

HOUSTONSERVICE



"Volunteering is a
pathway to
successful
communities"

**A Plan to Promote Civic Engagement by Empowering
Houston's Communities.**

**March 28, 2011
Annise Parker, Mayor**

HOUSTONSERVICE

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Houston's Communities.**

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“Houston boasts a long tradition of community service and engagement. The Houston SERVICE plan provides measurable strategies that will allow us to harness our collective passion for service and better target our volunteer efforts toward areas of critical need.”

-Mayor Annise Parker



A Message from the Mayor

In January of 2009, the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act ushered in a new era of service and civic engagement. Houston, as a Cities of Service Leadership Grant recipient, is at the forefront of this national movement. I am pleased to join our President – and mayors from over 100 cities across the nation – in answering this call to service by announcing the release of Houston SERVICE.

Houston SERVICE is the City's high-impact service plan, developed with the support of Cities of Service, a bi-partisan coalition of mayors nationwide dedicated to engaging citizens locally to make a difference against pressing City issues. The following pages outline a coordinated strategy focused on matching volunteers and established community partners to Houston's areas of greatest local need. The service plan is a blueprint for action in Houston, designed in response to the feedback of hundreds of community partners that overwhelmingly agreed our efforts must focus on addressing pressing local challenges:

1. Increasing students' college readiness
2. Strengthening veteran services
3. Preparing our citizens to respond to emergency situations

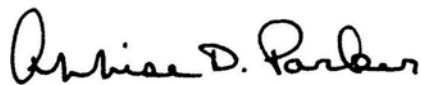
As a result, Houston SERVICE will harness the collective talent and energy of our citizens to accomplish these primary goals:

- Provide after-school educational programs for at-risk youth
- Enhance mentoring programs for our returning veterans
- Educate citizens on life-saving CPR techniques
- More generally, increase citizen access to volunteer opportunities in the City

Houston is a city of open arms and warm hearts. In 2008, I saw first-hand the outpouring of support and record volunteer response in the wake of the destruction of Hurricane Ike. Houston SERVICE will create a volunteer support infrastructure to accommodate and sustain this passion for service while strategically addressing the most pressing needs of our great City.

I thank the many community partners without whom this effort would not be possible, and the citizens of Houston who continuously and consistently make me proud to call Houston home. Together, we will make a difference.

Sincerely,



Annise D. Parker
Mayor



Executive Summary

Mayor Annise Parker joined the Cities of Service Coalition on February 3, 2010, with a commitment to work together with the other mayors in this bi-partisan coalition to address pressing City needs with citizen service.

Houston SERVICE – the City of Houston’s Service Plan – focuses on increasing the impact of volunteerism by aligning key partnerships with service programs that address the City’s most critical challenges. Programs that are priorities for our service plan are those that address three priority need areas: providing after-school educational programs for at-risk youth (After School Zones), enhancing mentoring programs to help reintegrate our returning veterans (Houston Veterans Continuing Service), and educating citizens on life-saving CPR techniques (Everyone Can be a Lifesaver).

1. Impact Initiatives

After assessing Houston’s current efforts in these areas and collaborating closely with community partners, volunteer Impact Initiatives were carefully designed and will be implemented using various community partners.

- **After School Zones:** This initiative seeks to increase both the number of mentors engaged with the City’s at-risk youth and the number of young people who are able to participate in academically rich after-school programming. The ultimate goal is to improve educational outcomes for the targeted youth by setting individualized goals for students and engaging them in apprenticeships that will help them gain mastery over content areas.
- **Houston Veterans Continuing Service:** The veterans’ initiatives will offer peer to peer support to help 250-500 newly returning combat veterans reintegrate successfully into civilian life over two years. This initiative will help these veterans understand and better access the programs and services that are available to the 2,500 servicemen and women who return to Houston annually.
- **Everyone Can be a Lifesaver:** This initiative involves training citizens on a potentially lifesaving technique, compression-only CPR, which would impact the entire Houston population by having more residents ready to respond to instances of cardiac arrest.

Measuring impact is a crucial component of Houston SERVICE. Each of the three initiatives includes specific metrics to assess the programs’ impact over the next two years, with an ultimate goal of moving the needle on the City’s identified challenges through implementation of targeted volunteer strategies.

The following service plan has been designed so that the tools used to measure the outcomes will be replicable for future service programs. Houston SERVICE will report

these outcomes over the next two years as the programs roll out.

2. Infrastructure Initiatives

The City of Houston has identified three cross-cutting challenges that deter citizens from participating in service projects throughout the City. These three challenges must be faced head-on to effectively engage Houstonians in the Impact Initiatives described above, as well as other volunteer opportunities in the City.

Through extensive outreach over the last several months, we have identified three Infrastructure Initiatives we will take on to support volunteering in the City: changes in the City of Houston’s volunteer website (HoustonSERVICE.org), procedures regarding volunteer badging (Volunteer Badging 2.0), and a need for a Leadership Forum to facilitate collaboration between Houston organizations (Mayor’s Non-profit and Faith Based Leadership Forum). By providing new resources and aligning key partnerships with service programs that address the City’s cross-cutting challenges affecting essential volunteer practices, it is our goal to make volunteering in Houston a priority.

The City of Houston’s three Infrastructure Initiatives are:

- **HoustonSERVICE.org:** The City of Houston, in partnership with Cities of Service, has developed a new website that will provide up-to-date information on volunteer needs in Houston as well as a user-friendly interface to make applying for opportunities easier. On the website, Houston area non-profits, faith-based groups and corporations will be able to post volunteer opportunities and highlight service projects. This will encourage greater organizational partnerships and increase volunteer awareness of Houston service programs.
- **Volunteer Badging 2.0:** The City is committed to improving and accelerating the process of providing volunteers with required City identification badges, to make it easier for residents to volunteer with the City of Houston.
- **Mayor’s Non-profit and Faith Based Leadership Forum:** This forum will provide an avenue for volunteer administrators to meet annually with the senior leadership of the City of Houston in a Leadership Forum. This forum initiative will improve coordination and collaboration among non-profits and other organizations in the Houston area such as corporations and foundations.

It is our hope that by implementing these Infrastructure Initiatives, Houstonians will be better served and better able to serve.

Introduction

About Cities of Service

Founded in New York City on September 10, 2009 by 17 mayors from cities around the nation, Cities of Service is a bipartisan coalition of mayors who have committed to work together to engage citizens in a multi-year effort to address pressing city needs through impact volunteerism. The coalition has rapidly grown since its inception and now includes more than 100 mayors, representing more than 49 million Americans across the nation.

American cities face serious challenges, and many mayors want to take advantage of every resource available to them — including the time and energy of public-spirited residents — to address those challenges. In cities across America today, citizen service is often an underutilized or inefficiently utilized. Cities of Service supports mayors to leverage citizen service strategies, addressing local needs and making government more effective.

All Cities of Service efforts are characterized by a concept called “impact volunteering” — volunteer strategies that target community needs, use best practices, and set clear outcomes and measures to gauge progress.

In June 2010, the City of Houston was one of ten cities to receive a *Cities of Service Leadership Grant*. Funded jointly by Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Rockefeller Foundation, the two-year grants enable cities to hire Chief Service Officers responsible for developing and implementing high-impact service plans.

Cities of Service Methodology

In addition to funding, all *Cities of Service Leadership Grant* recipients receive technical assistance and support from Cities of Service to develop high-impact service plans. Much of this support follows a methodology outlined in the *Cities of Service Playbook*.¹

Like all *Cities of Service Leadership Grant* recipients, Houston first conducted a landscape analysis to identify both the specific challenges the city would address through service and the resources and opportunities available to support the effort. This landscape analysis included:

- Focus groups with key stakeholders, including representatives from city agencies, nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, local businesses, and foundations;
- Expert interviews with local and national leaders, including Chief Service Officers from cities across the nation; and
- Surveys of volunteer-using nonprofit organizations, city agencies, and K-12 schools.

After completing the landscape analysis, City of Houston developed a unique set of Cities of Service initiatives: “Impact Service Initiatives” to address specific challenges in the City’s priority need areas and “Infrastructure Initiatives” to address cross-cutting service challenges. Next, the City developed metrics to gauge the progress of each initiative and operational plans for implementation.



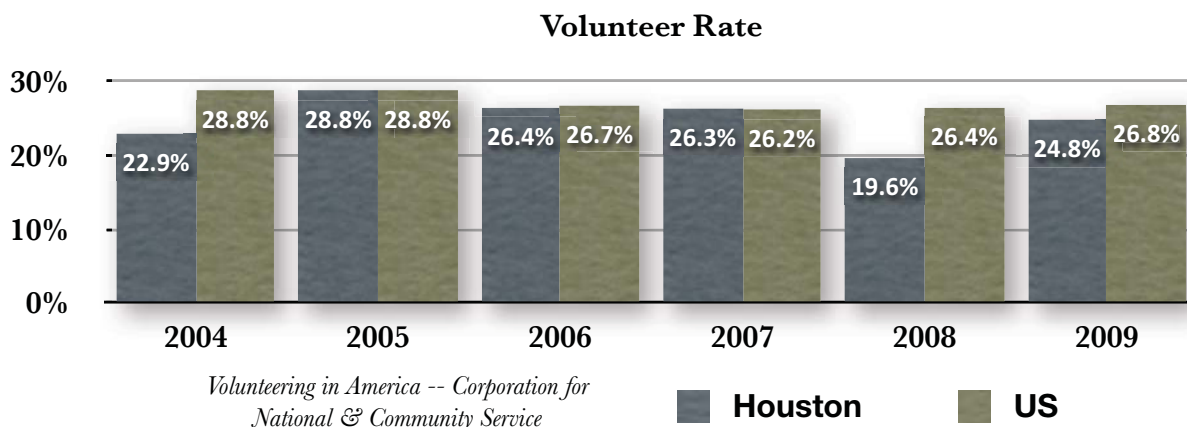
¹ The Cities of Service Playbook is available for download at citiesofservice.org

Service in the City of Houston Past & Present

The City of Houston is the 4th largest City in the United States, and continues to grow at a rapid rate. However, we rank 40th out of the 51 major U.S. cities in volunteer service. According to *Volunteering in America*, only 23% of the City's adult population volunteered an average of 34.2 hours/person. This is a relatively low number and not indicative of the City's rich history of volunteerism. We can do better!! The mission of Houston SERVICE is to provide Houstonians more opportunities to volunteer and become civically engaged in their communities.

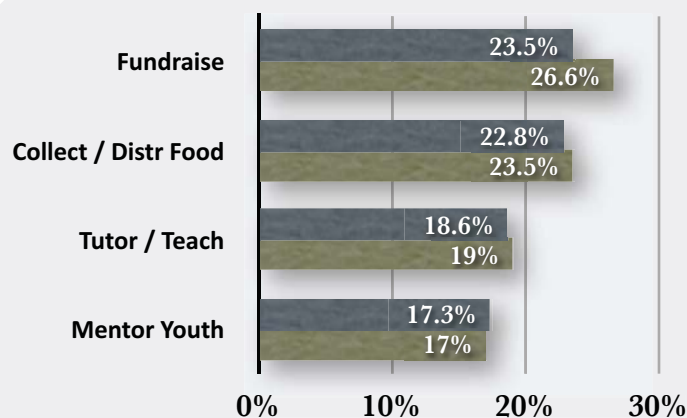
"Our prime purpose in life is to help others."

- Dalai Lama



Volunteers are an essential source of energy, ideas, spirit, and manpower that help Houston function as a large metropolitan area. For example, the City's Volunteer Initiatives Program (VIP), which is the pre-cursor to Houston SERVICE, annually places 3000-5000 volunteers with various City departments, allowing them to channel their passions into meaningful action.

Through these volunteers, the City of Houston has been able to provide services that might otherwise have been cut during this time of economic need. Volunteers have become an integral part of moving the City forward in the 21st Century and, in the process, have made it a leading community in its commitment to service. The following graph breaks down the different areas in which Houstonians have served the community:



The top four volunteer activities cited were: Fundraising (23.5%--3.1% lower than the national average); Collect/Distribute Food (22.8%--.7% lower than the national average); Tutor/Teach (18.6%--.4% lower than the national average); and Mentor Youth (17.3%--.3% higher than the national average). Although education/youth development activities comprise half of the major areas in volunteerism for the City of Houston, Houston SERVICE aims to create more opportunities in these areas. The data illuminates the lack of focus in the areas of veteran's outreach and public safety and health.

Houston has a great tradition of service that is keenly reflected in the size of the veteran population that resides within the Greater Houston area. Harris County has the second largest veteran population in the United States with nearly 305,000 veterans. This presence is a testament to the understanding of what service means for our country, our City and our community.

Houston's Mayor Annise Parker, who was elected in January 2010, issued a statement that embodies the esprit de corps of the typical volunteer in Houston:

"Whether it is helping our neighbors next door or those far away, Houstonians never hesitate to step up and lend a hand. Too often we fail to recognize and appreciate those who give of their time to others. This is our chance to say thank you."

In June 2010, the City of Houston, along with nine other cities around the nation, became the recipient of a Cities of Service Leadership Grant provided by the Cities of Service, and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Rockefeller Foundation. With this grant, Houston hired the City's first Chief Service Officer, Cameron M. Waldner, to develop and implement a high-impact service plan that matches Houston's volunteer resources with the issues of greatest local need. This is how Houston SERVICE has been created.

"A leader is someone who helps improve the lives of other people or improve the system they live under."

- General Sam Houston

A. Methodology

As part of its landscape analysis, Houston SERVICE conducted extensive research to identify the pressing City challenges that can be addressed effectively with volunteer service, as well as the cross-cutting challenges that hinder more service across the City. To do this, the following activities were taken:

1. Focus Groups

Focus groups were held over a few weeks and involved 133 participants, representing various nonprofits, faith-based organizations, as well as universities and colleges in Houston. These discussions were facilitated by our Chief Service Officer at the local United Way office. Data was also received from participants through in-person and telephone interviews, as well as panel discussions involving university

and school leaders, non-profit and volunteer agency directors, foundations, and corporate administrators.

2. Survey

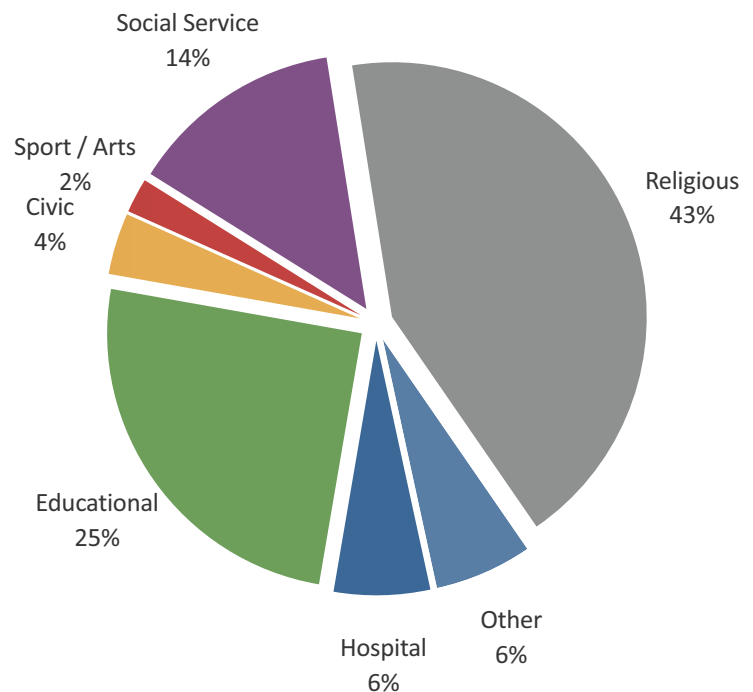
An electronic survey was sent to over 250 representatives from internal agencies, nonprofit organizations, volunteer based institutions, and universities that captured information related to the benefits of increased volunteer activity. The information collected includes specific areas of need, organizational volunteer capacity, measurement of volunteer activity, and characteristics of effective volunteer management.

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

-Aesop

B. The Service System

Whether they are non-profits, public schools, City agencies, or places of worship, organizations use the enthusiasm and skills of volunteers to strengthen operations and support the administration of programs to further their mission. The survey data collected documents that volunteers are most often being used to prepare fundraising mailing, serve on boards of directors, and to deliver services to clients.



The above data represents the most prevalent areas of volunteering in Houston. With the *Cities of Service Leadership Grant*, Houston SERVICE will continue to promote programs and various initiatives within these areas.

The results of the focus groups and the surveys provided a general idea of how the different non-profits, faith-based organizations, and universities are addressing volunteerism in Houston.

The initiatives presented in the following section, highlighting the goals and strengths of Houston's blueprint of service; offer a diverse and comprehensive vision for building existing strengths as well as improving on the strengths and challenges noted above. The ultimate goal of Houston SERVICE is to move the needle on pressing City challenges through impact volunteerism, while bringing Houstonians together, achieving sustainable practices in volunteer recruitment, and leveraging the collective impact of local-level action to affect state-level and federal volunteer policies through service initiatives.

“Unselfish and noble actions are the most radiant pages in the biography of souls.”

- David Thomas



Impact Initiatives

The City of Houston has a tradition of providing service opportunities to its citizens. The City has consistently embodied the principle of service by implementing unique programs to allow citizens to address the City's needs and become agents of change. Utilizing the Cities of Service Leadership Grant, the City of Houston is using high-impact volunteer strategies to address pressing City needs.

“Only life lived for others is worth living.”

- **Albert Einstein**

After School Zones

Challenge: Currently, the City of Houston, like many large cities, is facing falling graduation rates in some of its high schools. Effective study habits are nurtured in middle school, so targeting students at both levels is important. This is especially true as the City is also facing low attendance rates throughout middle and high school.

Initiative: As studies have shown that pairing mentors with students helps to alleviate absenteeism and low graduation rates, the After School Zones initiative seeks to increase the number of mentors engaged with the City's at-risk youth. Along with the immediate goals of providing an educational outlet and a safe recreational environment for students, Houston SERVICE aims to increase academic outcomes for these students.

The After School Zones initiative is formulated by the City of Houston in partnership with schools and organizations and seeks to integrate art, health, and education through guest speakers and offer them to high poverty areas and high needs schools. The partnership includes Houston SERVICE, with the Chief Service Officer and Office of Education, Houston Public Library, Houston Independent School District, local museums, mentor organizations, community organizations and higher education. For year one, the initiative will be implemented at a local, high needs middle and high school. It is the goal of the City of Houston to expand this program in the following years.

This program is designed to be easily replicated and based off of pre-existing services and resources that connect to resources for students and families. It will serve middle school and high school students providing them positive out of school time in an academically-rich environment. The program will engage students in a service learning project, which will be overseen by Houston SERVICE and the Mayor's Youth Council. Additional learning opportunities will be provided by guest speakers who will utilize their professional interests to engage students in literacy, arts, life skills, high school graduation, and college planning activities and connect the classroom to careers. The Mayor's Youth

Council will partner with after school youth to hold a town hall meeting at a local school, focusing on the importance of mentoring and youth engagement. Finally, mentors will work regularly with students to develop a college/career plan and help students identify available positive out of school activities.

The pilot program will be held at a Houston Public Library, but may also take place in museums, City of Houston community centers, schools or other community organization locations. Adhering to the model established by Citizen Schools, a consultant in this initiative, the mentors will cultivate a college-bound mentality and help students develop a personal career plan. The volunteers will be solicited and retained by Ryan Middle School, Houston SERVICE and the Houston Public Library. University partners will analyze the data for the initiative and measure the efficiency and overall success of the program. Students from local universities will also attend some After School Zones to apply lessons from their service-learning classrooms to the mentor sessions.

Based on focus group research and sustained practices of the Houston Public Library, the City of Houston has identified a 3:1 student to mentor ratio to achieve positive outcomes. This would require 10 mentors in the pilot year to achieve our expected outcomes. In addition to volunteers, Houston SERVICE has requested 3 AmeriCorps Vista members to assist in the expansion of this pilot. With these additional personnel, the outreach into the mentor community will be further sustained for Year 2 and beyond.



A mentor assisting a student with her homework in the Houston Public Library

For the pilot year, the City of Houston will collaborate with a middle school and high school within close proximity to their public libraries. The program will foster an academically stimulating environment, connect students to educational resources in their community and promote career-focused activities. Upon completion of the pilot year, the City of Houston will move towards collaborating with five middle

schools and high schools for the second year, and focus on establishing the after school zones with ten middle schools and high schools by the end of the third year.

Listed below are the four metrics that will be used:

1. Number of mentees served
2. Increase in number of students who begin developing college/career plans
3. Increase in students' attendance rates
4. Increase in positive behavioral changes toward school

To maintain a 3:1 student-mentor ratio, the City of Houston will require approximately 80 - 100 volunteers to reach 250 students in year two and approximately 400 volunteers to reach 1,000 students by year three. The ultimate goal will be to sustain the year 3 implementation for five years, and it is anticipated that 2,500 volunteers will mentor over 6,000 students in this initiative.

<i>After School Zones</i> Challenge addressed: School attendance and graduation rates of at-risk youth		
Lead	Metrics	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ryan Middle School • Houston Public Library • Houston Parks and Recreation • Mayor's Office of Education • Houston SERVICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in students with a mentor • Increase in number of students who begin developing college/career plans • Increase in students' attendance rates • Increase in positive behavioral changes toward school 	Launch Spring 2011

Houston Veterans Continuing Service

Challenge: The City of Houston, along with many other major cities, has a challenge of reintegrating returning veterans back into civilian life. This has been the on-going mission of the City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs (COHOVA). It is not easy for veterans to reintegrate back into civilian life due to reasons such as: veterans not having access to available resources or not knowing how to access those resources, and not having a viable support system such as family and friends. Related to this, COHOVA, Lone Star Veterans and the VA Medical Center have identified many veterans who need assistance but lack mentors to help provide access to that assistance.

While the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center provides strong support and services to returning veterans, the City of Houston seeks to increase the number of veterans that receive such support and services. The City wants to ensure that these service members have direct access to free local resources when they return home, as well as provide them with outreach opportunities in the community to further enrich their lives.

The following statistics provided by the comprehensive report, "All Volunteer Force, From Military to Civilian Service" from Civic Enterprises 2009, offer a glimpse into how Veterans are disconnected from the community:

- Nearly 7 in 10 respondents (69 percent) said that they had not been contacted by a community institution, local non-profit, or place of worship. Fifty-four percent of veterans had been contacted by a veteran's service organization. Sixty-nine percent were offered a service, while only 21 percent were asked to serve.
- Only 13 percent of veteran's strongly agreed that their transition home was going well, and just 9 percent strongly agreed the needs of their family were being met.

The following statistics offer why Veterans continue to serve:

- Those veterans who were volunteers were twice as likely to be contacted by a community organization as those who did not volunteer.
- Veterans were interested in meeting needs in their communities and many wanted to serve on multiple issues.
- 55 percent of respondents who volunteer said their transitions were going well, compared to 47 percent of non-volunteers. The difference held for their family's transition, with 48 percent of veterans who volunteer saying their family's needs were being met, while only 38 percent of non-volunteers said the same.

Initiative: The Houston Veterans Continuing Service initiative aims to increase the City's outreach to transitioning veterans and their families residing in the City of Houston. The initiative will recruit and train peer mentors (veterans who have successfully transitioned to civilian life) to help returning veterans access services such as job/career training, housing assistance, and mental wellness/health care. The overall goals of the initiative include helping veterans that need assistance reintegrate into society, increasing the number of mentors and volunteers available for veterans' assistance, offering veterans opportunities to assist their peers, and increasing awareness of veterans issues throughout the City of Houston.

Veterans have expressed a strong desire to help their fellow veterans reintegrate into society. By participating in mentoring activities, the returning veterans will integrate into civilian life and feel a sense of connection to the City. The City of Houston in partnership with the Lone Star Veterans Association has pledged to certify peer mentoring specialists as trainers within this initiative. These specialists will train volunteers to further expand the number of peer mentors.

The Veterans Affairs initiative will support veteran to veteran mentoring, providing an opportunity for successfully transitioned veterans to assist new veterans in their integration into civilian life. The initiative will also recruit and train non-veteran volunteers to support case management for the veterans, services which will supplement the case management already being performed by the City of Houston's Office of Veteran Affairs. Recruitment of new volunteers will come from a variety of available resources including the City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs, Lone Star Veterans, and the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Through the implementation of this initiative, the City of Houston expects to create a veteran population more integrated into the civilian and service activities of the City. For the first year, the initiative will require a minimum of 150 volunteers to meet the mentor need at the Harris County Veterans Court and the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Sustaining the program will require approximately 500-1,000 by year five.



Listed below are the metrics the initiative will measure:

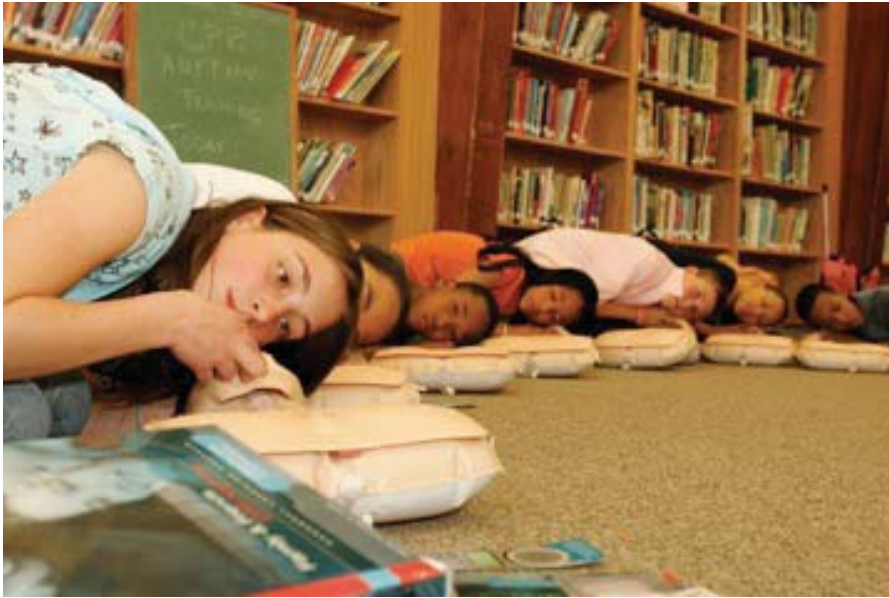
1. Number of veterans trained to be veterans peer to peer mentors.
2. Number of veterans receiving peer to peer assistance.
3. Number of veterans receiving job training and other City benefits.
4. Number of veterans with job placements after 6 months

The City of Houston will require the collaboration and cooperation of several partners to ensure the success of this initiative including the City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs, Lone Star Veterans Association, Wounded Warrior Project, Harris County Veterans Court, Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, The Open Table and the University of St. Thomas.

Houston Veterans Continuing Service

Challenge addressed: Reintegration of returning veterans

Lead	Metrics	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs • Lone Star Veterans Association • Houston SERVICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of veterans trained as mentors • Number of veterans receiving peer to peer assistance • Number of veterans receiving job training and other city benefits • Number of veterans with job placements after 6 months 	Launch Sumer 2011



Everyone Can be a Lifesaver

Challenge: The City of Houston seeks to increase the number of citizens trained in hands-only CPR. The City faces the challenge of not having enough trained volunteers ready to respond in a CPR emergency.

In general, eighty percent of out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrest victims collapse at home. This means, the person most likely being saved – or not – is a loved one. Effective bystander CPR, provided immediately after sudden cardiac arrest, can double or triple a victim's chance of survival. If bystander CPR is not provided, a sudden cardiac arrest victim's chances of survival fall by as much as 10 percent for every minute of delay until defibrillation.

Today, only one third of people who suffer out-of-hospital sudden cardiac arrest receive bystander CPR. Further, only 35 percent of those trained on administering CPR feel confident enough in their training to act.

Initiative: *Everyone Can be a Lifesaver* seeks to provide citizens an opportunity to become trained in hands-only CPR and provide avenues for these citizens to share their knowledge with five friends, family members or neighbors. In doing so, the program raises awareness amongst local volunteers for both the new CPR training techniques and Houston's newest service initiative.

Through *Everyone Can be a Lifesaver*, the Mayor's Citizens Assistance Office (MCAO) trains volunteers on the life saving hands-only CPR technique. The MCAO has a presence in local communities, super-neighborhoods and operates through the City's Multi-Service Centers where they actively engage volunteers and the community alike, which gives this initiative a broad reach. Volunteers in this initiative will be trained by and provided with a *CPR Anytime* kit. These "volunteer trainers" then commit to training five friends, neighbors, or family members with the CPR technique.

By adopting *Everyone Can be a Lifesaver*, Houston can dramatically increase the number of residents trained with this life-saving hands-only CPR. While it is true that the City of Houston has

responded well to natural disasters and emergency situations, there is still a need for CPR trained volunteers in the community.

Listed below are the metrics the initiative will measure:

1. Initial number of Houstonians trained in compression-only CPR
2. Number of Houstonians trained directly in compression-only CPR
3. Number of Houstonians trained indirectly through the "pass it on" component

Within a year, we expect to have 10,000 instructor trained volunteers in hands-only CPR and we expect their reach in training others to be 40,000 – 50,000.

Implementing this initiative will provide various City offices and local non-profits with an opportunity to work towards creating a more efficient City-wide response to victims of cardiac arrest. It will also uphold the City's commitment to providing its citizens meaningful venues for civic engagement.

Everyone Can be a Lifesaver

Challenge addressed: Number of citizens trained in life-saving CPR

Lead	Metrics	Timing
Mayor's Citizen Assistance Office American Heart Association Houston SERVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of volunteer "trainers" recruited and trained directly (10,000 persons) • Number of citizens trained in CPR indirectly through the "pass it on" component of the initiative (40,000 – 50,000 persons) 	Launch Summer 2011

Infrastructure Initiatives

The City of Houston is committed to making our municipality a premier City in volunteering. However, the existing infrastructure needs to be strengthened in order to achieve this goal. During the fall of 2010, the Mayor's Office held a focus group to address broad challenges in volunteerism in the City of Houston. The focus group brought together faith-based organizations, non-profits, and local universities.

The City of Houston identified three cross-cutting challenges that deter citizens from participating in volunteer projects:

- Volunteer connectivity to service opportunities,
- Efficiency of volunteer badging process, and
- Coordination and collaboration between organizations.

Houston SERVICE plans to address these cross-cutting challenges in order to effectively engage Houstonians in service. Highlighted below are three strategies – Infrastructure Initiatives – that the City of Houston will implement in order to improve volunteer connectivity to service opportunities (*HoustonSERVICE.org*), efficiency of volunteer badging (*Volunteer Badging 2.0*), and coordination and collaboration between organizations (*Mayor's Non-Profit and Faith Based Leadership Forum*).

HoustonSERVICE.org

Challenge: Houstonians are eager to volunteer, but they may not have the knowledge of where the need is for volunteer services. Twenty nine percent of organizations surveyed did not have a staff person dedicated to volunteer management, which makes it even more difficult for volunteers to connect to service opportunities.

Initiative: The City of Houston, in partnership with Cities of Service, has developed a new website that will provide up-to-date information on volunteer needs in Houston as well as a user-friendly interface to make applying for opportunities easier. On this website, Houston area non-profits, faith-based groups and corporations will have the opportunity to post volunteer opportunities and highlight service projects. The new website will encourage greater organizational partnerships and increase volunteer awareness of Houston service programs, ultimately helping to improve volunteer connectivity to service opportunities.

Volunteer Badging 2.0

Challenge:

Another cross-cutting challenge the City of Houston faces is its slow badging process. This inefficient process causes a delay in volunteer access to volunteer opportunities.

Initiative: *Volunteer Badging 2.0* will improve and accelerate the process of providing volunteers with required City ID badges. This will encourage more Houstonians to volunteer as the process will be streamlined and hassle free. Volunteers will not be deterred by the inaccessibility to City facilities or the length of time it takes to get processed. Improving the badging process will increase the number of volunteers assigned to service activities, thereby enhancing the service atmosphere of the City.

Volunteer Badging

Challenge addressed: Efficiency of the City's badging process

Lead	Metrics	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Houston Fire Department • Volunteer Initiatives Program • Mayor's Citizen Assistance Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of volunteers recruited • Number of citizens trained in CPR through the initiative 	Launch Summer 2011



HoustonSERVICE.org

Challenge addressed: Volunteer connectivity to service opportunities

Lead	Metrics	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Houston SERVICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of unique visitors to website • Users connected with service opportunities through the site • Number of postings by Houston organizations (relative to the old site) 	Launch Summer 2011

Mayor's Non-profit and Faith Based Leadership Forum

Challenge: The third cross-cutting challenge is to improve coordination and collaboration among non-profits and other organizations in the Houston area. Thirty one percent of survey respondents stated that a lack of knowledge of corporations and philanthropic entities in the community was a challenge to their service efforts. Over 1/3 of respondents stated that competition with other organizations was limiting their ability to work together and achieve better results.

Initiative: This cross-cutting challenge will be addressed by holding an annual Leadership Forum. Through this Forum, Houston SERVICE aims to reach out to numerous organizations in the non-profit, faith based and corporate-philanthropic networks to create a coalition of engaged civic partners that will foster open communication in an effort to sustain better volunteer programs.

It is the hope of Houston Service that by addressing these cross-cutting challenges in our service plan, Houstonians will be better served.



Leadership Forum

Challenge addressed: Connectivity of Houston organizations to each other

Lead	Metrics	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Houston SERVICE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of organizations attending the Forum Number of connections/collaborations that occur because of the Forum, as assessed through a post-Forum survey 	Launch Summer 2011

Endnotes

1. Corporation for National & Community Service, Volunteering in America Report 2009, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp>
2. Statement by President Obama on the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, March 31, 2009, http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/newsroom/statements_detail.asp?tbl_pr_id=1288
3. NYC Service: A Blueprint to Increase Civic Engagement, http://nycservice.org/pdf/nyc_service_report_web.pdf
4. All Volunteer Force, From Military to Civilian Service from *Civic Enterprises* 1.2009 <http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/allvolunteerforce.pdf>

Houston SERVICE Plan Overview

Initiative Name	Priority Area	Impact Initiative	Impact Metric(s)	Goals	Lead Partner (s)	Timing
After School Zones	Education & Youth Development	Provide mentors to the City's at-risk youth and engage them in positive out of school activities in an academically-rich environment	-Number of students mentored -Number of mentors recruited - Number of students who develop college/career plans - Student attendance rates - Student behavioral changes toward school	Semester 1: 10 mentors trained, 30 students mentored Year 2: 80-100 mentors trained, 250 students mentored Year 3: 400 mentors trained, 1,000 students mentored	-Houston Public Library -Mayor's Office of Education - Houston Parks and Recreation Department -Houston SERVICE -Houston Independent School District -University of Houston-Downtown	Spring 2011
Houston Veterans Continuing Service	Veteran Services	Reintegrate veterans into civilian life by increasing their access to City services and providing opportunities for veteran to veteran mentoring	-Number of veterans recruited as peer-to-peer mentors - Number of veterans receiving peer-to-peer assistance -Number of veterans receiving job training and other City benefits - Number of veterans with job placements after 6 months	Year 1: 150 veterans trained Initiative Totals: 500-1,000 veterans trained	-City of Houston Office of Veterans Affairs -Houston SERVICE -Lone Star Veterans Association -American Legion Post 416 -Wounded Warrior Project -Vets 4 Vets -Harris County Veterans Court -Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center -Harris County Vet Center -University of St. Thomas	Spring 2011
Everyone Can Be a Lifesaver	Health and Public Safety	Increase the number of trained citizens in compression-only CPR to improve outcomes in emergency situations	-Number of volunteer "trainers" recruited and trained directly (10,000 persons) -Number of citizens trained in CPR indirectly through the "pass it on" component (40,000 – 50,000 persons)	Year 1: 10,000 volunteers trained Initiative Totals: 40,000 – 50,000 volunteers trained	- American Heart Association - Mayor's Citizens' Assistance Office - Houston SERVICE - Houston Community College	Summer 2
Initiative Name	Cross Cutting	Civic Infrastructure Initiative	Metric	Lead Partner (s)		Timing
HoustonSERVICE.org	Website Development	Provide information on volunteerism in the City as well as a user-friendly interface to make applying for opportunities easier	- Number of unique visitors to the site -Users connected with service opportunities -Increased number of postings by Houston organizations	- Houston SERVICE		Spring 2011
Volunteer Badging 2.0	Improved Infrastructure for badging	Improve and accelerate the process of providing volunteers with required City ID badges.	-Number of volunteers who apply for a badge -Number of volunteers who receive a badge -Time lapsed between volunteer matched with opportunity and provision of badge	- Houston SERVICE		Summer 2011

Mayor's Non-profit and Faith Based Leadership Forum	Community Outreach	Improve coordination and collaboration among non-profits and other organizations by hosting an annual leadership forum	-Number of organizations attending the Forum - Number of connections/ collaborations that occur because of the Forum	- Houston SERVICE		Summer 2011
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Other On-Going Service Efforts from the Mayor's Office

What is the Volunteer Initiatives Program?

In 2004 the City of Houston created the Volunteer Initiatives Program (VIP) to engage residents in civic service. The VIP places 3000 - 5000 volunteers annually with various City departments, allowing them to channel their passions into meaningful action. This innovative collaboration between Houston employees and citizen volunteers will continue to improve the City's existing partnerships with nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and the community at-large. The contribution that the VIP generates towards saving the City's time, resources, and funds through its volunteer and internship outreach is enormous. Without the generous dedication of these workers, Houston would not be able function in the capacity that it does and is continually grateful for the amount of quality volunteers and interns that the VIP procures. The Volunteer Initiatives Program has established rapport with several local and national organizations to plan community outreach events that provide important services to the Houston Community.

Listed below are a few engagements of the Volunteer Initiatives Program

- *The Souper Bowl of Caring*: an event that provides much needed food supplies to Houston's homeless community at the end of the National Football League season during Super Bowl weekend.
- *The Jefferson Awards for Public Service*: works with various volunteer organizations to promote the efforts of volunteers across the country to raise awareness about service opportunities within the community and empower individuals to follow by example.
- National Days of Service: opportunities for civic engagement throughout the United States. The Volunteer Initiatives Program gathers and distributes information about the many events taking place on these days, and if needed coordinates resources for particular projects.

Getting the Youth Involved – the Mayor's Youth Council

In 1998, the City of Houston proudly created the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC), a program open to all interested Houston high school students. After a screening process and an interview, the top candidates are selected to represent their respective district and are expected to participate in two volunteer projects a month. Modeled after the elected City Council, consisting of a Chair, City Secretary, and At-Large and District Council Members with Senior Aides, the MYC provides valuable experience to members to gain a thorough comprehension of the dynamics of City government. Members grow personally and intellectually, obtaining a deeper understanding of City departments, the role of community leaders and elected officials and their personal capacity to advocate and implement change.

Students who are not selected also have the option of enlisting in the Youth Service Corps, a nationwide organization that provides service opportunities to young people. Utilizing this organization as a vehicle, Mayor Annise Parker continued the tradition of promoting civic engagement among Houston's youth by creating the Mayor's Youth Service Corps. The Mayor's Youth Service Corps are required to volunteer at least twice a year for a minimum of ten hours. The dedication of these volunteers is evident in their ability to surpass this requirement annually, hence embodying the Houstonian spirit of service.

Restoring Houston's Historic Cemeteries

Mayor Annise Parker has made it a priority to restore dignity to the historic cemeteries in Houston. The initiative is imperative in preserving Houston's rich, diverse history for the City's future generations.

"Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise I rise I rise."

- Maya Angelou

To execute successfully, the Restoring Houston's Historic Cemeteries initiative is partnering with the Texas Historical Commission and its R.I.P. Guardianship Program, the non-profit organizations responsible for the cemeteries, and Houston businesses and volunteers. The Mayor's Youth Council, the Mayor's Cultural Affairs Office, Chevron's Human Energy, and AmeriCorps NCCC will also participate in this endeavor. The involvement of these organizations will be critical in transforming the historic cemeteries into admirable symbols of the City's past, portraying the arrival of the first free African-Americans to Houston in search of a new life. The struggles and successes of these African Americans exemplify the undeniable presence of opportunity in Houston as well as the rewards that individuals reap when availing such opportunities with dedication and perseverance.



Acknowledgements

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Universities

The following universities were enthusiastic participants in the three Houston Initiatives.

Houston Community College
Rice University
University of Houston – Downtown
University of St. Thomas

Community Organizations

These organizations have provided valuable insight into the cross-section of volunteerism in Houston through their participation in surveys.

American General
American Heart association
American Hospice
American Legion Post No. 416
The Beacon
Boat People SOS
Citizen Schools
Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
Eye Care for Kids Foundation
Family to Family Network
Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council
Harris County Veterans Court
Houston Food Bank
Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston
Junior Achievement
Lemonade Day
Lone Star Veterans Association
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center
Museum of Fine Arts Houston
The Open Table
Ryan Middle School – Houston Independent School District
Sam Houston Area Council, Boy Scouts of America
Shriners Hospitals for Children
Texas Campaign for the Environment
Texas Childrens Hospital
Wounded Warrior Project
Urban Harvest
Vets 4 Vets
YMCA of Greater Houston

Mayor's Volunteer Initiatives Program – Interns

The Cities of Service Grant would not be possible without the dedication of the following interns who pledged their time and efforts to making Houston a better City for volunteerism and civic engagement.

Dave Beauchamp, University of Delaware
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Darren Pagano, University of Houston - Downtown
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Yimin Yuo, Rice University

The City of Houston

The city government of Houston has been a huge presence in the development and production of the Cities of Service Initiatives.

The Department of Education
The Houston Fire Department
Houston Health and Human Services
Houston Parks and Recreation Department
The Houston Public Library
Houston Television
The Mayor's Office
Office of Homeland Security
The Office of Veterans Affairs
The Volunteer Initiatives Program

Special Thanks to:

Volunteer Houston, established in 1974, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development, promotion and support of volunteerism. For more than 35 years, Volunteer Houston has been the city's sole referral service connecting volunteers to a broad spectrum of diverse nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations all around Houston and its vicinity rely on Volunteer Houston to acquire over 30,000 volunteers per year.

The Mayor's Volunteer Houston Awards were first awarded in 1984. The awards continue to honor individuals who do remarkable volunteer work that make Houston a better place to live. Nominations are reviewed and honorees selected by a diverse community panel of judges. The awards are presented at a ceremony held in the spring each year.

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For a copy of Houston SERVICE, go to www.houstonservice.org.



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