

Executive Report

Evaluation Results: 2009 National Conference on Volunteering and Service

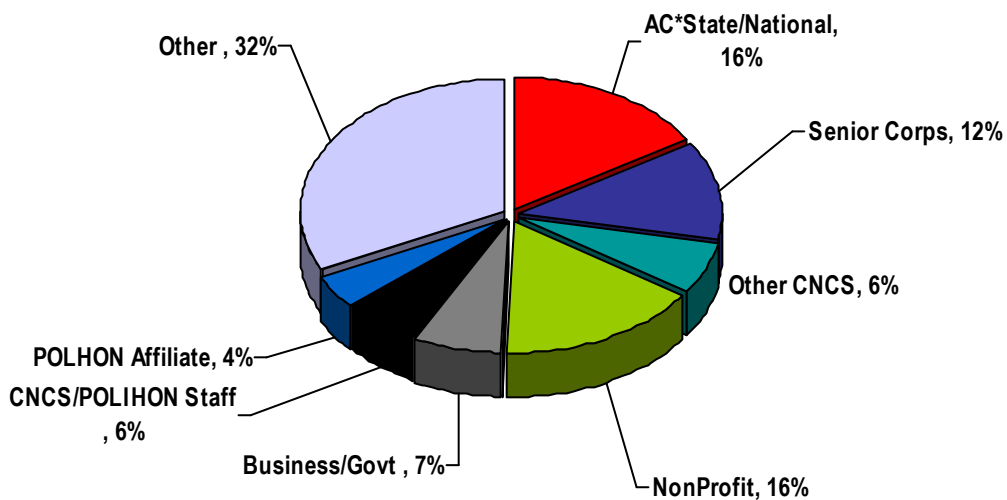
Overview

The 2009 National Conference on Volunteering and Service, co-hosted by the Points of Light Institute & HandsOn Network (POLI/HON) and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), was held in San Francisco, California from June 21st through June 24th. The evaluation design, carried out by the Aguirre Division of JBS International, utilized multiple sources of data. In total, 2,200 conference registrants completed an overall conference survey online in the month following the conference, for a response rate of 55 percent of the 4,000 attendees who provided a working e-mail address. Also, more than 2,300 participants in 82 of the 90 sampled sessions completed session-specific surveys, and a total of 78 session observations were completed by volunteers who were recruited to serve as session Evaluation Assistants.

Conference Attendance

Over 5,200 volunteer and service leaders from the non-profit, corporate and government sectors attended the 2009 Conference which represented a significant increase (18%) from the 2008 conference. As can be seen in Chart 1, below, many of the attendees were CNCS affiliates (38%), although non-profit participants (16%) and participants who selected diverse “other” registrant types (32%) made up a higher proportion of the 2009 attendees than in prior years. Over a third of the participants (37%) reported that they had previously attended the Conference.

Chart 1: 2009 National Conference Attendance Registrant Type



Results of Conference Surveys

Overall Conference Survey Highlights

Conference Goals, Message, and Networking: The Conference aims to build participants' service and volunteering related knowledge and skills, communicate a national call to service, honor the achievements of people engaged in service and meet the professional development needs of

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those engaged in service. It also provides a venue for participants to network with other service professionals, meet new partners and establish new connections. The Conference participants agreed that the 2009 conference met these goals. A large majority of respondents agreed that the conference communicated a national call to service (96%), that the Conference honored the achievements of people engaged in service (86%), and that the Conference met professional development needs (84%). Most respondents agreed that they learned effective practices that they could apply to their work (87%), they are better prepared to meet needs in their communities (72%), and the Conference helped them exchange relevant ideas and information with their peers (88%).

Communications Strategies: Conference organizers leveraged automated text messaging and a wide range of technology in an effort to reduce unnecessary paper use, and in acknowledgement of the growing use of on-line social networking sites (i.e., Twitter and Facebook). These communication strategies were used to keep registrants informed about Conference events and schedules before and during the conference. More than half (51%) of survey respondents felt that these technologies were useful in communicating conference information. One third (33%) used one or more of the technology services offered, with the largest proportion (16%) signing up to get text message conference updates.

Respondent Comments: Content analysis of 724 respondent comments from Overall Conference Surveys show that almost half of the respondents (42%) offered positive comments that usually include praise for the general conference quality. One participant wrote, “Well done, excellent experience, great variety, motivational on many levels!!!” The remaining comments (58%) contained concerns or suggestions for improvements which covered a wide range of topics including Conference communications strategies, costs and session quality. Although attendees appreciated efforts to keep the Conference green, multiple participants expressed concern about the lack of handouts and presentation materials during sessions. One participant commented, “What I found the most problematic was there were no handouts to go with the information, made it very hard to follow some of the sessions.”

Overall Rating: Overall, survey respondents found the Conference to be valuable and of high quality. Many indicated that they plan to attend the Conference again next year. A large percent of respondents (84%) felt that the Conference was worth the cost of attending and almost all respondents (91%) rated the overall conference quality as “excellent” or “good”. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they were “extremely likely” or “likely” to attend the 2010 Conference.

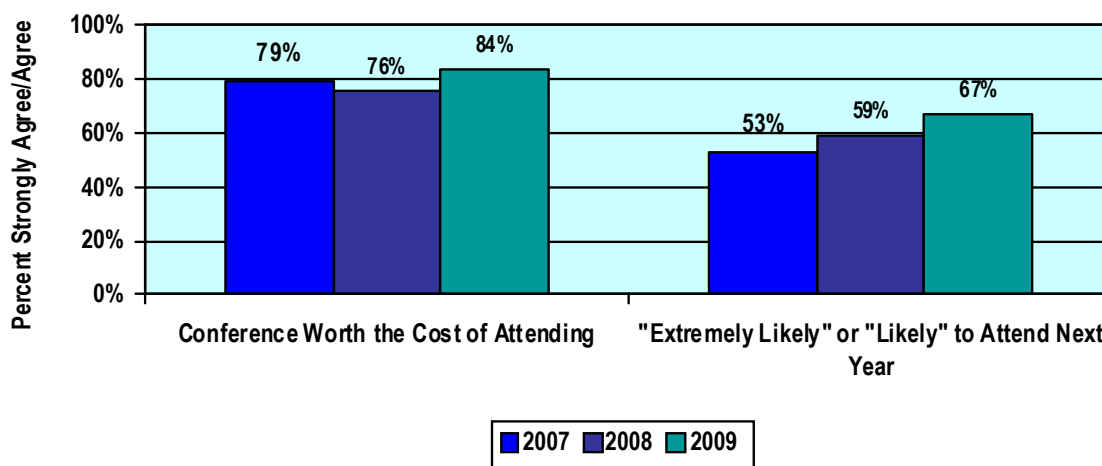
Conference Workshop Survey and Evaluation Assistant Observation Highlights

The survey results indicated that the workshop sessions were the most highly valued part of the Conference. Session respondents (94%) and observers (92%) agreed presenters were well prepared. Session respondents (90%) and observers (92%) agreed that the presenters were effective. The individual workshops evaluated were rated as “excellent” or “good” by almost all the participants (90%) and observers (85%).

Year to Year Comparisons

Since its inaugural conference in 1992, the Conference has grown from 1,200 attendees to over 5,200. The proportion of attendees who reported attending the previous year has grown from 28 percent in 2008 to 35 percent in 2009. Ratings for most Conference logistics have improved over the past three years. A higher percent of 2009 respondents (81%) said that Conference goals and other information were clearly communicated, compared to 2007 (65%) and 2008 (73%). Gains were also seen in the proportion of the 2009 respondents who said that it was easy to register for the Conference (75%), up substantially from 2007 (56%) and 2008 (65%). Chart 2 illustrates that the overall ratings for the Conference have improved from 2007 through 2009. More respondents (84%) felt that the 2009 Conference was worth the cost of attending, compared to 2008 (76%) and 2007 (79%). Gains were also seen in the proportion of 2009 attendees who indicated that they were “extremely likely” or “likely” to attend the next year (67%) compared to 2007 (53%).

Chart 2: Year to Year Changes in Overall Evaluation Ratings



Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation data collected about the 2009 National Conference on Volunteering and Service strongly suggest attendees were satisfied with the conference, the workshop presenters, the workshop content and the learning environment. The three years of data shows that several areas, including the conference registration experience and the cost of attending have improved and that the proportion of attendees who return each year has consistently grown. The survey results show that the vast majority of attendees believe the 2009 NCVS to be a valuable experience and that the conference helps to inspire and support their work in National Service.

Recommendations based on the available evaluation data include:

- Ensure that technology used in communications is functioning well so that people receive the technology updates they register for and that messaging capacity is judiciously used.
- Ensure that sessions have appropriate, but brief, handouts.
- Where possible, continue changes implemented this year to improve the registration process and decrease attendee costs.