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## What Is the New National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement and What Will It Mean for Us?

By [Betsy McFarland](#)

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In July of last year, I joined over 500 volunteer management professionals from across the U.S. (and several from other countries) in attending the 2017 National Summit on Volunteer Engagement Leadership, the first event in over 10 years that was designed *exclusively* for people whose work centers on engaging volunteers. Energize, Inc. Founder Susan J. Ellis debriefed her experiences at the event in a [Volunteer Management Hot Topic last August](#). Besides her personal reflections, she noted about the collective enthusiasm and desire to keep the momentum going to bring about unity and collaboration in the field at the national level. Susan wrote:

*The Summit ended at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, but participants had all been invited to reconvene an hour later for a more intense strategy planning session for what might keep the momentum of the Summit moving forward. About 75 colleagues fought the fatigue of long conference days, rolled up their sleeves, and spent two hours debating next steps. Common ground: We simply must keep moving forward and harness the incredible enthusiasm and optimism of the Summit.*

As one of those participants, I am happy to report that our determination has brought about an exciting new chapter: the new [National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement](#) is coming to life!

During that enthusiastic planning session back in July 2017, we appointed [a task force](#) (which I co-facilitated with Dana Litwin of AL!VE). We charged the task force with proposing a structure for a formal group to leverage and convene existing networks, organizations, and individuals to elevate and drive a national conversation about the power and potential of volunteer engagement, as well as encourage collective action for nationwide engagement strategies. The National Alliance is our proposal.

## What IS the National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement?

The National Alliance structure has been designed to convene staff and volunteer leaders across *many sectors*—including traditional nonprofit, faith-based, health, human service, government, and civic organizations, and membership associations, higher education facilities—as well as representing volunteer engagement professionals, executive leadership, development/ fundraising professionals, human resource professionals, funders, and beyond. Collectively, we “put to paper” what we see as the goal for the Alliance:



*The mission of the Alliance is to guide future collective action at the national level towards embracing volunteer engagement as an effective strategy to address community needs.*

Results from our initial meeting at the Summit mandated that the following activities comprise the initial key focus, thus our immediate goals are:

- Creating a Clear National Vision
- Developing a Communications Hub
- Convening Future Gatherings
- Furthering Research/ Accreditation

To see the detailed outline of the proposed **structure** and **guidelines** for the Alliance and how we hope to **move forward**, please read the [Case Statement on the new Alliance website](#).

## Don't We Already Have a National Association for Leaders of Volunteers: AL!VE?

The Alliance is not a replacement for AL!VE ([Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement](#)) or other existing national or regional organizations or associations. These bodies will continue to be the place where professionals in volunteer engagement can network with other professionals, discover professional learning opportunities and resources, and help advocate for the profession. The Alliance, rather, will be a coalition to facilitate collaboration across *many sectors*, bringing together more voices to build united strength for **collective action**. Our friends at AL!VE are generously providing support to the Alliance as a co-facilitator and fiscal agent.

## What Will the National Alliance Mean for US?

As leaders of volunteers, professionals in volunteer engagement, and volunteer-involving organizations, it can be challenging to move beyond the day-to-day work on the ground. Together, with others in the Alliance such as funders, government agencies, researchers, and others who mobilize volunteers whether or not they have “volunteer coordination” in their job description, we can elevate and drive a national conversation about the power and potential of volunteer

engagement and encourage collective action for nationwide engagement strategies. Together as an Alliance, we can speak up if public policy threatens the impact of volunteers. Together, we can shape a national view of volunteering. Together, we can encourage the right questions are asked in research and studies on volunteerism. Together, we can ensure volunteers have effective support to make change in our communities.

## What Are the Next Steps?

The Task Force is working to create an Interim Leadership Team to formally launch the Alliance by the end of the year, and to put forth a process for how people can get involved. Also, we are close to launching a Communications Hub Working Group, an exciting new online platform where we can convene and exchange ideas.

The Alliance has been designed to include many voices, including staff and volunteer leaders across many sectors. Here's how you can get involved:

1. Visit <https://all4engagement.org/> and read the Alliance case statement.
2. Share this Hot Topic and the [National Alliance website](#) with your colleagues and networks!
3. Add yourself to the [National Alliance email list](#) to receive updates about this important work.
4. Be on the lookout for future opportunities to serve with a work group and other important roles.

*What are your thoughts/concerns about the new National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement?*

*Can you envision a way the Alliance could play a part in improving volunteer engagement in the U.S.?*

*If you are NOT from the U.S., is there a national body in your country that focuses on collective action in support of volunteer engagement?*

## Comments from Readers

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*Submitted on July 5th, 2018*

*Gail Gilmartin, Volunteer Coordinator, Horizon Health and Wellness, Phoenix, AZ , USA*

Wonderful to read about the creation of the Alliance. As one who has been in Volunteer Coordination and Management for over 20 years within the non-profit sector, I am encouraged and excited to see what the alliance will bring to the life of those of us who are life-long volunteer "engagers."

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*Submitted on July 26th, 2018*

*Lee Miller, Library Admin, Indian Rocks Beach Library, Indian Rocks Beach, United States*

I am interested in creating tools for volunteer managers to use to be effective. I am currently working on a Volunteer Manager Field Guide and would love any input of collaboration from your organization! I currently serve on the the ALA Learn Round Table where I am focusing on volunteer training.

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*Submitted on July 27th, 2018*

*Gerald (Jerry) ..., Presenter, Consultant, and Blogger, Indept Contractor, New York, NY, USA*

Thank you Betsy for this Hot Topic. I've been following the developments since I participated in the session after the Summit. Your article is an important follow-up. Since I'm on the board of a local professional association, I shared some highlights from your Hot Topic with my local professional association via our e-newsletter – including the links your provided as well as a link to this Hot Topic.

My questions regarding thoughts/concerns and the Alliance playing a part in improving volunteer engagement in the US:

1. How will the Alliance reach out to local and state professional associations and what role(s) do they anticipate for those associations?
2. Since my intentional career change in 1993, an identifier for what we do and who we are has changed/evolved. Identifiers include volunteer administrator; director, manager, coordinator of volunteer services; volunteer resource(s) manager; volunteer engagement professional; etc. The titles are often based on specific industry/sector; specific titles/categories within government, nonprofit, etc.; country; and our internal attempts to define ourselves. Will the Alliance be able to address who we are, what we do, and the importance of our role? Thus identifying a nationally understood identifier(s) for the profession? I ask because an up-to-date, accurate, and “easily recognizable identifier” will impact interactions with funders, organizations who hire us, volunteers, media, etc.

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