



# **Pima County's Sustainability Program & Volunteers: A Report on Recent Survey Findings & Recommendations**

**June 10, 2015**

**Prepared for the SAPCO Steering Committee by the  
Office of Sustainability and Conservation**

## **Executive Summary**

Pima County's Sustainable Action Plan (SAPCO) launched in 2007 continues to successfully meet program goals and targets. Much of the responsibility for implementing SAPCO and for its successes rest with the Volunteer Corps who collect data, educate and engage employees, and provide ongoing support for County-wide sustainability efforts.

As SAPCO matures from an early start up effort to a full-fledged program, undertaking a process assessment to gauge program strengths and weaknesses provides an opportunity to adapt and manage the organization to ensure continued its viability into the future. Along with a series of one-on-one meetings with S-Team Leads and a SWOT Analysis completed by the Sustainability Division with input from the SAPCO Steering Committee (Appendix B), a survey of the County's Volunteer Corps was undertaken to collect participants' views and observations of the volunteer experience and overall program operation. The April 2015 survey consisted of 16 questions administered through SurveyMonkey to 126 employee volunteers. Survey questions were designed specifically to assess current levels of volunteer engagement and motivations and barriers to participation; perceptions of compliance with SAPCO initiatives, gaps and needs; volunteers' overall satisfaction; and ideas for improvement. The survey ran for seven days and the average response rate was sixty-two percent (62%).

In combination with the survey results, the following recommendations are based on a review of volunteer program management resources, one-on-one conversations with S-Team Leads and their groups and the SWOT Analysis of program Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (Appendix B).

SAPCO Program Recommendations:

- Identify and direct fresh efforts towards (re)engaging departments that don't actively participate in SAPCO.
- Direct fresh efforts towards (re) engaging the support of County directors, managers and supervisors for employee volunteerism in SAPCO activities.
- Identify opportunities to improve employee compliance with SAPCO initiatives in areas where compliance appears to be slipping (recycling and energy conservation, for example) through identifying barriers and using appropriate theory-based behavior change campaigns and in-house media resources.

- Identify, anticipate and plan for future program needs, for example links with Pima Prosperers, and planning related to building climate resiliency.

#### SAPCO Volunteer Corps Recommendations

- Identify opportunities to recruit new volunteers, broaden the diversity of the volunteer base and establish a plan to retain volunteers.
- Devise a simplified path for prospective volunteers to join SAPCO groups and activities.
- Create and maintain a two-way communication channel with Volunteer Corps.
- Explore forming an *under-30* sustainability volunteer group to engage young professionals.
- Communicate successes frequently to promote the efficacy of action to reinforce volunteers' desire "to make a difference." This key concept represents an aspect of a *psychological contract*<sup>1</sup> or expectation volunteers have related to the investment of their time and energy in participation (Taylor et al., 2006). Identifying and fulfilling psychological contracts become important overtime when considering how to plan for long term program sustainability.
- Create opportunities for volunteers to participate Create opportunities for volunteers to participate in field trips and trainings about sustainability issues and topics to support their desire to "learn more about sustainability."
- Develop solutions to volunteers' barriers to participation in SAPCO, for example, lack of support by Directors for volunteerism, or the amount of time required to research green purchasing options.
- Create a SAPCO Volunteer Management Plan that includes an online handbook and ongoing program assessment.

In referring to studies of other volunteer-based programs, SAPCO is likely transitioning from a *Start-up and Implementation phase* to a *Maintenance phase*. Such shifts create fresh opportunities undertake program assessments and integrate results into adaptive planning. The results of the Volunteer surveys suggest that County's Volunteer Corps remain committed to SAPCO ideals but face multiple barriers to participation. These barriers, along with other gaps and needs that emerged in survey responses, the SWOT Assessment, and in S-Team discussions, can be addressed and resolved through strategic planning to ensure program viability and sustainability into the future.

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<sup>1</sup> "Perceptions of 'employment agreements' beyond what is formally agreed withing the context of the volunteer experience." (Taylor, Darcy, Hoye, & Cuskelly, 2006)

## Introduction

In December 2014, the Office of Sustainability and Conservation at Pima County hired a new program manager whose responsibilities included overseeing the County's successful and diverse Volunteer Sustainability Corps (Eco-Champions, S-Teams, and Green Purchasing Representatives). To better understand the composition and status of the Corps, a survey of volunteers was undertaken to identify program gaps, needs, barriers to participation (by volunteers and departments), motivations for participation, volunteer satisfaction, and ideas for improvement. Several survey questions were also added to gather information on the current composition of the Volunteer Corps. The results of the survey are intended to support strategic planning.

## Overview of the SAPCO Volunteer Program

From its adoption in 2007 and renewal in 2014, Pima County's Sustainable Action Plan for County Operations (SAPCO) has resulted in measurable environmental, social and economic dividends for Pima County.

Sustainability programs and initiatives across the County are led by employee volunteer teams, currently these teams consist of: the Green Purchasing Representatives, Eco-Champions, the SAPCO Steering Committee and the SAPCO Sustainability Teams (organization chart attached).

Over the past seven years, the volunteer groups have retained exceptionally high levels of membership and engagement. Most groups and leaders maintain a strong sense of ownership of their program areas and responsibilities. This bottom-up approach to sustainability, coupled with the endorsement of efforts by County leadership, has resulted in high quality program outcomes (as measured through the data collected and reported in the annual SAPCO Report Card).

However, in considering studies of other volunteer-based programs and best management practices, it is wise from a planning perspective to take into account how volunteer groups change over time in order to anticipate and support future needs. Broadly speaking, volunteer programs typically undergo four phases of development, these include: I. An *Early Startup Phase* (planning and design), II. An *Implementation Phase* (volunteer recruitment and training, program establishment and formative assessment), III. A *Maintenance Phase* (recognition for program and volunteers, ongoing volunteer recruitment and retention), and IV. An *Adaptive Management Phase* (process evaluation followed by adaptive planning to identify gaps, needs, and new opportunities).

While information on launching and implementing volunteer programs is widely available, far fewer resources provide guidance on maintaining and adaptively managing them overtime. Undertaking process evaluations can help with program sustainability through identifying gaps, needs and new growth opportunities that can be addressed in planning. As such, the Division of Sustainability, undertook the first ever survey of the volunteer corps along with a SWOT analysis of the Program's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The results of Survey and the SWOT are intended to provide the SAPCO Steering Committee a current assessment of overall program health based on participants' own input.

Figure 1. Volunteer Program Management

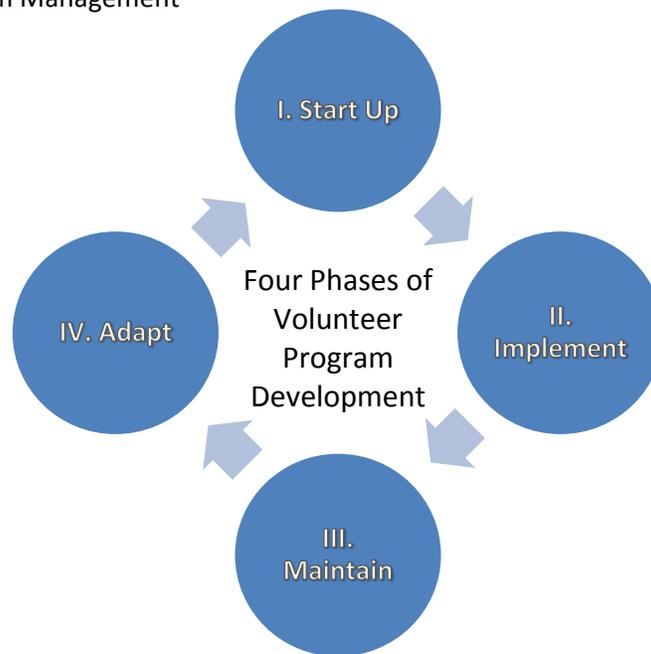


Figure 1. Four Phases of a Volunteer Program Management Cycle: I. *Early Start-Up Phase* (planning and design), II. *Implementation Phase* (volunteer recruitment and training, program establishment and formative assessment), III. *Maintenance Phase* (recognition for program and volunteers, ongoing volunteer recruitment and retention), and IV. *Adaptive Management Phase* (process evaluation followed by adaptive planning to identify gaps, needs, new opportunities).

The volunteer survey consisted of 16 questions (including four skip logic follow-up questions). The questions were formulated to contain a mix of structured response and open-ended response options. The survey was constructed with support from the County’s IT Department using an online tool, “Survey Monkey” . An early version of the survey was piloted by OSC staff; feedback obtained during the pilot was used to refine the final instrument.

One hundred and twenty six (126) staff members identified through a volunteer database were invited to participate in the survey. Volunteers consisted of S-Team Members and Leads, SAPCO Steering Committee Members, Eco-Champions and Green Purchasing Representatives. The survey ran for one week (7 days) from the dates of April 9, 2015 to April 17, 2015; daily reminders to complete the survey were sent to participants by the IT Department. The survey was voluntary and anonymous, no names or EIN information was retained or linked to the data that was compiled and analyzed by the Sustainability Division. Any information provided in the open-ended responses that could be linked to a respondent, was redacted.

## VI. Results

Response to the survey was quite high, 62% total response rate (46% of active volunteers), with an average of 69 responders per question (some respondents did not complete all questions, some questions allowed for more than one response). A summary of key results is presented in this section, the full set of survey questions and responses are provided in the Appendix.

## What we learned about the County's Sustainability Volunteer Corps

More than one-third (33.8%) of respondents indicated that they have participated as a sustainability volunteer between two and five (2-5) years and more than a quarter (25.7%) of the volunteers reported that they have participated more than five years. Nearly twenty-two percent (21.6%) of respondents indicated that they no longer volunteered but wanted to complete the survey anyway. Only one of the 78 respondents reported being a new volunteer (less than six months).

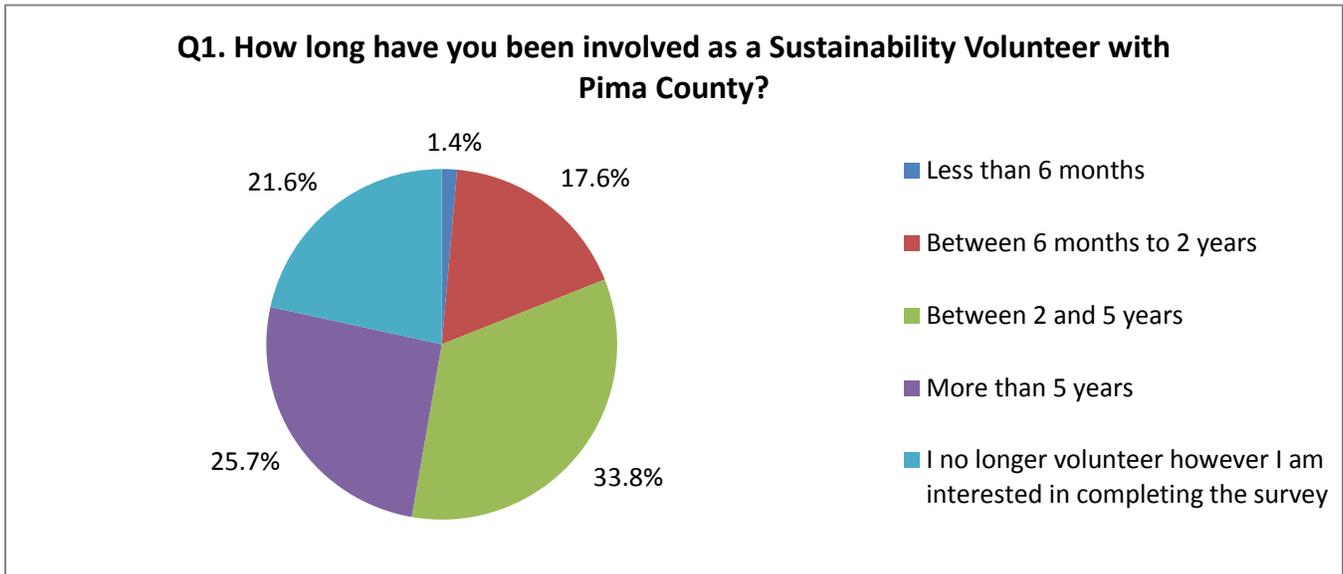


Figure 2. Length of Volunteers' Participation

Volunteers were asked to identify which sustainability programs they participated in (with the option of choosing more than one). The program areas with the highest levels of reported participation were the Eco-Champions (52.1%), Green Purchasing (43.8%) (likely both GP Representatives and S-Team combined), Waste Reduction (27.4%), Health and Wellness (27.4%), Carbon Footprint (11%) and RWRD's Sustainability Program (9.6%).

The highest levels of volunteer participation by Department were the following: Health (23%), Libraries (18%) and RWRD (almost 12%). Positions reported with the highest participation were Administrative (38%) and Management (nearly 22%).

The majority of S-Team Volunteers seventy-six (76%) reported spending on average one to two (1-2) hours a month on S-Team activities (meetings, planning, outreach) and eighty-nine (89%) reported spending an additional one to two (1-2) hours a month on contributing information to the annual SAPCO Report Card.

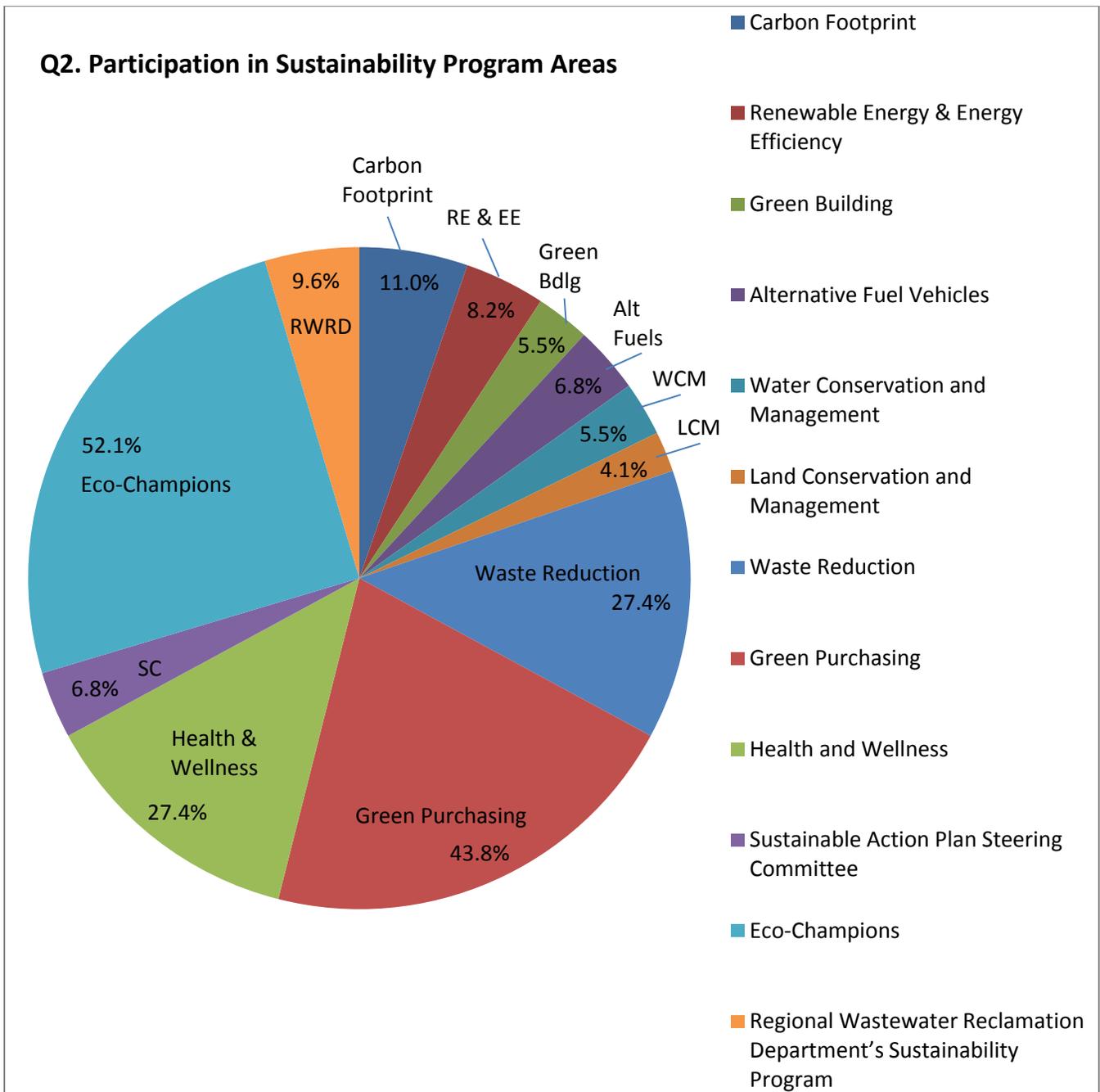


Figure 3. Volunteer Participation in Program Areas

### What Sustainability Volunteers Shared About Barriers to Participation

#### Individual Barriers to Participation

In an open-ended response format, volunteers were asked to share information about any barriers they faced in meeting S-Team requirements and responsibilities. The responses were coded and categorized; a complete list of responses is included in the Appendix. Overwhelmingly, volunteers identified *lack of time* as the number one barrier to participation (13), followed by *lack of support by colleagues or management* (7 mentions), then *insufficient resources and training* as well as *difficulty in attending meetings* (4 mentions each).

### Achieving S-Team Goals

When asked to describe any barriers S-Teams faced in achieving their sustainability goals, respondents noted that *disinterest and lack of engagement by employees* was the primary barrier to achieving their S-Team’s goals (8 mentions), *lack of support by management* (6 mentions) was the second biggest barrier, and *lack of time and logistics/lack of resources* tied as the third most prominently mentioned barrier (3 each).

### What Sustainability Volunteers Shared About Motivations to Participate

In response to the question, “Please rank the following factors in terms their importance to your decision to volunteer,” respondents highly identified with the concept of “making a difference” (48%) and the associated, “building a healthier community for me and my family” (46%) as their primary reasons for volunteering. Forty one percent (41%) reported that “learning about sustainability issues” was the primary motivation and thirty percent (30%) reported that “passion for their program area” was the driver behind their involvement (responses based on a five-point Likert scale 1 = not valuable, 5 = extremely valuable).

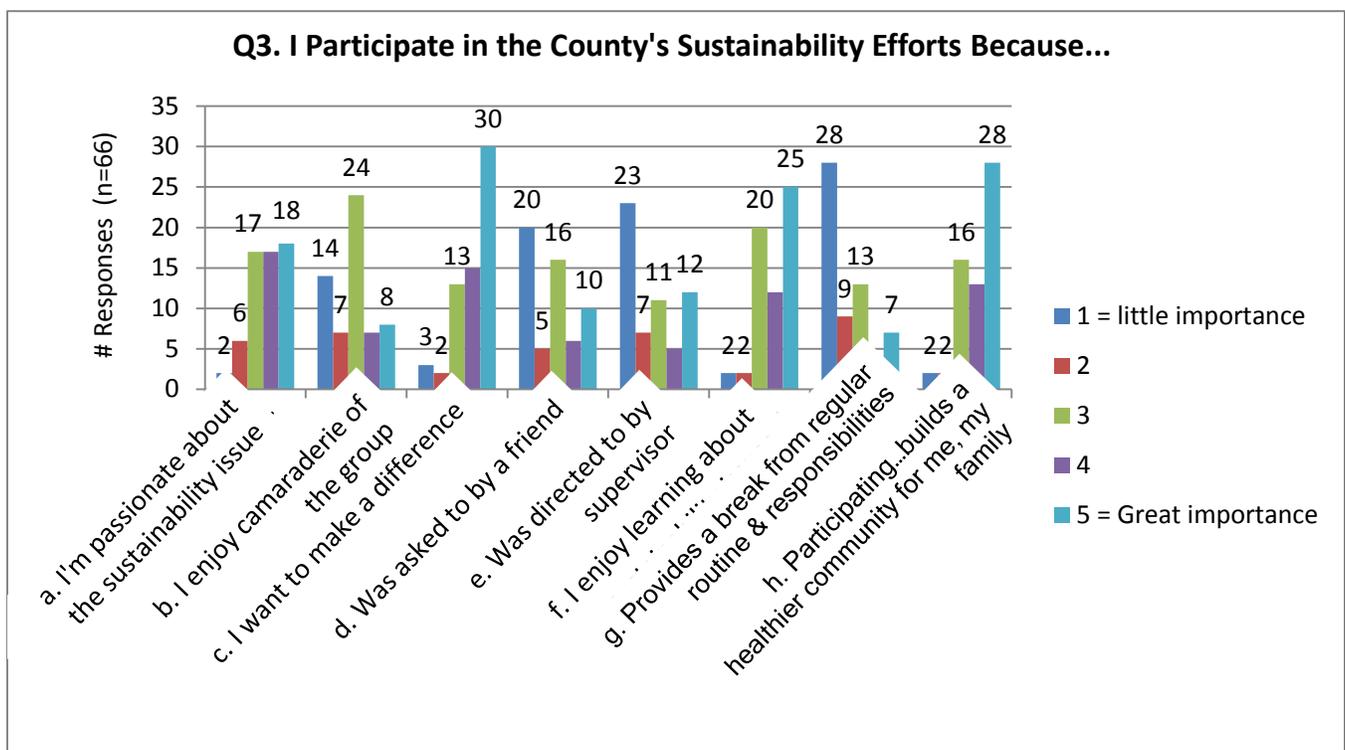


Figure 4. Volunteers’ Motivation

In response to the question to rank the value of promoting more “recognition of volunteer efforts by County leadership,” thirty-nine percent (39%) of participants indicated that in general, this would be of average value, thirty-three percent (33%) indicated that “leadership recognition” would provide much value, and slightly more than ten percent (10%) offered that this would be extremely valuable. As a follow up question, respondents ranked “photo and interview in EScoop” as the most valued form of recognition (39%) and “an awards ceremony and attendance by County leadership” as the next valuable form of recognition (35%).

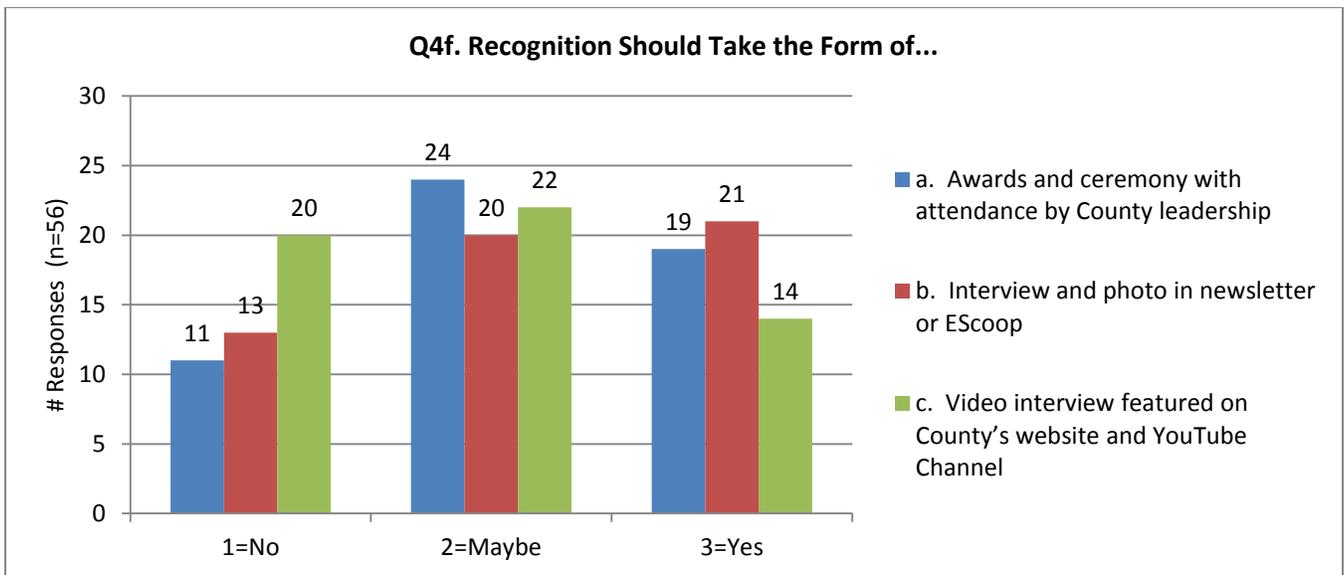


Figure 5. Volunteers' Preferred Form of Recognition

In terms of expressed interest in continuing education and outreach opportunities, fifty-six percent (56%) of respondents indicated that they would “definitely be interested” in participating in “Field trips to different County or community sustainability sites/activities” if permitted by their supervisors. “Leading sustainability trainings for County employees and/or departments” received nearly a three way split in interest by volunteers (“definitely not interested,” “undecided” and “definitely interested”), while forty-five percent (45%) of volunteers were undecided about participating in “Challenge Competitions to earn individual rewards (such as Health Wellness points, gift certificates or movies, dining, or family activities).”

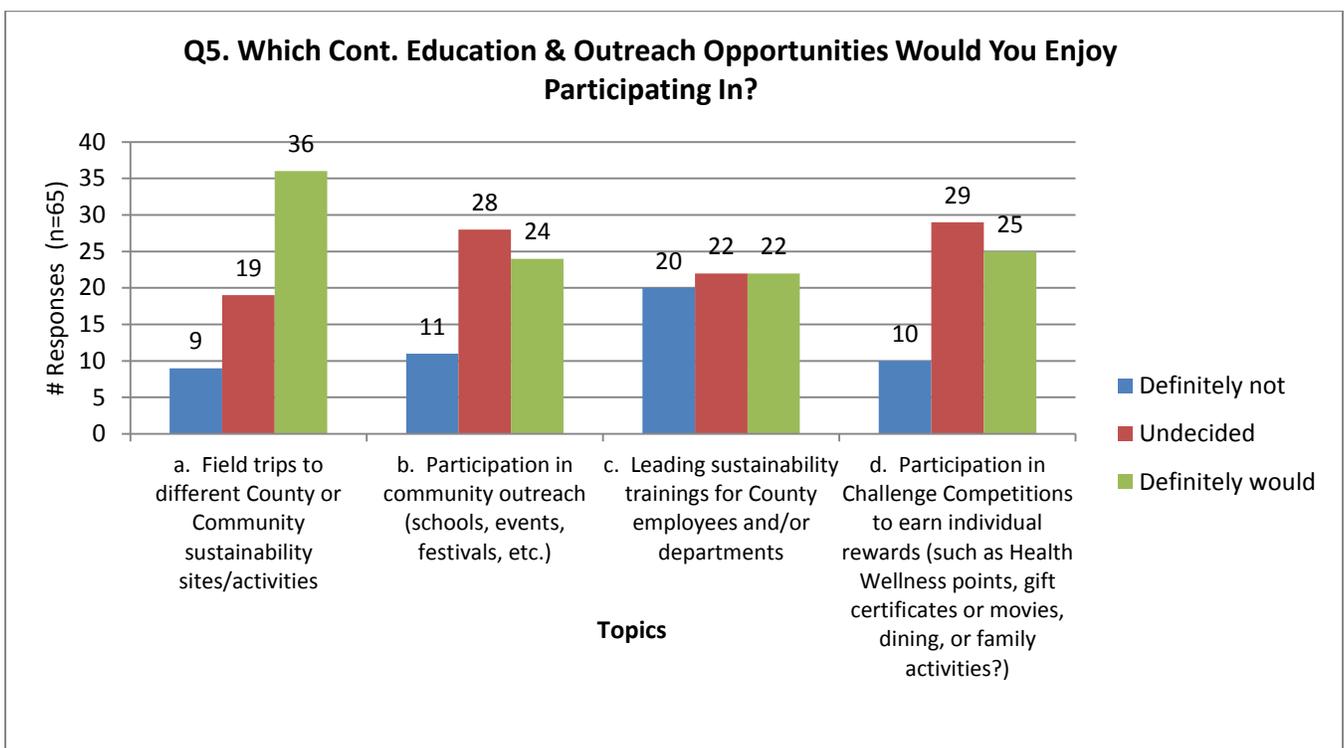


Figure 6. Volunteers' Preferred Education and Outreach Opportunities

Participants were asked to share open-ended responses to what they enjoyed the most about being a volunteer and what they liked the least. The responses were coded and categorized.

Of the twenty-six (26) responses to the question of what volunteers enjoyed the most about participating in the County's sustainability efforts, responses fell largely into four categories (some respondents provided more than one comment). Eleven (11) people reported that *making a difference* was the favorite aspect of volunteering, nine (9) respondents reported that *taking positive action and associated good feelings* were favorite aspects, seven (7) people reported that *learning and sharing* were their favorite highlights of participation and three (3) volunteers responded that *helping the community* was the most important association.

Twenty-six (26) survey participants responded to the question of what they enjoyed the least about being a volunteer. Responses fell broadly within the following categories: Eleven (11) volunteers reported *no negative associations*, seven (7) volunteers reported that the *lack of participation by staff and/or lack of efficacy* was a least favorite aspect, four (4) reported that *lack of support* was an issue, the *feeling of not doing enough* and a *lack of time* were each reported by two volunteers, one volunteer cited *insufficient support* and another noted *feeling that he/she did not know enough*.

### ***What Aspects of the SAPCO Program Work Well According to Volunteers***

In the query to volunteers about what works well with the County's Sustainability Program, responses ranged from the success of the *recycling and green purchasing programs*, the *benefits of County leadership support*, and *teamwork*.

### ***Areas for Program Improvement According to Volunteers***

When asked to share opinions regarding how the County's sustainability efforts could be improved, open-ended responses ranged from *improving implementation through better communication and training*, *offering incentives to new hires* and for new volunteer programs, and *addressing non-compliance issues* with the heads of departments.

### ***Improving Information Exchange and Engagement across County Departments about Sustainability Activities, Tips and Events***

Of the options provided, an "electronic newsletter" received the highest response (45%), followed by a "website calendar" received the second highest vote (32%) for providing "much value" towards improving information exchange and engagement. In general, social media tools received low marks by participants, 21%-32% responded that a *Twitter feed* and a *Facebook page* would have "limited" to "no value." The lack of interest in social media by volunteers might be indicative of the average age demographic of the Corps (Boomers compared to Millennials).

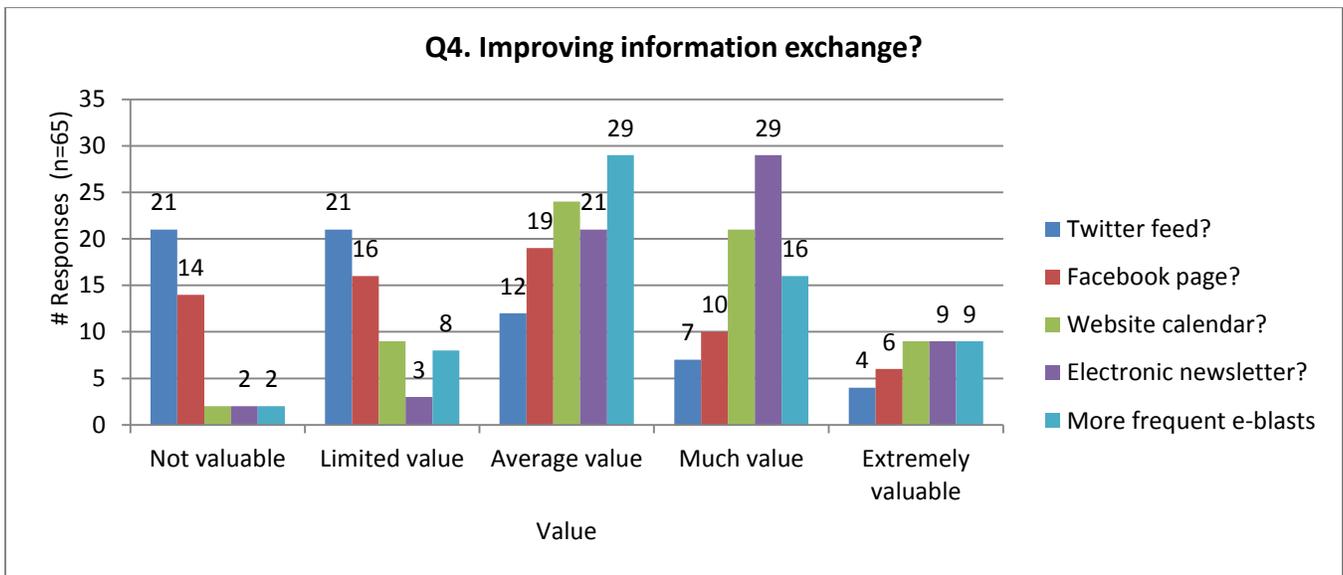


Figure 7. How Information Exchange Could be Improved

### How a Small Sustainability Fund Could Be Best Used?

In response to a semi-structured question regarding how a small sustainability fund could best be used, the majority of volunteers (17) were in favor of using the funds for *training*, thirteen (13) volunteers felt *incentives* would be an appropriate use of funds, eleven (11) respondents suggested *field trips* would be useful, six (6) encouraged the use of the funds for *challenge prizes*, four (4) requested *food and beverage* support, and one volunteer suggested the funds be used for *recognition awards*.

### Perceived Compliance with Sustainability Policies and Guidelines as Reported by Volunteers

Lastly, we wanted to get a sense of how volunteers perceived compliance over the past 12 months with four sustainability campaigns.

#### Lights out Campaign

Sixty-seven (67%) of respondents reported that the practice of turning lights off in empty rooms had increased, 20% reported no change, there were no reports of a decrease in the practice, while 14% were unsure.

#### Energy Conservation

In response to the question whether employees had increased or decreased compliance with the policy prohibiting small appliances, twenty-seven percent (27%) reported an increase in compliance, forty-nine percent (49%) reported no change, six (6%) reported a decrease, and eighteen percent (18%) were unsure. There was no response to the follow-up skip logic question regarding an explanation of why compliance might have decreased.

#### Recycling

Volunteers were asked to share their perspectives regarding how well recycling policies were being complied with across the County. Fifty-eight percent (58%) responded that recycling in their department has increased, 36% said that recycling has remained more or less the same, one respondent said that recycling has decreased, 4.5% were unsure. There was no response to the follow-up skip logic question to why recycling may have decreased.

### *Green Purchasing*

According to forty-nine percent (49%) of volunteer respondents, compliance with green purchasing across the County has increased, twenty-eight percent (28%) reported no change in green purchasing, one respondent reported a decrease in compliance and fourteen percent (14%) were unsure. In a follow-up skip logic question, one person noted the “the amount of time required to research green purchasing options” was an explanation for a decrease in compliance; another respondent reported that “lack of enforcement” was a reason for decreased compliance.

## **V. Discussion**

Volunteer-based programs provide opportunities to expand the scope and depth of initiatives or projects that might not have other means of advancement. In fact, some advocates suggest that volunteerism should be reconceptualized as human-made, renewable resource (Brudney & Meijs, 2009). In Pima County, leadership and the volunteers themselves, recognize that the Corps is the backbone of the Sustainable Action Plan for County Operations. Information collected directly from volunteers therefore, is especially useful for strategic planning purposes. Broadly speaking, the key takeaway points from the volunteer survey are the following:

- SAPCO volunteers remain engaged in activities across the County but there are areas that could benefit from stronger leadership (Eco-Champions), deeper support from directors and supervisors and in some cases, additional resources (for recycling).
- The composition of S-Team groups has remained largely intact over the past two years, in some cases, since their inception. One issue, while not directly addressed through this survey but raised in one-on-one conversations with volunteers, was the need to begin to think and plan for succession. Many volunteers are nearing retirement; others may be ready to retire their volunteer role. Within the past two years, only one new volunteer reported joining a sustainability team.
- Volunteers are motivated to participate largely through the drive to “make a difference,” the principle barrier to participation is “lack of time” followed by “lack of departmental support.”
- Volunteers expressed a desire to participate in field trips to County sustainability projects or those by other regional partners and to receive more training in sustainability issues.
- Lastly, when volunteers were asked to assess *perceived* compliance by employees with four sustainability campaigns (Lights Out, Energy Conservation, Recycling, and Green Purchasing), the majority of respondents reported increases in compliance across all areas with the exception of Energy Conservation, which the majority of respondents reported *no change*. Since in fact, energy use has steadily increased since 2012 (per EnergyCap software analysis) and recycling is likely decreasing (based on 2015 mid-year estimates), this suggests the timing to launch new awareness and behavior change campaigns on these topics may be needed. Research on shifting workplace norms suggests that affecting change typically requires multiple sustained efforts to overcome barriers.

## **VI. Next Steps & Recommendations**

Studies of Volunteer Programs have produced interesting work on stage of change models. Based on the level of organizational success and maturation of the County’s Volunteer Corps, it is quite likely that the program is transitioning from a *Start-up and Implementation Phase* characterized by high energy and enthusiasm directed at creative collaborations to a *Maintenance phase* in which data collection and reporting mechanisms have been

largely streamlined, but in which assessment can help reveal program gaps and needs and opportunities to improve performance.

In combination with the survey results, the following recommendations are based on a review of volunteer program management resources, one-on-one conversations with S-Team Leads and their groups and the SWOT Analysis of program Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (Appendix B).

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## VIII. Citations

- Brudney, J. L., & Meijs, L. C. P. M. (2009). It ain't natural: Toward a new (natural) resource conceptualization for volunteer management. *Nonprofit and Volunteer Sector Quarterly*, 38(4), 564-581.
- Taylor, T., Darcy, S., Hoyer, R., & Cuskelly, G. (2006). Using psychological contract theory to explore issues in effective volunteer management. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6(2), 123-147.

