

**Kosciusko County Leadership Academy White Paper: Volunteer Kosciusko**

Taylor Garrison, Michael Slavkin, and Jessica Wienhorst

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**Overview**

A critical component of every community is the opportunity for its citizens to serve. Kosciusko County has a long-standing history of community engagement. One critical source of support to the community comes from Volunteer Kosciusko, an organization founded in 2009 and supported through the United Way. It all began in 2009 after Don and Jacqueline Bergen returned to the Warsaw area after living in Chicago and Cleveland for 20 years. Upon returning to the county, the Bergens wanted to get involved back in the community, but were not sure where to start. After meeting with friends and talking about their interests, it became clear that there were many people within Kosciusko County in the same situation. How could they make a difference in their community in an area of interest that also demonstrated a need?

To that end, the Bergens met with the United Way and a gathering of chief officers from a variety of organizations in order to clarify how interested citizens could get involved. The United Way requested the following people to continue to be involved:

- Patricia Coy, United Way
- Don Bergen, Volunteer
- Ken Locke, Salvation Army
- Tracy Furnival, Baker Youth Club
- Jack Felger, Council on Aging (retired)
- Lewis Jones, Combined Community Services (relocated)
- Cindy Cates, Literacy Services
- Randy Hall, Cardinal Services
- Michelle Boxell, Cardinal Services
- Rick Paczkowski, Home Health Care & Hospice
- Eric Lane, Warsaw Community Church (Now, Fellowship Mission)

Each of these individuals supported a system whereby individuals would have the chance to work in the community. The committee recommended that individuals be able to identify information from a website on current needs from a variety of not-for-profit organizations. The individuals should be able to sign up for various experiences and in doing so, provide organizations with their information.

Volunteer Kosciusko has been a web-based portal for residents to find volunteer opportunities that fit their lifestyles. Whether community members seek a one day volunteer opportunity or a longer-term relationship with a community organization, over its existence more than 1,000 volunteers have signed up with Volunteer Kosciusko to find a way to contribute their time and talents. Furthermore, some 65 organizations have worked with Volunteer Kosciusko to regularly fill their volunteer needs.

With assistance from Bill Kelly from Vision It Now, a website development firm, Volunteer Kosciusko was born as the web portal it is today. Beginning in 2009, various communities within Kosciusko were able to commence matching citizens with community partners. For the past seven years, the website has provided an opportunity to announce community events, provide information about organizational needs, and advertise opportunities for experience and involvement.

In speaking with original board members and Ron Bergen, it became clear that the website has provided good information about events and experiential opportunities. However, keeping the website up to date has proved challenging, as it requires someone to consistently scrub the dates as events come and go. Further, it is unclear if the 1,100 member participants of Volunteer Kosciusko continue to be active in their involvement in

serving the community. It is more likely that some of them have moved, become unavailable, and sought out other opportunities.

#### Current Status

During the fall of 2016, our KLA group reviewed the current status of the Volunteer Kosciusko website and outreach. It was determined, specifically, that the system no longer reaches out to the community in a way that is most effective for this time. The technology is limited and potentially dated due to so many recent innovations. Further, the lack of social media connections is problematic, in that today's youth and young professionals likely do not consider going to a website in order to find a volunteer opportunity. Furthermore, in examining the information listed by area organizations, most of the requests for support were over 9-12 months old, further limiting the success of the website to document current needs.

Per our discussion and recent research concerning internet changes and development, it does not seem adequate enough in today's world to merely have a website. With the internet in the palm of everyone's hand, the website used by Volunteer Kosciusko needs to be mobile-friendly and to be even more successful, have an app that will be available to anyone interested in using the website on a regular basis. This also will ensure a bigger and potentially younger audience and thus, more volunteers for Volunteer Kosciusko. In 2014, a study revealed that 25 percent of all web traffic originated from a mobile device (David & Muman, 2014). This number has increased exponentially in the past three years, as smart phones have become all but the only option on the market. "Mobile devices make use of "natural user interfaces," and those interfaces are making computing easier for people of all ages and abilities" (Hennig, 2016, p. 545). Apps are

meant to provide a mobile-friendly as well as user-friendly option for people to communicate.

As time and technology change, so too do the wants and needs of consumers change when it comes to operating websites and finding value in them. “Navigation design is the complete and accurate planning of the website structure to enhance convenience for users and allows them to quickly find needed information. The goal of information design is to make the website content rich and clearly transmitted. Visual design is the use of visual components to make the screen more attractive to users and to make website information easier to understand.” (Hennig, 2016, p. 545). Today’s market is very competitive and if a person cannot immediately spot the information they are looking for within a few seconds, they often stray to another site to browse. Volunteer Kosciusko’s home page (as it exists now) is already difficult enough to navigate and it is no longer the attraction it certainly was when it started out. When it comes to the actual design of a successful website, it must ignite an interest in the customers, raise participation, and motivate the customers to use the website (Hennig, 2016).

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Lastly when it comes to website success, it is absolutely essential for the website to be truthful and validated in some way. On the current posting page of Volunteer Kosciusko we identified that there are still events listed as “needing volunteers” that took place almost a solid year ago. This does not voice much reliability and validation of content. Visitors to the site will not return if they believe it to be incorrect or not maintained. This deficiency is also evident in the section on the home page that lists all the possible areas to serve in Kosciusko County. Most of the towns/cities are grayed out revealing that they aren’t in fact feasible serving locations. We hope to come up with ways to improve the

above areas in order to make Volunteer Kosciusko a more dependable and appealing site accessible by both hand-held devices and computers.

### Methods

Along with the actual analysis of the website, we were able to create an updated list of organizations that want to or could benefit from being a part of Volunteer Kosciusko. Our goal was to find out what these organizations want out of this website, what contact information they want us to have for them, and find out how much this website could potentially boost their platform. To take this step we began to set up possible meetings with United Way, Cardinal Services, Kosciusko County Community Foundation, and other organizations that have multiple connections within the community.

After meeting with Brenda Rigdon from Kosciusko County Community Foundation, we were able to acquire a list of over 400 non-for profit organizations that our county has had the pleasure of working with in the past. From the list we were able to research and narrow down that number to roughly 200 organizations. We kept only organizations that were located in Kosciusko County and that had updated contact information on their website. This was all conducted and placed into an excel spreadsheet for Volunteer Kosciusko to use as a contact method.

Once we had this list of organizations, our group put together a brief survey to send to each organization that would allow them to answer the questions we had from above. Our group (alongside Rachel Greig from United Way) sent an email with the link to the survey to each organization. The questions and responses to those can be found in Appendix A. This survey gave us a great indication of what our community organizations are truly needing and wanting out of Volunteer Kosciusko. It also gave us a small indication

of who is still using the website, or who is ready to begin their relationship with Volunteer Kosciusko! With the updated contact info received from the survey, we are excited at the opportunity to follow up with those organizations so they can start their journey with Volunteer Kosciusko as soon as possible. With the positive responses we received, we were able to put together a list of goals for this project that are based on community response.

Upon the complete review; our KLA group decided that there were a few goals we ultimately were striving for concerning Volunteer Kosciusko

([www.volunteerkosciusko.org](http://www.volunteerkosciusko.org)). Specifically, we listed the following goals below:

- Exploring the Volunteer Kosciusko website ([www.volunteerkosciusko.org](http://www.volunteerkosciusko.org)) and updating it accordingly to include a more streamlined process for community organizations to promote and maintain their needs.
- Marketing the Volunteer Kosciusko website through social media outlets.
- Update our non-for-profit list with contact info to have in inventory
- Ensure sustainability (administrative oversight) of the website through the identification of a community organization that has the ability for support over the long-term.
- The possible creation of an app for volunteers and people of Kosciusko to utilize in seeking volunteer support.
- A systematic examination of marketing of the Volunteer Kosciusko system to not-for-profit and service organizations.

Marketing is a component of Volunteer Kosciusko that has not necessarily been emphasized during its existence like it could be in the present day. As a result, many community members and organizations are not aware of its existence; let alone how to

access it. It would be beneficial to have most, if not all, not-for-profit organizations as a partner; further, they can assist in marketing efforts, to ensure that the word gets about Volunteer Kosciusko and what it is doing for their organization. Getting schools and internal groups (National Honors Society, K21 Foundation, Key Club, and etc...), churches, and other businesses involved would aid in this endeavor of marketing as well. One way this might be expanded would be creating a flyer or business cards to offer these groups/organizations and to hand out to the general public. It would be great advertising for both the website and their organization! Volunteer Kosciusko has the potential to be these organizations' sole volunteer access point.

Sustainability of Volunteer Kosciusko has been an issue over the course of its entire existence. While the site has received support from United Way, it was unclear if the structure currently continues to be systematically reviewed. Having a dedicated intern overseeing the upkeep of the website would provide an excellent opportunity for both technical advancement and the formation of connections throughout the community that would certainly only benefit them. They could ultimately be in charge of ensuring that the contacts and organizations within the website are current and involved. This intern also could be responsible for the marketing and the attractiveness of the website to ensure that it will continue to be both used and exploited throughout the entire community.

In order to make this a probable possibility, we explored the route of using Ivy Tech Community College in Warsaw to supply an internship opportunity for a student to take on this task of both reviewing, updating, and marketing the site, as well as the app if that were to come to fruition. In researching this possibility, we were delighted to discover that the



app itself does not need to be a **cost-worthy creation**, but rather another student learning opportunity from the Ivy Tech Community College's Warsaw Technology Department.

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#### Strategies for Re-Envisioning Volunteer Kosciusko

It was clear from our early meetings with Don Bergen that the actual website and the Volunteer Kosciusko program were closely tied. Modifications to one would require updates to the other. With this in mind, our KLA Leadership group decided that we needed to start with two critical meetings: a discussion and site review with Jerry Haines from Vision It Now, the creators of the website, as well as a meeting with the Kosciusko County United Way and its staff, who were instrumental in founding Volunteer Kosciusko and funding it.

Our group met with Jerry Haines from Vision it Now in early December, 2016 to review the site and discuss the process used to create it. It would be critical that any modifications to the site or updates be clarified first with Vision It Now and with United Way, not only to verify whether the changes could be made, but also whether such changes would provide greater utility for the community. Mr. Haines discussed the procedure used to enter information and the processes required of both not-for-profit organizations and the volunteers themselves.

An immediate review of the site demonstrated that the original format (still in use since 2012) would not provide an adequate platform for creating a phone-specific application format. While it was clear that this enhancement **would** be a critical requirement for volunteers reaching out to Volunteer Kosciusko in 2017, it would require a significant improvement to the current shell of the website. As a group we also discussed

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some other opportunities that might significantly benefit the site. Specifically, the following modifications were addressed:

1. Create an opportunity for an app as well as mobile screen-friendly pages (removal of side panels and columns so that site can be tablet-appropriate or phone-appropriate, based on the size and formatting of the screen).
2. List all of the organizations that volunteers can serve with and the appropriate links to their websites or social media.
3. Provide a forum for general information and expectations or needs for each organization. This would be an excellent opportunity for them to market their own organization.
4. Provide an opportunity for organizations to upload events that need one-time volunteers or a “blast” requesting volunteers with details and requirements.
5. Create a central area for background checks and limited criminal history checks for those organizations that might require them.
6. Create a link or survey opportunity for volunteers who might not be sure where their skills would serve them best and help guide them to the appropriate organization.
7. Create links for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that exist solely for Volunteer Kosciusko.
8. Padlock the browser and serve to ensure that communication is secure between all who take part in Volunteer Kosciusko.

Mr. Haines was quick to reassure that the site as it exists today could be updated easily to make it more user-friendly, specifically in regard to what individuals with smart phones

and tablets expect of today's websites. Therefore, we know that it is absolutely be adjusted in the current format to be small screen friendly and to adjust to each and every user.

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Some critical details came up in the discussion with Mr. Haines, however, that required discussion with United Way. Specifically, as Mr. Bergen moves on from facilitating the Volunteer Kosciusko site, who will step in to be a central manager? This person will require some basic technological training up front and ongoing management of the site and its volunteers. Further, a clarification of who needed to be tagged in all Volunteer Kosciusko emails was addressed. The question arose of who that host should be "to/from" so that emails can be quickly cleared and confirmed as not being spam because so many new people/groups were being included in the line of communication.

We were able to identify in our Vision it Now meeting that the current cost of the website would have a cost per year, and that any maintenance or modifications to the site would have a price per hour. This hourly price includes the cost for training another person to operate the setup they had created. Mr. Bergen and Mr. Haines also shared that Rachel at United Way had been a secondary supervisor to the site, assisting in our quest to clarify another contact person. The specific amounts and background details of the site are located in another document for privacy reasons.

#### United Way Meetings

Michael Slavkin met with Patricia Hoy, Executive Director and Rachel Greig, Community Impact Coordinator for the United Way the day after our meeting with Vision It Now. We quickly realized just how small our community still is when it was brought to our attention that Ms. Hoy had heard about our meeting with Vision It Now and was wondering

if our group was planning to even meet with United Way. It was an excellent lesson in preparation and open communication as one works with the community!

Ms. Hoy and Ms. Greig were both very excited about our KLA project and the opportunity to update the site. The United Way has wanted to update the site for several years, and the chance for them to find a way to modernize the site and collectively seek information was appreciated. Both individuals shared that Volunteer Kosciusko was and always will be a United Way sponsored program, and their desire was to make sure that any modifications made to the site should indicate that the program is a United Way sponsored site. Most important to them was the idea that whatever our KLA group explored that the white paper be strategic in systematically examining the utility of the site and the needs of both volunteers and non-for-profit organizations within Kosciusko County.

A central concern voiced by both Ms. Hoy and Ms. Greig (that we had also already identified) is the limited site options that currently exist with the site. Both United Way representatives shared concerns over the clunky nature of the site, and the need to modernize. They shared in our excitement and agreed to the need of including an app for phone and tablet use. Neither Ms. Hoy nor Ms. Greig thought that a website was a very valid system in today's user needs. Both were also anxious to see that the management for the site provide easier options for updating of information, modification of key personnel and needs, and clearer opportunities for volunteers. The idea also came up to identify ways for fundraising efforts to be incorporated into the app, so that those who were interested in offering time, talent, AND treasure is eligible to do so.

This led us to our next quest of obtaining a quote from another organization called 180 Design. The information we exchanged with this organization allowed us to see what it would cost to completely redo/redesign the website. It also allowed us to get a complete outsider's opinion for the possibilities this site could truly have and ultimately how much it would cost to have that set up and maintained. Some specific things discussed as possibilities for the site were: creating it with the ability to auto update events (thus automatically erasing activities that have already passed), placing organizations or volunteer activities by categories (working with kids, food, planning etc...), having a newsfeed allowing volunteers to share their experiences and recommendations, and allowing each organization to have a profile, so to speak, that would allow them to share who they are and what they do! All of this information was also provided to United Way for review.

In conducting the survey, obtaining quotes for the website, and discovering possible avenues for sustainability we were able to put together an implementable plan for United Way to use moving forward in the modernization of Volunteer Kosciusko. With the \$1000 winning prize from Kosciusko Leadership Academy, our group would be able to not only cover the cost for the redesign of the website, but also allocate funds to the yearly costs of keeping the website safe, secure, and sustainable for the users and organizations. This money could also aid in covering the costs of Ivy Tech creating an internship position that would be involved in all marketing and maintenance of the website once finished. The sustainability of the website through labor is essential in order for it to continue to reach its potential for our organizations and their volunteers.

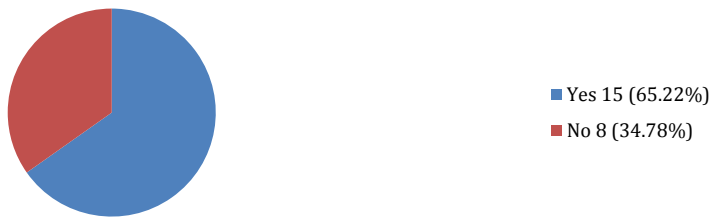
In conclusion, we are extremely excited with the community response we received and the potential this website has in further connecting Kosciusko's citizens and its non-profit organizations. Technological advancements have mandated a need for up to date computer software and appealing site displays to capture and hold the attention of its users. Volunteer Kosciusko is still being used regularly today and we hope to build it up to its potential as a mainstream source of communication and recruitment!

**Appendix A**

Volunteer Kosciusko Survey created through SurveyMonkey

Altogether, 23 responses to the survey were gathered. The questions included on survey are listed below along with some of the responses to each question:

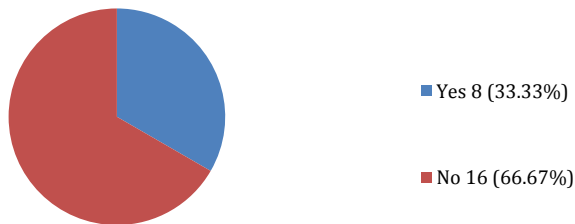
**1. Have you ever heard of Volunteer Kosciusko?**



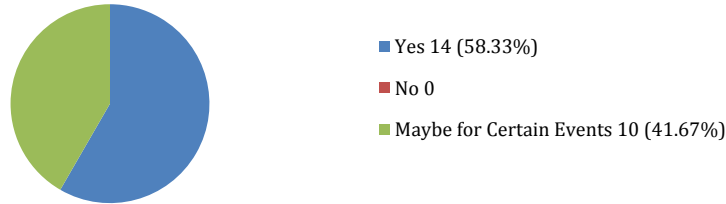
**2. Are you often hurting for volunteers for your organization?**



**3. Volunteer Kosciusko was created as a tool for people in the county to search for volunteer opportunities and ultimately help connect them to organizations that best suit their skills and desires to serve. Have you ever used the website or known anyone**



**4. Would you be interested in making your organization available on the website for people to find volunteer opportunities?**



**5. Would you be interested in having the ability to post specific events or chances for people to volunteer with your organization?**



6. What benefits, if any, do you think your organization could have from being a part of this?

- a. "Long-term volunteer opportunities"
- b. "Our large scale FREE events could grow with adequate help"
- c. "Networking and building relationships"
- d. "Promoting awareness and maintaining a solid list of people"
- e. "Actually fulfilling the volunteer positions needed"
- f. Finding new and younger committee members"
- g. "Increased exposure to general public".
- h. "We already utilize this service and receive volunteers"
- i. "Help us find dedicated coaches for youth sporting events"
- j. "More people would hear about us"
- k. "Ability to offer more events to the general public"
- l. "Wider Exposure"
- m. "Would be beneficial to have local volunteers"



7. Are there any specific capabilities you would want this website to have if your organization chose to be a part of it?
  - a. "Ability to post specific events and opportunities"
  - b. "Ability to directly connect with interested volunteers"
  - c. "We are really looking for a media person to keep our events in the spotlight"
  - d. "I think having contact information for every participating organization is important"
  - e. "We need volunteers for certain times of the year for 2-3 month durations"
  - f. "Will be better able to answer this with time"
  - g. "Volunteer spotlights of people who have helped through website"
  - h. "Maybe load photos or videos to share with potential volunteers. Allow for messaging between organizations and volunteers through the site for Q & A before "committing" to an organization/volunteer"
  
8. Volunteer Kosciusko is seeking to renew through United Way. Is this revised Volunteer Kosciusko something you would like more information about, or are you ready to jump in? Please provide us with your organization name and the best contact email below that will allow us to reach out and provide you with more information!
  - a. City of Warsaw Parks and Recreation Department- Sheila Wieringa- [swieringa@warsaw.in.gov](mailto:swieringa@warsaw.in.gov)
  - b. Classic Arts Programs- [jmeulink@comcast.net](mailto:jmeulink@comcast.net)
  - c. Potawatomi Wildlife Park- [park@getintonature.com](mailto:park@getintonature.com)
  - d. [mgoble@kchamber.com](mailto:mgoble@kchamber.com)
  - e. Kosciusko Community Senior Services- [Bill@kosciuskoseniorservices.org](mailto:Bill@kosciuskoseniorservices.org)
  - f. Jennifer Kerns, Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, Warsaw Community Development Corporation
  - g. [sokbcwalls@aol.com](mailto:sokbcwalls@aol.com)
  - h. Wawasee Kiwanis Club - [tylermclead@gmail.com](mailto:tylermclead@gmail.com)
  - i. The Beaman Home- [Tabitha@thebeamanhome.org](mailto:Tabitha@thebeamanhome.org)
  - j. [lakelandyouthcenter@gmail.com](mailto:lakelandyouthcenter@gmail.com)-Jenny Douglas Executive Director
  - k. Isaiah 11 Ministry Linda Ozier [Lindalouo@aol.com](mailto:Lindalouo@aol.com)
  - l. [lakelandartassociation@gmail.com](mailto:lakelandartassociation@gmail.com)
  - m. Combined Community Services  
[pwright@combinedcommunityservices.org](mailto:pwright@combinedcommunityservices.org)
  - n. Shelly Schwab, Big Brothers Big Sisters 574-306-2178 or  
[michelle.schwab@bbbsnei.org](mailto:michelle.schwab@bbbsnei.org)

- o. Erin's House for Grieving Children, [Ellen@erinshouse.org](mailto:Ellen@erinshouse.org);  
[Megan@erinshouse.org](mailto:Megan@erinshouse.org)
- p. Camp Alexander Mack- [info@campmack.org](mailto:info@campmack.org)
- q. Builders Association of Kosciusko and Fulton Counties- [info@bakfc.com](mailto:info@bakfc.com)

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