

REACH-Needs Assessment Report

April 15, 2018

By Shannon Pittman-Price

Overview

REACH, which stands for Reading Enriches All Children, is a nonprofit organization that is based in Chesapeake, Virginia. This organization was established in 1998 by an educator named Kristin Hildum. Hildum's vision was for a homeless and at-risk children to have access to literacy. Her goal was to create a program where volunteers would go out to homeless shelters, do read alouds, facilitate a craft, and give each child two developmentally appropriate free books to read. Their first Read Aloud program was established at the HELP and Emergency Response shelter in South Hampton Roads. REACH currently serves eleven homeless and domestic violence shelters, and has a partnership with several local organizations.

The mission of REACH is simple. The organization wants to "promote youth literacy and education, and continue to impact and support the literacy needs of at risk children in the Hampton Roads area." Statistics show that reading is a major component of success in academics, but when a child is faced with homelessness the chance of academic achievement decreases. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, shows that children who are not reading proficiently by fourth grade are four times more likely to dropout of high school. REACH strives to alleviate this issue by facilitating the Read Aloud Program and having various read aloud events in the community. REACH participates in numerous local festivals, host fundraising events, and has read aloud popup sessions to read and host discussions. They are always striving to create more programming and expand the organization to reach more kids.

There are only two full time staff members on site, Jennifer Goffe the Executive Director and Leslie Clarridge the Program Director. Throughout the year there are unpaid interns. Most of the the services are carried out through volunteers. The committee for this report is as follows:

- Executive Director, Jennifer Goff
- Program Director, Leslie Clarridge
- Volunteer, Shannon Pittman-Price

Purpose

The purpose of this needs assessment is to determine what actions need to be done to increase awareness of the program and to attract major donations.

Needs Identified

In the initial meeting, the committee discussed the goals of the organization and any perceived gaps that were keeping REACH from meeting those end goals. It was determined that there are two main issues. The first issue deals with lack of funding to initiate new programs to reach more at risk youth in the community and the lack of staff kept them from engaging more with volunteers and giving refresher trainings periodically.

REACH's goal for this fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2018, is to distribute 20,000 books and serve 1800 children. Last fiscal year, ending on June 30, 2017, they distributed 19,523 and served 1650 children. Lack of funding makes it hard to implement new programs and market new initiatives that will attract the big donors. The staff also wants to engage volunteers to keep them active and involved in their volunteer teams, but that proves to be difficult with the current workload. This report seeks to see if refresher training is needed by volunteers.

Data Collection Tools

Three data collection tools were used to acquire the data needed to determine the true needs of REACH. The tools that were used were as follows:

1. **Committee Interview**-Two interviews were conducted with the executive director and the program director. Interview discussed previous efforts on marketing, goals and new programming.
2. **Volunteer Survey**- A survey was sent out to the 417 volunteers about their experience with REACH, suggestions for improvements, and if refresher training would be beneficial or them.
3. **Marketing Survey**- A survey to be distributed to the marketing committee at REACH to gauge the current marketing strategy and what direction the marketing initiative need to go in.

Committee Interview

In the committee interview, each question was written to provide the most information about the company. These questions provided insight into the purpose of the organization, what successes the organization has already accomplished, what were there issues and their goals.

After an analysis of the responses from the interview the following information was determined:

- The main goal for REACH is to increase its marketing efforts to raise awareness about the organization and attract major donors.
- The issues that they have is trying to create more programs to reach more at-risk kids, but there is a lack of funding and a lack of staff.
- There is an abundance of donated books.
- Onboarding training for volunteers is adequate, but they want to do refresher training but lack the staff and time.
- A new program they are trying to initiate is Moonbeams and Sweet Dreams. This program will have them partner with the Boys and Girls Club to give a book to parents wrapped in a blanket. This is to encourage nightly reading with parents.
- It was emphasized that marketing and attracting major donors is the main focus.



Interview Questions

Program/Volunteer Coordinator and Executive Director

1. If you could choose your top three goals for advancing REACH services this year, what would they be?
2. What issues do you foresee that would get in the way of accomplishing these goals?
3. What are you currently doing with REACH that is working well for the organization?
4. Are there any areas where you see opportunities for improvement?
5. How would those improvements advance the mission of REACH?
6. What is the procedure for training REACH readers that are new to the organization?
7. Do you think there is anything that could help them improve on their read aloud strategies? Implementation of the reading program is a non-issue, engagement with vols through re-training/online resource training
8. Is there any training for the shelter staff to know what to expect? Yes
9. Are there any challenges you face that could be resolved with training?
10. Do you see the start of any emerging training need(s) that you think may be need attention over next 1-2 years?
11. Is there a tool or resource that could help you or your team work more efficiently?

Volunteer Survey

The purpose of the volunteer survey was to see what the needs were of the volunteers. Since the services of REACH is carried out by the volunteers, it is important to take into account how they feel about their training and opportunities at the organization. Volunteers spend their time working to achieve the mission of the organization, so they have a vested interest in making sure the organization grows. The executive director and program director expressed the need to engage volunteers and do maintenance training. The survey consisted of 10 questions. The questions asked about their thoughts on their initial training, if they would find refresher training beneficial, and do they have the resources they need. There are 417 volunteers total, with 241 being very active. Out of the 241 surveys that was sent out, only 13 volunteers responded to the survey. The results of the survey are below:

- All volunteers felt that they received adequate onboarding training.
- All volunteers felt that they are provided multiple chances to volunteer within REACH.
- A majority of volunteers that responded felt that refresher training would be beneficial to them, and 38.5% felt it was not necessary.
- All volunteers agreed that there should be some resources available for parents to continue to read to their child.
- Some volunteers indicated that they wanted more ideas for crafts, discussions and books to read.
- Volunteers wanted to be able to connect more with other volunteers to share information and ideas.

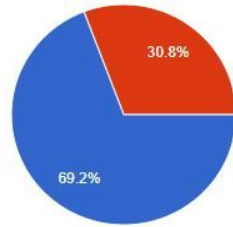
Below you will find the survey and data collected.

Based on our initial training, do you feel it prepared you to be an effective volunteer?



13 responses

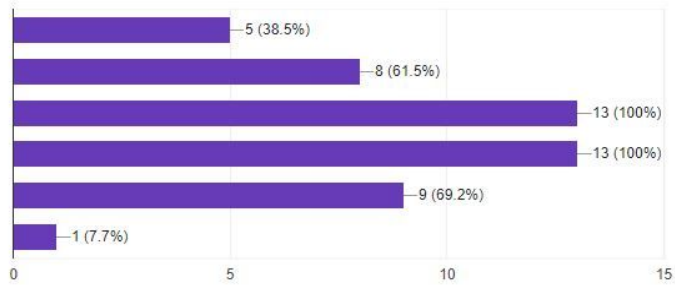
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- I felt very prepared.
- I felt moderately prepared.
- I felt slightly prepared.
- I did not feel prepared at all.

What do you think are the most important things to do when you are giving a read aloud? Check all that apply.

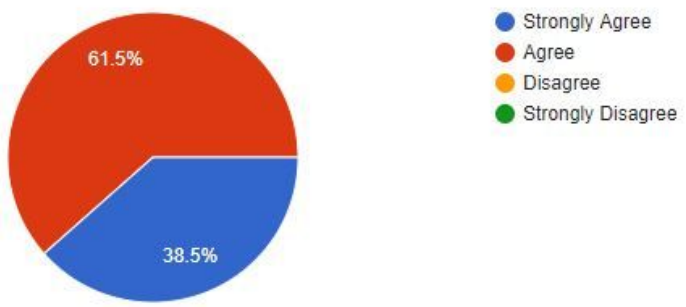
13 responses



My volunteer training equipped me with the resources and strategies I needed to be a successful reader.

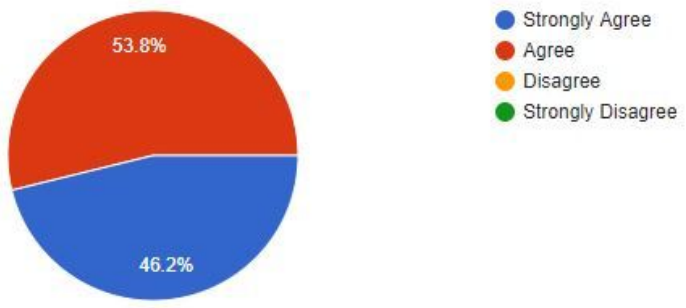


13 responses



I am provided with multiple opportunities to be more active in REACH.

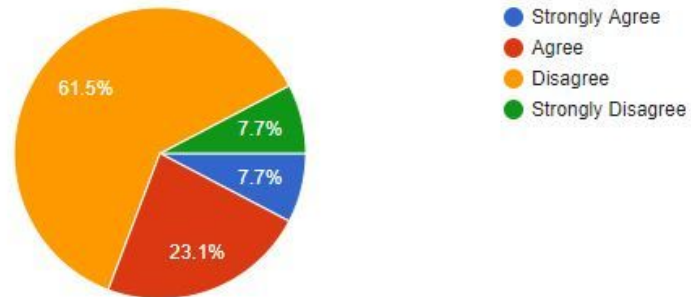
13 responses



Parents of the kids have the resources to assist with reading with their children?

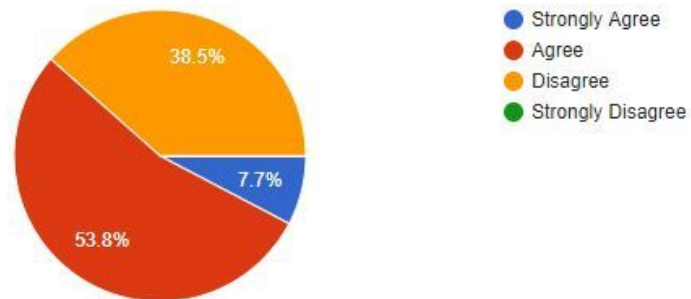


13 responses



A refresher training periodically would be beneficial to me as a volunteer.

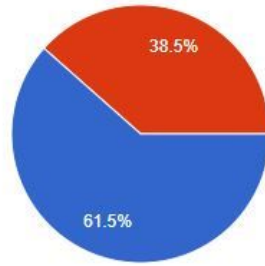
13 responses



Providing parents with a resource to help with their child's reading would be beneficial.



13 responses



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

What strategies or resources do you need to be a more effective volunteer reader?

9 responses

Supplies

I would like to see members who actively participate on my read-aloud team. Those that do not actively participate for a year or more should be asked if they would like to continue and become involved and if not, be replaced by others who would like to participate and join our team. Volunteer team members are a wonderful resource if you have a true team to work with.

A helper to do craft

REACH makes the necessary resources available to me. I feel that the strategies are up to the individual volunteer.

Craft ideas!!!

Continued open communication, suggestions of books and discussion topics

I feel very confident as a reader in the REACH program. However, I am very excited to consider the opportunity to better encourage parents feel more engaged in their children's reading.

Better response from shelters

I need more craft ideas to go along with my reading selections.

What do you think is the best way to get the word out to the community about REACH?

10 responses

Social media, word of mouth, community events

Social media and additional volunteers to participate at community events.

Presentations by staff who can give examples of effectiveness

Social media and events

Word of mouth; churches; school meetings (PTA) 4 Kids; other volunteer organizations

Newsletters (many areas have monthly ones that go out) ; an extensive article in Pilot or other newspaper about all that Reach does.

Social media/internet, direct communication with shelters and community centers

Possibly air time on NPR as a supporter or guest on local shows like Hearsay with Cathy Lewis or The View???

Social media

I think having a strong social media presence and having testimonials of the program would be great.

Marketing Survey

One perceived need identified by the executive director and program director is the need to expand the marketing efforts of REACH. Since REACH lacks the funding and staff it is difficult to expand programming to reach more kids and distribute more books. Marketing the organization through events and fundraisers brings in some money but not enough to push programming forward. Currently they have the following events and fundraisers:

- RAP Sessions (Read Aloud Program)-Go to different places and have someone read and host discussions.
- Dine for a Cause
- Pop UP RAP Sessions
- Community Fairs
- Give Local 757
- 15th Annual REACH Survivor Challenge
- Summer Festivals
- 20th Anniversary Event in November

These events bring in a couple of hundred dollars. Recently there was a T-shirt fundraiser that raised \$191 and a Dine for a Cause event that brought in \$110. The main focus is to try and attract bigger donors to donate funds so they can create more programming. With this information in mind, I created a survey for the marketing committee. There is a total of thirteen committee members including both directors. The focus of the marketing survey was to get a grasp on the current marketing efforts to see where there was a gap. The following survey was submitted for distribution among the committee members below:

What do you think REACH does well when it comes to marketing the organization?

Long answer text

What do you think is the biggest marketing challenge for REACH?

- Don't have effective marketing tools
- Need education or support to market the organization
- Don't have enough time to effectively market
- Other

If you checked other in question please specify your response.

Long answer text

What marketing materials do you currently have?

- Business cards
- Brochure/Flyer
- Website
- Social Media

What marketing materials or tools do you think you need?

- Website
- Social Media
- Brochure/Flyers
- One Pagers about organization
- Other

What do you think can be done to improve the marketing materials?

Long answer text

How much time is spent on weekly marketing for REACH?

- 5 hours or less
- 10-15 hours
- 16 or more hours

What resource gaps and restraints do you think REACH needs to overcome in relation to marketing?


Long answer text

What activities or marketing is currently being done at REACH?

Long answer text

What ideas do you have that will improve the marketing of REACH?

Long answer text



Unfortunately the marketing survey was not completed, but the marketing goals were communicated, as well as, meeting notes from committee meetings. The book distribution goal for this year that end on June 30, 2018 is 20,000 books and 1800 children served. As of March 1, a little under 10,000 books had been distributed and 1202 children had been served. The fiscal year runs from June 30, 2017-June 30, 2018. The meeting notes showed what types of events and fundraisers was planned for the remainder of the year and next fiscal year. Some events and fundraisers they have planned are as follows:

- Info Both/RAP Session/Donation Jar at the Care-A-Lot Pet Extravaganza
- CHIP Rubber Duck Race: Tent and Read Aloud Area
- Get Moving and Get Healthy Community Fair: REACH will distribute 500 new books for kids attending fair.
- HR Social Stuck in the 90s Brunch: Proceeds will benefit REACH
- 15th Annual REACH Survivor Challenge: A networking and marketing opportunity where teams from local employers compete in survivor style obstacles.
- Festevents Tent at two festivals over the summer

These are the events that are upcoming on the calendar. There is also discussions on how to partner with new businesses. For example, there is an upcoming meeting with the Noblemen Philanthropic organization and doing a Car Wash at Old Dominion University.

The upcoming events are good steps towards marketing the organization and getting the word about the mission of REACH.

Recommendations

Through analyzing the data I did have access to I have made certain recommendations to address the needs of the organization.

Gap

Based on the research, the gap is the amount of books that REACH wants to distribute and kids they want to service versus how many kids they actually service and how many books are distributed. The question that was left unanswered in this assessment is how are the specific numbers for how many books distributed and kids reached decided? Both directors emphasized they needed more funding for marketing efforts, but what is the specific amount of money needed for programming. Once those key questions are answered a more specific analysis can be structured.

Marketing

REACH has at least two events a month that is used to raise awareness about the organization and to raise money for programming. Normally the funds raised at events aren't substantial. To attract bigger donors, increase awareness, distribute 20,000 books and serve more kids the follow suggestions should be made:

Suggestions

1. Research potential high capacity donors in the local area and see what charities they already donate to, and align it with REACH. Then, reach out to those individuals and build relationships. For example, offer to do a RAP (Read Aloud Pop Up) session at one of their events. Invite politicians, big local names in the community to come out and do a read aloud themselves.
2. Go on a promotional tour where you will give presentations at local events, but most importantly have current volunteers give testimonials about their experiences.
3. Send thank you notes and follow up immediately with leads. Make sure to express what you are lacking and what the organization needs to grow and why they should donate.
4. Hire unpaid interns and create a strategic social media strategy and communications calendar.
5. **Social Media:** Utilize all social media platform in order to increase engagement. The way you will increase engagement is by telling compelling stories: volunteer interviews, children and parent testimonials, invite high level constituents to your events, invite them to do read alouds with kids and video it, have social media campaigns where individuals can post a selfie with their favorite childhood book.
6. **Social Media:** Make donating easy for the donors. Use tools like Charitweet that allows people to make a donation through Twitter. Have a quick donation button front and center on every platform.
7. **Social Media:** Post strategically every day. Remember to tell a compelling story. Use trending hashtags to spread the message, make it easy for them to engage, make calls to action prominent on all online platforms and remember to be purposeful.

Social Media is a great tool for non profit organizations. A best practice is to have a team that works off a communications calendar to know when to post. Since REACH is only a two staff member team, I suggest hiring 2 unpaid interns from the local college and spread the posting amongst the directors and the two interns. Social media is the tool to increase awareness and engage people which then lead to more donations and access to major donors.

Volunteers

In order for the organization to increase awareness, attract major donors, and distribute more books they need to have reliable and engaged volunteers. Everything plays a key role in the success of REACH. REACH has 417 volunteers with only 214 who are currently active. The survey that was given assess their perceptions of training and volunteer. Out of the thirteen respondents everyone strongly agreed or agreed that they felt equipped to carry out the volunteer session. All respondents except one felt that periodic refresher training would be very beneficial. To me more effective as a volunteer reader the survey results showed that the volunteers wanted their team to actively participate, craft ideas, give book ideas and discuss everything.

Suggestions

1. **Online Volunteer Refresher Training:** Since there is not enough manpower to carry out face to face training, I suggest creating the online course through an open source learning management systems like Blackboard Coursesites or Moodle. The following topics will be covered:
 - a. **Module 1:** Policies and Procedures Revisited: Quick overview and revisiting the policies and procedures of REACH with any added updates.
 - b. **Module 2:** Book Selections and Ideas: How to select engaging books for the read aloud and create a corresponding low maintenance craft.
 - c. **Module 3:** Read Aloud Strategies: This module will go over different strategies with updated research for reading aloud for kids and how to ask questions to help develop the reader.
 - d. **Module 4:** Read Aloud Management: This module will discuss strategies on how to manage a group of varying aged kids in a read aloud session.
 - e. **Closing:** Appreciation: This module will consist of video from kids, shelter workers, and directors thanking the volunteers for their time and efforts.
2. **More Communication:** Each volunteer is placed on a shelter team and take turns reading each month, but this can leave a sense of disconnect between the team volunteers. I would suggest you team groups within Facebook under the REACH page. In the Facebook Teams, they will be able to communicate and coordinate ideas with one another. Another way to increase communication with volunteers is to send out The Advocate newsletter consistently so everyone is aware of the happenings of REACH.

Evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing suggested plan and the online volunteer refresher training after the recommendations are implemented, the following activities should be performed:

1. Keep track of what was posted online in social media and what suggestion was used for each event and keep a tally of how much money was earned from that event versus similar events from the previous year.
2. Survey volunteers to gauge how the course has helped them and how it has increased communication on volunteer teams.
3. Keep track of how many more donors are acquired after implementation.