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# Report to Community on Volunteer Forum: Elko, Nev.

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## Introduction

Every three years, Nevada Volunteers revises and updates their State Service Plan. The State Service Plan is a strategic planning document developed to assess the robustness of voluntarism across the state, increase stronger partnerships for volunteerism and identify strategies to strengthen volunteer and engagement efforts across Nevada. As part of the planning process, Nevada Volunteers in partnership with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension conducted six community forums across the state in Reno, Fallon, Las Vegas, Mesquite, Elko and Tonopah in spring of 2016 as a means of outreach to both rural and urban communities. The purpose of the forums was to gather information and share ideas about volunteerism, service and community engagement.

On May 11, 2016, Nevada Volunteers and Cooperative Extension hosted a Community Forum in Elko, Nev. Information gathered from the forums will be incorporated into the Nevada Volunteers three-year State Plan of Service and can be accessed here: [http://nevadavolunteers.org/about\\_us/reports-facts/](http://nevadavolunteers.org/about_us/reports-facts/). The *Report to the Community* reflects only the information provided by the specific community.

Announcements of the Forums were provided through media release, email contacts, local community calendars, and other communication channels used by Nevada Volunteers. An effort was made to encourage participation from a wide variety of stakeholders including businesses, individual volunteers, faith-based groups, nonprofits, civic organizations, and municipal or governmental agencies. Forum sites were selected to have a wide representation of the state's geographic uniqueness. Total Attendance for all six forums across the state included 106 participants.

Twenty-eight people registered for the Elko Community Forum, with 21 people attending the forum. Participants represented each of the five categories (individual, government, non-profit, faith-based and civic groups, and business). The contents of this report include the information and thoughts about the community as seen from the perspective of these participants. This report is not intended to be a comprehensive picture of the entire area, but merely a snapshot as provided by those in attendance.

## Background Information

Strong resilient communities have layers of connections that assure residents have access to and relationships with others and to services and activities they need. Community volunteerism and engagement are important components to a healthy and resilient community. A term often used to describe a network of community engagement and social trust is *Social Capital*. Social Capital describes the various social networks with which people have access to resources including the type and depth of relationships and connections within a community. The number of volunteers within a community is a strong measure of community engagement and one aspect of social capital. Higher rates of volunteerism and engagement in a community are associated with improving government services, preventing crime, increasing graduation rates, fostering economic development and increased community responsibility for problems solving (Levine 2013; Mathews 2014; Opportunity Nation 2014; Pancer 2015; Putnam 1995; and Schneider 2004).

In addition to building social capital, volunteer service has positive effects on volunteers as individuals. Volunteers report greater life satisfaction and better physical health than do non-volunteers, and their life satisfaction and physical health improves at a greater rate as a result of volunteering. Interestingly, those who give support through volunteering experience greater health benefits than those who receive support through these activities, especially among the elderly (Wu 2011).



## What opportunities exist in Elko?

Participants in the forum were provided a framework that included businesses, nonprofits, civic or faith-based groups, municipalities or governmental entities, and individuals (Figure 2). The framework was provided to highlight what is needed to have a flourishing volunteer infrastructure. Participants were asked to describe what existed in the community related to each of those areas. The conversation in every community included comments from participants about how difficult it was to actually know what was available and what was happening around opportunities for engagement and volunteerism. Participants identified 81 entities that offer volunteer and engagement opportunities within the Elko community (Figure 3).

### Opportunities for Volunteerism and Engagement in Our Communities

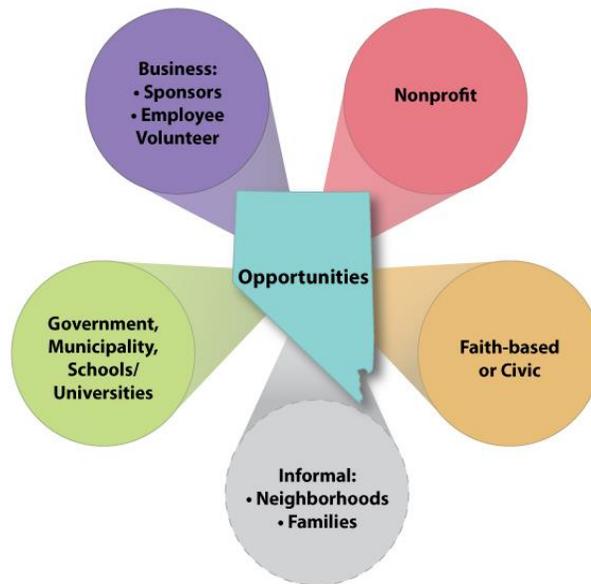


Figure 2. Volunteer ecosystem.

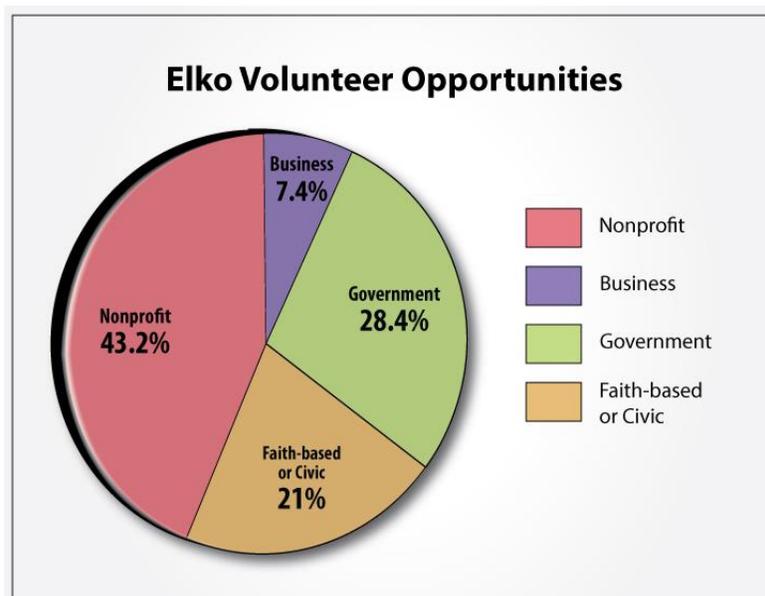


Figure 3. Volunteer and engagement opportunities in Elko.

## How are volunteer efforts leveraged across various sectors?

To examine the degree to which community sectors work together or “network” to have greater impact, each community was asked to provide examples of volunteer activities that involved collaboration among the sectors. Building a community network is vital to enhancing and engaging more citizens in volunteering and service. The cross-sector network concept was depicted in another visual graphic (Figure 4), and participants were asked to describe the type of connections and networks that they individually use or were aware of in the community. Examples provided by participants in the forum of such networks are listed below (Figure 5). The examples provided are not comprehensive but merely provide a few examples as shared by participants in the forum.

### Linking Volunteer Efforts Within Sectors and Outside Sectors

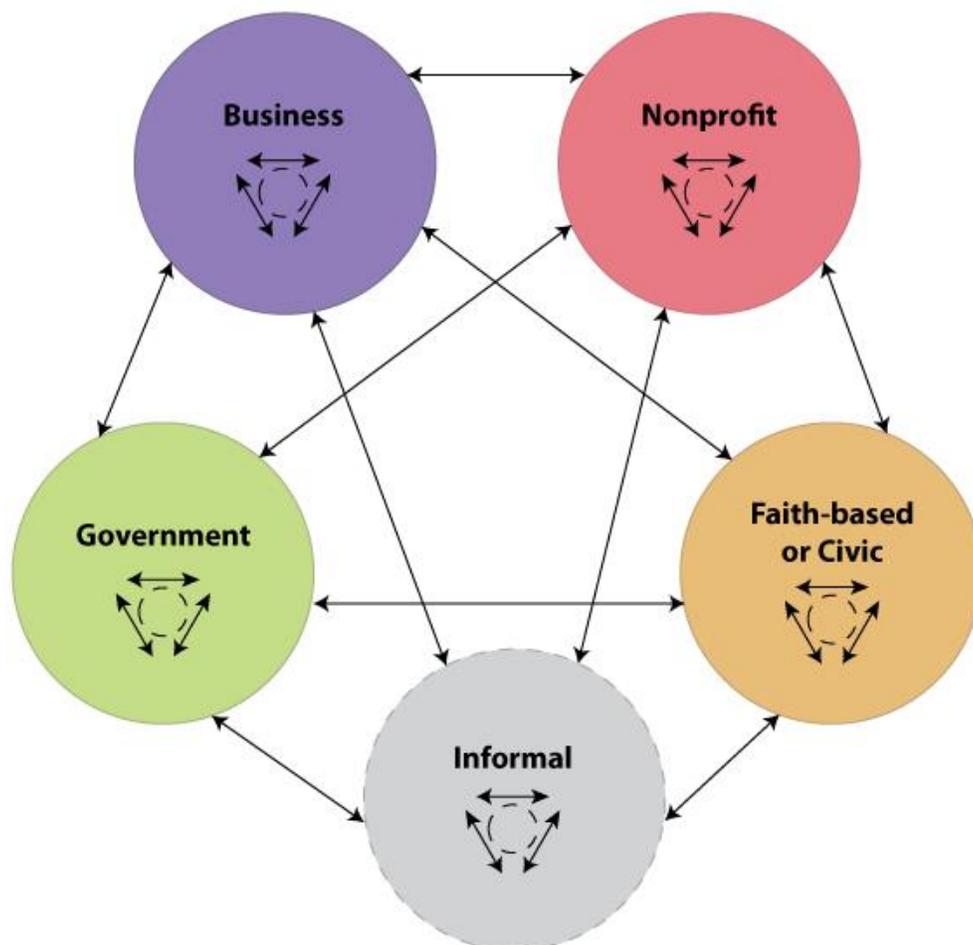


Figure 4. Building a stronger community network across sectors.

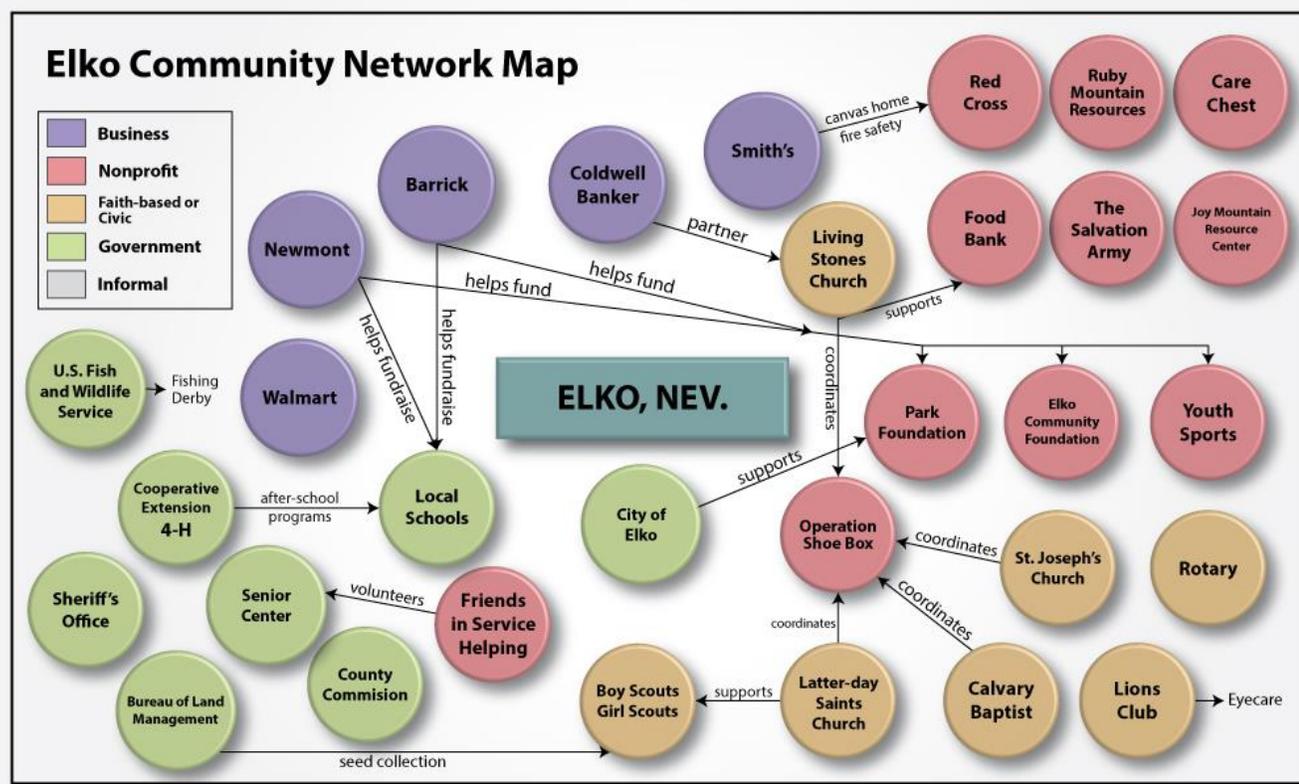


Figure 5. Community network map from examples shared in the forum.

In summary to the question *“How are volunteer efforts leveraged across various sectors?”*, a picture that emerges is one of dedicated people and organizations operating as best they can to improve and support issues in their community. While each sector has its champions and leaders who are excelling, Nevada currently lacks the infrastructure to strengthen and leverage opportunities across the state. Although there is a strong “will” of caring and dedicated people in the community, an infrastructure to strengthen the will of organizations and individuals does not currently exist. Based on the discussion, it seems Elko has a strong community network among the various entities with some cross-over occurring among nonprofits, businesses, government entities and municipalities, and faith-based and civic organizations. Elko appears to have a fairly robust network of social capital, which will help maintain community resiliency. The formal structures appear strong and not dependent upon one or two individuals within the community. Although key community leaders are essential in a community, Elko does not seem to be heavily dependent on just a few individuals, as some smaller, rural communities in Nevada are. While few civic or faith-based entities were listed, they were mentioned in the discussion frequently as primary ways links were made for services and volunteer efforts.

### What strategies would strengthen volunteerism in the community?

Finally, participants were presented with examples of possible strategies from surveys and national best practices that enhance volunteerism. Participants were asked to identify a few strategies that they felt had the most potential for moving volunteering and service forward in Elko. Participants identified the following two strategies as the top priorities to strengthen volunteerism in the community. A list of strategies with specific comments are included in Table 1.

- (1) Community-based volunteer information or connector hub. (14 votes)
- (2) Increase the visibility of volunteer opportunities/impact. (14 votes)

Table 1. Identified strategies to strengthen volunteerism in Elko.

| Votes | Strategies   |
|-------|--|
| 14    | <p>Community-based volunteer information or connector hub.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 211 (information).</li> <li>- Nevada Volunteers.</li> <li>- Volunteer Match; Justserve.org; Hands-On Monthly Update newsletter.</li> <li>- Volunteer centers.</li> <li>- Publish list in periodicals.</li> <li>- Weekly happenings.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get the information out.</li> <li>- Non-internet ways to learn about opportunities – person with a phone number.</li> <li>- Need to do multiple ways of promoting.</li> <li>- Ask a friend.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| 14    | <p>Increase the visibility of volunteer opportunities/impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting data – works = this. One person in organization is assigned to this.</li> <li>- Constant campaign. Use Elko Convention and Visitors Authority to promote. Have a community volunteer program to teach what volunteerism is. Partners Allied for Community Excellence does a good job. Get City Council involved.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Let people know of all opportunities.</li> <li>- Elko Chamber of Commerce.</li> <li>- Elko Convention and Visitors Authority.</li> <li>- Program for volunteers.</li> <li>- Expectations.</li> <li>- It's a job.</li> <li>- Include city/municipal organizations involved.</li> <li>- Data – Who's volunteering and who's not and why.</li> <li>- Balance between promoting and having work for volunteers to do.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| 12    | <p>Increase access/opportunities for youth and student service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help youth understand what volunteering is.</li> <li>- Open way to come in.</li> <li>- System of accountability / follow-through.</li> <li>- Give elementary school students volunteer opportunities.</li> <li>- Linking leadership with volunteering.</li> <li>- Barrier: Some teachers/advisors have given up and don't think youth will help.</li> <li>- Sports and other school clubs should do service.</li> <li>- Work with school leadership on structure.</li> <li>- Is court-ordered community service a negative?</li> </ul>  |
| 7     | <p>Training for staff/volunteers to run quality volunteer programs.</p>  |
| 5     | <p>Incentives that promote stronger volunteer engagement.</p>  |
| 3     | <p>Increase access/opportunities for those who have left the workforce.</p>  |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| <b>2</b> | Collect common metrics to measure volunteer impact and contributions.                         |
|          | A community engagement leadership team for ongoing conversation/focus.                        |
|          | Business employee volunteers provide needed capacity and internal operations support.         |
|          | Strategic focused effort to address community needs.  |
|          | Influence key decision makers in the community about value/importance/impact of volunteering. |

Among all six communities, participants in both urban and rural settings conveyed a consistent message of three core themes.

Theme 1. Nevada needs to have a volunteer connector or “hub” system in local communities, whether virtual or physical, to serve as a place for all things volunteer-related.

Theme 2. Nevada needs to increase the visibility of volunteer needs, volunteer efforts and volunteer impact to widen the awareness and interest of community members and leaders in local areas. This awareness can help highlight the power and impact of volunteer work.

Theme 3. Communities need training to be provided (either locally or regionally) for volunteer managers and programs to increase the effectiveness and retention of volunteers.

## Overall Takeaways:

Elko has a changing economy and, similarly, the infrastructure underlying the volunteer efforts seems to be changing resulting in a need to find new ways to resource and support volunteer efforts. Traditional ways of doing engagement are not working as well as in the past. Elko as a community could benefit from stronger leadership and individual connections among interested stakeholders to develop peer networking and a way to identify individual needs. Barriers to greater linking stem from shifting business priorities in the area, governmental rules, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about who to go to for various resources or support.

Nonprofits need support to integrate the practices for sound financial oversight, management, personnel practices and resource development. This need for capacity within the nonprofit sector impacts a community’s ability to attract funding and grant resources from local, state and federal sources, and to connect with business resources. Using skilled professionals in volunteer positions will boost nonprofit capacity at the local level. This practice is emerging as a national trend, but it needs structure and support to be widely applied in Nevada.

Nevada Volunteers and Cooperative Extension are grateful for the time, interest and energy given by these local residents to participate in the forum. As follow-up to the forum, this report is being provided to each participant, and the information is being used as a foundation for the development of the State Service Plan, which will guide the efforts and resources of Nevada Volunteers for the next three years.

Potential next steps include the convening of individuals and organizations to continue the conversation to implement strategies to support further engagement of citizens; identifying a liaison in each community who would serve as a contact point for volunteer information and awareness, working in tandem with Nevada Volunteers; and promoting the utilization of national service resources as a mechanism for meeting community needs.

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