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USF and CoachArt Collaboration Project
Volunteer Survey and Engagement

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Abstract

As a nonprofit organization creating a transformative arts and athletics community for families impacted by childhood chronic illness, CoachArt depends exclusively on volunteer support to facilitate lessons for its students. Initial focus for the project emphasized the needs of CoachArt. Upon further engagement with CoachArt staff, it became apparent the interconnectedness between addressing the needs of CoachArt and those of their volunteers. For the project team, the search to understand volunteer needs translated to the redevelopment of the post-engagement survey. Engaging volunteers as a pathway to building a thriving volunteer community emerged as the corresponding goal for the project. Literature review strengthened arguments for gathering volunteer data and incentivizing volunteers as a retention tool. Online and in-person interviews of CoachArt staff, current volunteers and other high performing volunteer organizations in the Bay Area provided the project team useful information on the needs and experiences of the volunteer. Data analysis of the findings lead to the identification of four core recommendations: two programmatic and two to strengthen the CoachArt volunteer community. Two volunteer surveys accommodating the two programs were developed to support and capture the experiences after each 8 week lesson. A rubric was also developed as a supplemental tool for in-home lessons to give specific feedback pinpointing strengths and weaknesses within their program. Hosting quarterly meetings to address volunteer issue areas is recommended to support volunteers and build the CoachArt volunteer community. Increased social networking events revealed in the final recommendation addressed the desire for volunteers to network with each other, and build bonds based on their mutual experience.

Keywords: survey, volunteer, volunteer retention, volunteer engagement, rubric

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Introduction

CoachArt is a nonprofit organization creating opportunities for children with chronic illnesses and their siblings to engage in free art and athletic activities. Founded on the principle that children with chronic illnesses were in need of further support and enrichment, Coach Art founders Zander Lurie and Leah Bernthal piloted their first program in partnership with Children's Hospital Los Angeles in 2000, enrolling 50 pediatric patients in art and athletic classes. Today, this 306-volunteer strong organization engages over 200 chronically ill children and their siblings in art and athletic programs through the support of over 100 community partners.

Since their expansion to Oakland in 2013, serving the greater San Francisco Bay Area, CoachArt programs have quadrupled in size. Programs begin with the matching of volunteers to students through a comprehensive application and assessment process. Once common interests have been identified, CoachArt staff place volunteers and students in either an 8 week in-home lesson or group activity, depending on the preference of the volunteer and student. Volunteers are responsible for creating their own lesson plans and getting them approved by CoachArt staff. Previously, volunteers and students were surveyed at the completion of their 8 week lesson to determine whether both parties wish to continue attending and administering classes or choose a new activity. It is worth noting that student surveys are still being administered, however volunteer surveys ceased in 2014.

Volunteer engagement to date has primarily been dependent on the volunteer's involvement in the 8 week programs. Targeting the San Francisco Bay Area chapter for this collaboration, the project team initially focused on the needs of CoachArt. However, through communication with staff it became evident to the project team that in order to produce the product that CoachArt desired it was imperative that they understand the

expectation and needs of the volunteers as well. Through a preliminary conversation with the Executive Director and subsequent meeting with the Bay Area Program Director and Coaching Manager, it was determined the most beneficial area to focus the project team's efforts was on the construction of a new post-engagement volunteer survey. Additionally, establishing ways to unite volunteers in order to build and maintain an engaged volunteer community.

Research on survey development and volunteer retention and engagement offered initial information and data into the project. The literature review utilized written resources including books focusing on nonprofit management and journal articles highlighting the usefulness of volunteer data and incentives for repeat volunteers. Data on volunteer needs and experiences were collected through online and in-person interviews of CoachArt staff, current volunteers, and other high performing volunteer organizations in the Bay Area. Through data analysis, the project team identified four core recommendations: two programmatic and two to strengthen the CoachArt volunteer community. The following text details the project team's process beginning with understanding the goals of CoachArt and identifying their needs. Findings of the literature review and results of the data collection will be discussed leading into the data analysis. Once all processes and evidence have been outlined, the text will reveal the four recommendations of the project team.

Literature Review

The literature review centered on the two themes of the project, survey development and volunteer engagement and retention. In considering the best way to support volunteers through a short-term project, CoachArt staff and the project team determined that a survey was an important tool to measure the volunteer experience.

Referring to an employee feedback survey in the article *Surveys Boost Satisfaction*, the author Chen (2004) quotes the director of CIO Service Delivery, "In the past, the only means of voicing issues would be through a help desk mechanism, and we've found that these surveys give us a real measure of how we're accomplishing our goals" (p. 73). Employees responded well as it gave them an active voice and an opportunity to provide feedback on services they were receiving. Taking this into account, the project team's literature review on survey development considered various aspects to creating an effective survey including methods, timing, format, and question structure.

In the article by Hopkins, Meyer, Mclennan, Sharp and Sheffield (2012) they discussed using various methods to collect data including interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. The project team incorporated these methods in the initial research of the project, determination of project focus, and data collection. Determining the distribution frequency of the survey was important as CoachArt was debating whether to survey volunteers using a quarterly system or based on the completion of their 8 week lesson.

In the article, *The Influence From the Dynamics of Training and Volunteers' Characteristics on Volunteers' Retention in Non-Profit Organizations*, the authors indicate the need to administer surveys regularly in order to receive up-to-date, relevant information that could influence programmatic decisions (Chen, Chen and Chen 2010). The article *Better Survey* by David Ambrose (2007) highlighted format and broke down survey questions into seven categories: demographics, behavioral, attitudinal, knowledge, predispositions, conditional/prepositional, and future intentions (p. 30). As Ambrose (2007) states, "The importance of the categories of the model is not the need to assign questions to a category but to prompt the designer of the survey instrument to include the question" (p. 30), and later continues to say, "Obviously, just as there may

be no relevant questions in a given category, there may also be multiple questions in a category” (p. 31). Incorporating Ambrose's category methods into their survey was one strategy the project team used to create a holistic view of the volunteer experience.

The article by Andy Phillips (2015), *OH Research: How to Conduct Surveys*, offered insight into the various aspects of survey creation addressing both practical aspects such as delivery method, question types, and survey analysis while also addressing the potential harm an ill-delivered survey can have on survey owners. As a precursor to determining practical aspects of the survey, Phillips (2015) recognizes the important step of determining the aim of the survey as a means to ensure all other elements of the survey support that aim. He continues explaining delivery methods such as postal, in-person, and highlights online platforms, Google Forms and Survey Monkey (Phillips, 2015).

Question types determine the structure of the survey as Phillips (2015) advises, "Start with questions that are easy to answer or non-confrontational. It is advisable to place the most relevant questions first, as the order in which you ask the questions will help to engage the respondent early on" (p. 3). A key tactic the project team adhered to focused on the flow of the survey. Respondents may become confused or disengaged if question topics change too often, therefore Phillips (2015) recommends grouping similar questions together.

To maintain engagement, varying questions types such as multiple choice, numerical, text and rating scales should be practiced. "The provision of "other" free text boxes is a useful addition for surveys, as the respondent is not forced to provide an answer that they do not feel best matches their own belief" (Phillips, 2015, p. 4). The project team utilized this tactic in specific areas where additional information would be

beneficial and refrained in others where the respondent would feel overwhelmed by the quantity of survey questions.

Under the volunteer engagement and retention topic, the identification of key motivators for volunteer service was a reoccurring theme throughout the literature review. One simple ideology presented in *Nonprofit Management 101: A Complete and Practical Guide for Leaders and Professionals* created a frame of mind from which the team approached the project: Do not underestimate a person's willingness to help (Heyman, 2001). Referencing this point throughout the collaboration process assisted the project team in designing a product that helps support willing volunteers from their initial point of interest through the duration of their volunteer engagement.

Heyman (2011) went on to identify motivators for volunteer service including the desire to help others, be involved in the community, contribute to a cause, develop new skills and gain new experiences, use current skill set, and stay fit. Understanding these motivations, organizations can motivate current volunteers by being able to show why their volunteer experience is more impactful than doing other activities. Moreover, organizations can translate volunteer motivations into opportunities for volunteer engagement.

When discussing motivators, it is also worth noting the common barriers to volunteering Heyman (2011) revealed. Time constraints and the desire to see immediate results were noted as potential barriers for volunteer service (Heyman, 2011). The effects of volunteer retention can significantly influence the impact of an organization. As Newton, Becker and Bell (2014) quote in *Learning and Development Opportunities as a Tool for the Retention of Volunteers: A Motivational Perspective:*

It is therefore essential these volunteers are retained to minimise the time and costs associated with the recruitment, selection, orientation and training of new volunteers. Furthermore, turnover of volunteers or infrequent volunteer participation must be minimised as it can negatively affect the short-term productivity, performance and service quality of an organisation (p. 517).

In the article, the authors attempt to connect motivation for volunteer recruitment and retention. Similar to Heyman (2011), authors Newton, Becker, and Bell (2014) identified the motivators of volunteering to be the value of service in helping mankind, the desire to gain new skills and experiences leading to career advancement, and improve self-confidence and personal development (p.516).

Other motivations identified by the authors include fostering social networks and reducing feeling of guilt for being more fortunate than others. Through the integration of volunteer recruitment and retention motivations, Newton, Becker, and Bell (2014) developed the following hypothesis, "Volunteers with a stronger motive for volunteering (i.e. values, understanding, social, career development, protection or enhancement) regardless of which motive, will report higher levels of organisational commitment and intentions to stay" (p. 517).

Through the testing of this hypothesis, it was revealed that, "...as higher levels of volunteer motivations (as a set) were significantly related to greater organisational commitment and intentions to stay: results which are in line with previous research (Newton, Becker, Bell, 2014, p. 517)." In summary, the project team used the confirmed hypothesis and evidence from these articles and several others coupled with data collection and analysis to determine the recommendations illustrated in the text below.

Data Collection and Analysis

CoachArt's demographic includes a diverse community of unique volunteers and students. The following preliminary data gave the project team a snapshot of the populations CoachArt serves and allowed the team to develop a thorough understanding of the organization. The following information was gleaned from the project team's collaboration with CoachArt staff:

Currently, there are 306 students enrolled with the organization and 262 active volunteers. The students are 53% female, 45% male, and 2% gender neutral, whereas the volunteers are 75% female and 25% male. CoachArt students range in age from 4-19 years old and the three most common chronic illnesses amongst them are asthma, blood disorders, and cancer. Active volunteers range from 19-64 years old, representing an inclusive age spectrum.

The ethnicities of the students mirrors those of the East Bay area: the largest population served is 33% Latino/Hispanic followed by 27% African American, 12% Anglo American, 9% Asian American, and the remaining 18% are a mixture of Middle Eastern, multicultural, or declined to state. While the ethnic demographics indicate Latinos/Hispanics are the largest group of students, 98% of CoachArt students prefer to speak English. Many CoachArt volunteers speak other languages, the most common being Spanish; however volunteer bilingualism is not a priority for the students.

The final component of preliminary data refers to household income and size. These two demographics serve as the most important elements influencing CoachArt programs. For example, 66% of CoachArt families have an average household size of 3-5 members while 16% are comprised of 6-8 members. Furthermore, 42% of families have a household income of less than \$25,000 per year. The second most common household income ranges from \$26,000 - \$44,000 and is represented by 18% of

CoachArt families. Knowing background information on families is mutually beneficial to both CoachArt staff and volunteers as it allows them to better prepare and support their students throughout their 8 week lesson.

The majority of CoachArt families live below the poverty line, a fact which makes programmatic services even more vital to the wellbeing of the students. CoachArt serves and supports not only students impacted by chronic illness, but allows their siblings to participate in the activities as well. This aspect of CoachArt is what sets them apart from comparable organizations. It should be noted that CoachArt gave the project team the aforementioned demographic information; however the remaining data collection was facilitated independently by the project team. CoachArt staff expressed their need to develop a new volunteer survey, however because data from the previous volunteer survey was not collected, it was unavailable to the project team.

The project team's first step in the data collection process was to examine similar nonprofit agencies in the Bay Area that have demonstrated high volunteer recruitment and retention rates. It was assumed that this information would aid the project team's understanding of how other agencies meet the needs of their volunteers. Accordingly, the project team reached out to an anonymous organization located in Oakland to solicit information regarding their volunteer satisfaction and received informative responses that served as foundational data for the project. Similarities resided around recruitment strategy and volunteer motivations while differences were demonstrated in volunteer retention and frequency of survey delivery.

In addition to learning about CoachArt's needs, the project team corresponded with volunteers and solicited their feedback on their experience with the organization. It was determined that in order to produce a versatile survey, volunteer needs must also

be identified. The project team sent each volunteer a short series of questions giving insight to their experiences and needs. The questions included:

1. Why do you volunteer with CoachArt? Please explain your motive for joining this organization.
2. How long have you volunteered with CoachArt, and what keeps you coming back?
3. In your opinion, what could CoachArt be doing to improve upon your volunteer experience?
4. How did you hear about volunteer opportunities at CoachArt?
5. How do you feel CoachArt can better support the students they serve?
6. Do have have any suggestions on how CoachArt can appeal to a wider pool of volunteers? Do have have any suggestions on how CoachArt can appeal to a wider pool of students?
7. Please feel free to provide any additional feedback that you think may be helpful in our effort to develop a useful CoachArt volunteer survey.

The responses from the volunteers indicated a strong desire to build the CoachArt community which set the stage for a dual-approach to meeting the needs of the organization and those of the volunteer to strengthen the community.

In the final stages of data collection, the project team attended multiple meetings with CoachArt staff, participated in a volunteer training, and volunteered at the holiday art gala fundraiser which served as pragmatic elements to the data collection process. As stated by authors Sprague and Hu (2015) in the article *Assessing the Value to Client Organizations of Student Practicum Projects*, “The clients’ satisfaction can largely be attributed to...regular client feedback” (p. 263) and “clients have contact with the students at least three times throughout the course” (p. 267). Taking this approach into

account, the project team received client feedback and met regularly with staff members.

The empirical data collected throughout the collaboration has allowed the project team to appropriately meet the needs of CoachArt. The end results of our project design are intended to be multi-faceted and beneficial for both CoachArt and the volunteers.

Recommendations

During collaborations with CoachArt Staff, it became evident there was an immediate need for change on the programmatic side of the organization. CoachArt staff addressed the importance of re-developing a volunteer survey to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, as it had not been done since 2014. The project team worked with the staff to design questions that extracted information that CoachArt was seeking from their volunteers. As mentioned previously, the project team also worked with three volunteers to obtain feedback on their experience with the organization. Through data collection and research, it became apparent that volunteers feel a deep connection to the families and students they serve and to CoachArt's mission. The recommendation for a volunteer survey was developed with the goal of helping CoachArt build and grow their current volunteer program and harness these connections through their survey.

In order to incorporate the needs of both the volunteers and CoachArt, the project team designed two surveys; one for in-home volunteers and the other for group activity volunteers. Through data collection, it was discovered there were varying needs amongst the two volunteer groups which CoachArt wanted to capture. The major difference between the surveys is distinguished in the questions regarding volunteer's communication with CoachArt. The in-home survey asks for further elaboration about

the communication with both the family and staff whereas the group survey only asks about staff (see Appendix A and B).

Both surveys inquire about the volunteers' initial training experience, completed prior to starting their program. This information is important for CoachArt to collect in order to identify if their current training program is an effective means of support. If volunteers are not properly trained it directly affects how they perform their duties and the overall experience they have with CoachArt and the families they serve. Both surveys weigh heavy on questions that work to collect the satisfaction level of volunteers. In order for this to be an effective tool, the project team recommends that CoachArt administer the surveys to each volunteer after the completion of each 8 week lesson. Per CoachArt staff, surveys will be implemented in 2016.

During the collaboration process, it became apparent that although the surveys are pragmatic in identifying overall satisfaction levels, it was as equally important to develop a tool evaluating the effectiveness of in-home lessons, as these are conducted individually. Since group activity volunteers work together, they have immediate access to assistance and support through the other leaders in their group. In order to gauge the efficiency and growth of the in-home lessons, the project team has developed a rubric (See appendix C) which allows volunteers to continuously record their 8 week lessons and progress they, along with their students, are making. The Coaching Manager will evaluate the completed rubrics to identify where volunteers are in need of more assistance, behavioral issues students may be having, and the overall growth of the student. The project team's recommendation for a rubric serves as an additional tool to measure the efficiency of in-home lessons and provides CoachArt with another opportunity to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses within their programs. For example, if a volunteer experiences behavioral issues with a student and is unfamiliar

with how to discipline such behaviors, the rubric informs staff and enables them to address these roadblocks during future trainings. CoachArt staff will be proposing the rubric to their leadership team for implementation in 2016.

The project team's next recommendation is for CoachArt to host quarterly meetings tailored specifically to areas where volunteers have expressed challenges. If volunteers are feeling challenged by how to navigate behavioral issues, CoachArt could then focus a quarterly meeting on how to manage and communicate with students demonstrating difficulties. This will not only provide CoachArt with more frequent opportunities to interact with volunteers, but also allows them to provide support, directly affecting satisfaction levels. Meeting topics will be relevant and co-hosted by staff and volunteers, allowing them to address all information needed to ensure volunteers feel supported and prepared to carry out their role(s).

The surveys and rubric serve as two comprehensive, programmatic tools to measure the effectiveness of CoachArts' programs and volunteers' satisfaction levels. However, as the project team continued to research and collect data they identified that in order to ensure the success of the programs, building and establishing a cohesive volunteer community was also a vital element. During an interview with a CoachArt volunteer, she expressed the need for more networking and social gatherings. Currently, CoachArt hosts minimal social events for volunteers and when organized, are limited to happy hours. The project team's final recommendation is for CoachArt to continue offering these events, but increase the frequency to once a quarter, and expand networking opportunities to luncheons, team-building activities and enrichment trainings. This diverse list of social events allows CoachArt to connect volunteers with a variety of interests. The overall goal with this recommendation is to bring together

volunteers and provide them the opportunity to interact with one another and strengthen their relationships and community.

Conclusion

CoachArt's ongoing commitment to their volunteers and the families they serve is the primary reason for their success since its conception in 2000. Throughout this collaboration the project team was fortunate to meet families and volunteers in their community, allowing them to gain a firsthand understanding of CoachArt's mission and establish a deeper connection. The proposed recommendations for in-home and group surveys, rubric, quarterly meetings and social networking events were designed in collaboration with CoachArt staff and various members of their community. The project team is confident that their research and data collection, combined with their recommendations, provides CoachArt with the resources to maintain and grow their volunteer program, create an engaged volunteer community and continue providing quality service to the 306 volunteers and 262 children they serve.

Appendixes

Appendix A: CoachArt Volunteer Survey for In-Home Lessons* Required

1. Which activity did you teach for your In-Home Lessons? *

2. Did you like the model of In-Home Lessons, where you worked more or less independently with your student(s)? Please explain your answer. *

- Yes I liked working independently
- No I did not like working independently
- Indifferent

If you answered no, please explain why

3. Reflecting back to the volunteer training, do you feel you were properly prepared to begin your volunteer role(s)? *

- A. Yes
- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C, please explain

4. Do you feel you are provided adequate resources to perform your volunteer responsibilities? *

- A. Yes
- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C, please explain

5. Please answer the following statements regarding the communication between you and CoachArt Staff *

	Yes	No
CoachArt staff responds in a timely manner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff are knowledgeable about the programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff are respectful of volunteers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff made me feel welcome as a volunteer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication with CoachArt Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6 . Please answer the following statements regarding the communication between you and the CoachArt Family: *

	Yes	No
The CoachArt family was welcoming and friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CoachArt family was easy to communicate with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CoachArt family was respectful of my time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered no to any of these statements please explain why

7. Do you feel a part of the CoachArt community? *

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

If no, how could this be improved?

8. Which of the following networking opportunities would you like to attend: (check all that apply)*

- Team-Building Activities
- Volunteer Happy Hour
- Volunteer Luncheon
- Enrichment Training
- I am not interested in networking opportunities
- Other:

9. What could CoachArt do to ensure you volunteer again? *

- Match me with closer student(s)
- Provide better volunteer resources and/or teaching materials
- Host group activities closer to public transportation
- Other:

10. While volunteering with CoachArt, did you feel your time was valued? *

- A. Yes
- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C please explain

11. Throughout the course of the 8 weeks, did your student make any improvements or positive changes that you feel were caused by the CoachArt program? Please explain your response below. *

- Yes improvements and/or positive changes were made
- Some improvements and/or positive changes were made
- No improvements and/or positive changes were made

Please explain your response. *

12. What would you consider to be one of your greatest accomplishments during your 8-week program? *

13. What challenges did you encounter with your student(s) throughout the 8-week program? *

14. We want you to have the best volunteer experience possible! Below, please add any comments or suggestions you believe can help us improve the CoachArt volunteer experience

Your name

Your email

You can contact me about my answers

- Yes
- No

Appendix B: CoachArt Volunteer Survey for Group Lessons* Required

1. Which group lesson did you lead/assist? *

2. Reflecting back to the volunteer training, do you feel you were properly prepared to begin your volunteer role(s)? *

- A. Yes
- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C, please explain

3. Do you feel you are provided adequate resources to perform your volunteer responsibilities? *

- A. Yes
- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C, please explain

4. Please answer the following statements regarding the communication between you and CoachArt Staff *

	Yes	No
CoachArt staff responds in a timely manner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff are knowledgeable about the programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff are respectful of volunteers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CoachArt staff made me feel welcome as a volunteer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I am satisfied with the communication with CoachArt Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered no to any of these statements please explain why

5. Do you feel a part of the CoachArt community? *

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

If no, how could this be improved?

6. Which of the following networking opportunities would you like to attend: (check all that apply)*

- Team-Building Activities
- Volunteer Happy Hour
- Volunteer Luncheon
- Enrichment Training
- I am not interested in networking opportunities
- Other:

7. What could CoachArt do to ensure you volunteer again? *

- Match me with closer student(s)
- Provide better volunteer resources and/or teaching materials
- Host group activities closer to public transportation
- Other:

8. While volunteering with CoachArt, did you feel your time was valued? *

- A. Yes

- B. Somewhat
- C. No

If you answered B or C please explain

9. Throughout the course of the 8 weeks, did your student make any improvements or positive changes that you feel were caused by the CoachArt program? Please explain your response below. *

- Yes improvements and/or positive changes were made
- Some improvements and/or positive changes were made
- No improvements and/or positive changes were made

Please explain your response. *

10. What would you consider to be one of your greatest accomplishments during your 8-week program? *

11. What challenges did you encounter with your student(s) throughout the 8-week program? *

12. We want you to have the best volunteer experience possible! Below, please add any comments or suggestions you believe can help us improve the CoachArt volunteer experience:

Your name

Your email

You can contact me about my answers

- Yes
- No

Appendix C: In-Home Lesson Rubric

	Followed Directions	Engaged	Participated in activity	Completed task	Communicated with me	Additional comments
Lesson 1						
Lesson 2						
Lesson 3						
Lesson 4						
Lesson 5						
Lesson 6						
Lesson 7						
Lesson 8						

*please rank the following on a scale of 1-5

- 5 – Outstanding – Above Expectations**
- 4 – Met Expectations**
- 3 – Met Expectations with Direction**
- 2 – Sort of Met Expectations**
- 1 – Minimally Met Expectations**
- 0 – Not At All**

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