



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

A Call to Service: City Leadership for Local Volunteerism
April 22, 2010

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Speakers:
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Dublin, Ohio;
Dr. Judith A.M. Smith, president and CEO, HandsOn Jacksonville, Jacksonville, Fla.; and
Diane S. Lance, special counsel to the mayor, Metropolitan Government of Nashville and
Davidson County, Tenn.

BOSLAND: Hello and welcome to “A Call to Service: City Leadership for Local Volunteerism.” My name is Julie Bosland and I’m the deputy director of the National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, the host for this monthly audioconference series. I want to begin by acknowledging and thanking the HandsOn network, our co-sponsor for today’s audioconference. We’re grateful not only for their support for this call but also for the terrific work that they’re doing in communities all across the country.

It’s my pleasure now to introduce our three speakers who will share their perspectives and experiences promoting service to address local needs and build stronger communities. We’ll start first with Marilee Chinnici-Zuercher, president and CEO of HandsOn Central Ohio and former mayor of Dublin, Ohio from 2004 to 2009. Thanks for being with us, Marilee.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: Thank you.

BOSLAND: We also have with us Dr. Judith A.M. Smith, president and CEO of HandsOn Jacksonville and a board member of the Points of Light Institute and HandsOn Network. Judy, thanks for being with us.

SMITH: My pleasure.

BOSLAND: And finally, we have Diane Lance, special counsel to Mayor Dean in Nashville, Tennessee. Welcome, Diane.

LANCE: Thank you.

BOSLAND: Judy, I was wondering if you could start us off in our conversation today by giving a brief overview of what we mean when we're talking about promoting service and how the HandsOn Network is supporting this work across the country.

SMITH: Thanks, Julie. And first of all, I guess I'd like to say that when we talk about service, we really are talking about the pursuit of altruism, and really a devotion to the welfare of others and the principle of action that follows it, the volunteering, the active pursuit of altruism through our resources, our energy, our time.

A few years ago, a study was done that said that 92 percent of people thought that it was important to help others. So it's really volunteering and service which are kind of words that sometimes can be difficult to get your arms around. Just what does this mean? Does it mean that people are never paid? Well, paid or unpaid, all about the act of altruism. In our business we work with volunteers. But there are also stipended services such as AmeriCorps and the National Service Program, so we like to think that working together we are all part of this act of volunteering.

So let me tell you a little bit about the HandsOn Network if you're not familiar with it. HandsOn Network is the volunteer focus arm of the Points of Light Institute. And the Points of Light Institute is – it convenes the largest volunteering network in our nation. Our action centers in this HandsOn Network are in more than 250 communities across the country and we're also in 11 international locations. The center has reached about 67 percent of the population and they literally facilitate an average of about 24,000 projects, volunteer projects, in a month, any given month. Our centers work directly with nearly 70,000 different non-profit organizations, faith organizations, education and community-based organizations, and they organize volunteer projects, civic education activities and work with community coalitions that are focused on grassroots impact.

Let me tell you a little about their impact because our HandsOn action centers have been on the ground in many of your communities working very hard. Numbers that we have from 2008 alone tell us that the HandsOn volunteers delivered more than 30 million hours in volunteer service, and if you value that, that's about \$650 million to local cities. That accounts for about 1.2 million volunteers annually that come through our network. However, as part of the response to President Obama's call to volunteer, the HandsOn Network has really upped the ante and we now have what we call our "Get HandsOn" action campaign. Through that we hope to mobilize an additional 500,000 volunteers who, in turn, will recruit their friends, their neighbors, their co-workers and family members to engage in two million acts of service over the next three years. These volunteer leaders will plan and manage local service activities that have direct impact on some of your most pressing local issues such as reducing dropout rate in our schools, renewing the planet, and reviving the economy. Our "Get HandsOn" action campaign will not only increase overall civic participation. We really believe that we can create

a real dent in issues that you face everyday by equipping more citizen volunteers. We need your help. Cities are the frontline. We want to work with mayors and with city leaders to define civic solutions that leverage volunteers as sort of a tipping point in providing more service to the community.

BOSLAND: Great. And we have been seeing that more and more cities are getting engaged, paying attention to this issue and really partnering to mobilize volunteers. Marilee, you were a founding member of the Cities of Service initiative which was spearheaded by New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, last September. I'm wondering if you could take a few minutes to describe this initiative and to also share how other cities can get engaged in this effort.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: Thank you. Well, the Cities of Service bipartisan coalition of mayors representing more than 20 million Americans really in this country and the declaration of service that was created for the Cities of Service, which the founding members signed and all mayors coming on to it since that time period have signed, is really a commitment to finding new ways to tap the power of volunteers to address each city's most pressing challenges that Judy just spoke about.

The coalition's intent, of course, is to share these best practices with each other and the strategies that we all developed in our communities to engage more citizens so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, and we can just expand or sort of manage the program that's appropriate for our own community. We were really excited that the Rockefeller Foundation from the beginning became a partner with Cities of Service and they have committed several million dollars to ensure that the initiative has the right kind of infrastructure at local community levels to be able to build the strategies and implement those strategies successfully in the community. Also, right from the beginning, we had the "iParticipate" campaign, which the Entertainment Industry Foundation also was a formal partner of with Cities of Service to advertise and market the importance of citizen engagement by having some of the television and movie stars, of course, encourage people through the public service announcements of getting involved in the community.

So we have seen really a large number of cities have joined on now, recognizing the importance of civic engagement and civic ownership really. I often say to the citizens in my community and when I'm talking at workshops that it isn't about someone else's city. We are the city, and it's our responsibility to really make our communities what we want them to be, and we largely do that through our volunteer engagement with our community.

BOSLAND: Great. And I should note that the mayors of Jacksonville and Nashville were also among these 17 founding members of Cities of Service and that the number of cities participating is now I believe up over a hundred.

Diane, I wanted to turn to you now to talk about in Nashville, as I mentioned, Mayor Dean was one of the founding members of Cities of Service. Why was it important to him to promote and facilitate service within the community? And maybe you could share a little bit about how he's making use of volunteers to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

LANCE: Sure. That sounds great. Let me take back just a little bit – after Mayor Dean joined the Cities of Service initiative founded by Mayor Bloomberg this past fall, and immediately, enthusiastically embraced this initiative. One of the strongest reasons is because it's such a – volunteerism is such a useful tactic to address citywide priority areas that are hard to achieve, the goals that you set in those areas. And the two priority areas that Mayor Dean has that he would like to target the volunteerism on is education and environmental education – so education in our public schools and environmental education. And Mayor Dean agrees that our best available tool when you face the citywide challenge is to use the volunteer efforts of the community because they are bothered by the lack of progress in these target areas as well and often rise to the challenge and participate in the solution.

Like many other cities, education is a great challenge in Nashville. We are in “Restructuring 1” status and that's a great concern not just to the mayor, to our area chamber, to all the citizens across the city, so it's actually – finding volunteers to participate in the area of education is not a challenge. Structuring volunteerism within the school and providing all the necessary training is something that does require some work. Tennessee is a volunteer state; Nashville is its capital, so we definitely have the volunteerism spirit. And we are also fortunate to have one of what I believe one of the strongest HandsOn programs in the country. We are also additionally fortunate that we have another volunteer management agency that focuses particularly on schools. They provide financial partners for schools as well as volunteerism management and that's called the Pencil Foundation. And having these two resources has been extremely helpful in Nashville's efforts to target volunteer efforts within our schools.

Just as a bit of background, under a former superintendent, there was no volunteerism in the schools. The schools – essentially, the school doors shut to volunteers. It was seen as more of a burden than a help and people cannot get into volunteer in the schools unless their child I think attended and they were working in that classroom. And that creates a problem when you're just trying to improve the school and pulling out of Restructuring 1 status.

With Mayor Dean, he took office two years ago, that's changing and has changed. The doors have been reopened and he has – one of the most effective ways he's shown that the doors are reopened by starting a volunteerism campaign within metro government. Often, Mayor Dean's way is to send a message to the community by setting an example with metro employees and utilizing metro employees in a way that says, “Hey, private sector, why don't you all do this too?” And so, what he has done in February of 2010, he signed an executive order that allows metro employees to volunteer in selected high-need public schools and he started off with 10. And in these 10 schools, metro employees are allowed to – are given two hours of paid administrative leave, one hour to volunteer, one hour for travel times there and back, to volunteer in these selected schools.

And they're not just going in and volunteering in a way that, you know, they think might be helpful. It's very targeted. Each school worked with the Pencil Foundation, gave a list of where they would like to see the volunteers' efforts focused, it could be in their math or reading skills for a certain grade and that's where the volunteers are being targeted at this time. We have I think between 71 and 75 metro volunteers volunteering on a weekly basis in the schools, and that's one of them. We've already been hearing about it having really positive outcomes for the children, and we look forward to monitoring some of those outcomes and following them and seeing if we were able to move the needle. This is working in conjunction

with an effort by our area chamber to launch a citywide volunteer program which is also being worked on by the Pencil Foundation and HandsOn Nashville, which is a citywide campaign to promote volunteerism in the school.

So we've also used our metro program as a pilot for this larger volunteerism initiative that we're really excited to launch in the fall. One thing we know, that if we build a great volunteer program in the schools, they will come – so we better make sure it's great. And so, we're really working hard to make sure that we have principals and administrative staff trained on identifying the best areas of volunteerism, getting volunteers to log in their hours, getting volunteers to tell their stories of volunteerism in a way that we can promote these stories to encourage other people to do it. And that's where we are. And so, we, again, we're part of Cities of Service and we're still in the state of looking at all our target areas of education. We're excited at seeing some serious advances being made on the part of our volunteer efforts.

BOSLAND: That's great. Thanks, Diane. And Judy or Marilee, do either of you want to share some of the specific target areas like the education or environmental education that Nashville's focusing on, ways that volunteers are being mobilized to address particular issues or areas of need in your community?

SMITH: Sure. We've got – when our mayor took office several years ago, he initiated what was called “Rally Jacksonville!” which was a literacy initiative. And it is housed under our Jacksonville cities – excuse me, Jacksonville Children's Commission and the program mobilizes corporations, volunteers from corporations and other organizations to adopt a daycare by tutoring the children and by providing other resources for them. We also are working – we're – HandsOn Jacksonville was just this year designated as the lead agency in Northeast Florida for Global Youth Service Day and our city of Jacksonville has jumped on that to help promote it to get more youth involved in the multiple Youth Service Day initiatives that have been created by young people. So that kind of promotion coming from the bully pulpit of the mayor's office is very helpful in helping people to gravitate towards these different needs in the communities.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: In Dublin, Ohio we were fortunate to have – about 10 years ago, we established a volunteer office in the city of Dublin. We happen to hold a number of major events in our community throughout the year and we hold the second largest Irish festival the first weekend in August and we really are dependent on about 2,000 volunteers to have a successful festival so we knew that we needed to focus in on that. This initiative, the Cities of Service, provided us an opportunity really to expand and lift up and really look at more critical issues in the community that volunteer strategies could address. So through focus groups following participation in Cities of Service, we identified three primary areas that our community needed to address through volunteers. And I'll list one of them, which was to create and maintain service that addresses health, wellness in Dublin's natural environment. And the initiatives here in Central Ohio, including Dublin, are largely centered around child obesity. We have a famous, a nationwide children's hospital here who has really taken that on as a major initiative for all of us to look at. And so, we implemented in Dublin a volunteer-led wellness club through our recreation services and we're calling them “WACKY – Wellness Action Club for Kids and Youth.” And they're doing very creative things at, you know, doing bike rides and walks in the

park and also walks through many of our metro areas where they can also do environmental cleanup at the same time and getting the message that through volunteering, it's good and healthy for you to be doing that.

So that's something that regardless of the size the city that you are – Columbus, Ohio, Mayor Michael Coleman, he also does a great health initiative, and they do a lot of walks and all as well.

BOSLAND: Great. And how did you use your role as a local elected official to inspire and encourage residents to volunteer?

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: Yes. Our – I went back to the city council and asked for their support that we could really encourage more of our citizens through our volunteer office. So we agreed that we wanted to lift up and, you know, really engage a lot more volunteers than we already did even though we certainly had a fair number that were involved.

So we created focus groups and called people in. We did individual interviews. I participated in many of those, trying to really get people to talk about why do they want to be engaged, in what ways could they be engaged, and we put out a number of articles in our local newspapers talking about the importance of civic engagement. And we decided that we would also develop a much more robust Web site for the city and the volunteer area and use the social networking media opportunities now that are available. And so, those have all been initiated since the Cities of Service in September.

BOSLAND: Great. And what about in Jacksonville or Nashville, how have you seen or in other communities around the country, how have you seen city officials inspiring and encouraging residents?

SMITH: I wanted to take it back a few years. This is Judy from Jacksonville. I want to talk about our Biloxi affiliate, HandsOn Gulf Coast. After the Katrina hurricane, they were an amazing leader in that area, helping literally to create the East Biloxi Coordination Relief and Reconstruction Center along with local city officials. And this central hub coordinates non-profit agency efforts for East Biloxi residents in need of housing recovery and rebuilding assistance. So HandsOn Gulf Coast was instrumental in helping to create a grid system for the coordination center which organized the recovery efforts so that every neighborhood in East Biloxi had assistance from a government or non-profit agency. This incredible grid system has enabled HandsOn Gulf Coast to gut 722 homes, de-mold 422 homes, fully rebuild 12 homes, restore 37 parks and green spaces and devote over 5,000 volunteer hours in schools and community centers as well. They are still in operation. What is it – five years later and HandsOn Gulf Coast continues to support the agency by supplying dedicated AmeriCorps members to staff the center.

BOSLAND: Sounds like it was a great effort and really also showed the importance of having entities that can coordinate this work and connect those interested volunteers to volunteer opportunities.

SMITH: Absolutely, in the wake of a disaster.

BOSLAND: Exactly.

SMITH: And it doesn't have to just be a hurricane. We are all in the crosshairs of various disasters nationwide.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: Another group that would be really helpful in many communities is your leadership development group. I know that in Dublin we have Leadership Dublin and this is an organization that we partner with, the City of Dublin partners with on a very regular basis to develop and enhance the volunteer programs in our community. And I would encourage other city officials to look at their leadership programs in their communities as well.

BOSLAND: That's great. I think these are important points that there are groups out there that can be very important partners to cities that are doing this kind of work.

I wonder if we could talk a few minutes about – for cities that are embarking on this for the first time, how they can go about ensuring that this is something that receives attention that they have a point person or a lead agency that can coordinate with those outside partners whether it's a HandsOn affiliate or other groups like this? Do you all have any thoughts on how cities structure their service efforts?

LANCE: I do have a thought on that. This is Diane Lance from Nashville. One of the main things I noticed when we started our initiative is we had some media events announcing that we were joining the Cities of Service initiative. That was great; we got a lot of good press. We also launched a Web site about volunteerism and we would feature some of the efforts that the mayor was doing and some of the initiatives and lots of links to our local programs and we have a lot of interest in being added on to it.

The one thing that I would just mention, I think it's always important to point out the things to take pause on. This created an influx of phone calls, large groups looking for done-in-a-day projects especially as summer approached. And these projects can easily, usually be staffed by your local volunteer entities such as the HandsOn affiliate network of some sort. What we noticed was happening is they were not so much interested in – one, they want to feel like part of the initiative. So once you describe that HandsOn is part of that initiative, the second hurdle is they really didn't want to do some of the costs that came with managing such a project. And those types of projects are, I found to be, fairly distracting in the service effort because the service effort, at least Cities of Service, is about directed volunteerism to actually move the needle for significant change on important areas of concern for the city.

And it took a while to be able to, say, turn people away or turn them to other – took back to HandsOn, you know, to the HandsOn affiliate, but it's a necessary for the evil to have to do that. It would be wonderful to be able to provide lots of volunteer projects for interested church groups and communities. But they really take a lot of time and that's not the expertise in the mayor's office. So that was one of the things that I noticed. It's really staying focused on where your targets are and where you're trying to move the needle is one of the most important things. The second is making sure, you know, what the community wants. And I think we come to a part about being homegrown and that's obviously an essential part of the equation.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: That's a really good point, Diane, that you're making. But I think there are flexible volunteer opportunities that a city might have on their calendar for groups to participate in. I know in Dublin we are – because of the environment and we have a lot of green space and streams and rivers and all, we have a large environmental cleanup program and various aspects of that. So we are able to direct groups to these kinds of activities because they are within our strategy, though I completely agree with you that you need to stay focused to whatever your volunteer strategy is and what things you're trying to move the needle on. So it depends on what your focus might be as to whether you can accommodate larger groups. Then you do need to make them aware that they're coming to your program that's already in place and if there is – I think Diane brings up a very good point that I know Judy will speak more on, and that is that volunteerism is not necessarily free, and that there is an infrastructure that is necessary and there are costs related to service projects. And perhaps Judy might address a little bit more of them.

SMITH: Yes. And I didn't want to jump back. Diane, you make a very relevant point, but also understand that there are multiple ways to structure the one-day projects. And very frequently, this is the on ramp for somebody who hasn't yet been involved in service and we need to meet the volunteer where they want to be and take them from that point to where we need them to be.

Many times getting involved in a one-day event at a school exposes them for the first time to the needs in our challenged schools. When people see the need, they start looking for further ways to get involved, and same thing with environmental projects. Sure, a one-day beach cleanup on a Saturday morning doesn't sound like much of a volunteer commitment and it's not. But when you start doing it and you start learning more about the needs of the clean beaches or of the clean river and you start learning more about the environmental causes behind the Saturday morning fun with your friends, you can inspire people to become more involved at a much deeper level and then point them in a direction of other opportunities that would more fully utilize their passion, if you will – their developing passion. It really – all volunteers are different. Every volunteer in the world is different because their needs are different.

Going back to Marilee's comments, there is also this misconception out there that volunteers are free and that managing volunteer efforts is kind of just free. And nothing could be further from the truth. We would never think to just staff our human resources department in a large industry or government organization as an afterthought. But many, many times in an organization, the volunteer management component is done as an afterthought. "Oh, Susie has a little more time on her plate. Just give it to her." There is a whole discipline of learning and knowledge that people need to understand before they try to lead and manage volunteer efforts. You have every complexity of an HR director, plus you don't have the compensation and benefits package that you're offering people. So I would urge anyone who is planning to develop some sort of way to utilize volunteers through a municipality, I would urge you to learn the discipline, to learn the background knowledge that it takes in order to manage a volunteer program.

I will say that there is a really nasty statistic out there and it's exacerbated because of this lack of understanding of volunteer management as a professional area. And that is that

one in three volunteers, and this was a study from – I want to say, Marilee, help me out here – 2007 I believe – the Corporation for National and Community Service made a statement that one in three volunteers vowed never to return because they had such a bad experience. Now that's a horrible statistic.

BOSLAND: I'd like to follow up on that statistic. And let's have some focused discussion on a couple of the things that cities and their partners in the community can pay attention to address that – mainly, how you best connect residents to volunteer opportunities that are a good match for where they are and where their interests are as well as what the city's trying to accomplish; and then, also, how cities can provide the training and support that volunteers need to both prepare them and to kind of help maintain their energy and enthusiasm over time.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: Well, I know in Dublin we have actual sessions with both the not-for-profit sector and the school district and the government people that are engaged in designing volunteer projects or volunteer experiences. They don't necessarily need to be projects, so that we're really talking about how to structure and develop the volunteer experience. You need to have a job description. You need to have exactly what are the skill sets that you're looking for from the people that are going to be involved and the, you know, specific time and day. All of those logistical kinds of things need to be in place so that when the volunteer comes, you're ready for them and their time is not wasted.

Also, we have sessions with the volunteers. We have talked to them about how do they make their decision about where to get involved; how much time do they really have available; and can they be consistent; can they really be a mentor that has to come every week, or do they really need just a once-a-month experience. And then, offer them the connection to the appropriate volunteer experience based on their own personal life. So the structuring is not dissimilar to creating a job, you know, in your business or in your city government. You need to think about the same kinds of things for volunteers as well.

SMITH: Right. And really, you need to not think about volunteering as the job. You need to think about volunteering – you know, there's an adage in our line of work that volunteering is not a job description; it's a pay category. Volunteers can do literally anything that they're qualified to do. And designing volunteer jobs around – you know, you recruit to the job just like you do with any other position. You have to have the right people in the job. You have to have the job fit. And added to this mix is that, well, employees do too, but volunteers even more so want to know that they are making a difference. They are improving somebody's life or they are improving the environment, or they are carrying forward some sort of change that their work is not just for a paycheck. Their work isn't just to feed their families. They are after a cause, not just – and it goes back to an old paradigm of volunteering which was when there were more people who had more time on their hands and were looking for social things to do. And they might come and volunteer for an agency to do some of the low level repetitive tasks that an agency would otherwise pay minimum wage to do. And the primary example is stuffing envelopes. Please don't ever ask your volunteers to stuff envelopes. It is not a meaningless – or excuse me – it is not a meaningful way to do work unless they are just dedicated to the agency and they want to help in even those low level repetitive type ways that you would typically pay

someone minimum wage to do. Structure – structure your positions to reflect today’s volunteers. Today’s volunteers are in the workplace. They’re busy; they’re skilled; and they want to make a difference.

BOSLAND: I want to go now to a question that we received from a participant on this call that gets a little bit at the point Diane made earlier about supporting homegrown volunteerism or using volunteers from the community to solve the problems that they identified in the community.

The question from this participant is what mechanisms or elements are in place through Cities of Service or other initiatives that begin to chip away at some of the root causes that requires such strong service programs, for example, economic empowerment efforts or education equity efforts. Do any of the three of you have thoughts on how service – and this is some of what you were talking about having a mission or the importance of the work that volunteers are doing? Thoughts or reactions?

LANCE: This is Diane in Nashville. You know, the thing that I would tell you about that, and I know I can’t answer the question in full, but I always go back to when you have this – with the Cities of Service initiative, it is coming out of a mayor’s office and it’s what the mayor is prioritizing. And basically, as far as the larger underlying issues, it is the city through the mayor saying we own this problem and this is our problem. And there’s something different with that coming from the mayor’s office and having it be through the government that this is our problem, we own it, it is up to us to do it. And people keep using the phrase “the bully pulpit” which I think very, very accurate – although it still has the word bully in it – but it’s just wrapping your arms around the promise, embracing it as your problem as an entire city. It’s pointing the finger at it and saying, “What are we going to do about it?” And the root causes of some of these inequities and all of that are all being exposed by everyone saying, “We are looking at this problem.” And just by bringing those inequities and those challenges to the surface, it’s – I personally feel as having worked really hard on the Cities of Service work – is that by doing that, it changes some of the fundamental issues that cause the problems to begin with.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: I think, to expand on what Diane’s saying too is if we look at it in a different context as well, one of the critical issues for many communities, and certainly it is true in Dublin and Central Ohio in general, is the sort of flight of young people. We’re calling it a brain drain, you know. We happen to be centered in a city with 11 universities in the general vicinity here, and so, we have the second largest and sometimes first largest university with the Ohio State University. And we want to maintain these young people and their brains in our community. And one of the things that we know about retention for economic development purposes is really to engage young people in the community and make them part of the community. And so, this is a way that we can also do that is to have programs that are of interest to them, to volunteer where they really get to know their communities extremely well that they feel that they are making a difference in the community. And so, they begin to see the positives of saying and ultimately raising a family in the community and, so it helps, from a city perspective, it also helps in your economic development initiatives and challenges that you have.

SMITH: You know, to go back to what Diane said too – the quote from the Hopi elders: “We’re the ones we have been waiting for.” When we all step up and take leadership, and when city governments and when the mayor stands up and owns the problem, then the next thing is to bring everyone to the table who is affected by the problem. And that entails deep collaboration, deep respect for each other and utilizing, as you said earlier, Julie, the grassroots movement. There are a lot of leaders at the grassroots level. There are a lot of leaders who are within the areas that where the problems are arising. They want to do something about it just as much as people on the outside looking in want to do something about it. It’s a matter of deeply respecting each other, deeply getting to know each other and rallying around the cause together, not just giving lip service to “everybody’s got to work together; everybody’s got to volunteer;” not just the call to action but deeply wanting to work together, deeply wanting to unite and respect all of the sectors working together including a grassroots sector working with the non-profit sector, working with the government sector, working with the business sector; everybody owning the problem and not pointing the finger at over there is the problem. We’re the ones we’ve been waiting for.

BOSLAND: That’s a great way of thinking about it. We have one more question come in by email while we were talking. And this is a fairly broad question from Mobile, Alabama. Is there a model available for doing this kind of work or where would you send people to learn from the experiences that others or to get guidance in developing a local initiative?

LANCE: Is that question coming out of a mayor’s office or?

BOSLAND: I’m not sure.

LANCE: Ok.

SMITH: There’s a Cities of Service Web site that they can go to and get some best practice information. And the HandsOn Network Web site also has information as well as any of the HandsOn organizations throughout the country.

LANCE: And the National Corporation for Community Service has just been an invaluable resource for us.

SMITH: Correct. There’s a lot of information on the Web. There’s a lot of information at each of those Web sites and that’s just the start. There’s so much information.

BOSLAND: I’d like to use this as an opportunity just to mention to callers that there was a resource document as well that went out with the dial-in information that we will update with some of the suggestions from this call and re-circulate to participants that includes both the Web sites that were mentioned here for Cities of Service and HandsOn Network as well as a number of city examples of programs or ways that they’ve addressed the different elements of the discussion today.

I think we are at a point in time where, operator, we could open up the lines for questions.

OPERATOR: Thank you. At this time I would like to inform everyone, in order to ask a question, please press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. We'll pause for just a moment to compile the Q&A roster.

BOSLAND: And maybe while we're pausing, I'll ask one more email question quickly – how can volunteers be integrated into offices or programs with unionized employees? Any thoughts on that?

SMITH: No, I think that Marilee has a really good example. But that's a very important issue because in unionized offices, there has to be an agreement with the union because there is a threat of a takeover of jobs.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: I think that, of course, the number one thing is that you have to work with the unions and they need to be part of the development of the program. An example I would like to just lift up in Westerville, Ohio which is a suburb of Central Ohio here. They created what they call the Westerville Citizen Police Academy Alumni Association. They're actually now their own nonprofit, but originally, when they started out, the police were very leery about them coming into their shop and what would be the volunteer role really. And they started out pretty slow. You know, they said, "Well, when you need extra people to answer your phones, we could be there and trained to do that." And what the police ultimately found, of course, was that the citizens were doing the jobs and that they were being taken away from the street and the true police jobs that they wanted to do. And so, they wanted more of these volunteers to take on some of the administrative tasks that were appropriate for them to take on and have them then do the more policing tasks that were necessary. Now they run an extremely large number of programs in partnership with the police doing bike rodeos and finger printing activities and memorial activities, etc. But it was slow and deliberate that the police chief really brought the volunteers in the community and the police union together to form a program that they could go develop in partnership. I don't think it's impossible to do.

BOSLAND: That's a great example. Ok, I think we're ready for our first question. Operator, can we have somebody queued up?

OPERATOR: Your first question comes from the line of Dana Foster with the city of Brighton.

FOSTER: Yes. Good afternoon. I appreciate your time and this conference. Quick question I have goes to liability or related liability exposure for – you know, we're with the city government here. If we want to use volunteers or utilize volunteers for maintenance activity or clean up activity, what would be your suggestion on how to handle or address liability difficulties, you know, relative to safety and such?

SMITH: There are probably different liabilities in each state. But I would check on getting the volunteer liability insurance policy with your insurer that insures your city officials. The state of Florida I'm sure is different than many. We have a number of volunteer protections in place. General liability insurance is not terribly expensive. You can also have people sign waivers.

FOSTER: Ok. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Jamie Verbrugge with the city of Brooklyn Park.

VERBRUGGE: As far as the city of Dublin, Ohio, curious to know how many total volunteers contribute to that 30,000 hours to the city. And then, for the Office of Volunteer Service, how many employees do you have working with the volunteers?

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: The office is staffed by two full-time people. One is the volunteer administrator-manager of the program, and the other is the support administrative staff person. They obviously recruit volunteers to help them do their office work. But in terms of our dedication of staff, it's two full-time people. I want to say that we had about 3,800 volunteers that made up those service hours. I could be wrong about that number though.

VERBRUGGE: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. Your next question comes from the line of Elizabeth Taylor with the city of Hartsville.

TAYLOR: Good afternoon. Thank you. It's a wonderful discussion. I have a question. How do you differ the work done by volunteers in the projects compared to those folks already serving on standing committees like design review boards, planning commissions and things like that?

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: You know – this is Marilee in Dublin, Ohio and we have boards and commissions, and we are very excited about the number of people. In fact, I think what the Cities of Service articles have done for us – we've had, recently we did more interviews for boards and commissions openings and we had, you know, lots more people even that applied than we had availability. But we do encourage all of the people that applied for boards and commissions to work with our volunteer administrator and sign up for our community volunteer opportunities. I think that the distinction is really one of – boards and commissions are very defined and have specific roles that they play for the city, and volunteer opportunities are much broader-based. They may be specific in terms of mentoring or environmental, those kinds of things, but they're not as regulated as our boards and commissions are.

SMITH: Right. They're more governance and advisory in nature rather than hands on, getting your hands dirty, getting the job done staff-type work.

TAYLOR: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Dottie Perham-Whittier with the city of Lewiston, Maine.

PERHAM-WHITTIER: Yes. My position is community relations coordinator with the city of Lewiston and I'm going to be the one that is facilitating volunteers working within our departmental areas at the city. We have a city council policy, and we have forms, and we've been really structured in how we want to set this up. But a couple of you mentioned the importance of knowing the discipline of volunteer management, and I've been going to some meetings and I've gone to a conference and I'm kind of picking up things here and there, but am I just going to sink when I start this if I don't know more than I know?

SMITH: I'm sorry. Say that last part again, please, Dottie?

PERHAM-WHITTIER: I'm just wondering when we start this, I felt pretty comfortable as we start this, but when I heard one of you mention the importance of the discipline of volunteer management, I just wonder if I know enough to undertake this or if I can just take it slow and learn as I go along.

SMITH: You know, there are different resources out there. I'm sure you can get some through the HandsOn Network. You could also attend some volunteer management training. You're in Lewiston, Maine?

PERHAM-WHITTIER: Yes. And I have gone to a couple of conferences, you know, like a day kind of thing.

SMITH: The more training that you can get in the discipline of volunteer resource management, you can find various books. Go to Amazon and Google it; or Google it and then go to Amazon. Go in and look for some of the resources. There's a wonderful book by Tracy Connors. He put together a compendium, an edited text if you will, called the Volunteer Management Handbook, and it's in the process of being revised, but the first edition is still a very helpful document. And as you explore, you'll find many others, many other books – if you're a type of person who likes to get into reading up about it, that's great. If you're the kind of person that needs to go to a course, those should be available in the northeast through some of the HandsOn organizations.

PERHAM-WHITTIER: OK. Well, thank you very much.

SMITH: Sure.

OPERATOR: Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. At this time there are no further questions.

BOSLAND: We did get one other question coming in by email asking about what the cost has been associated with implementing these various models or various initiatives to promote services. Does anyone have a sense of what it might cost the city to undertake?

LANCE: Well, at this point in Nashville, with our education volunteer efforts, we have not invested at this point yet any financial resources. Obviously, we are fortunate recipients of a Cities of Service chief service officer position, so that would be one resource that we have funded through a grant, so someone to coordinate is obviously critical. As far as, you know, what we have been working with, the training programs for volunteers and because we don't plan on doing any of that training in-house, in contracting with a HandsOn program, what we've noticed is they are so excited about this initiative that they are really willing to work closely with us at minimal cost. It's really about the relationships and utilizing what is out there.

We do have as part of one of our environmental segments of our program, we are going to be adding more green space in the community and have that be a grassroots effort where communities are coming to us saying, "This is metro property and we would like to utilize it in this way, whether it be a ball field or a park or a community garden," and that does require some funds. But we are also relying on the community to provide the labor and the upkeep of these pockets of land. So I don't quite know if I'm answering that in full, but the cooperative relationships, and when you pick a priority area, you tend to have a lot of people involved to want to make it work and who are willing to bend over backwards to make it work.

SMITH: I think that too. Don't reinvent wheels that are out there. If you have a HandsOn affiliate in your city, work with them; collaborate with them. Don't create new technology tools if they already exist in your community. Collaboration is the name of the game. That's the business we're in.

CHINNICI-ZUERCHER: I want to emphasize what Diane was saying also about people coming together because of the excitement over what your initiatives might be. We had a wonderful example of that in Dublin a couple of years ago; actually, about four years ago now I guess. A gentleman contacted me and said that he was interested in developing a ball field that was designed specifically for children with any form of disability. I was very excited about that opportunity and went to the city requesting that did we have a ball field that we could donate to this and dedicate to this. And the city council immediately said yes, that they really wanted to do this, and fortunately, they just designed some new ball fields that we were going to be phasing in. And then I went to the corporate community and went to a major construction company and asked them if they would join us in partnership and they dedicated their staff to a whole year of developing this and brought all their vendors on to this project. And it became a very, very exciting opportunity for all of the sectors as well as citizens to participate in this and our service organizations. We did need to raise some cash money, and everybody came together and did it. But it provided an opportunity as Diane was saying for people to really do something special for your community and donate both their talent and their resources to it.

LANCE: Let me add on to that, this is Diane again. And I have two examples which I think really show the importance of buy-in in the community. Going back to that neighbor space program where communities identify spaces that they would like to change the use of – we had two come up at the exact same time. One is one that we found, and it was in a neighborhood where there were lots of children, low income, a wonderful space. And the second is a hillside in another area that they simply wanted beautification and they came to us. So let's take the one that was in the neighborhood we identified with which had the highest need. We initiated a community group meeting. We talked about or opened up the floor for what the community would want. They had lots of great ideas. It's a wonderful meeting. When it came time to say, "Well, what are you as a community willing to do to invest in this on an ongoing basis," the room went dead silent. You know, and with some urging, everyone sort of got on board but it was very different than the community meeting in a similar type neighborhood where they had brought it to us and brought the need to us and said, "Look at this. There really is a need." And we agreed with them and then, lo and behold, I mean we're barely having to do anything except the things that they're not capable of doing because they don't have the right equipment, and they've just taken off and it's a real community project. So the buy-in at the beginning of this is just so important, and that's where your free resources will come in and the volunteerism pays for itself.

BOSLAND: Great. Well, thank you, all, for those examples. I just wanted to mention for folks who are on the line that would like to continue to learn more about this topic, the Points of Light Institute and the Corporation for National and Community Service will be hosting the 2010 National Conference on Volunteering as a Service in New York City, June 28 to the 30th, and there was a link to this conference on the resource document that I mentioned earlier that went around with the dial-in information and will be re-circulated after this call. So that's an opportunity to dig in more deeply, continue to hear other examples and best practices.

I want to close the call today by thanking our three terrific speakers, Marilee, Judy, and Diane, for all of your insights and your inspiration, and also for thanking again the HandsOn Network for co-sponsoring this call with the National League of Cities. And thank you to all of you who called in today. I'd encourage you to join us again on Thursday, May 20th at 3:00 pm for the next audioconference in this series entitled "How Municipal Leaders Can Engage Parents in Dropout Prevention." Thanks again for joining us, and I hope everyone has a great day.