Strategic Plan

VOICEcorps reading service
Columbus, Ohio

FY 2017 thru FY 2019
(July1, 2016 – June 30, 2019)

Adopted by Board action, June 23, 2016

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background

The following Strategic Plan covers the three year period from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2019. In preparation, stakeholders were solicited for input so that VOICEcorps management could recognize diverse perspectives as well as differing views of the course forward. These stakeholders included: VOICEcorps consumers, volunteers, paid staff, directors, sponsors and financial supporters.

VOICEcorps is a small organization that can best be characterized by a team management model rather than organized by operational areas with the potential effects of silos and turf protection. This approach helps ensure that appropriate talent is brought to bear on organizational objectives. Every project becomes an organization-wide project rather than a departmental project and management can more easily understand how the elements of these projects fit together.

VOICEcorps primarily serves a twenty-one county area of central Ohio as well as providing programming through its affiliate relationship with the Scioto Valley Radio Reading Service in Portsmouth. In addition, VOICEcorps embraces technologies which permit basic information access services to print-disabled people throughout Ohio. This has become an important additional outreach as economic pressures have drastically reduced the availability of locally-based reading and information services in many parts of the state leaving blind and print-disabled people with no audio information services.

VOICEcorps has grown beyond the original "radio reading service." VOICEcorps and similar organizations began using the term "Audio Information Access Services" some years ago in recognition that, though still extremely important, reading is not the only means of obtaining critical information. It is further recognized that "radio," in the purest sense, is no longer adequate to meet the needs of an ever-changing and evolving community of print-disabled people. Audio content can and must increasingly be provided through newer, more portable and more user-controllable platforms such as mobile phones, iPods and other portable devices and computers (laptops, netbooks and tablets (iPads)). Although conventional radio broadcasting remains the major part of our service delivery model, it is increasingly only one of a number of strategies employed to provide critical reading and information services to people who cannot access paper or digital print due to a disability.

Plan Objective

Provide a framework for Board and Management decision-making and an action plan that maintains and enhances VOICEcorps services. This three-year plan will be reviewed quarterly and updated annually.

VOICEcorps reading service, Inc.

Our Vision
VOICEcorps will be universally known as the leading, trusted source of timely information and entertainment for those who cannot access it.

Our Mission
To connect, inform and inspire by offering information and entertainment in any way that honors the dignity of people of all ages who cannot use standard print due to a disability the result of which is that consumers will experience a more independent, well-informed and enriched life.

What We Value
We value the dignity of all individuals and their ability to live life to the fullest extent possible. We believe this is possible through the relationships we build to provide excellent service to our community.

What we'll do about it
We seek to offer an increasingly wider variety of services through diverse networks to an ever-broader audience.

We will assure usability, providing reading and information access services of the highest possible quality including information comprehensiveness, creative innovation, consumer focus, vocal performance, audio fidelity and service reliability.

We will ensure relevance to all possible print-disabled constituencies. Programs and services should account for those who are old, young, active, homebound, having varied print-disabilities and ethnic diversity.

We will maintain relevance by asking for feedback, listening and responding to comments, and demonstrating appreciation to staff, volunteers and supporters.

We will stay fiscally strong to support current operations and to ensure the sustained future of the organization. We will continuously improve and enhance viability.

We will develop the management, paid staff, and volunteer force such that all objectives become team objectives with training, communications, and human resources sufficient to support our goals.

For whom we'll do it
We provide access to the written word for those who cannot read it due to a disability. We know this is possible only through our volunteers, our supporters, and our staff.

Guiding behaviors

- We honor our consumers, board, volunteers, staff and supporters.
- We serve our community by serving our consumers.
- We strive for quality and variety through:
  - Timely, accurate service
  - Informing and entertaining
  - Encouraging feedback
  - Ensuring a dynamic, high quality organization
- We build community both outside (consumers and supporters) as well as inside (volunteers, staff, and board).
- We always maintain an open mind.

Current Situation

VOICECORPS value to its Consumers

The value VOICEcorps brings can be split into three categories: 1) information/education, 2) entertainment, 3) sense of belonging. For a user of VOICEcorps, one or a combination of these reasons will be cause for a listener receiving value from the service. Information/education value comes from clients receiving government, financial and current events reports plus world, national, state, local and community news on a timely basis that they would receive nowhere else. This information allows consumers to live more independent, engaged lives than they otherwise could. Entertainment value occurs anytime the service is used primarily to relieve tension or boredom… be this at a hospital or in a user's home. Finally, the VOICEcorps station, its volunteers and programming, engender a sense of belonging and community among a group of listeners that are often shut out of traditional community activities.

Summary of Consumer Segments

The VOICEcorps client base, broadly speaking, is individuals in the central Ohio geographic region who are unable to access the printed word. These individuals have restricted access due to challenges ranging from chronic problems (blindness) to temporary incapacity (hospital stays).

There are five primary channels by which clients may access VOICECORPS programming: a) dedicated radio receivers, b) cable television, c) dedicated services to hospitals, d) Internet audio streaming, and e) on-demand audio podcasts. Programming content is currently designed primarily around users of the dedicated radios.

The American Federation for the Blind research suggests the demographics of the average central Ohio low vision person to be a middle-aged white male from a small household. The typical VOICEcorps

listener is a white female over the age of 60 coming from a small household. Current listener demographics, including household income, do not appear to have changed significantly over the last five years.

Changes in Consumer Populations

Led by baby boomers, our population is aging. The natural progression of maladies in older life will result in a growing need for services to persons with vision impairment or disabilities like stroke which impede or prevent reading standard printed materials. Complications from rising rates of obesity and diabetes will further increase the print-disabled community.

As the country increasingly moves toward a knowledge economy, access to information will become ever more important especially for information which changes daily. A non-physical area of change is the progressively higher use of computers and electronic devices among the visually impaired (with a disturbing decrease of Braille fluency). While computer competency in our senior population is rising, a significant portion of people… from lack of skills, affordability or disinterest… will never have access to information through data communications.

Summary of Capabilities

Volunteerism

VOICEcorps enjoys the help of nearly 250 volunteers who give roughly 10,000 hours of their time each year. At the current Independent Sector rate of $22.14 per hour, this is $220,000 of annual value.

Perhaps ninety-five percent of volunteer time is spent reading. The rest is front office work, mailings, newsletter distribution, receiver repair and broadcast equipment maintenance. The group is diverse, encompassing a wide range of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Most volunteers are retired; many serve in multiple volunteer roles. There is little difficulty finding volunteers for reading assignments. A decline in volunteer reading interest is not anticipated. For non-reading work, however, recruitment is lacking.

Operational Capabilities

As a broadcasting facility, VOICEcorps' capability is equivalent to almost any commercial radio station. Our six production studios allow for recording a large and diverse amount of material plus the flexibility to develop new programming. Copyright laws require our programming to be intended for the visually-impaired. Although our radio signal reaches twenty-one central Ohio counties, we do not transmit over the "open airwaves" to the general public but to special radio receivers on loan to qualified listeners. Other programming is transmitted through closed-circuit, private, password-protected, recorded or wired channels. Our online and podcast material is also password protected.

The VOICEcorps web-site features a slowly-expanding library of audio programs and related information, "on-demand" audio podcasts, back issues of organizational newsletters, and useful consumer resources. Printed and electronically-delivered newsletters are published for volunteers, consumers and donors.

Organization

VOICEcorps is divided into the following functional areas:
- Administration
- Fund Raising and Development
- Programming / Content
- Operations & Engineering
- Marketing / Outreach
- Volunteerism

The functional areas work together to develop, enhance, and maintain the following initiatives:
- Staffing (both paid and volunteer)
- SCA Radio Broadcasting
- Cable TV Broadcasting
- Internet Radio Broadcasts
- On Demand Audio Web Content
- Group Sites (hospitals & nursing Homes)
- Mobile Access (iPhone, iPad, iPod and Android)
- Text Based Web Content and Services
- Resource Development
- Paid Sales and Services

Personnel

VOICEcorps is professionally administered by just four full-time and two part-time staff:
- Executive Director
- Director of Volunteers
- Director of Operations
- Administrative Secretary
- A part-time marketing person
- A part-time control room technician.

Summary of Financial Position

VOICEcorps will require approximately $400,000 annually in basic operating funds each of the next three years to maintain current service levels. Operating funds come from state and city appropriations, grants, program underwriting and through donation drives. State and city funding, workplace giving and program underwriting comprise 60% of budgeted revenues. VOICEcorps has

operated at a financial loss for several years, relying on reserves to make up the difference between income and expense.

A high percentage of VOICEcorps' annual income is from sources that are prone to significant changes. City and state funding can decrease rapidly due to economic or political factors outside the control or influence of VOICEcorps. High-dollar financial grants are often awarded through competitive processes whose criteria change from time-to-time. Support from these sources could evaporate unexpectedly.

The VOICEcorps Board of Directors

The VOICEcorps Board of Directors is an elected body which oversees the activities of the organization. It is the highest authority in the management of the corporation and is its legal agent. Members actively participate in meetings and events associated with staff, volunteers, consumers and supporters, participates in its financial well-being, its legal decision-making, and promotes VOICEcorps whenever possible. The Board meets 10-11 times a year on the fourth Thursday of each month. It does not meet in December. Sometimes, the Board meets in August, depending on the needs of the organization

Beyond its usual fiduciary and business oversight, the Board of Directors sets VOICEcorps' organizational policies, the Strategic Plan, and supports the Executive Director and staff in implementing the plan objectives and tactics.

A VOICEcorps director is selected because of his/her experience, areas of expertise, commitment to the Organization, and interest in the community. The Board is a critical component to the success of VOICEcorps.

Committees are active agents in fulfilling these roles and dealing with issues that require its thoughtful and creative input. There can be standing committees and any number of committees created on an as-need basis (e.g. a Strategic Planning Committee formed to review and make corrections annually to the Strategic Plan). Each committee chairperson will be responsible for the activities of the committee and will report-out to the full Board at regular intervals. Chairmanship of a committee is voluntary. Committee membership can draw from any source necessary as determined by the committee chair. Each committee will have at least three members and each Board member is required to serve on at least one committee. The Board Chair serves on each committee but can chair none. The standing committees are:

Executive

The committee is comprised of the Board Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. It is responsible for matters of strategic importance, and to represent and make certain decisions between scheduled board meetings. It coordinates and manages implementation of the Strategic Plan by working with the Executive Director, other Committees, Board members and others in order to facilitate the process. Additionally, the Executive Committee is charged with certain personnel matters including the Executive Director's review, recommendations of changes in compensation to the Board and to insure the Director's developmental needs are being met.

Finance

The Finance Committee is composed of the Treasurer, Chairperson and one other Board member. Its responsibility is to review the organization's financial position on a monthly basis, report that position to the Board at its regular meetings and to bring any issues it needs to hear. It is responsible for recommending the organization's annual budget and determining its long-range financial needs.

Funding and Resource Development

This committee is comprised of board members, staff, professional fundraisers and volunteers. Its primary responsibility is to recommend fundraising targets, set a fundraising plan, and ensure that goals are reached. It determines the blend of sources, identifies prospects and develops an action plan about who is going to approach what sources, when and how they will do so.

Consumer Advisory

It is the responsibility of this committee to act as the "voice of the consumer" by advising the Board on needs, changes and desires of the consumer audience.

Operations

This committee's responsibility is to review with the Executive Director any operational, technical or broadcast engineering issues or concerns as they arise and report to the Board on any issues requiring the Board's action. This committee is also responsible for identifying the operational needs for any future endeavors and coordinating their creation.

Board Development

It is the responsibility of the Board Development Committee to manage a process for Board member identification, recruitment and development. It typically nominates new members to the Board annually but may do so at any time.

Looking Forward

VOICEcorps does an exceptional job of serving its listener community. With its solid operational foundation and volunteer support, the opportunity exists for VOICEcorps to broaden its mission of service to the community. As noted earlier, the current demographics of our listener base is narrow. The challenge for the organization is to expand the community it serves and its options while maintaining financial solvency.

One of the keys to broadening our audience is to understand why non-users in the print-disabled community do not take advantage of the service. We have identified a number of hurdles to usage through our annual listener surveys and a focus group. There is a common thread identified: *ACCESS & OPTIONS*. In order to broaden the audience to which VOICEcorps provides information, we need content with broader appeal and to improve the options for access to that content through multiple channels. The themes manifest themselves in a number of ways:

- Many eligible "non-users" find the current scheduling format difficult to interpret and find the desired program content.
- The "non-user" community tends to be more active than our present, core listenership. Its members are typically less willing to adjust their schedules to hear content of interest indicating a need for some sort of "on-demand" delivery of content.
- The stationary nature of receivers forces listeners to be somewhat immobile while a more "mobile" form of access to the content would be desired.
- There is a wealth of online information sources for the visually impaired but a lack of desire and resources for non-computer users to develop the required computer skills.
- Many visually impaired individuals find little programming content of interest to them or are unavailable to access the programming at the time it is available.

Summary

VOICEcorps has a seasoned staff, a strong volunteer base and a history of successfully achieving its mission of providing access to printed material for visually and physically impaired users. The mission provides necessary services to those that can use them. It is anticipated this need will continue well into the foreseeable future.

The VOICEcorps staff is small without the capacity in terms of time and skills to fulfill all the roles required. Its large group of volunteers donate their efforts to accomplish much of the work needed in program production and certain clerical functions but not in other areas. Development, fund raising, marketing, consumer outreach, broadcast equipment maintenance, receiver repair and IT are areas which need to be addressed. The organization's financial position has, for some years, inhibited hiring additional staff or outside professionals.

VOICEcorps' present consumer base is narrow; its demographics characterized as older and heavily female. However, the potential customer base is a large and varied group which covers many demographic categories mainly related only by visual needs. Due to its diversity, providing this group programming access and options is challenging.

VOICEcorps is in a position to significantly impact the needs of this group and, due to its excellent volunteer reader foundation, has the flexibility to explore and create new, richer program content. Unfortunately, the financial resources are unavailable to significantly expand the mission.

Analysis

VOICECORPS must maintain its strong operational capability. Our mission is to provide our users with a valuable service they cannot get anywhere else. We must assure that programming as currently delivered continues into the foreseeable future. To do so, VOICEcorps' number one priority is to insure it achieves and maintains financial viability. VOICEcorps must develop financial and operational capability to address its needs over the coming years.

There is a need to improve the options available to access VOICEcorps programming and to broaden the content available to current, potential and underserved consumers. Consideration should be given to younger listeners, to aging population trends and to the growing segments with vision impairments brought about by diabetes, obesity and longer life spans.

Several operational areas have been neglected as financial resources were directed elsewhere. Some, whose attention was previously considered non-essential, have become troublesome and effecting critical functional areas. Of particular concern is broadcast equipment maintenance and receiver repair.

Finally, there is a great unmet need to expand outreach to the sizeable unserved print-disabled population of our area as well as to areas of Ohio which have no audio information services.

These needs fall within our organization's mission and values.

THE PLAN

Implementation and Correction

In order for VOICEcorps to "do more good" it is important to address the issues above. VOICEcorps will do so through this Plan. The Strategic Plan will be put into effect following final Board approval and reviewed quarterly with corrections and revisions, if needed. It will be fully updated and approved annually at the time of Budget approval.

We will estimate the financial resources necessary to implement the initiatives identified in this plan. Consideration of the impact on the financial condition of VOICEcorps will be given before any individual goal is undertaken. Staff capacity and skills will be considered to assure we have sufficient human resources for success.

Objectives and Tactics

Funding and Resource Development

Objective: Raise adequate funding to keep VOICEcorps viable in the short run and to support increased capacity to meet goals and objectives.

- Build a development team made up of professionals and volunteers
- Emphasize collaboration among the development team and other members of the VOICEcorps staff to address the strengths and weaknesses of our current efforts and to enhance results.
- Diversify VOICEcorps funding sources so that a reduction or loss of any funding source cannot threaten the viability or the organization. Evaluate current funding make-up and create plans to shift funding to sources that are less susceptible to forces outside of VOICEcorps direct control.
- Rebalance funder categories to more closely reflect those of similarly-sized agencies as reported in "Giving USA" and "Grant-Seeking" research reports.
- Improvements and increases in funding must be achieved in all of the following areas:
  - Individual gifts – campaigns
  - Grants – Government, Foundations and Corporations
  - Planned giving
  - Legacy Society
  - Major Gifts solicitation
  - Special Events
  - Underwriting / sponsorships
  - Other Income / revenue

Programming / Content

The average sighted person in the general public has diverse media choices. VOICEcorps strives to provide choice to its listening audience to meet individual needs for information, portability, timeliness, localness and for life style. With this in mind, the content (programming) VOICEcorps produces and/or presents will take advantage of all available delivery platforms used by print-disabled people. In recognition that different target demographic groups tend to prefer some technology platforms over others, content will be adjusted to reach the appropriate target group through the most appropriate platform.

Objective: Enhance Core Programming

- Broaden the available programming on each delivery platform.
- Create procedures for keeping programs current.
- Develop the ability and implement on-location program production to enhance the wealth of information which is not reading based but is still generally unavailable to people with print-disabilities.
- Continue to create and enhance programming on the subjects of accessibility, technology and other topics that would appeal to the interests and needs of people with disabilities but which are not available from other sources.
- Investigate the use of DAISY encoding standards for Web Audio On-Demand programs to enhance the usability of that content for listeners
- Identify presentations which could be packaged to generate an after-market revenue stream.

Objective: Improve Relevancy to Young and Middle-Aged Male Listeners

- Develop programming and sound that reflects listeners' interests and tastes.
- Promote the availability of the various platforms so listeners can choose the service delivery vehicle most suitable for their needs.
- Market specifically to under-represented listener groups.

Objective: Analyze Source Materials and Adjust Content

- Identify the changing landscape of print journalism and its delivery mechanisms and adjust programs accordingly.
- Review current program offerings for relevance and adjust, expand, or discontinue
- Identify new content that is popular and should be added to VOICEcorps. Consider pop culture trends and program accordingly.

Objective: Develop Updated and Robust Web Content

- Form a review team to reimage, redesign and overhaul VOICEcorps.org, creating a modern, content-rich accessible site that encourages member loyalty, volunteer engagement, and provides resources to the public. Coordinate marketing to more fully promote regular content updates to boost website usage.
- Create a volunteer support area allowing better team communications
- Explore the potential that volunteers themselves handle scheduling and other program production tasks.

- Extend and expand the use of social networking to more fully engage volunteers, partners, and the audience.
- Create original on-demand programming that will be available primarily via the web.

Objective: Engage Audience and Communicate with Members
- Create feedback mechanisms so that various audience demographics groups and divisions can provide guidance for program development, scheduling, and adjustment.
- Review and revise current audience communication methods and practices to promote maximum effectiveness from VOICEcorps to its audiences and from the audiences to VOICEcorps.
- Introduce live focus group discussions with selected groups of listeners for more in-depth discussion and understanding.
- Use alternative social networking sites which more fully cater to the needs of blind, low vision and other people with disabilities.

Volunteerism

Objective: Create a Better-rounded, Informed Volunteer Corps to Help VOICEcorps Meet its Other Goals and Objectives
- Add resources, information and tools to VOICEcorps.org.
- Hold regular orientation sessions for all new volunteers. Invite veteran volunteers as well.
- Offer at least one annual workshop or training session to volunteers.
- Teach volunteers a 30-second elevator speech so that they can communicate our mission and vision to others reliably.

Objective: Effectively Engage Volunteers in Order to Create a Deeper Pool of Resources from which to Draw
- Introduce volunteers to the listening audience (print, web, electronically and in person).
- Hold annual volunteer focus groups.
- Hold informal volunteer get-togethers throughout the year in order for volunteers to meet one another.
- Establish a procedure for providing program feedback to each volunteer.
- Ask volunteers how to best communicate with them, and then implement ways to reach them effectively.
- Create volunteer management teams to help us meet these goals.
- Set up short-term volunteer teams for special projects.
- Create a Volunteer Buddy System where established volunteers contact and mentor new volunteers.

Objective: Recruit and Train Adequate Numbers of Volunteers to Meet Our Extended Needs
- Define needs.
- Interview for specific positions and qualifications.
- Identify special expertise current volunteers may have.
- Expand recruitment efforts to find talent for unmet needs.

Operations & Engineering

To support the provision of excellent service to the audiences of VOICEcorps, we will pursue the following:

Objective: Improve VOICEcorps technical capabilities

- Install a hot-swappable audio backup server.
- Add capability to encode and upload content from any studio to VOICEcorps.org
- Add capability to play, record, edit and transfer programs to program sharing sites.

Objective: Create a standardized method to begin supplementing current operations, engineering and IT functions with a new corps of skilled and specialized volunteers, part-time employees and contractors for the purposes of engineering maintenance and support, receiver repair and distribution, operations training, audio engineering and related tasks

- Collaborate with Development to create needed funding when necessary.
- Collaborate with Director of Volunteers to build this network.
- Begin recruitment efforts at schools, universities, and companies.
- Determine working boundaries and collaboration areas.

Objective: Establish Formal Production Standards

- Enforce standards to assure uniformity among programs.
- Encourage flexibility and creativity while working within standards.
- Investigate options for volunteers to record at home.
- Create or revise handbooks for operating in recording booths, control rooms and remotely.

Objective: Modernize Mission Critical Equipment

Collaborate with development, current IT and engineering along with any applicable vendors and volunteers. Associated equipment will include:

- Computers running broadcast software.
- Servers and backups.
- KVM switches.
- Office workstations
- Upgrades to computer stations to include more robust processing power as well as improvements to supplementary equipment such as computer monitors, speakers, microphones, printers, scanners, etc.

Objective: Evaluate Audio Infrastructure

- Evaluate signal fidelity across all devices.
- Evaluate ease of access for repair and replacement.
- Identify potential failures in studio equipment and wiring.
- Recommend changes needed to bring broadcast facilities back to standards compliance.

Objective: Improve Remote Recording and Broadcasting Capability

- In support of our core values, create a kit of accessible recording equipment for blind users.
- Provide appropriate training for volunteers and select staff to use the equipment.

Objective: Improve In-Studio Access to Web-based Publications and other Reading Materials.

- Install a second computer and computer monitor in selected production studios to obtain printed information from the web and other sources.
- Develop a local document server for storage of reading materials prepared for broadcast
- Work toward replacing the existing hard copy (newspaper ripping) reading materials method with electronic storage to the degree that this method is more efficient.
- Institute the training of volunteers and associated personnel as it relates to this goal.

Administration

Objective: Implement this Strategic Plan

- Distribute the final strategic plan to all staff and interested volunteers to promote familiarity and inform decision-making.
- The Executive Director will ensure that all staff members and key volunteers understand where they fit into the plan and how they might develop specific steps and stratagems to reach the objectives and goals of the plan.
- Publish the plan in print and Braille, and publicize its existence to all stakeholders.

Objective: Improve efficiency of VOICEcorps human resources

- Management and operational staffing will be regularly reviewed to ascertain where economies can be achieved within VOICEcorps.
- The Director of Volunteers will recruit and train teams of volunteers with skill sets required to meet VOICEcorps goals and objectives
- Staffing levels will be optimized for maximum impact on goals and objectives and to minimize activities and efforts which draw resources away from the goals and objectives.

Objective: Set In Place a Professional, Self-Correcting and Continually Improving Management System

- Although VOICEcorps is tolerant of many styles of management and working structures, certain standards are in order. VOICEcorps activities will be highly professional, give appropriate attention to detail, error correcting, responsiveness, consideration, non-defensiveness, and supportiveness.
- The Executive Director will meet with staff at least quarterly to review strategies, problem solve, and coordinate organizational activities.
- Staff and volunteer team leaders will meet with their teams on a regular basis to facilitate communication between the Director and all stakeholders to assist in promoting goals and objectives.
- Staff and volunteer communication will be encouraged to aid in coordination and help produce a collegial spirit of cooperation.
- Staff and volunteers will be encouraged to participate with clubs and other organizations to produce a spirit of cooperation and aid in coordinated mutually beneficial efforts.

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