



PROPOSAL TO

The 2010 National Volunteer Assembly

Presented by:
Committee/Advisory Group/Sponsors
March, 2010

CORE TEAM MEMBERS:

- MaryAnn Nation – Greater LA Area Team
- Carrie Jacobs – Volunteer Development Department staff
- José E Ruiz-Salas – Sierra San Joaquin Area Team
- Amy Showers-Stone – East Metro Area Team
- Ann Swayne – Oahu Chapter

OTHERS CONSULTED:

Sponsors requested input from the Hosting, Sending and Volunteer Development Advisory Groups.

PART 1: MOTION SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST

MOTION

Create a standing committee on diversity that will be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of diversity initiatives across the organization. The committee will focus on diversity of Sending students, Hosting families, and volunteers, as well as the impact of organizational policies and practices on diversity.

ACTION DESIRED FROM NATIONAL VOLUNTEER ASSEMBLY

We request approval from the National Volunteer Assembly for a standing committee on diversity. Understanding that a standing committee can be created by the National Council, the sponsors of this proposal wanted to obtain the *strongest* possible commitment for the creation of this committee.

BACKGROUND OF MOTION

AFS-USA is the oldest and largest international high school exchange program in the US. As a “leader in intercultural learning,” with its mission to work “toward a more just and peaceful world,” the question that comes to mind is, does AFS reflect a commitment to the essence of its vision – inclusion? The honest answer is that we don’t know. At best, we could be a diverse organization, but we have no real measure to support such a claim. At worst, we are sorely under representing certain groups, and therefore off-track in the pursuit of our mission. From a business perspective, we could be neglecting opportunities to grow our student and host family numbers, volunteer base, and funding, which are all detriments in the current financial and regulatory environment.

It’s the unfortunate lack of data that makes developing an organizational strategy premature, which is why the sponsors’ view is that the committee initially focus on collecting quantifiable data, examine current practices and explore the communities we do and don’t serve. Once we understand our situation, the committee should move to clearly define diversity, recommend goals, strategies, and objective measures of success.

In the end, AFS-USA needs a diversity strategy that reflects our mission, that sets the example for others to follow, that makes it evident that we are the industry leader, not because we send or host the most students, but because we are true reflection of our society.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGES TO THE PROPOSED MOTION? WHY SHOULD THE NVA APPROVE THIS MOTION? PLEASE BE SPECIFIC – ADVANTAGES TO THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, TO AREA TEAMS AND LOCAL CHAPTERS, AND TO INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE HIGHLIGHTED.

The opportunities that come from the work of the diversity committee:

1. Defines a consistent vision of diversity for AFS-USA
2. Takes a deliberate and quantifiable approach to fulfilling the AFS-USA mission of moving toward a more just and peaceful world – setting standards and measures of inclusion
3. Provides a program experience that reflects US diversity, for both students hosted in the US, as well as the students we send abroad as ambassadors
4. Makes AFS a leader in the industry and across other types of organizations
5. Makes stating the case to funders interested in issues of diversity much more concrete, allowing us to retain and gain investors
6. Allows access to new communities, increasing the pool of students, families, and volunteers – an opportunity to expand the pie – to resolve our most pressing problems of sending more students, finding more families, and engaging more volunteers
7. Informs the development of the lead management processes: volunteer, student, and host family
8. Increases cultural competence of AFS staff and volunteers
9. Provides AFS-USA quantifiable data on our constituents, which we currently do not have.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST DISADVANTAGES TO THE PROPOSED MOTION? PLEASE BE SPECIFIC – DISADVANTAGES TO THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, TO AREA TEAMS AND LOCAL CHAPTERS, AND TO INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE HIGHLIGHTED.

The return on investment is hard to predict, so there may be a perception that given the financial situation of AFS-USA, it would be asking too much from the organization's resources, both financial and human, to invest in what would be a profound and intensive change in our methods; and therefore taking resources from other more immediate needs.

WHAT ARE THE TWO OR THREE BIGGEST CONCERNS THAT HAVE ARISEN REGARDING THE PROPOSED MOTION AND HOW IT MIGHT AFFECT AFS-USA? HOW COULD THOSE CONCERNS BE ADDRESSED/RESOLVED?

1. Without the commitment from all parts of the organization, it is not likely to succeed. There will be a need to engage the National Volunteer Assembly, the board of directors, the National Council, advisory groups, committees, and the general body of volunteers and staff early and often in the process.
2. That attempts to define and discuss diversity are limited to sending more, poor minority students abroad. There is a need for AFS-USA stakeholders to engage in a discussion about how to define diversity in a broader sense, which we believe can be driven by a diversity committee.

3. Volunteers and staff may be asked to act outside of their comfort zone to engage diverse communities. Although we are an organization that deals with cultural differences on a daily basis, our own experiences aren't often debriefed for understanding, we aren't often sitting as students in the orientations. It may be necessary to provide diversity training and not assume it happens through simple exposure to other cultures.
4. AFS-USA may not have the capacity to successfully implement the changes recommended by the diversity committee. As an example, we have not shown much skill in integrating new volunteers, or even returnees, into existing units. It is an issue that, in the perception of some, plagues our volunteer development efforts.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The European Federation for Intercultural Learning¹ volunteer recruitment statement, "Diversity should be an essential element in your recruitment plan. In addition to race and ethnicity, consider other components of diversity, such as age, gender, education, income levels, religious beliefs, physical abilities, and skills. Know the demographics of the community your organisation serves. The organisation will be more effective if members reflect the community. This demonstrates to the community that people are assets, and it tells your consumers that you value them as partners not just as clients"²

COST IMPLICATIONS OF IMPLEMENTING THE MOTION:

Possible costs in the initial data collection and research phase could include

1. an in-person meeting, perhaps to coincide with either the national hosting or sending conference
2. integration of data collection process into Global Link, which could incur a cost to design and format online forms to include appropriate questions for students, host families and volunteers
3. the cost of a consultant, if the committee recognized a lack of volunteer and staff expertise

¹ Federation of AFS organizations in Europe

² Borgiattino, Sara. Promoting & Developing Volunteering. V.U.: Bram Goris // 2005. pg 36-37.

PART 2: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND TIMELINE

After the creation of the committee, the first phase of the committee's work would be to create and implement a data collection process, complete an initial research of AFS communities, and review the literature on diversity. Hopefully, over the next year, there is enough time to collect and analyze the data, and provide the NVA 2011 with at least a preliminary report.

Action	Timeframe for Completion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• solicit interested volunteers and staff for committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• to begin immediately at NVA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on level of interest, create an application and selection process, which clearly outlines the commitment and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• mid-May
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• invitations to go out to interested volunteers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• end of May
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• initial telephone conference of interested volunteers and staff• select chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• beginning of June
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• plan for data collection, research, and exploration of communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• beginning of July
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• begin research activities• begin exploration of communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• beginning of September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• face-to-face meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• end of September
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• implement data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• January 1, 2011 – depending on how quickly data collection can be implemented, or integrated into Global Link, and what reporting measures are put into place (e.g., by calendar year, program types)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• submit preliminary report to the NVA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• April 2011

PART 3: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Up to now, we have attempted to collect all the currently available demographic information and presented it on the AFSWiki page:, Diversity Committee Proposal. We are also adding other documents and web links we think are important to this topic, and encourage others to do the same: [http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Diversity Committee Proposal](http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Diversity_Committee_Proposal)

Web links to additional information:

<http://www.energizeinc.com/art/subj/div.html>

[http://www.diversitytrends.com/free diversity articles/impact population.html](http://www.diversitytrends.com/free_diversity_articles/impact_population.html)

Articles Cited:

Heyworth, Peter. "Attracting the Differently Abled". Turning your Organization Into a Volunteer Magent. Second edition. 2007. Pg 145-147.

PART 4: CONCLUSION

We can ask ourselves a question posed by Peter Heywood "Does your organization attract or repel the differently abled?" Whether you ask this question of differently abled or other diverse groups, the truth is we don't know. As an organization that seeks to engage and empower our volunteers, we should know that we are doing our best to create an environment of inclusion. How do we make the case that our efforts have impact without endeavoring to seek out that information?

AFS USA should approach this strategically; creating a diversity committee is the first step. We ask that the committee be given time and resources to undertake a thorough assessment. Input will be sought from a wide audience from within the AFS community. Research outside of AFS will also be conducted and national trends examined.

As the US conducts the 2010 census, AFS will have the perfect opportunity to reflect on the organization's own demographics. A diversity committee will give us the space to begin that discussion. It will help us take a real look at our ability to attract people from different groups: age, ethnicity, faith, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

We need a body that is responsible and accountable for helping us understand our current situation and status on diversity and moving the agenda forward throughout the organization. We propose the creation of the Diversity Committee of AFS-USA.