Section 1: Goals & Objectives

1.1 Background

The Utah Commission on Service and Volunteerism, as a state commission, is governed by the Serve America Act, which mandates all commissions develop and annually update a statewide plan for service covering a three-year period that is consistent with the broad goals of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

A. The plan must be developed through an open and public process that allows for maximum participation and input from a broad cross-section of individuals and organizations with a demonstrated record of providing educational, public safety, human, or environmental services, residents of the State, State Educational Agencies, traditional service organizations, local government, labor unions, and other interested members of the public.

B. The plan must ensure outreach to diverse, broad-based community organizations that serve underrepresented populations by creating state networks and registries or by utilizing existing ones.

C. The plan must set forth the State’s goals, priorities, and strategies for promoting national and community service and strengthening its service infrastructure, including how Corporation-funded programs fit into the plan.

1.2 Objectives

The following objectives outlined by UServeUtah directed the methodology of gathering input of the public, in order to comply with and support the Serve America Act.

A. Develop an understanding of current community volunteerism efforts
B. Provide an opportunity for the community to identify and align on possible needs that can be addressed through volunteerism and possible community volunteerism priorities
C. Provide an opportunity for UServeUtah to identify tools, resources and create networks to assist with the support and growth of volunteerism in local communities to address critical needs
D. Provide the opportunity to introduce and discuss how national service resources might support local efforts to address critical community needs, if/when available
1.3 Research Questions

To accomplish the outlined research objectives, analysis of the data collected from across the State of Utah was guided by the following research questions.

A. What are the unmet needs in Utah’s communities?
B. What is required for UServeUtah to effectively address those needs using volunteers?
C. How impactful are community engagement and National Service in Utah currently?
D. What opportunities exist to increase the impact of community engagement and National Service in Utah?

Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Electronic Survey

An electronic survey was distributed using the Qualtrics software platform. This quantitative data collection tool received 1,233 total responses representing every Utah county. Responses were analyzed using descriptive and cross-tabulation methods to identify key trends in the statewide data as well as needs and trends specific to certain variables such as age, county, ethnicity, etc.

2.2 Listening Tour

Staff from UServeUtah conducted a listening tour across the State in 8 locations including Logan, Vernal, Ogden, Salt Lake, Provo, Moab, Cedar City and St. George. In each location, a focus group was held with a standardized set of questions to identify both local and statewide needs and trends. In some tour destinations, the UServeUtah staff met with the local higher education institution’s staff engaged in campus volunteer management and service learning. These institutions included Utah State University, Utah Valley University, Southern Utah University, and Dixie State University.

Section 3: Exploring the Data

3.1 Community Needs

Statewide Snapshot

Volunteerism is a foundational element of Utah’s culture. Eighty-three percent of respondents indicated that they actively volunteer in their community.

Utah’s culture of volunteerism affects organizations, citizens and communities in various ways:
**Organization voices:** Over a third of survey respondents from nonprofit organizations indicated that volunteers expand their capacity by providing valuable direct service to clients such as tutoring and mentoring that, in many cases, would otherwise not be possible. This was echoed by listening tour participants across the State as well.

“Our organization would not exist without volunteerism.”

“I think volunteerism definitely assists in filling gaps in service that often nonprofit organizations cannot have the budget to provide additional staffing for. Especially when trained and provided adequate resources, volunteers can fill a much needed gap.”

**Volunteer voices:** The three most common motivations for volunteering among survey respondents were 1- a personal connection to the organization, 2- deep concern for the issue area, and 3- a sense of responsibility to give back. Survey and listening tour participants reported that service helps them develop new skills and provides social connections as well as a sense of purpose and belonging.

These volunteers give their time to many different issue areas—the top areas being religion (22%) and education (18%) with a relatively even distribution among all other issue areas (see Appendix A for an issue area breakdown). The most common way that respondents find volunteer opportunities is word of mouth (35%) with their religious organization as the second most common at 23% which indicates the powerful role that local networks and relationships play in Utah’s volunteerism culture. JustServe.org is used by 13% of respondents to find volunteer opportunities, though a number of comments from the listening tour reported JustServe.org perceived as an ineffective recruitment tool, particularly in rural areas.

**Community voices:** Survey results indicated the top unmet needs in communities across the State are perceived to be mental health, substance abuse, and K-12 educational outcomes. Furthermore, 89% of survey responses indicated that volunteerism is a viable strategy to address those needs, and an overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) believe that National Service in particular is making an impact in addressing the needs of Utah communities.

“Communities who band together and support one another are stronger and more unified. You are helping your own and that is strong motivation.”

“Many of our local issues can be resolved or improved by connecting people in need with people who have skills and knowledge to share. Volunteers would be so helpful in this.”

“Volunteerism can help, but without other support, change won’t be permanent (ex. AmeriCorps helping work with homeless populations, but if there’s no affordable housing available or money for services provided by others, capacity to help becomes limited).”
“The immediate impact and generosity of volunteers in our community is felt by everyone because their work really improves the community.”

A Closer Look
How impactful are National Service and community engagement in Utah currently? What opportunities exist to increase their impact? An analysis of the data revealed several key areas that may inform actionable initiatives responding to these questions.

AmeriCorps: Of the respondents who have been AmeriCorps members, close to half (43%) completed more than one year of service, indicating they had a positive experience during their first year. One in three were hired by the agency with which they served, and 88% stayed engaged in community after their service—all positive indicators of the impact their year of service had on them. Additionally, 80% referred family and/or friend(s) to the AmeriCorps program. We can conclude from these data points that AmeriCorps members and alumni are deeply and positively influenced by their service experience; AmeriCorps shapes them into lifelong ambassadors of community engagement.

Volunteer Management: The survey and listening tour respondents who work with volunteers indicated that the top challenges faced by their volunteer program are 1- retention, 2- too many “one-time, project-based” volunteers and not enough volunteers for ongoing needs, and 3- insufficient resources to support volunteer programming. Survey respondents also indicated college students as the population from which they’d most like to have more volunteers, followed closely by ethnically diverse populations and older adults. Additionally, listening tour participants around the State expressed a desire to see college campuses and their resources—including student volunteers—connected to local organizations and community needs with more depth and effectiveness.

An area worth continued exploration with UServeUtah stakeholders is the incongruency between skills-based volunteers and the organizations with which they serve, as 86% of respondents expressed an interest in skills-based volunteerism, however only 68% of respondents working with volunteers reported using skills-based volunteers currently and only 11% reported wanting more skills-based volunteers.

Volunteer Engagement: Despite the high rates of volunteer activity among survey respondents, 60% are not at all or only slightly familiar with UServeUtah and 46% are not at all familiar or only slightly familiar with National Service. Instead, nearly half (45%) find resources to support their work through university partnerships and other local nonprofits. This data suggests that Utah social sector organizations and communities lean heavily on their local resources and networks for support.
The top barriers reported by respondents that prevent them from volunteering were 1- no time (29%), 2- compassion fatigue (16%), and 3- being unsure how to find volunteer opportunities (14%). Interestingly, for age group 13-24 specifically, 21% indicated not knowing how to find opportunities, which was roughly double that of any other age group. Also, in age group 45-54, one in four participants selected compassion fatigue as a barrier, the highest of all the age groups.

“Most opportunities are too far away. I don’t know how to find opportunities. JustServe doesn’t have opportunities near where I live and work.”

“In locating opportunities, many have hours in conflict with my work schedule. A secondary issue is the "all or nothing" thought. I may be able to assist with a day here and there however the perceived expectation is all the time needed or don’t bother.”

“I teach school and when I come home I am quite tired and emotionally spent.”

3.2 Community Perceptions

A few clusters of data in particular are worth a closer examination to elucidate key trends in stakeholder perceptions and activity around volunteerism in Utah.

**Pathways of Public Service & Civic Engagement**: On survey questions related to behavior and perceptions of the six Pathways of Public Service & Civic Engagement, Social Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility ranked the lowest—only 13% reported being engaged in such and only half of respondents perceive it as a type of volunteerism. Policy and Governance was the second-lowest rated, with active engagement in this pathway from only 24% of respondents and 57% perceiving it as a type of volunteerism. Response rates to all other pathways were significantly higher—both participation in and perception of the pathway as a method of volunteer engagement.

**College Service Centers**: Listening tour meetings with colleges and local nonprofits as well as survey responses highlighted an interest in local communities to more effectively embed service centers into the fabric of Utah communities. University Service Centers provide varying degrees and methods of support and connection for local organizations and student volunteers. These campus representatives, and local organizations’ volunteers and staff have voiced an interest in ongoing training, resource sharing, and networking around volunteer engagement.

**Rural vs. Urban**: Communities off the Wasatch Front expressed during the listening tour a desire for more training, specifically the need for more accessible training by providing frequent and consistent in-person sessions in locations around the State and/or the use of virtual training
platforms. They also expressed an interest in trainings that focus on the unique dynamics of how to engage volunteers in rural communities.

3.3 Volunteerism in Utah

Based on this data analysis, several areas have been identified where volunteerism is elevating life in Utah as well as several areas of opportunity that exist to better address the needs of Utah communities using volunteerism and National Service.

Areas of Excellence

**Human Resources:** Across age, gender and geography, Utah citizens are passionate about service and highly engaged. They are a valuable resource ready to be deployed in addressing community needs.

**AmeriCorps:** Members and alumni show high rates of continued community engagement and referring others to the program. National Service is also perceived as making a difference in Utah communities particularly where an AmeriCorps program and its members are shared among multiple agencies working on the same issue area.

**Volunteer Management:** Among survey respondents’ most requested resources were 1-volunteer toolkits and 2-information on where and how to volunteer. Additionally, many listening tour respondents requested training on various best practices. This is an indication of Utah’s volunteer professionals continually striving for excellence.

Areas of Opportunity

**Underrepresented Communities:** Of survey respondents who identify as Native American, only 63% actively volunteer, and among those identifying as Hispanic only 77% volunteer compared to 84% of total responses. Response rates from other ethnicities was too low to run meaningful analysis of the data and identify trends for those demographic groups. This was also the case for counties off the Wasatch Front. Future community assessments with targeted outreach to these demographic and geographic areas would increase the input from these underrepresented groups and beneficially inform future initiatives.

**Time vs. Tasks:** Volunteers voiced a desire for micro-volunteerism, or project-based, opportunities while organizations simultaneously voiced the desire for more long-term, ongoing volunteers. These, however, need not be mutually exclusive. An opportunity exists to educate organizations on how to reframe ongoing volunteer work into finite, even bite-sized, projects which if continuously implemented using best practices, will certainly ensure long-term engagement from volunteers As a result, both of these seemingly incompatible needs of volunteers and organizations would be addressed.
**College Connection**: Survey and listening tour respondents indicated that colleges can play a key role in connecting resources such as student volunteers, training, networking, etc. to local organizations addressing community needs. Some Utah colleges are already underway with such initiatives with varying degrees of support and effectiveness. Standardizing and deepening these campus-community connections would result in efficient deployment of human, financial and other resources within local communities.

**Section 4: Recommendations**

4.1 **Support Local**

As Utah leads the nation in volunteerism, a tremendous opportunity exists for UServeUtah to serve as a backbone agency in optimizing the vibrant volunteer culture and activity that already exists in local communities across the State. Based on the data analysis above, this can be done by working on a local level to strategically answer three questions specific to volunteer engagement:

**Who to Engage?**

**Youth**: Aria Finger, COO of DoSomething.org, states in *Volunteer Engagement 2.0*, “Nonprofits that don’t engage young people are missing out on an incredibly smart, passionate, creative generation.” Young volunteers reported their main barrier to service was not knowing how to find opportunities. Responses on the listening tour indicated a similar concern—a lack of youth volunteer opportunities. Conversely however, students were the group from which respondents were most interested in recruiting more volunteers. Engaging with colleges and student volunteers as well as training Utah nonprofits on how to recruit this age group would be beneficial for the nonprofits as well as young people looking to serve.

**Older Adults**: Respondents indicated wanting more volunteers from this age group, however the perception of older adult volunteers shared by listening tour participants is that they lack the skills and physical ability to serve. While this may be true in some cases, it should not be an assumption made of this entire diverse age group. Many older adults are highly skilled professionally and otherwise. Training organizations on understanding and effectively utilizing this age group would benefit the older adult volunteers as well as the organizations and community they serve.

**Ethnic Diversity**: Increased diversity among volunteers was a desire expressed by respondents and would also provide a broader stakeholder base offering deeper insight for future UServeUtah community assessments and their resulting initiatives.
Project-based: Volunteers indicated “no time” as their top barrier to not volunteering yet organizations expressed a strong desire to have more “long-term” volunteers. The National Council for Voluntary Organizations stated in its 2011 Trends in Volunteering Report, “long-term commitment to organizations is falling as people’s participation becomes more fluid…At the extreme, there is a growth in micro-volunteering.” Research has shown that the Millennial generation is particularly interested in flexible, bite-sized volunteer opportunities. UServeUtah has an opportunity to help volunteers overcome the time barrier and help agencies address their need for volunteer retention by offering training on how to frame volunteer opportunities as finite, project-related tasks. This volunteer engagement framing also benefits organizations as it increases accountability to tie volunteer work directly to the outcomes and impact of their mission.

Rural: The dynamics of communities off the Wasatch Front is distinct. Understanding how volunteerism can be a valuable resource in these areas and providing education, awareness and support accordingly will be particularly beneficial for Utah as needs such as mental health, substance abuse, education, poverty, etc. are often disproportionately high in rural communities.

How to Engage?
AmeriCorps: Members work to address critical community needs during their term of service. During and after their service, however, as ambassadors of community engagement they can also be a strong voice within local communities to raise awareness of UServeUtah’s resources, trainings, and other support if strategically engaged to do so. This would expand the reach of UServeUtah into local communities in helping to address barriers and challenges such as volunteer retention, having no time to volunteer, etc.

University Partnerships: The higher education institutions across the State can be a hub to connect UServeUtah with local communities in providing continuous training, networking, and celebrating success stories together. These partnerships will allow UServeUtah to be intimately connected with the diverse and changing needs of local communities across the State and provide targeted support based on these needs.

Remote, Virtual and Project-based: The landscape of community engagement and National Service is changing with continuous technology advances and generational shifts. These trends, both on a local and global scale, indicate that people desire to be engaged in service but are seeking opportunities that can be done remotely and/or through digital platforms and with clear goals and parameters. These needs were echoed by respondents managing volunteers who requested more trainings via online platforms as well as training on how to better use software and digital means to recruit and retain volunteers, especially younger generations.
**Why to Engage?**

**Focus on Impact:** Much emphasis has been placed in recent years on the *impact* of programming in the social sector. If volunteer managers, AmeriCorps members, and community volunteers understand the true impact of their work, they will feel more connected and committed to the cause. Based on the data analysis, it is evident that the word *impact* is frequently misunderstood as the number of hours served or number of dollars saved by an agency. Educating organizations and AmeriCorps programs on how to measure and report true impact to their volunteers and members will result in addressing and improving the number one challenge expressed in the data—volunteer retention.

**Focus on Volunteer Motivation:** Educating volunteer managers and AmeriCorps program directors on responding to the motivations of their volunteers and members will improve the effectiveness of recruitment and retention. Researcher Mark Hager of Arizona State University states in *Volunteer Administration: Professional Practice,* “Volunteer administrators...must learn about the needs and rewards that animate different volunteers and the positions that are most likely to confer these benefits.” This requires a shift in mindset from seeing volunteers as serving the needs of the volunteer manager or agency, and instead focusing on how the agency can serve and meet the needs and interests of their volunteers while simultaneously achieving their mission. This may mean creating internships, offering opportunities for structured socializing and reflection on service, etc.

**Community Wellness:** It is worth noting that volunteerism itself is a protective health factor and therefore can be a solution to addressing the critical mental health and substance abuse issues in Utah, if opportunities to serve are strategically developed and carried out. Resources, training and technical support from UServeUtah can be a key driver in ensuring excellence in community engagement and National Service across the State.