of America. Since that time the citizens' participation in politics, like almost every facet of “community”, has evolved. Small Town U.S.A., like the communities that comprise the Green Mountain State of Vermont, is no exception. Prior to discussing the specific findings of this project, it is imperative that a general overview of volunteerism and civic responsibility, part of the composition of a town's “social capital”¹, is explored and understood. After all, Vermont was the 14th State in the Union and not the first to explore local government. Arguably, Vermont's small town government structure provides a unique and intriguing look into the concentrated matrix of local authority dealing with geographic-specific issues while commingling with state government. A

¹ Term derived from the Social Capital Theory that places value on social networks. “The term calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.” Putnam, 19.

broad- stroke exploration of volunteerism trends in America will provide the foundation for a better understanding of a political and civic volunteerism.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERISM - AMERICA

“In his mid-19th century observations on the American scene, Alexis de Tocqueville saw this country’s network of voluntary organizations not so much as service providers but as “the moral associations” where such values as charity and responsibility to others are taught and where the nation’s crusades take root.”² The moral standard to “help thy neighbor” has been a fundamental part of all Americans stemming from the majorities’ roots in earlier Europe. Mutual dependence and assistance was as inherent as weekly attendance at faith-based worship. Children were taught to assist when needed, contribute when holding excess and lend a hand to those less fortunate. The flourishing moral requirement morphed and overlapped into community and government as the country quickly took shape in the 20th century.

A quick fast forward to 20th Century America with its increased technology and solidarity illustrated the continuing trend from the country’s early years. “The civic-minded World War II generation was, as its own John F. Kennedy proclaimed at his inauguration, picking up the torch of leadership, not only in the nation’s highest office, but in cities and towns across the land.”³ The increased leisure time of American post-World War II started a feverish retreat into civic, religious and community participation. Whether one volunteered to host tea after mass or a book review club one evening, frequented the local hospital to donate to hospice, spent time at the elementary school at reading hour or ran for a local elected political office, it was clear that Americans were

² U.S. Information Agency Bulletin, 10.

³ Putnam, 17.

eager to exert energy above and beyond their family and work lives. “As the 1960’s ended, sociologists Daniel Bell and Virginia Held reported that ‘there is more participation than ever before in America...and more opportunity for the active interested person to express his personal and political concerns.’”⁴ It was clear from 1920 when women were given the inherent right to vote until about 1960, the rate of participation in presidential elections increased 1.6% every four years and later projected to be at 70% by 1976.⁵ The golden age of the 1950’s and 1960’s saw the continued populous outpouring of community volunteerism. “The baby boom meant that America’s population was unusually young, whereas civic involvement generally doesn’t bloom until middle age.”⁶ Political analysts and sociology experts looked forward expectantly to a time when the bottom-heavy American population matured and grew into the civil minded volunteers that the many generations before had established. Unfortunately, such predictions were not premonitions but, as some are quick to point out, flawed analysis and unfortunate optimism.

As the traditional “American families” increased in size and the baby boomers started to age and moved on to form their own communities, financial constraints grew on all aspects of the household. Increased numbers to be fed, clothed and schooled started to take both parental figures out of the household. The workforce and business infrastructure started to solidify and business grew approximately two-fold. Juxtaposed with the growth were the civil rights movement and the renewed objective to preserve the American right of freedom of religion, speech and a democratic government. Voting

⁴ Putnam, 17.

⁵ Putnam, 17.

⁶ Putnam, 18.

and participation in the political process took precedence and, in part, became a substitute for *in personam* community participation.

As technology, including cellular communications and the internet began to take shape, busy citizens seemed to substitute in-person civic involvement to a greater extent. Family structure began to change and a downturn in civic participation appeared to coincide with the alteration of the traditional family unit.⁷ Evidencing of loosening family bonds (divorce rates steadily increasing to the one in two ratio still in place today), increased single-parent families and one-person households (doubled since 1950) could all be illustrations of weaker civic community involvement. Interestingly, The Vermont Business Roundtable found in their “Pulse of Vermont, Quality of Life Study 2000” that of the individuals surveyed, 63% agreed with the statement that “*With all the troubles we are facing today, I need to spend more time looking out for myself and my family.*” Ironically 49% of those who agreed volunteered in the previous year.⁸

Harvard Professor, Robert Putnam, in his book Bowling Alone, intensely studied citizens’ involvement in civic community, and formulated a hypothesis about he reports to be “What Killed Civic Engagement”. Putnam outlines the following factors:

- Generational Change (50-55%)
 - slow, steady and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren
- Electronic Entertainment (25%)
 - television (#1), internet, etc
- Suburbanization (10%)

⁷ Putnam, 277.

⁸ Vermont Business Roundtable, 15. It should be noted that the highest levels of agreement with the statement were those with the lowest level of education and income. In addition, those individuals surveyed who were born in Vermont were also the most likely to feel the need to focus on self and family.

-commuting, sprawl

- American family structure has changed (10%)
 - breakdown of family unit (increased divorce rates)
 - increase in single-parent families
 - fewer children, less marriages
 - pressures of time, money and two-career families

Putnam, through historical analysis, successfully outlines the prevalent patterns of volunteerism and communities. Putnam's work, though well-regarded, is not without controversy. It should be noted, however, that the facts and figures of other sources differ from Putnam and, in fact, illustrate that citizens continue to volunteer and contribute to local governments in mass numbers.

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERISM

People often ask me, what do you get out of volunteering? I tell them it's not what I get but what I become. I'm transformed by it. I've seen this transformation not only in me, but over and over again in the lives of others who volunteer and give back to their communities. Volunteering enriches and strengthens families. What better way to unite your family than to volunteer together for some community activity? I have also learned so much from being involved. I've become more organized and efficient and have learned how to create a team.

-S Susan Kohn, banker, Bank of America

According to many analysts of "social capital", volunteerism is strong and continually growing among American households. Brian O'Connell on behalf of the United States Information Agency reports that:

There is a pervasive view that in earlier times, Americans were far more willing than we are today to help one another and to become involved in causes and public issues. It almost seems a given to some that we are now a less caring society and that we should worry about what's happened to all that neighborliness, public spiritedness

and charity. Actually, the past was not nearly as good as remembered and the present is far better than perceived. ***A far larger proportion and many more parts of our population are involved in community activity today than at any time in our history. Fifty percent of all Americans are now active volunteers. That's a staggering hundred million people, or one out of every two of us over the age of 13.*** And we devote an average of four hours a week to the causes of our choice. The base of participation is also spreading. There are more young people, more men and more senior citizens. We organize to serve every conceivable aspect of the human condition and are willing to stand up and be counted on almost any public issue. We line up to fight zoning changes, approve bond issues, improve garbage collection, expose overpricing, enforce equal rights or protest wars... Obviously, the United States is not the only participatory society in the world. Giving and volunteering occurs in most countries, and nonprofit organizations can be found around the globe. But nowhere else are the numbers, proportions and impact so great.⁹ (Emphasis Added).

The United States Department of Labor released its report "Volunteering in the United States"¹⁰ with the key findings for 2001-2002. The monthly survey reports, based upon approximately 60,000 households, obtain information on employment and unemployment among the nation's civilian non-institutional population age 16 and over.

The particular Volunteer supplement released the following figures:

- 59 million people volunteered from September 2001 to September 2002
- The volunteer rate was higher in women than in men.
- Employed persons were more likely to volunteer than persons who were unemployed or not in the labor force.
- Among persons 25 years of age and over, the volunteer rate of college graduates was four times that of high school dropouts.
- The main organization for which the majority of volunteers worked was either religious or educational/youth-service related.
- Volunteers spent a median of 52 hours volunteering during the year.
- 35 to 54 year olds were the most likely to volunteer.
- Parents with children under age 18 were more likely to volunteer than persons with no children of that age.
- Nearly 30% of all employed persons had volunteered during the year.

⁹ Mr. O'Connell's report believes that proportionality is the key to understanding the contemporary numbers and their relation to the United States Population. (1998).

¹⁰ USDL 02-686, 12/18/02.

Another study entitled “Giving and Volunteering in the United States: Key Findings”¹¹

published the following:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Percentage of Adults who Volunteered:	44
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Total Number of Adult Volunteers:	83.9 million
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Average Weekly hours per volunteer:	3.6 hours
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Annual Hours Volunteered:	15.5 billion hours
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Estimated Hourly Value of Volunteer Time:	\$15.40 per hour
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Total dollar value of Volunteer Time:	\$239.2 billion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Percentage of Adults asked to Volunteer:	50%
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Percentage of Adults who Volunteered when asked:	71%

The Vermont Business Roundtable’s 2000 Quality of Life Study focused on Vermont’s population. The Roundtable reported that: “[s]ince a rich civil life is vital to quality of life in the state as a whole, we asked our respondents the following question: ‘Some people feel that civic life, that is the way that we help each other on our own or through voluntary organizations, has weakened in recent years while others feel as though it remains strong. In your area of Vermont would you say it has weakened or remains strong?’” The report disclosed that “six out of every 10” Vermonters believed that civic life in Vermont remains strong while nearly three out of ten told us that civic life had weakened in recent years. The remaining proportions were uncertain. “Those in the highest income categories and those born outside Vermont were the most skeptical that civic life remains strong.”¹² The Roundtable also discovered that “[t]he areas of life defined by our primary social ties are the ones that people consider to be most important.”¹³ The private priorities in life that Vermonters found “Very Important” are as follows¹⁴:

¹¹ Researched and issued by the Independent Sector (2001).

¹² The Vermont Business Roundtable, 15.

¹³ The Vermont Business Roundtable, 19.

¹⁴ 2000 Survey Figures.

Family Life	95%
Good Friends	88%
Helping Others	84%
A Good Job	78%
Residence	77%
Enough Money	75%
Living in Vermont	73%
Respondent's Town	71%
Recreation and Volunteering	48% ¹⁵
Religious Faith	47%

Interestingly enough, the facts and figures nationwide differ drastically from the Vermont statistics. It is evident that the small town structure of relatively rural Vermont impacts the thoughts and perceptions of those who inhabit the state. It is due to this discrepancy that this report will later transform from the general picture of America as a whole to the analysis of small town governance and its relationship to the volunteer base.... A relationship of which any local community and its political structure rely upon for vitality and continued successes.

¹⁵ Up from 39% in 1990 and 38% in 1995.

THE COST OF VOLUNTEER TIME

There are many reasons for welcoming citizen participation. One is purely economic: Volunteer services stretch available tax dollars to cover even more than would have been possible otherwise. This is a way to keep taxes manageable and still provide seriously needed programs. But the value of volunteering is far greater than financial. When residents participate in providing government services, they develop a sense of ownership, a commitment to community improvement that is both the right and privilege of a taxpayer.

- Susan Ellis on behalf of the United States Information Agency, at 16 (1998).

It is easy to accept volunteers and individuals who aspire to political office without regard for the “cost” associated for their time and sacrifice. The American culture often assigns value to things in predominantly monetary terms. For example, “a rain forest appears to the accounting ledgers only when it has been chopped down into lumber. Caring for children or older parents becomes part of the economy only when a stranger is paid a salary to do what a family member might have done before without cash payment.”¹⁶ The volunteer community has engaged in lengthy debate about the practice of assigned a dollar value to volunteer time. True pioneers in the volunteer and not-for-profit community realize that without an assigning value, the decision-makers who implement policy and fund the programs would not have tangible information on which to rely. This report will address this issue, however, it should be duly noted as imperative to the ongoing recognition and recruitment of any volunteer base.

¹⁶ Ellis, 1.

G. Neil Karn is the foremost pioneer in the development of the best system for placing a true dollar value of volunteer services.¹⁷ The key points of Mr. Karn's method is as follows:

- ⊕ It is possible to find an equivalent salaried job category for every volunteer assignment, even if it means a little creativity and searching.
- ⊕ The cost of paying an employee includes fringe benefits that raise the total value of the "annual employee compensation package" considerably.
- ⊕ We routinely pay salaried staff for hours they do not work, while we credit volunteers for hours they actually put in.
- ⊕ Volunteers should be "credited" with the dollar equivalent of the hourly amount an employee would earn for actual hours worked.

When imputing values to volunteers it is imperative to understand that any monetary figure is an illustration of an extension of the budget beyond anything that could otherwise be affordable.¹⁸

The dollar value of volunteer time, as generalized by the Independent Sector for the United States Department of Labor, is quantified on a yearly basis. The individualized value for each core community is adjusted accordingly based upon this figure. **The dollar value of volunteer time is \$16.05 per hour for 2001.**¹⁹ Assuming that the same number of volunteer hours was served in 2001 as in 2000, the total dollar value of volunteer time for 2001 is estimated at \$248.8 billion.²⁰

¹⁷ Mr. Karn was employed as director of the Virginia Department of Volunteerism at the time he developed the formula.

¹⁸ Ellis, 2.

¹⁹ Independent Sector Study, 1. This number takes in account the average hourly earnings of all production and non-supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls and increasing it by 12% to estimate fringe benefits calculates the value of volunteer time.

²⁰ Based upon 83.9 volunteers at an average of 3.6 hours per week (15.5 billion hours annually).

What does a number value like \$16.05 per hour mean to small towns in Vermont? Local governments are often faced with the decision between outsourcing a project versus taking the time to recruit able-body and willing volunteers to absorb the projects objectives and the potential costs. By utilizing a tool such as a “dollar value”, a town can quickly and readily generate a prospectus for a municipal project and multiply it by the dollar value to ascertain the budgetary constraints of each individual town. This general approach constitutes one of several different areas that require attention of local officials when burdened by a decrease in citizen participation.

HOW DOES A COMMUNITY MEASURE THEIR VOLUNTEER BASE?

The scope of this project focuses on the volunteer base (surplus or lack thereof) in a small town community in the state of Vermont. A supply of volunteers is imperative to the success of every community within the state. The first and most important thing required is a measurement of the current volunteer base. Consider the following places where people routinely volunteer:

- o Public schools and public libraries.
- o Local parks and recreation programs.
- o Community and U.S. military and veterans hospitals.
- o Not-For-Profit Organizations
- o Centers for services to the aging.
- o Facilities housing family and child counseling and protection services.

- o Courts, jails and prisons, probation and parole departments.
- o Homeless shelters.

“In these settings, citizens work as volunteers alongside employees as a team. They perform assignments identified by the staff as appropriate and important. An examination of the interrelationship of government and volunteering in the United States must take into account three distinct categories: Volunteering done on behalf of government by citizen volunteers, by choice and without remuneration.”²¹

“The very word “community” implies mutual aid and cooperative action. Many of the volunteer roles mentioned above contribute substantially to the quality of life in a community. Certainly at the neighborhood level, the integration of local government and its citizens can be quite personal. Government coordination and volunteer action combine to increase public safety, public health and the quality of public education. This even extends to neighborhood clean-up campaigns, anti-litter and “adopt a highway” programs and community gardens. Civic events such as parades, holiday festivities or community concerts may be coordinated by a government employee, but the helping hands (and feet!) of many volunteers are vital.”²²

Volunteerism often achieves two very important results. It helps to create a society that is stable and cohesive; it also adds value to the services that governments provide. One theory is that voluntary action creates “bonds of trusts” and “encourages cooperation”. The same is said for voluntary participation in public affairs can also help create a literate public, which is important for the preservation of democratic

²¹ Susan Ellis on behalf of the United States Information Agency, 15 (1998).

²² Susan Ellis on behalf of the United States Information Agency, 16 (1998).

principles.²³ People who consider themselves powerless as an individual can get things done when they volunteer together and, in addition, brings in people who are excluded from mainstream society. In general, volunteering has been shown to promote good health and emotional well-being.²⁴

Ellis identifies four (4) types of volunteers: Mutual Aid (i.e. unemployment or illness); Philanthropy for service to others (i.e. teaching, mentoring); Campaigning and Advocacy (i.e. for social change or justice) and, the focus of this study, Participation and self-governance (community involvement).²⁵ “Some volunteering-involving organizations suffer from a shortage of people coming forward; others have problems in mobilizing certain sections of the population, such as young people or older people. If, via the local and national media, citizens can be made more aware of the rewards of volunteering, these problems may be eased.”²⁶ By measuring trends in volunteering by way of survey, workshop and public questioning, it can show what kind of people “volunteer, why they volunteer and how they got to hear about the need for voluntary help can provide vital evidence for volunteer-involving organizations seeking to improve their mobilization and support of people who volunteer.”²⁷ It is through the self-assessment of a small town government that the Leadership Champlain Study proposed to highlight the areas of strength and weakness as to ultimately determine the next step in capitalizing of “social capital”.

The remainder of this report examines the core values found in volunteerism as found in Vermont via small town governance, using the Town of Richmond as a model.

²³ Independent Sector and the United Nations Volunteers, 9 (2001).

²⁴ Independent Sector and the United Nations Volunteers, 9 (2001).

²⁵ Independent Sector and the United Nations Volunteers, 12 (2001).

²⁶ Independent Sector and the United Nations Volunteers, 10 (2001).

²⁷ Independent Sector and the United Nations Volunteers, 10 (2001).

This report is the culmination of nine months of research and intimate collaboration with the governing authority in the Town of Richmond and the citizens who comprise one of many small towns found nestled in the Green Mountains of Vermont.

The Town of Richmond

- ☐ **Chittenden County**
- ☐ **Chartered:** October 27, 1794 (Vermont Act of Incorporation)
- ☐ **Area:** 20,957 Acres / 32.75 Square Miles
- ☐ **Coordinates:** 73°00'W 44°24'N
- ☐ **Altitude ASL:** 319 feet
- ☐ **Population:** 4,090 (US Census, 2000)
- ☐ **Population Density:** 124.9 persons per square mile

*Area, Population and Density rankings above refer to Richmond's relative position among Vermont's 255 civic entities (9 cities, 242 towns, 4 gores and grants).

Richmond was created from lands in what had been three contiguous towns (Jericho, Williston and Huntington); a piece of a fourth (Bolton) was added later. How a new town came to be created from some of the best land in four others is buried deep in petitions and laws of the young state. The whole thing has the distinct odor of politics, with the Allens, the Chittendens and other members of the Onion River Company involved. How the name was chosen is not known.

Richmond Center has always been the chief village, though Jonesville, to the south on Route 2, was a close second for a number of years. Ransome Jones was a prominent village merchant in the 1880's.

Fays Corners, on the road to Hinesburg, received a post office in 1890. Truman Fay's widow, Salome, was the one and only postmistress, the office folding two years later for lack of business. The chief business in that area was the Fay family's wool-carding and cloth dying mill, but that was defunct by 1900.²⁸

²⁸ Source: virtualvermont.org

5.1 Town of Richmond Study

Volunteer Methodology

The focus of the volunteer study was the Town of Richmond. Several meetings were held with Town officials to develop a base understanding of Richmond government. These meetings typically involved one or more of the Richmond-based Leadership Champlain team members; Ron Rodjenski, Richmond Town Administrator; and Fran Thomas, a current Selectboard member (former Chair) and author of the original project charter. It was through the course of several of these early meetings that the team narrowed the scope of work from a general thesis on small town government to the more specific emphasis on volunteerism. The team realized that with limited experience, time and resource, a full dissertation on the structure and operation of town government would be impractical. It was evident, however, that without dedicated volunteers, small town governments cannot succeed. Recognizing this, the team established the following goals:

- Study inhibitors to the enlistment of volunteers and make recommendations to increase Richmond's volunteer base
- Evaluate the factors that influence the effectiveness of Town volunteers, including governing structure and process, and make recommendations to Richmond on ways to get more from its volunteers

The Richmond study consisted of the following elements, each described in detail below:

- Town baselining
- Consultation with a professional community advisor
- Written survey of Richmond volunteers
- Phone survey of Richmond non-volunteers
- Volunteer workshop

A written announcement of Leadership Champlain and the Richmond team charter was published in The Times Ink!, Richmond's local newspaper. Additionally, the Richmond-based team members attended a Selectboard meeting during the data-gathering phase of the project to introduce themselves and the team mission.

Initial data gathering was done through basic research to baseline Richmond and its governing structure. Data compiled included general Town statistics and demographics plus information on the existing committee structure, their missions, the Town's volunteer requirements and its current volunteer base. Information was obtained through various town records, the Town Report and discussion with Town officials. The team also utilized the experience of Lynda Bruschette, a professional community advisor, who is currently studying Richmond as a model community. Ms. Bruschette is using Richmond as a basis for her doctoral thesis on social capital and has studied Richmond's history, issues and people in great depth. Her knowledge of Richmond and her experience with communities was an invaluable resource. She was consulted throughout the project through meetings, phone and written communication. She helped shape the direction and approach of the Leadership Champlain study. In return, findings and conclusions were shared with her for consideration in her own research.

To understand the issues affecting volunteers in Richmond, a written letter and survey was administered to current committee and board members. The survey sought to understand the make-up of the existing volunteer base in Richmond and their perspectives regarding the issues affecting the recruitment, retention and effectiveness of volunteers in the community. Of those surveys distributed by e-mail, 64% responded

(14-of-22), indicating a strong interest in the project. Additional surveys were distributed by letter, with a reduced rate of return (2-of-19).

Following the survey, the team hosted a two-hour workshop on volunteerism held at the Richmond Town Offices on April 29, 2003. Everyone who received a survey was invited, and fliers were posted around Richmond inviting walk-ins. In total, the workshop included twenty people – eight Richmond volunteers, eight members of the Leadership Champlain Team, Ron Rodjenski, Lynda Bruschette, Teddy Brown, (the Town videographer) and one walk-in interested in volunteering for the town.²⁹ The workshop was designed as a facilitated discussion to address the core challenges of the project – how to improve volunteer recruitment and their effectiveness in Richmond. The combined results of the written survey and the workshop provided a valuable set of core observations and brainstorming that spawned many of the final recommendations to Richmond.

Non-Volunteer Methodology

The team realized that in compiling data on non-volunteers, it was important to go directly to the source to determine obstacles and potential aversions to involvement. Therefore, the team completed a sample random survey of Richmond residents who have not been involved in town government to further identify routes and obstacles to volunteerism. Richmond resident names were randomly selected from the phone book and names of current and past town volunteers and employees were culled, leaving a pool of 36 names. Thirteen of these completed interviews. Additional data was gleaned

²⁹ In addition, thirty one non-volunteer residents, selected randomly, were informed of the Volunteer workshop by phone or voice mail message with 5-10 days' notice. Of those that stated interest, work scheduling and child care were the greatest obstacles to participation.

from several personal contacts of team members who live in Richmond and have never volunteered with town government.

Respondents were asked about their experience with Richmond town government as well as volunteering in general, their professions, obstacles to getting involved, and interest in becoming involved. Responses were grouped subjectively based on the data and context provided by the interviewee.

5.2: Comparative Towns Study

Chittenden County

In this portion of the project, the team decided to select random municipalities representing the varying local governments in the County of Chittenden so to analyze the varying structures, both statutory and elective, and determine any “structural” differences. The randomness of the selections came after lengthy debate and discussion. Ultimately, the team felt that by selecting their respective communities they could utilize the information to become more involved at their own communities at the end of the Leadership Champlain Project. The towns chosen as comparative models for study were Williston, Milton, Colchester, Village of Essex, and Underhill.

Each member visited the town office of each comparative in Chittenden County to gain knowledge of the governmental structure and its inner workings. The preliminary data gathering phase sought to uncover the various positions available in the town, both elected and appointed, and ascertain the supporting committees that were populated by the volunteer base. The data was gathered through interviews of town officials and varying paper sources including, but not limited to, town reports, websites, e-mailed surveys and other town-issued flyers available from the town offices.

The structure of the matrix was established by the base model Town of Richmond. The team recognized that without a solid template of positions in place in Richmond, a comparative analysis would be futile. The final matrix was completed by investigation the following categories:

- a. Position/Committee/Group
- b. Mission
- c. Objectives
- d. Number of Positions
- e. Volunteer/Appointed/Paid
- f. Length of Term
- g. Percentage of Positions Filled
- h. Commitment Required (as defined by Town)
- i. Commitment Required (Actual)
- j. Reason for Existence (Law, Need, etc.)
- k. Resources Available
- l. Successes/Failures/Noteworthy Projects

After the completion of the matrices, the team put the templates side by side to compare the similarities and differences. (The full sets of matrices are located in Appendix A and the full-text of all analysis/conclusions is intertwined with the other facets of the project as outlined in Section V: Analysis, Observations & Recommendations).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Population and budget constraints were taken into consideration when comparing a large Town with a greater populous and tax base to

those municipalities of smaller in physical/population size. In addition, all internet/web references were not included on the matrices and were independently researched by the Team. In closing, the team recognizes the fact that this type of information is always changing. In fact, the data was gathered both before and after the March Town Meeting days, recognizing the turnover of elected positions. As with any position, volunteer or paid, people choose to leave mid-term and those individuals and the vacancies they may have created are not reflected in this analysis.

The Town of Norwich

The group also found a comparative town on recommendation of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. The Town of Norwich was selected as an alternative comparative due to its recent conversion to a Town Manager structure and its relatively identical size to the subject Town of Richmond. Interviews similar to the ones conducted in Chittenden County were conducted with Norwich. Norwich interviewees included the town manager's assistant and 3 selectboard members, including the chair and the former state legislator who had chaired the restructuring committee. *Note: There were differing opinions whether volunteers are readily obtained to fill all positions, specifically minor town governance ones. Most volunteers are recruited through personal connections of existing members. The inclusive nature of current selectboard leadership was praised by some as the reason for avid participation. Praise for the new governance structure was consistent among all interviewees.*

Section VI: Observations, Analysis and Recommendations

Foreward

First and foremost, any apprehensions the Team had about delving into a “political hotbed” or offering an “outsider opinion” to a close-knit community were immediately erased by the reception offered to the Team by the administration and citizenry of the Town of Richmond. The community is filled with hard-working individuals who were anxious to assist us with the project and are bursting at the seams with energy for anything that would benefit their Town. Pride is rampant. Richmond is a focused community of individuals who strive to find what is best. The Town is aesthetically pleasing and home-town spirit is evident in all of those who graciously assisted us with this report. The Town should be proud of its heritage, its hard-working administration and the expansive latitude they afford to those who enter the “Town of the Round Church”. As a whole, the Team was elated with the assistance and cooperation afforded by all during this study. It should remain in the forefront of anyone reading this report that the scope and timing of the within project should not, in any way, take away from all of the positive attributes the Town of Richmond offers...it is merely a limited look at one issue at one moment in time. It took a seed of inquiry from a Richmond Selectboard member to create this project...a testament in and of itself to the persistence to improve upon and polish and make the Town of Richmond continue to shine.

Observations and Analysis

The various modes of study chosen by the Team created an ample amount of data from which to draw a number of observations. The main dynamic that evolved from the information became the steadfast theory for this study: **Small town government depends on volunteers to function and, subsequently, volunteers become an “added value” to the communities in which they serve.** Although a simple, and almost elementary concept when taken at face value, it was clear to the Team that the most straightforward solutions aren’t always the most evident when any governing body is constantly entrusted with complex problem-solving and matters of delegation. Through the genesis of the groups’ theory, the remainder of this section will illustrate the key observations and recommendations to the Town of Richmond, or any

Vermont community, for streamlining the focal area of volunteerism in a way that accents the current governmental structure and will ultimately improve efficiency and productivity of the community as a whole.

There are two main areas of focus that continually emerged from the mix of volunteer, non-volunteer and comparative town data. The two main branches of civic service involve the Town's (1) recruitment of volunteers and, (2) the consequential effectiveness of the volunteers once in place. *(Note: Compiled Data including the Comparative Town Matrices, Volunteer and Non-Volunteer Surveys, and the Town of Norwich may be found in complete form in the appendix to this report.)*

Recruitment

The first hurdle the team uncovered is the actual recruitment of the volunteer base to assist with the various projects in the Town of Richmond. Ironically, the reasons given by the volunteers interviewed and those offered by the random sampling of non-volunteers were not that different. The team discovered the following:

- † TIME COMMITMENT: Lack of time is both a perceived and real problem in attracting volunteers to civic service
 - Most individuals are extremely busy but conceded the availability of additional time to contribute
 - Many were unclear how much time was required and often covered away from anything perceived as too time consuming
 - Many current volunteers expressed distress with the increased amount of time required once enjoined with the particular committee – word of mouth appeared to lead non-volunteers away from civic service due to the exaggerated time requirements outlined in combination with the sporadic frustrations of the volunteers

- † INSPIRATION: People need to be inspired to donate the time - they need to understand “why does the Town of Richmond need me for this project?”

- ‡ AWARENESS: Community Awareness is essential to the recruitment of strong, capable and energetic volunteers.
- Most respondents conceded that they had little or no involvement with the Town because they weren't educated in the issues and needs of the town, how their contribution would assist the Town of Richmond in attaining a particular goal, what they stand to gain as individuals by participating and their lack of understanding as to how rewarding community involvement is and how it can positively impact a person's private life.
 - The respondents overwhelmingly displayed interest in, for example, "How does the particular task at hand impact me?" "What do I gain by foregoing my leisure time to volunteer for the XYZ committee?"
 - The community lacks any formal recognition protocol for public admonition of the volunteers that make things happen. Although the team agrees that it shouldn't be the number one motivator, recognition of accomplishments due to volunteer effort is important to some people and should be capitalized.

The first and possibly foremost observation of the Team was the number of individuals who didn't really know what government volunteer service entailed. Civic service was often commingled with politics and mandates found and discussed primarily in the media. Perceived and actual duties of each of the committees in existence were often found on opposite ends of the spectrum. It was painfully clear that individuals, though being self-professed as over-allocated in their own scheduling would be willing to contribute time and energy to the Town of Richmond if they were properly educated as to the Who, What, When, Where and, most importantly, the WHY they were needed.

Volunteer Effectiveness

The second key factor found in the data was the concern for committee effectiveness. There were lengthy discussions surrounding this highly subjective topic. The overall perception of the interviewees was that committees require structure to be effective. The structure should be a balance of an assertive, well-organized leader, a

strong mission statement and the individuals willing and able to complete the task at hand. Structure was often questioned by the respondents and, based upon their lack of knowledge as to the four W's (What, When, Where, Why) at the offset, it became increasingly evident that they were concerned with the committee structures. Concerns uncovered by the team included:

- ? "What is the mission of the XYZ committee? "I mean, what do they do?" "Isn't that the same thing that my friend on the XYZ committee is doing?"
 - o Scattered, repetitive or unclear ideas as to the direction of the particular committee, what is the task at hand, and the goal is accomplished.
 - o Structure was also mentioned as a constraint to some of the respondents who enjoy the fervor and freedom of delegation and responsibility. However, those who responded in this manner agreed that it was a trade-off willing to be made in exchange for structure and effectiveness.

- ? Ineffective Meetings
 - o Tabling of ideas until the *next* meeting, lengthy meetings with no agenda or little productivity, lack of accountability, inability to effectively problem-solve.

- ? Wasted Time
 - o A direct descendent of ineffective meetings, this problem was consistently relayed to the Team.
 - o Individuals failed to recognize why they should give up their nights/weekends for the Town when nothing seems to ever get done after the original creation of the committee to handle the task/problem?
 - o "I never heard how that [project] turned out?" "Was anything done?"

- ? Slow Progress
 - o The respondents expressed frustration at the seemingly slow progression of the committees toward the completion of the assigned task. This seemed prevalent in all areas of the government, including the statutory positions and the body of elected officials.

The two main prongs of the study uncovered several areas of concern for both the current volunteers and those who don't volunteer at all or haven't volunteered in a civic manner. The respondents, overall, expressed a desire to participate in government but placed many qualifications upon their cooperation. First and foremost, the pressures of two working spouses or single-parent families pull individuals away from their home and community for the majority of the day. The "spare" time afforded the individuals is not spent on tasks that don't offer personal reward or gain. It is obvious that those two concepts, gain and reward, are subjective and vary from individual to individual.

The data uncovered a desire to participate and its constricting *mask* of unclear direction and commitment required. The peril of a small town government like the Town of Richmond is held in the hands of those who compose the administrative and elected "backbone" of the local municipality. There are people out there who desire to contribute their share to the Town's "social capital"; and now it is up to the powers that be to make it a rewarding, effective and enjoyable experience.

Recommendations

After careful study and in-depth analysis, the Team has compiled a number of recommendations for the Town of Richmond in conjunction with the ongoing recruitment, retention and enhancement of the Town's volunteer and committee structure. The following recommendations are merely organized in the Team's order of *suggested* priority and anticipated effectiveness. It is imperative that the governing body of the Town keep one thing in the forefront when sifting through these recommendations: **Small town government depends on volunteers to function**

and, subsequently, volunteers become an “added value” to the communities in which they serve. A consistent effort by the Town is required to continually identify the pool of citizen resources available and yet untapped, maintain an active recruitment structure and continually educate and refresh the core focus of each committee utilized by the Town. Cooperation, understanding and flexibility are vital to this on-going process.

Recommendation One: Focus on Enhancements to Committee Operations

a. Development of Clear and Concise Mission Statements and Review on a Regular Basis

The Team’s research discovered that when a Town was able to physically hand a potential volunteer a manual entitled “Volunteer Handbook” that outlined the Town’s committees, their mission and even a forecast of the projects lined-up for the next fiscal year, the individual was more apt to respond by contributing their services to the committees that peaked their interests and appealed to their individual talents. Structure and information are requisite to create the foundation for the later recruitment and retention of qualified individuals. The Town needs to be able to answer the question “What does that Committee Do?” in a consistent and clear manner. The creation of a mission statement should be the first priority in creating any new committees empanelled by the Town.

After the creation of the actual mission statement, it should be a yearly item for each committee to review their mission. Changes should be made when the committee and/or its focus have changed throughout the period that is being reviewed. Annual projects and/or short-term/long-term goals should be outlined with anticipated dates of completion. It is imperative that boundaries are established and tasks outlined. This

procedure will not only allow the Town to educate potential recruits, but administratively allow for accountability. If a committee does not accomplish the requisite tasks, the Town may wish to evaluate the need of the particular group and entertain other options for completion of the job at hand.

b. Establish Accountability to the Selectboard

Vermont towns are chartered and structured much like a business. There is a ranking hierarchy that fosters the outer layers of individuals. Accountability appears to be a quality of business that is imperative to efficient and effective completion of tasks. The Town of Richmond is no exception. At the current time, all committees are not required to report back to anyone regarding their progress on a particular assignment. Time passes and productivity is often measured by way of public recognition or admonition. It is the opinion of this Team that the Selectboard require each volunteer committee chairperson to report on a monthly or, at least, bi-annual basis. The committee will have to maintain accountability, efficiency and structure. For example, if a July 4th Committee was established to coordinate the Independence Day events of the Town, it would be necessary for them to report in at the beginning of the fiscal year (let's say August for purposes of this hypothetical) to receive information regarding their budgetary constraints and offer an overview of the tasks they wish to accomplish. By February, in six months time, the committee should be calendared to report back to the Selectboard about their progress. This system will not only assist the committees with their task management, it will allow the Selectboard to review the individual committees, identify possible overlap or the need for additional committees to "divide and conquer" the over-burdened committees.

c. Revisit Committee Missions on a Regular Basis

Once a solid operating structure is in place, the need to calendar a reoccurring review of the mission/focus of an individual committee is imperative. This function serves two purposes: (1) To solidify accountability of a particular committee on an ongoing basis while (2) the Town refreshes its commitment to the relevant projects assigned to the group. The time period required for the review may be dependent on the tasks that the committee was assigned. It may choose to rely upon an annual or bi-annual review for housekeeping purposes. Either approach will provide continuity, accountability and clear outline of the expectations placed upon the group. Secondly, the Town will continue its positive commitment to recognizing the work/projects of the committee. Dialogue between the Team and respondents during the project highlighted a viable concern: “No one really cares about what we are doing.” (The overlap of recognition became prevalent in all aspects of this study.) All in all, a system should be created that allows a period of modification and editing of missions according to the needs of community as well as foster a positive relationship of checks and balances between the governing authority and the volunteers.

d. Document Missions for Members and Community

It became increasingly clear to the Team that if members of the volunteer community (or those that had even a slight contact with the volunteer community) were unsure of what the particular groups were entrusted to accomplish it was inferred that the community as a whole would also feel the same. It is therefore again recommended

that the Town publish a type of “Volunteer Handbook” that outlines the town committees, their mission, and a synopsis of past projects as an illustrative example. It should be a publication readily available for distribution at the Town Office, the Public Library and/or other staples in the community. The influx of new people into the Town should be seen as an un-tapped commodity as well. The underlying lesson learned by the Team was that people are skeptical to volunteer for the unknown – and a hands on publication that would supplement other town publications would allow all people of the community anonymous access to research potential committees that they may have an interest in prior to any contacts with the actual committees themselves. The same handbook could be a requisite in every committee members’ binder for not only reference but education as to the focus of the other groups in the Town. Updated on an annual or bi-annual basis when the mission statements were revisited, the handbook would define the core elements of each group and possibly become the skeleton for the entire volunteer system in the Town.

e. Establish the “Right-Size” Committee/Board for each Task

There were a number of discrepancies in the data between the comparative town and the volunteers/non-volunteers surveyed about committee size. On one hand, some views expressed concern for too many committees or too many committee members on some groups and not enough on others. Juxtaposed with that opinion, the other side voiced an issue with the lack of committees designed to handle one area and/or too few individuals manning the post. The constructive solution and proposition by the Team would be that immediately following the establishment of the core mission statements for each group an initial determination of the number of committees handling a certain

task would need to be outlined. This too would be addressed in the annual review of the mission statements and may have to be tackled on a trial basis until the work load and project focus of each committee emerged during the project year.

f. Establish Leadership Training Protocol for Chairpersons

The most logical conclusion that the Team derived from the analysis was the need for continual training of all the community leaders. The Team discovered that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns offers many different regimes of training. The Vermont Secretary of State also offers supplemental instruction for freshman town officials, zoning departments, planning commissions and an all-encompassing “Tune Up for Towns.” Similar to the business analogy utilized above, many professions are required to submit to annual training and certification in their areas of expertise. It wouldn’t be unreasonable for the Town to invest some time and energy into the continual education of its officials. The Town might also consider a more informal annual retreat of its officials and chairpersons to form and/or strengthen the bond and understanding of the dynamics of each group. Regardless of the mode of election or appointment, the individuals assigned to *lead* each committee would benefit from instruction in general leadership tactics and group dynamics. Like children in a school system, more education leads to a more informed public.

Recommendation Two: Prioritize Actions to Increase Volunteer Base

a. Raise Community Awareness

The data continually revealed that communities as a whole truly do not understand how to get something done in their town, who to turn to or, if interested in volunteering their time, who they need to consult. An informed community is that of an

involved community. Therefore, the team offers the following suggestions for educating the community as a whole:

🔗 ***Add Times Ink! Committee News Column***

- i. Focus on items of public interest
- ii. Explain the work of the committee, its potential on the community as a whole and the rewards of successful completion
- iii. Advertise vacancies and needs of committee
- iv. Have fun with it!! People aren't interested in reading a reiteration of the minutes – write to grab attention and interest!

🔗 ***Utilize the Cable Access Television***

It was clear to the Team that people are tuning into portions of the meetings already running on the cable television channel. By utilizing that television time with the addition of supplemental time for the individual reports of the committee chairpersons to the Selectboard may further educate the public as to the Who and Why of the town committees. In addition, the possibility of a monthly “Richmond Recruiting” segment could advertise any vacancies on committees and what projects were currently in play. Media should be explored for its wide-reaching capabilities to all segments of the population.

🔗 ***Distribution of a Circular to All Richmond Residents***

The Team suggests an annual mailing to all residents of the Town. This marketing strategy could be inserted into a tax billing, a bulk mailing or any other mass media campaign to the community. An inspiring and interesting call to volunteers with clear and concise mission statements and/or ongoing projects may inspire those who don't read the flyers on the wall or in the newspaper. Ironically, including it with a yearly assessment change or tax bill is sure to be opened and read at least once!

Miscellaneous Possibilities

There are several other possibilities for active recruitment. A phone survey of the Town's non-volunteers was successful in gathering data and some individuals even indicated they would volunteer for town government if they knew what was needed. The establishment of an annual tradition of a cold-call telephone campaign may target those individuals who work out of the Richmond community, those who don't have young children in the school system or even the retirees who return for the summer.

The Town currently maintains a website with various Town informational contacts and meeting minutes, etc. An enhancement of the website that allows users to delve into the mission statements, vacancies and other interactive Town media would create an additional prong on the media campaign. Simple mass marketing of the web site address would allow individuals to access the town in the privacy of their own home. If applicable, the Town may take one more step and establish an on-line "Richmond Town News" bulletin. A subscriber based e-letter would feature the committee highlights, who is who, what projects are underway and feature a link to the Town's main website for further information.

b. Inspire People to Donate their Most Important Commodity – Time

It became increasingly clear to the Team that everyone has varying freedom in the amount of time they can allocate to volunteering to their community. Some individuals are generous with their commodity of time and others are willing to commit only a smaller amount of time. The most daunting task for the Town would be to capitalize on the individual sectors and their agreed upon commitment. If a particular project requires more research/writing and less "hands-on" time the citizens who are willing to generate

written documents need to be sought out. Those will time limitations but physical resources to commit to a one-day building project need to be discovered. Inspiring the artists to commit a piece of artwork to a fundraiser for a town project would be easier than asking them to help build a bike path. Inspiring the mother and father of a highly-involved youth baseball player to build a new recreation baseball field would be easier than asking them to commit an evening a week to an administrative meeting about by-laws. Creating an environment that has a core structure of mission statements and the flexibility to adapt to individual time commitments would inspire those who have a fear of over-committing their already precious commodity – time.

c. Just Ask!

An overwhelming number of those surveyed by telephone and interviewed one-on-one replied that they would volunteer for particular projects or committees in the Town if only asked. The Team was continually told that “if anyone had asked me I would have helped.” Juxtaposed with the concept of individual proposition is word of mouth communication by existing volunteers. The most popular response to why current volunteers were recruited is because they were asked by another citizen. Committees should be trained and focused in networking to become comfortable with the concept of getting the next door neighbor to assist in a project. A little interaction with the system is a proven catalyst for further involvement in other aspects of the community. An individual recruited for a booth at a Town Day Fair could easily engage in a conversation with another community official, learn of similar concerns/ideologies and contently return to the following week’s zoning meeting to express interest in a vacant position. Even if a citizen refuses to assist after being asked, the seed of active

participation has been planted for them to take home and consider for future requests. It can never hurt to ask and no one should be able to respond that “I haven’t been asked” again!

d. Recognition

People need to know that any contribution of their time and energy won’t go unnoticed. Many individuals expressed their concern about the lack of cohesiveness with various Town bodies. To circumvent this apprehension with relatively minimal output or cost, the Team suggests the Town explore an award system for Volunteer of the Month/Year to be recognized in the media (including Times Ink!, Annual Town Report, etc.) and/or by more permanent marker/plaque in the Town Office. Town sponsored “Thank-You” events like a year-end barbecue or dinner banquet would not only educate the rest of the citizenry as to the accomplishments and projects of each committee, it would highlight those that went above and beyond the call of duty in the hopes of inspiring others. Recognition by saluting those who gave their time and energy to the mutual benefit of the Town is a small price to pay for the inspiration of a new volunteer.

Recommendation Three: Establish Processes to Maintain Focus and Linkage in the System – Strengthen Management Systems

a. Basic Actions on Committee Operations, Recruitment and Recognition

The sum of the above-referenced recommendations is not complex nor the equation novel. However, it became increasingly clear throughout the Team’s research that the basic principle of creating a foundation and building upward has been overshadowed by the ever-increasingly complicated mandated and technical portions of

town government. In order to create a model by which the Town would rarely run short on human resources to complete tasks, focus, commitment and some resources will need to be committed. First and foremost, the committees in existence need to be placed side-by-side and defined through a completed and concise mission. Once the core structure of each Committee is established an active recruitment plan must be implemented to fill any vacancies or to fill any holes in Town projects not currently covered by the existing committees. Regular reporting requirements are necessary for recognizing the ongoing effort exerted by the committees as well as to cross-pollinate the Selectboard with the other groups. The committees need to be encouraged, inspired and recognized on a regular basis to keep the commitment fresh and strong.

b. Creation of Position Entitled “Volunteer Coordinator”

The Team’s study determined that the tasks required in generating a strong and viable volunteer system needs great attention and intensive caring for an undetermined period of time. This system would be a change in the existing structure and require focus of existing resources that may already be tapped to the maximum. The Team recommends the exploration into the creation of a **Volunteer Coordinator (“VC”)** position on the Town roster. This point person would first be entrusted with gathering and compiling the mission statements generated by the existing committees. The same person would be the liaison between the Selectboard and the volunteer boards/committees until such time those regular reporting intervals are implemented. The VC would be responsible for maintaining a current list of all town volunteers and committee contact information including, but not limited to, committee members, meeting schedule, projects on the committees “radar”, estimated completion dates, etc.

The VC would be the “Chief Recruiter” and manage the networking, advertising and implementation of any acceptable marketing campaign. He or she would be responsible for managing the annual “recognition” events, coordinating and scheduling of training for all town officials and support to the extended Town volunteer network (school projects, Little League, Soccer, etc.) To summarize, the VC position would be responsible in the short term for initial committee oversight in relation to reporting requirements; in the long-term the individual would be responsible for stimulating all of the volunteers currently serving while inspiring the un-tapped resources found in homes all over the Town. The VC would become the point person or “go-to” person for all town boards/committees and therefore allow each sub-group to concentrate on their task-at-hand. Overall, the Volunteer Coordinator position would supplement the administrative employees and bridge the gap between the paid employees, the current board members and the general populous of Richmond.

c. Study Reported Efficiencies Gained by Towns that Implemented the Town Manager Governmental Structure

The Team engaged in research that included comparative Towns that had implemented a Town Manager structure. The Town Manager, similar in concept to the proposed Volunteer Coordinator, was the point person with decision-making authority who was accountable to the Selectboard of the Town. The Towns who structured themselves in such a way to implement the Town Manager reported efficiencies in structure – it allowed the other Boards to focus on their tasks at hand and not the day-to-day operations of the Town as a municipality. The Team learned that a comprehensive study, similar to that performed by the Town of Norwich when

transitioning to their current Town Manager structure, is required and is beyond the resources and time constraints of the Leadership Champlain project. (See Norwich Report in Appendix.)

In Closing...

Through nine months of interviews and data gathering the Leadership Champlain Team Richmond uncovered several areas of concentration for the Town of Richmond to investigate in order to develop a strong and enduring volunteer program. The underscored lesson learned was that people are willing to volunteer. People do volunteer. People need to be inspired to contribute their time above and beyond any *inherent* duty of civic responsibility. The Town of Richmond has a great deal to offer its inhabitants above and beyond a beautiful scenic backdrop. It is loaded with social capital that is merely untapped and is, quite honestly, bursting at the seams.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A team of individuals from the Leadership Champlain Class of 2003 was asked to study small town governance in the Chittenden County, Vermont, with an emphasis on the Town of Richmond with respect to:

- ✓ An increase of complexity of issues facing towns as a result of mandates from higher governments, increasing populations, etc.
- ✓ The tasks performed by elected and appointed “volunteers” and paid employees
- ✓ A decrease in the number of volunteers willing to serve in elected or appointed positions

Project Objective

Evaluate the enlistment and retention of qualified volunteers to serve in small town government using the Town of Richmond as a model.

In General

The measurement of a volunteer base (surplus or lack thereof) in a small town community in the state of Vermont is necessary for the recruitment and retention of the citizens who contribute its sustenance or “social capital”. A supply of volunteers is imperative to the success of every community. Government coordination and volunteer action combine to increase public safety, public health and the quality of public education. The first and most important thing required is a measurement of the current volunteer base. Once identified, analysis can be undertaken and recommendations formed for the continual recruitment and retention of an efficient and productive volunteer network.

The Study

Analysis took the form of individual interviews, current volunteer and non-volunteer surveys, a workshop in the Town of Richmond and the compilation of comparative town data. The Team took the information and applied the findings to historically successful volunteer programs as well as created several novel recommendations for utilization by the Town of Richmond.

The Recommendations

1. Focus on Enhancements to Committee Operations
 - a. Development of Clear and Concise Mission Statements and Review on a Regular Basis
 - b. Establish Accountability to the Selectboard
 - c. Revisit Committee Missions on a Regular Basis
 - d. Document Missions for Members and Community
 - e. Establish the “Right-Size” Committee/Board for each Task
 - f. Establish Leadership Training Protocol for Chairpersons
2. Prioritize Actions to Increase Volunteer Base
 - a. Raise Community Awareness
 - b. Inspire People to Donate their Most Important Commodity – Time
 - c. Just Ask!
 - d. Recognition
3. Establish Processes to Maintain Focus and Linkage in the System – Strengthen Management Systems
 - a. Basic Actions on Committee Operations, Recruitment and Recognition
 - b. Creation of Position Entitled “Volunteer Coordinator”
 - c. Study Reported Efficiencies Gained by Towns that Implemented the Town Manager Governmental Structure

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