



VITAL FORCE

Adults Actively Engaged in Community

What it is:

VITAL FORCE describes the energy of people, particularly of older adults, that is ready to be tapped to help strengthen our communities. As they grow older, adults want to continue to learn, explore, and grow spiritually. They want to give back to their communities, share their rich experiences and make a difference. They desire to be active in a group that reflects diversity. They want to be active participants and players in their communities.

VITAL FORCE is a process that galvanizes civic engagement by encouraging groups of adults to integrate their skills and interests and work in teams to help resolve pressing community issues.

VITAL FORCE is the wellbeing derived from effective civic engagement by Vital Force participants and their communities.

How it works:

- Led by participants, not staff
- Builds & empowers volunteer leaders
- Participants identify community issues after an educational process
- Vital Force teams form around identified issues of common interest
- Vital Force teams have diverse membership
- Vital Force teams develop and implement action plans (direct service, advocacy, community capacity-building) that take account of their skills and passions as well as knowledge about issues
- Vital Force teams operate for a pre-defined period of time on a learn → do → reflect → learn → do → reflect model (following best practices for service learning)
- Sponsors have the ability to influence and help focus engagement via recruitment, issue assessment, and education/training (e.g., focus on vital aging in vital communities)

Components:

1. Resources for facilitation and coaching

- Experienced facilitators and/or coaches model the skill initially
 - Training to develop local (volunteer) facilitators and coaches and teach planning and reflection skills
 - Paid staff time to provide encouragement and administrative support for Vital Force team leaders
2. Process and tools for assessment, planning, and reflection
 - Guide for participants to identify their personal skills and passions
 - Process and tools for focusing on and researching community issues
 - Process and tools for developing and implementing action plans
 - Process and tools for reflection (recalling, sharing and integration of experience for individual learning and spiritual growth)
 3. Process for other organizations and community institutions to participate as sponsors or partners
 - Provide content in area of expertise, service learning, etc.
 - Reflect community diversity
 - Provide staff support (RSVP, AmeriCorps, student interns, etc.)
 - Provide funding to cover costs for coordination and action plan
 4. Project coordination
 - Organizes marketing and recruitment
 - Pulls pieces together, guides toward mission, motivates
 - Keeps track of information and data collected
 - Helps to assure that goals are achieved
 - Sets timelines and monitors progress
 - Prepares reports
 - Plans recognition and celebration
 5. Evaluation process
 - Gathers feedback
 - Inputs spur continuous improvement and evolution
 - Cross-pollination of ideas and learning between Vital Force teams
 - Qualitative measurement of outcomes – in terms of both personal and community benefits

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 (with input from Jim Scheibel, Sharon Anderson and Julia Classen from Aurora Consulting, Colleen Fritsch and Kristen Lund from DARTS, etc.)

