

Book Group Facilitation Guide

Transforming Disruption to Impact: Rethinking Volunteer Engagement for a Rapidly Changing World

Edited by Doug Bolton, Beth Steinhorn, Jerome Tennille, and Craig Young

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This guide is designed to help book groups explore, discuss, and apply strategies featured in the book, *Transforming Disruption to Impact: Rethinking Volunteer Engagement for a Rapidly Changing World*. While the book has implications for community leaders, business leaders, teachers, and others, this facilitation guide presumes that book group participants are mostly nonprofit leaders, volunteer engagement leaders, corporate engagement leaders, funders, and/or volunteers. However, you can adapt these questions and formats to fit your group's unique membership.

The four sections of this guide mirror the four sections of the book and can be used to facilitate a single book discussion or a four-part discussion, consisting of four separate meetings. As the facilitator, select questions and topics from each section to support the structure of your book group.

Discussion questions and activities are organized according to the four sections of the book:

1. Landscape of Disruption
2. Rethinking Strategy
3. Rethinking Engagement
4. Rethinking Impact

Each section features:

- Warm-up
- Discussion
- Quotes and Interpretation
- Concepts to Action

If you choose to combine all or some of the sections into fewer than four distinct sessions, you may want to select just one "Warm-up" question and facilitate that at the start of the gathering, move through discussion and quotes from each relevant section, then facilitate just one "Concepts to Action" for the whole session.

Warm-up

On a personal note, what was one notable disruption you experienced in recent years?

Discussion

1. Many disruptions affected nonprofits, communities, and corporate operations and engagement. Which disruptions did your organization and community experience?
2. Did any of the disruptions identified in the first section of the book surprise you?
3. What additional disruptions affected organizations and communities in recent years? Have they affected your work or volunteering in notable ways?
4. One theme woven into some of these chapters is the changing motivations of volunteers. In your experience, how have volunteer motivations shifted in recent years? Do you anticipate future shifts as well?

Quotes and Interpretation

The appendix features selected quotes from each chapter, organized by section. Review the appropriate section in the addendum, select a quote or two (or ask a participant to do so), and discuss one or more of the following prompts:

- Does the excerpt resonate with you? Do you agree with it or disagree?
- How does the excerpt relate to your work or inspire new questions or thinking?
- Did your experience differ from this statement? If so, in what ways?

Concepts to Action

1. How have you documented the disruptions your organization faced? With whom have you shared that information?
2. With whom will you discuss the disruptions moving forward? How will you advocate for volunteer engagement and its benefits in the future?

Warm-up

Share a time when you embraced your role as a leader—in work, with family, or in your community—and one way you led effectively.

Discussion

1. What did you like about the ideas presented in this section? Were any of the ideas ones that you would like to see implemented in your organization or community?
2. Many of these chapters related directly or indirectly to the concept of leadership. What strategies or qualities of leadership did you find inspiring?
3. How have you tapped into leadership volunteers in new ways in recent years? How have you embraced your role as a leader?
4. Some of the strategies presented here relate to new perspectives of CEOs, funders, corporate partners, and community leaders. How have these chapters influenced your ideas for collaboration with any or all of these stakeholders?

Quotes and Interpretation

The appendix features selected quotes from each chapter, organized by section. Review the appropriate section in the addendum, select a quote or two (or ask a participant to do so), and discuss one or more of the following prompts:

- If you were to start an essay or blog post with this statement, where would your writing go from there? What point might you make?
- How does the excerpt relate to your work or inspire new questions or thinking?
- Did your experience differ from this statement? If so, in what ways?

Concepts to Action

1. Using some of the concepts in these chapters, how can you open a dialogue with your fund development or executive leadership about investing in volunteer engagement?
2. If you were to apply some of the ideas in these chapters about corporate engagement, with whom could you share these stories and how would you advocate for more skilled or pro bono engagement?

Warm-up

If you were to have written a chapter about your experiences during recent years, what story or strategy would you share?

Discussion

1. Do you have experience with any of the actions or methods mentioned in this book?
2. How did your experience of “community” change in recent years, and how did that experience apply to your efforts to engage volunteers or serve clients? Do you believe that there are benefits to nurturing a sense of community? If so, what?
3. Many of the chapters in this section addressed change management—as well as barriers to change. What did you find particularly noteworthy? Anything you would add to that topic?
4. What lasting lessons have you learned from organizations who transformed disruption to impact?

Quotes and Interpretation

The appendix features selected quotes from each chapter, organized by section. Review the appropriate section in the addendum, select a quote or two (or ask a participant to do so), and discuss one or more of the following prompts:

- Is there a more powerful sentence or series of sentences from the chapter in question that you believe is more inspiring or emblematic of the author’s message? What is it and why?
- How does the excerpt relate to your work or inspire new questions or thinking?
- Did your experience differ from this statement? If so, in what ways?

Concepts to Action

1. What will you do to nurture a sense of community within your volunteer corps and your staff?
2. How might you implement scenario planning to help prepare your organization for any future challenges?

Warm-up

One of the editors of the book describes this effort as a dream opportunity to invite leading thinkers in volunteer engagement to a virtual dinner party to hear how they transformed the disruptions of recent years into impact for their organizations. If this group were hosting such a dinner party, who is one person you would invite?

Discussion

1. What methods do you regularly use to track and communicate volunteer impact? How did that change during the pandemic? What might you change moving forward?
2. Did the concept of multifaceted impacts of service (i.e., impacts on the community, on the volunteers, and on the sector) resonate with you and your experience? If so, how?
3. What ideas do you have for significant infrastructure improvements that would drive 10x impacts on volunteer engagement?
4. Reflecting on the book overall, what topics are you interested in pursuing further?

Quotes and Interpretation

The appendix features selected quotes from each chapter, organized by section. Review the appropriate section in the addendum, select a quote or two (or ask a participant to do so), and discuss one or more of the following prompts:

- Does this statement apply to other areas of your work or life beyond engaging volunteers? In what ways?
- How does the excerpt relate to your work or inspire new questions or thinking?
- Did your experience differ from this statement? If so, in what ways?

Concepts to Action

1. What disruptions do you anticipate encountering in the coming years?
2. How might you expand the way to you reveal and communicate the impact of volunteers in the future? With whom will you discuss the disruptions moving forward? How will you advocate for volunteer engagement and its benefits in the future?

Section I: Landscape of Disruption

In responding to the pandemic, evidence shows that national volunteering leadership organizations faced significant challenges... The mobilization of volunteers was necessary to provide help during the pandemic, but the challenge of keeping volunteers safe was also of paramount importance.

Time of Crisis: Leadership for Volunteering and Community Resilience, p. 12
Nichole Cirillo and Wendy Osborne

If there is a legacy of the pandemic on volunteer connections it is this: our presence—mindful, conscious, human presence—is required to promote healthy, thriving communities.

Connecting Volunteers to Organizations: Learnings from the COVID-19 Pandemic, p. 31
Laura Plato

...I often remind folks that this work isn't about simply checking a box; it requires intentionality. It requires endurance, time, commitment, and support from the highest level.

Racial Equity in Volunteerism, p. 39
Wendy Vang Roberts

It is not a surprise that age segregation is common in programs that engage volunteers and national service members, just as it pervades every major aspect of American life.

Co-Generational Service: A Disruption to Increase Impact, p. 48
Phyllis N. Segal

If you're always comfortable—if everybody around you is always comfortable—years will go by and nothing will change. You'll never start a dialogue, you'll never change the power dynamic, and you'll never know what you could have done.

Moving Beyond Transactional Volunteerism to Transformational Civic Engagement, p. 64
Natalye Paquin

Section II: Rethinking Strategy

Many people are desperate for change because they've recognized the systems that got us here will no longer work to create the transformational change we're seeking. This, too, applies to how we engage volunteers.

Evolution of Corporate Volunteer Engagement, p. 76
Jerome Tennille

A strong and diverse volunteer base can be mobilized to meet a variety of communal needs when managed effectively. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic will not be the last crisis that our partner organizations experience, and forward-thinking organizations will continue to invest in volunteers to meet needs that they cannot yet anticipate.

Why We Invest in Volunteerism: A Funder's Perspective, p. 88
Rina Cohen

When you share your concerns and challenges, showing some vulnerability, they will rally. Let volunteers know what you need from them.

All Together: Volunteers and Staff Pull in the Same Direction to Achieve Result, p. 101
Lauren Spero and Cyndi Zagieboylo

In 2020, we started to understand that the social justice and social outcomes we were seeking weren't going to work with the barriers that we had erected to solve them. We learned about those barriers between philanthropists, volunteers, and we worked hard to overcome them.

Disruptions Move Skills-Based Volunteering into Mainstream, pp. 108-109
Danielle Holly

Let's ask ourselves the question, "How can we change our volunteer engagement practices and expand the definition of best practices to be more inclusive and less rigid?"

The Power of Informal Volunteerism, p. 122
Karmit Bulman

The influence of the corporation on the lives of individuals—their finances, their mental health, their families, the way they vote—is society-shaping. If companies continue to offer volunteering solely for the sake of volunteering, we will see systemic oppression persist.

Volunteering as a Mechanism to Develop Empathy, p. 126
Chris Jarvis and Angela Parker

Section III: Rethinking Engagement

If we really want to get beyond vanity volunteering and engage people to address root causes of hunger and poverty, for example, we must incorporate learning into these days so that we tap into the best of effective service learning, which includes learning, service, and reflection.

Service Days: Changing the Conversation, pp. 144-145
Beth Steinhorn and Jerome Tennille

Scenario planning helps eliminate the bias toward optimistic thinking seen in strategic planning and prepares an organization to be thoughtful about even those things that would seem unlikely to occur.

Technology and Services Are Poised to Create WIDER Nonprofits, p. 153
Doug Bolton

We also built a clear path for volunteers to take on larger roles. Past project volunteers often become product managers in the next cycle. Past product managers could be promoted to managing directors overseeing three to five projects.

Students Self-Organize for Impact, p. 161
Amay Aggarwal and Mary Zhu

At MENTOR, we have worked to support the field in several ways to ensure physical distance does not mean social disconnection.

The Mentoring Field: A Lesson in Persistence and Evolution, p. 170
Elizabeth Santiago, PhD, and David Shapiro

Effective communities establish clear lines between who are members and who are nonmembers—not with the goal of keeping people out, but rather to ensure that those who cross boundary into the community know that are, in fact, “in.”

Redefining Community in a Hybrid World, p. 183
Beth Steinhorn

Section IV: Rethinking Impact

Language influences actions and can inadvertently narrow how we define impact.

Purpose-Driven Volunteer Impact, p. 197

Sue Carter Kahl, PhD

The unprecedented urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic removed barriers that had previously stifled collaboration and, instead, increased trust among partners as everyone was clearly working toward the same goal—saving lives across their state.

The Multifaceted Impacts of Service, p. 204

Kaira Esgate

In the field of innovation, it is widely understood that if you want to improve something by 10 percent, you can probably do it by tweaking the current approach or technology. But if you want to improve by ten times or more, you need a fresh, innovative approach or technology.

Disruption Exposed Our Lack of Infrastructure; It's Time to Build It, p. 217

Craig Young