

Partnership Snapshot



The Need: Skills-Based Volunteering Training

Ohio nonprofits and their corporate partners wanted to engage with each other on a deeper level than traditional hands-on volunteering allowed, but many had poor experiences with skills-based volunteering (SBV) in the past and were hesitant to try again.

To help these organizations overcome barriers to productive cross-sector partnerships, ServeOhio, the Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism, sought support from Common Impact, a national leader in SBV program management and social impact consulting that works with nonprofits, state commissions, and other social sector networks and conveners to create systemic change and grow access to - and the impact of - SBV programs for organizations of all sizes and cause areas.

ServeOhio and Common Impact developed a blueprint to equip nonprofits with the knowledge, resources, and support to run successful SBV programs, as well as ensure ServeOhio's own ability to sustain and scale SBV initiatives independently beyond its partnership with Common Impact. From this vision, the Skills-Based Volunteerism Training Academy was born.

The Solution: SBV Training

The Skills-Based Volunteerism Training Academy (SBV Academy) was designed to enable nonprofits across Ohio - particularly those in business hubs such as Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland - to leverage SBV to unlock local private sector talent as a valuable resource to support growth, innovation, and resiliency. Nonprofits were invited to apply for the program, which would culminate in them being able to design and implement high-impact SBV projects on their own.

The SBV Academy highlighted the opportunities and benefits of pro bono for nonprofits, such as capacity building, bridging infrastructure gaps, and creating a dedicated space to focus on operations. The program also educated nonprofit professionals on the role SBV plays in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, giving them a stronger understanding of their partners' motivations and goals.

Nonprofits received comprehensive training on SBV fundamentals and program management, including: determining organizational readiness, project identification and scoping, volunteer recruitment, project management, project evaluation, and integrating SBV into their long-term infrastructure. They attended monthly training webinars and also had access to monthly coaching & technical assistance calls for individualized support. Common Impact's quarterly resource sharing provided access to additional products such as a custom toolkit for nonprofits new to SBV that was designed in partnership with ServeOhio, the interactive SBV how-to hub [Capacity Commons](#), SBV project description templates, and COVID-19 and crisis resiliency resources.

The SBV Academy took place in-person its first year, then shifted to virtual in second and third years due to the pandemic, allowing for more flexible participation that simultaneously accounted for changes to the nonprofits' operations and availability.

"ServeOhio's partnership with Common Impact provided



Ohio nonprofits the opportunity to learn about the power of SBV, gave them access to coaching and support from national experts, and helped build capacity for small, medium, and large nonprofits across the state."

– Rebecca Verhoff-Kiss,
Director of Strategic
Engagement, ServeOhio

The Long-Term Impact

In three years, the SBV Academy supported 28 Ohio nonprofits as they explored and launched SBV projects. The program removed common barriers to entry around SBV execution, gaining stakeholder buy-in, and communicating the business case for SBV.

Along the way, participants learned the importance of evaluating their volunteers' and their own readiness to participate in a SBV project. They also gained an aptitude and appreciation for project scoping, recognizing both the need for engagements to be narrow in focus and the significant time required to define them effectively.

As for ServeOhio itself, Common Impact's "train the trainer" model provided the instruction, support, and resources for the commission to keep bringing SBV to Ohio nonprofits on its own and act as the state's go-to source for all things pro bono. It's one of the best parts of skills-based volunteering done right: learning and relationships last long beyond the engagement, ensuring long-term and sustainable change.



"[The SBV Academy] has allowed us to be more efficient as we do capacity building. We have a much more organized process and it will help in the future if we require additional staff to join our organization."

– Sara Continenza, Executive Director, Food Strong

"Participating in the program was very enjoyable and a good learning experience that [gave us] skills to put into place for future projects!"

– Nicole Frederick, Volunteer Coordinator, Nature's Nursery