## Community of Practice Meeting for Medium-Sized Member Programs

## August 31, 2017 8:15 AM – 10:15 AM

On the last day of Conference, the medium-sized programs met together for the first Community of Practice meeting for programs with budgets between $500,000 and $2,000,000. The goal of this Community of Practice is to:

* Connect with people that work in programs with budgets within a similar range;
* Share experiences and learn from each other;
* Collaborate and achieve common outcomes;
* Accelerate member learning;
* Validate and build on existing knowledge.

Liz Seman, Immediate Past Chair of the Meals on Wheels America Board of Directors, has agreed to serve as Board Champion for this Community.

Approximately 120 Members were in attendance. The discussion was moderated by Linda Netterville and Magda Hageman-Apol.

Discussions focused on the key issues you told us in a pre-Conference survey you wanted to discuss, namely

* Volunteers (retention, recruitment, etc.)
* Funding and fundraising
* Cost of food/meals

The participants were able to choose two of the three topics to discuss. After lively table discussions a spokesman for each table gave a brief overview to the larger group of what they had discussed, which we captured in the notes below.

**Solutions and Future Strategies**

1. **Volunteer Recruitment**

* Solicit local businesses to provide recurring and ongoing company volunteers.
* Solicit volunteers from university and community college faculty and students.
* Take advantage of Meals on Wheels America Ad Council volunteer referrals.
* Place volunteer advertising on all meal delivery vehicles.
* Use county jail inmates with meal preparations. Provide volunteer inmates with one hot nutritious meal.
* To help resolve seasonal volunteer issues use teachers and stay at home moms during summer months.
* Solicit local government departments for volunteers such as; fire, police, and elected officials offices.
* Solicit other community based organizations for volunteers such as fraternal clubs, VFW, Rotary, churches, etc.
* Use local business or community base organizations to adapt a meal route.
* Use local school websites to recruit teachers and school staff. Most school websites provide email addresses for their school staff.
* Provide volunteers a job description that detail volunteer responsibilities.
* Encourage corporate volunteers to man an ongoing regular delivery route.
* Challenge local business CEO’s to volunteer and challenge other CEO’s to participate.
* Develop a volunteer Advisory Council. The state Member organization of Texas is a good example.

1. **Volunteer Retention**

* Pick a month to highlight and thank your volunteers.
* Provide an annual event to recognize and celebrate volunteers.
* Provide name badges that include the number of years each person has volunteered.
* Have annual volunteer communications such as: satisfaction survey, newsletter, volunteer handbook with guidelines and responsibilities.
* Provide a car wash for volunteer’s vehicles to help with retention.
* Get special pins for volunteer service accomplishments.
* Need to make sure all background checks are up to date (which vary from state to state).
* Reorganize volunteers by providing: celebration dinners, picnics, raffles, etc.

1. **Other Volunteer Tips**

* Provide volunteers to grocery shop for clients.

1. **Fundraising Ideas**

* Local grant opportunities are very limited.
* Consider using targeted direct mail campaign. If done correctly can be very effective.
* Many veterans grant opportunities are available.
* Use a local parking lots to collect fees during times of community breakfast fundraising opportunities.
* Offer a senior prom.
* Organize a Silver fox fashion show.
* Virtual “no dinner” dinner or “No concert” concert
* Develop an outpatient reimbursement program with local medical/hospital system.
* Hold a Let’s Do Lunch fundraiser using local restaurants.
* Host indoor walkathon, auction, etc.
* Host youth or adult hockey compaction or challenge.
* Use local food trucks to donate a portion of their proceeds from a designated donation time offer, i.e. a Friday young professional business to business challenge.
* Sponsor a gala.
* Try a wide variety of different funding venues.
* Develop major and individual giving programs to provide sustained funding.
* Know your donor audience and use aspirate solicitation.
* Sponsor a live auction.
* Make sure to track and segment your donor giving levels.
* Track donor giving a make sure donor gifts are distributed as donor has requested.
* Offer coupon book with discounts or free goods or service for donation.
* Follow up with very brief donor satisfaction survey to understand why they are contributing.
* Host a special event such as Mac & Cheese Bowl with ticket sales and program sponsors.
* Host a free breakfast fundraiser.
* Use local artists to provide art for donation.
* Use local grocery stores to encourage customers to round up their purchases to buy a meal.
* Solicit local utility companies to sponsor a week of meals.
* Develop an employee giving program with a company matching program.
* Use local potter’s guild to donation bowls to sponsor a meal.
* Host local band event or competition.
* Host local business with a “Bubbles (retailers), Bottles (grocery/beverage distributor) and Beans” (restaurants) event.
* Host a telethon.
* Place donation cards on local restaurants tables.
* Local restaurants provide gift cars with a percentage of the card going for donation.

1. **Cost of Food Meals**

* Be sure to do an analysis of the cost of all meal preparation.
* Dine around town, local restaurants offer all seniors discount or lower cost meals.
* Analyze pre-cooked meals vs. meals that are prepared from scratch.
* Analyze renting kitchen space vs. purchasing kitchen space.
* Analyze the use of out of date kitchens and equipment to other options.
* Analyze low cost options vs. low quality food offerings.
* Review all of your options using paid staff vs. volunteers.
* Review and understand your Title V funding options.
* Cooking on site offers some advantages such as direct from farm options.
* Consider working with caterers to help with meal preparation.
* Consider other food preparation partners such as: hospitals, restaurants, schools, etc.
* One member program’s meals were completely funded by client donations.
* Volunteers vs. paid drivers have a direct effect on the cost of each meal.
* To safe costs consider group purchasing.
* Be aware and know the federal “Good Samaritan Act” for accepting food from grocery stores or restaurants, caterers, etc.
* Consider using shelf stable milk vs. fresh.

Going forward, provided there is sustained interest in this group to continue to talk with colleagues, we plan to have a virtual meeting of the group early 2018 and at next year’s Conference.