Highlights of 2012 Conference

Overview

The 2012 National Conference on Volunteering and Service, which took place in Chicago June 18-20, provided more than 5,000 citizen leaders with the opportunity to learn, connect and be inspired through more than 100 plenary sessions, workshops, special events, service projects and more.

Convened by Points of Light, the Conference is the leading volunteer sector gathering, providing service-minded citizens with an environment to share and cultivate new ideas, discuss challenges and work together to create solutions through the power of people.

“Programs where people are helping people and neighbors are helping neighbors are the essence of the American spirit,” said first lady Barbara Bush with Neil Bush, Points of Light board chair.
A New Generation of Service

Five-thousand Conference attendees filled the opening plenary, “A New Generation of Service,” returning to the city that hosted the first National Conference on Volunteering and Service in 1992. The ballroom was jam-packed with positive energy and enthusiasm as attendees enjoyed the presentation of our nation’s colors and singing of the National Anthem by the Chicago Public Schools’ Junior ROTC.

President Barack Obama highlighted the great American tradition of service shining in each and every service leader in the room and encouraged all to keep striving to create change. Former first lady Barbara Bush was joined by her grandchildren, Pierce Bush and Lauren Bush Lauren, along with other dignitaries including Dr. Jill Biden and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who stressed that it is impossible for government to reach its goals without the power of service. Actor and SixDegrees.org founder Kevin Bacon added star power to the lineup of presenters including U.S. Army veteran J.R. Martinez, MSNBC’s Melissa Harris-Perry and Points of Light Chairman Neil Bush.

Opening plenary attendees continued the work of the day’s earlier Seeds for Change service project by assembling seed packets, seedlings, implementation guides, service-learning materials and gardening supplies to create 500 “Seeds for Change: Community Garden Kits.”
Conference Highlights:

Solving America’s Education Crisis

Attendees of Target’s “Celebrating the Power of Service in Education,” session spent a good amount of time on their feet offering standing ovations to the incredible speakers that brought to life the issue ranked most important to Americans – the education of our nation’s children. Presenters included a young man who is living proof of how service can transform the life of someone who could be easily labeled a “statistic” to a dedicated public school superintendent who will stop at nothing to give his city’s children the education and cultural experiences they deserve.

Soledad O’Brien, CNN special correspondent and anchor, led the discussion exploring how public service and volunteerism can allow a community to play a large role in shaping the education of youth and, by extension, the future of America’s workforce and its place in the global community. O’Brien was joined by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, Miami Dade Public Schools CEO Alberto Carvalho, David Rojas, 2009 Chicago Boys & Girls Club Youth of the Year and Target’s very own Laysha Ward, president of community relations. Together, this engaging speaker panel paved the way to tackle our education crisis and encouraged all to use their personal power to improve students’ academic performances.

Seeds for Change Creates School Gardens

Conference has a legacy of active engagement with its host cities’ communities and this year was no exception. Seeds for Change, sponsored by Chase, showcased Chicago’s motto “Urbs in Horto (City in a Garden)” as a model for how environmental and economic success can be achieved through service.

Volunteers worked alongside students, parents, teachers and other local community members to create a garden at Theophilus Schmid Elementary School, Donoghue Charter School and Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago. They built plots, planted seedlings, constructed greenhouses and benches, and learned how to overcome the challenges of finding fresh produce in various parts of the city known as “food deserts.” More than 609,000 Chicago residents live in these areas, which lack access to grocery stores and healthy food options.

Chicago public schools with access to a garden will receive at least one of the kits that were assembled after the Conference’s opening plenary. The installation, seeding and upgrading of these gardens engaged thousands of volunteers including youth, community and Conference volunteers. Chase and Points of Light also provided specialized training and implementation guides for other communities to replicate the program.
Conference Highlights:

Civics and the Economy
Throughout the economic downturn and continuing recovery, individuals and organizations have looked to the volunteer sector to address community needs. While nonprofits have stepped in to help, the challenge of how civic engagement can build a stronger economy, more highly skilled and versatile workers and create economic benefits for communities remains.

Chase, the official economy track sponsor, hosted “Civics Service, Helping to Drive Economy Through Action.” This super session brought together thought leaders, corporations and individuals that are making an impact in their local economies and setting the stage for significant change in society through service that provides a tangible economic benefit.

The session featured JPMorgan Chase Chairman of the Midwest Glenn Tilton; former Governor of the Federal Reserve System Dr. Randall Kroszner; Global Practice Chair, Edelman Business + Social Purpose Carol Cone; Chicago Chief Service Officer Jenné Myers; Vice President, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs and IBM Foundation President Stan Litow; Executive Director of the National Community Tax Coalition Jackie Lynn Coleman; CSRwire CEO Joe Sibilia; and Jonathan Greenblatt, special assistant to the president and director of the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation. The Second City improv troupe provided comic relief with a look back at our world’s legacy of great volunteers and a peek into what our future could look like if we all step up to serve.

Additionally, Toyota sponsored the Conference Business Track with thought-provoking keynotes from Mark Hoplamazian, president and CEO of Hyatt Hotels; Carol Cone; Brad Keywell, co-founder and managing partner of Lightbank and co-founder and director of Groupon; Neil Nicoll, president and CEO of YMCA of the USA and Kate Maehr, CEO of Greater Chicago Food Depository.

Inspiring Change Through Skills-Based Service
A Billion + Change, a growing national campaign to mobilize billions of dollars of pro bono and skills-based volunteer (SBV) services from corporate America, is bringing into sharp relief the valuable role SBV programs play in building the capacity of nonprofit organizations to meet community needs at home and around the world. In less than a year, nearly 200 companies have pledged an estimated $1.8 billion worth of time and talent to nonprofits, keeping the campaign on track to inspire 500 companies to create or expand a SBV program in their workplace by 2013.

During Conference, campaign pledge companies like Capital One, HP, Deloitte and IBM shared the inspiration driving their SBV programs, and how they are achieving high-impact, transformative change through service at a special Pre-Conference session, “Leading Service and Inspiring Change.” PepsiCo, Kraft Foods, GlaxoSmithKline and the Advisory Board Company also discussed how their programs are addressing critical issues such as global health and education, water resource management and improving STEM education through skills-based service.

Pranav Kothari, managing director of Mission Measurement, led a dynamic conversation about innovations in business and philanthropy and how corporate innovation can spark broader social change in “Beyond Business as Usual: Leading Innovation and Driving Social Change.”

The excitement at Conference is the latest in a national tour of A Billion + Change events that will culminate in a White House Forum on June 27, at which the campaign will start to imagine the phenomenal possibilities of collective action, with 500 companies working in partnership with nonprofit professionals to change communities for the better.
Exploring Service for Military Members, Families

Points of Light, Chase and ITT Exelis hosted the Community Blueprint Summit for Change, a time to explore ways to create community-based solutions to meet the needs of service members, veterans and their families.

During the two-day session, participants explored how to bridge military and civilian communities to create a stronger, more united nation. Topics included military and civilian partnership and collaboration, trends and research on the challenges facing service members, veterans and their families, and models for engaging military and veteran volunteers to address our nation’s most pressing challenges.

The Community Blueprint Summit for Change featured an array of special guests, including former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army General George W. Casey, veteran Bryan Anderson, craigslist founder Craig Newmark, General Marianne Watson of the National Guard Bureau and former Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colonel David Sutherland.

HandsOn Network Affiliates Share Stories, Ideas

During the HandsOn Network Pre-Conference, more than 170 people from affiliates came together to network, discuss important sector trends and celebrate their collective success. An impressive lineup of presenters and speakers, including communication experts Michael Margolis and Allison Fine added to the excitement.

Margolis presented, “Reframing the Story of 21st Century Volunteer Centers,” focusing on how reframing our message is the key to reinvention, relevance and relationship building with our constituents. Margolis is the founder and president of Get Storied – an education, advisory and publishing company with a goal to teach the world how to think in narrative. His popular book, “Believe Me: A Storytelling Manifesto for Change-Makers and Innovators,” quickly turned him into a leading voice in the world of storytelling.

Fine shared her expertise during her presentation, “From Institutions to Social Networks,” which provided a framework to re-organizing as social networks, use social media to power the network and energize your community and volunteers with this new lens. Fine is the co-author of the bestselling, “The Networked Nonprofit,” and author of the award-winning “Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age.”
Youth Making Their Mark

For the first time, the Conference hosted a learning track exclusively for young people to inspire, equip and mobilize them to take their leadership and service to the next level.

Over three days, nearly 100 youth, age 13 to 18, convened for the generationOn Youth Summit and Youth Workshops, an intensive and interactive learning experience. During the Sunday afternoon Summit on civic dialogue and service-learning, youth leaders reflected on the power of youth involvement in service, and mobilized young people to take action by discussing creative ideas, success stories and lessons learned.

Attendees began the Summit with a special service project to prepare Good & Ready “Black Out Boxes” designed to help seniors during emergencies. These boxes were filled with flashlights, batteries, food, water and notes of comfort. The attendees then participated in a panel discussion, moderated by Pierce Bush, with notable youth leaders that explored the challenges and triumphs of being a service-leader and a youth.

On Monday and Tuesday, participants attended seven skill-building workshops that focused on communication skills, fundraising, social media, public relations, public speaking, idea development and service-learning.

Attendees created tote bags and games for seniors in the Chicago community, then explored how service-learning can spark inspiration. The young people considered their own motivation and interests and were inspired to explore their own communities and develop ideas for their own projects. Each youth received a toolkit to help chart their path.

The Conference youth track was a true testament to the power of youth to become champions of service and to make positive impacts in their communities during the summer and into the future.

Civic Fellows

The Civic Fellows Leadership Exchange was a new feature of the 2012 Conference. Attendees were able to participate in intimate conversations with thought leaders to exchange ideas, innovations and effective practices for engaging citizens in service. Expert participants included Israel Idonije, Chicago Bears; Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author Isabel Wilkerson and Craig Newmark, founder of craigslist.org and craigconnects. The sessions will be broadcast in a 10-week podcast series after the conference.
Service Superstars – 2012 Awards Overview

Outstanding volunteers, institutions and corporations were honored at the Conference for their commitment to service and civic engagement. Congratulations to the following award winners:

Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence
Cbeyond Inc.
Kraft Foods Inc.
Timberland, LLC

National Service Impact Award
Disaster Services - AmeriCorps St. Louis Emergency Response Team
Economic Opportunity - Christopher Gonzales - Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center
Education - National College Advising Corps
Environmental Stewardship - Coulee Region RSVP
Healthy Futures - Philadelphia Health Corps
People’s Choice - Habitat for Humanity Vet Corps

Eli J. Segal AmeriCorps Alums Entrepreneurship Award
Ryan Sarafolean
Anita Yip

George W. Romney Excellence Award
HandsOn South Alabama

Daily Point of Light Award
Cassandra Lin

generationOn Excellence in Leadership and Service Awards
Lauren Stock
Sidney Levarity

Corporate Volunteer Council of the Year Award
Central Indiana Corporate Volunteer Council

Corporate Volunteer Council Fast Start Award
Calgary Corporate Volunteer Council

Hasbro Community Action Heroes
Nina Mahalingam
Will Lourcey
Cassandra Lin
Maryam Farooq
Zachary Certner
Nimansha Jain

HandsOn South Alabama receives the George W. Romney Excellence Award with David Albritton, ITT EXELIS

Concetta Bencivenga, executive director of generationOn, Cassandra Lin, Hasbro Community Action Hero and J.R. Martinez
How Citizen Service Strengthens Communities

This year’s closing session asked the crucial questions, “What does it mean to be a citizen?” and “What will our legacy be?” Points of Light CEO Michelle Nunn noted that too often we look to experts, when it is more amateurs, ordinary citizens, rolling up their sleeves to solve problems and discover answers that our world really needs.

Wendy Spencer, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, stressed the importance of this year’s theme, Turning Point, and how this is a decisive moment for what we can achieve through service and volunteerism. Spencer spoke with confidence and hope, noting that the challenges our country faces are steep, but are more than matched by the willingness and passion of volunteers to address them.

Nunn and Spencer shared the stage with journalist Laura Ling, Guiding Light Network Founder Eric Liu, Save the Children Vice President Mark Shriver, Dr. Rev. Otis Moss III and Points of Light Board Chairman Neil Bush. Together, they helped define the role 21st century citizens play in their communities, our role as citizens and the connections we have to our communities. Each pushed Conference attendees to not only find ways to help their neighbors, but to bring together friends, family, neighbors and others to build an army of individuals dedicated to solving our collective problems and create a stronger, better, healthier world.

2013 Event Will Keep Volunteers on Point for Service

The 2013 Conference on Volunteering and Service is scheduled for June 19 - 22 and moves to our nation’s capital, Washington, D.C. Surrounded by the city’s rich culture and history which makes our country so great we will learn, connect and be inspired through a range of provocative and relevant plenary sessions, workshops, intimate conversations, service projects and more.

“Our conference celebrates local and national efforts to take responsibility for our communities and our country through service and volunteerism,” said Points of Light Board Chairman Neil Bush. “Convening in a post-election Washington, D.C., will take our discussions to a new level and help us establish new ways for 21st century volunteers to use their time, talent, voice and money to build stronger, healthier communities.”
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