NNIPCamp Baltimore, May 18, 2017

Session 2 – University Students and Civic Tech Volunteers

Led by Neal Humphrey (Housing Insights) and Seema Iyer (BNIA)

Notes by Olivia Arena

Present: Seema Iyer, Lisa Pittman, Gina Lovasi, Amanda Macune, Katie Pritchard, Liz Monk, Jeff Matson, Randy Rosso, Kathy Pettit, Neal Humphrey, Stephen Larrick

Members and interest in the subject:

* Lisa Pittman--Children’s Trust, has student employees
* Gina Lovasi, Urban Health Collaborative--uses and trains students and volunteers
* Amanda Macune, Rice Kinder Institute-- Community Bridges program (students)
* Katie Pritchard, Data You Can Use--receiving students (public health and urban planning)
* Seema Iyer, BNIA, on both sides—place students at internships and receives students at BNIA
* Liz Monk, University of Pittsburg-- school of social work/students
* Jeff Matson, University of Minnesota-- students for effective labor
* Randy Rosso, Food Research and Action Center-- had his first intern, not sure I’ve given him enough meat to have a substantive experience
* Kathy Pettit, Urban Institute—Student topic, motivation was that I have been hearing things from new partners. We know a lot about the student side that we are now documenting. On the nonprofit side, how can university partners do it better? How can the nonprofits get students?
* Neal Humphrey, Housing Insights—coordinates volunteers with Code for DC for Housing Insights
* Stephen Larrick, Sunlight Foundation

**\*\*\*Follow Up\*\*\***

* **RFP (Jeff)**
* **List of Skills—Data You Can Use (Katie)**
* **Community Bridges Descriptions/Application materials (Amanda)**

**Overview🡪**How to incorporate and manage temporary/supplemental labor from unconventional sources. We have broken down the session into four shared ideas or topics—supply, onboarding, production, retention.

Seema Iyer: We must focus on the supply to get the other components correct.

Neal Humphrey: While we have the four topics, they are interrelated.

Seema: Types of supply—I have all kinds of needs that I can’t fund full time positions for. Example, I have a communications position that I can’t afford to hire for but is a perfect student opportunity. You should think about the roles that you can use a student for. We use a lot of GIS, but to hire university students you should have an understanding the lay of the land of GIS departments. I can’t take my own GIS students because Baltimore doesn’t have them. Building relationships with institutions and departments within those institutions.

What type of places do you want to partner with their pedagogical strength? We had a student come to us with a Shriver Fellowship and wanted to do her work with us. A Shriver Fellow now comes every year to help with the data day program. I know I’m going to need bodies. This becomes a clear definable project in the 8 weeks they are going to be there. Also, it’s important to think about what they are looking to get out of it, what their program is like, what their professors are like.

Gina Lovasi: There’s heterogeneity even from one source. The consistency of the materials requires a lot of supervision. One of the things I’ve been moving toward is having some hierarchy so that someone can get experience in mentoring and supervision and can build that skill--having graduate students mentor undergraduates. How do you build that into the learning experience?

Seema: Based on the work, the supervisor may change.

Neal: Heterogeneity is also at the experience level. [With different levels of experience] How do I find the people I need more of? In my experience, the people Code for DC attracts is the intermediate or high beginner coder that wants experience. They show up more often because they want the experience, but they may get stuck [on specific tasks]. It does have more people interested in civic engagement. With more advanced people, one of the challenges is they don’t want to just be tutoring or giving free lessons to beginners. With recruitment, we have to change the messaging. Recently we didn’t have any python coders, we weren’t getting naturally occurring volunteers. So I did specific outreach—this is where we are, this is the duration, this is the output. We reached a different audience that didn’t have an urgent need.

Kathy Pettit: Intake assessment. Is it more on the selection process [after they arrive]? What’s the intake process to figure out the right path?

Gina: Two things. I had someone who wanted to be a mentor and wanted her person to have a job. They’re taking someone I’ve been working with.

Seema: To the university student it is so important to work with the faculty members themselves. Whatever negative aspects of the students it was [that they experienced], we can facture that into the curriculum. EX: Varying levels of initiative. All of our programs have feedback. Your relationship is with that faculty member.

Neal: This question to do with skill levels, moves into onboarding. This assessment of skill level is a consideration.

Amanda Macune: I’m in recruitment. We go to the partner institution and go a review. In the fall, we do a fall training. We use the community feedback to develop our professionalism and community trainings in the Fall. The training in the Fall is important to hit the ground running.

Neal: Feedback cycle—tough challenge because inconsistency in the number of people who show up or participate at any given time. The assessment I go through is from an onboarding technical standpoint, basic instruction, set up. Whether people can get through that is a good indicator. Get your stuff is the first flag. The next part is to map them into the list of tags I’ve come up with. It helps me delineate tasks and instruction. The key thing that goes into onboarding is pushing them into a task. Beginning person is small and doesn’t need to be done immediately.

Relates to the six-week internship problem. I’ve tried to give less context as it goes on. Just learning about affordable housing is complicated. You still need that 🡪 we need this and this is the impact. But there’s minimizing non-essential context. Not have people want to know or need to know what the other teams are doing.

Seema: Students are different. Students are using their experience typically to round out a degree experience. For the students, it’s ideal to figure out where the internship fits in, and understanding their path and where they want this to fit in.

Katie: One pager—skill list and try to check off one thing an internship. Also, you can add students [after internship] to donor list. They often give back.

Neal: You’ve got someone where they are a beginner, but when you show them the product you can get more follow-through. One first part, when you have someone good, promote them as quick as you can. It can be in small intervals. Promote can be the small things, giving more autonomy and authority.

Seema: We just had this person that just left. He did everything. Don’t bring people in when you’re busy. That will be overwhelming. Think about timing and what tasks you want them to do. We have tasks that require data-mapping, cleaning, communications.

Amanda: We have check ins monthly with the organizations, and we have check ins twice a month with the students. We make our staff available to them. We offer that extra help to take the burden off the organization. Recently we’ve realized that we like to recruit the younger students because they like to volunteer throughout the time in school.

Seema: Because all our projects are interdisciplinary, our students from different disciplines can create a little more capacity in new areas. Have sociology and biostatistician. It’s a mutually beneficial thing.

Jeff: Our student internships are based on an RFP that we solicit from nonprofits. We look to make sure it’s appropriate for a graduate student. We try to set some deadlines and deliverables—work plan. We ask what type of tasks the students want to be doing. Where do they need to work? Most of the graduate programs require an internship.

Seema: I’ve found that our strength is that they want to learn about Baltimore. Our data helps them understand what they are seeing about it. Civic side?

Neal: For some of them it is helpful to see that neighborhood perspective. For others, we aren’t at quite the stage of the project where they can see the end. They are still assembling all the pieces. One of the things happening, when topics come up do the 10-30 second description of things. A lot of the volunteers are sharing those things and reading more. Communications/cohort/peer connections

Seema: Hackathons—production? Baltimore did hackathons, but it didn’t seem very productive??? What are your thoughts?

Neal: Production generally. It is good to set a production goal. That’s relatively arbitrary, but that’s what I’m sticking to. They can be long enough to accomplish something—they have a deadline. Make sure the scope is set efficient to match the time. This is going to vary based on the skills you have coming in. Have a few leaders that you know could get something done by the end of the day, maybe a little bit more to instill urgency. Hackathon on Saturday, larger work session that can help push to the deadline. Doing more backend onboarding work and the hackathon is more of a dedicated time and space.

Kathy: YourSTLCourts came from a hack event, but then they had an institution to move it to product. They got the kernel of what worked to then more to an institution.

Neal??: Depending on what you are trying to do—you aren’t expecting anything out of it. Hackathons are good for demos, producing something needs a follow-on. Another thing for production is that limiting the amount of decision-making they can do about approach. Really trying to target that. It’s better to overkill or overshoot than try and change it. Don’t allow people to rant—less democracy. We have started from a this is the way now, we should change later. Not going to the solution that I’m sure will work vs the easiest meant that there was a lot of ambiguity. Need information to have planning discussions.