

# REIMAGINING SERVICE

## A CASE STUDY IN CROSS SECTOR COLLABORATION

Prepared for the Presidio Institute, a Presidio Trust initiative

By La Piana Consulting

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## ABOUT THE PRESIDIO INSTITUTE

Through innovative curriculum, convening programs, and a vibrant tenant community, the Presidio Institute provides transformational experiences that inspire, encourage, and empower leaders to make positive impact in their communities. The Presidio Institute is located at historic Fort Scott, a stunning 20-acre campus overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge, and the former command center for the Army Coast Artillery Corps.

The Presidio Institute is an initiative of the Presidio Trust, a distinctive federal agency created to save the Presidio and transform it for a new national purpose. The Presidio Trust's strategic direction includes a mission to create positive impact through initiatives like the Presidio Institute, which engages individuals, corporations, non-profits, government agencies, and other sectors in discovering solutions to complex challenges. To learn more, visit: [institute.presidio.gov](http://institute.presidio.gov).



## ABOUT LA PIANA CONSULTING

Since 1998, La Piana Consulting has helped hundreds of nonprofits and foundations leverage organizational strategy, structure, and culture to realize their goals. The firm is nationally recognized for its leading-edge thinking and practice on strategy, business planning, and partnerships, and its original methodologies have been adopted across the social sector. For more information, visit: [www.lapiana.org](http://www.lapiana.org).



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2009 to 2015, Reimagining Service brought together a cross sector coalition for a time-bound campaign to increase social impact through effective volunteer engagement. In that time, the initiative brought new research and practices to the field that have changed the way organizations engage volunteers. This case study examines Reimagining Service's distinctive characteristics, as both a cross sector collaboration and a time-limited effort, while focusing on how these contributed to its success.

Reimagining Service illustrates four phases of collaborative development:

1. It was born out of a unique combination of influences that signaled a timely opportunity to advance a shared vision.
2. It engaged individuals with knowledge of and influence in the field, and leveraged resources toward common goals.
3. It turned ideas to action through a facilitative style of leadership that allowed for both collective and individual ownership of results.
4. It stayed true to its original mission, and to its commitment to a limited life span.

Reimagining Service sunsetted its work in January 2015, publishing a [Summary Report](#) that highlights its achievements and identifies ways that others might continue the work to deepen the impact of volunteer engagement. This case study serves as a complement to the Summary Report and seeks to inform the growing field of organizations considering collaborative strategies to achieve social impact.

The Presidio Institute, which served as fiscal sponsor for Reimagining Service from 2013 to 2015, is pleased to share the campaign's lessons with the field as part of its ongoing commitment to advancing cross sector collaboration. La Piana Consulting was selected to develop this case study because of its years of experience in supporting organizational partnerships and its recent work with limited-life charitable foundations.

This document was informed by a series of in-depth conversations with members of the Reimagining Service Council, its chair, and its executive director. Interviewees included: Bobbi Silten, Council Chair; Kaira Esgate, Executive Director; and Greg Baldwin, David Smith, and Amy Smith, Council members. A complete list of Council members and their affiliations is included in Appendix A.

# SEIZING A MOMENT

Reimagining Service was born out of a unique combination of influences and of the ability to recognize this as a timely opportunity to advance a shared vision.

## SETTING THE STAGE

In the spring of 2009, President Obama had just signed the Serve America Act, expanding national service programs like AmeriCorps and creating several new initiatives to increase service and volunteering. To those working to advance volunteer service, this had come as a long-awaited validation. Later that summer, the First Lady would even present the keynote at the Points of Light Conference on Volunteering and Service in San Francisco. The economic recession had yet to fully take hold, and for many the political climate overall still held a sense of optimism about change. Corporate social responsibility initiatives had not only gone mainstream but were continuing to evolve, bringing business and philanthropy into earnest dialogue about how doing good could be done together.

## ARE WE READY?

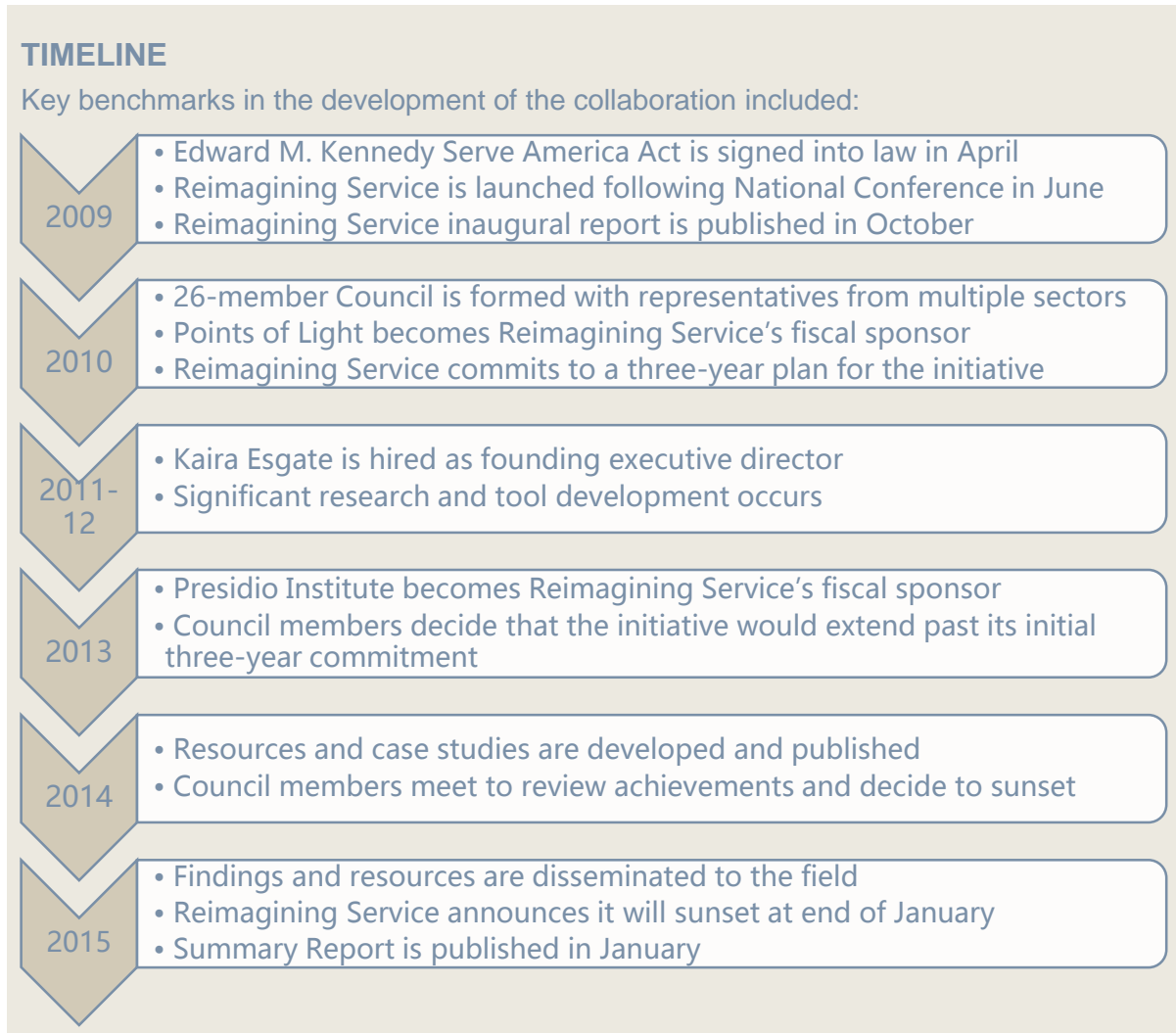
It was at one such meeting of corporate, non-profit, and public sector entities that the first inkling of Reimagining Service began to take shape. Bobbi Silten of Gap Inc. and Council chair recalls: “I was in Boston with folks from Taproot [Foundation] and Deloitte as part of the Pro Bono Action Tank, which was looking at how to get companies to pledge their professional skills to the non-profit community, and we were all excited that the Serve America Act had just been passed — but at one point we all looked at each other and asked: *Are we really ready?*”

In order for the ramp-up of national service called for by the Act to be realized, it would need to be supported by the capacity of those in the field to make effective matches between individuals and volunteering opportunities. As described by Council member Greg Baldwin of VolunteerMatch, the prevailing narrative about service at the time was that it was simply a matter of needing more people to step up and volunteer, and that was an erroneous one: “The rhetoric didn’t recognize that the underlying issues were more subtle and complicated.” What he, Silten, and others working in the field knew was that the real issue was how to engage people in service in a meaningful way. This pointed out the need to reframe the conversation.

Amy Smith of Points of Light, another Council member, summed up this potential, and the vision driving Reimagining Service, in this way: “If we could use our human capital in the same strategic way we were always so careful to use our financial capital, wouldn’t *that* be reimagining service?”

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With legislation prioritizing national service posing both an opportunity and a challenge, and the upcoming National Conference in San Francisco serving as a further catalyst, Silten left the Taproot meeting in Boston motivated to reach out to colleagues and gauge their interest in coming together to shape a solution.



## ASSEMBLING ASSETS

Once it was recognized that those already in the field were best equipped to reimagine it, the task turned to getting key players together, resourced, and organized.

### WE ARE THE ONES WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR

Before Silten boarded her flight to return to the Bay Area that day in 2009, she met with Alan Khazei, co-founder of City Year (and a participant in crafting the language of the Serve America Act), to test the idea with him. Both agreed on the timeliness of the opportunity — the sticking point was *who* should take up the challenge. Khazei’s response was to ask: *Who*

*are we waiting for?* This provocative answer prompted Silten to begin making calls to assemble a group.

## FORMING THE COUNCIL

Because experience in the area of service and volunteering was a primary criterion for involvement, many of these individuals already knew, or knew *of*, one another by virtue of their working in the field. Identification of participants was intuitive but intentional — a process Silten has called “curating” the collaboration. In addition to knowing the field, key qualities selected for were:

- **The ability to think big.** “We needed folks who could look at the problem through a new lens, who *could* reimagine,” Silten recalls.
- **Access to networks.** It was important they had connections through which they could both be informed (learn) and be a voice (influence).
- **The desire to be there.** David Smith of Presidio Institute echoes fellow Council members when he notes: “What was probably even more successful than the idea were the people that were attracted from the beginning, people who *wanted* to spend time together grappling with something beyond their own organizations.”

Council members were chosen by virtue of their individual attributes, not to represent specific organizations. For this reason, the use of stand-ins or surrogates was not necessary or encouraged, which helped maintain consistency among the group. The Council typically met twice a year in person and twice by phone, with committee or working group meetings in between. In addition, the “small world” character of the field frequently found Council members in the same room at other conferences or meetings, providing the opportunity to pick up conversations where they had left off and lending continuity to these relationships. (See Appendix A for the list of Council members.)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This body first formally met as the leadership Council in December 2010 and soon articulated the shared goal of increasing the impact of volunteers through practice, research, and funding. One of their first activities was to agree on a set of four principles to guide their work; listed below, these principles have since been broadly shared and adopted across the volunteering and service sector.<sup>1</sup>

**Principle 1:** The volunteer ecosystem is more effective when all sectors participate in its evolution.

**Principle 2:** Make volunteering a core strategic function, not an add-on.

**Principle 3:** Focus volunteer engagement on true community needs.

**Principle 4:** In order to get a return, you have to invest.

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<sup>1</sup> The principles were originally crafted in 2009, but refined with Council participation in 2010. See a full description of these principles at <http://www.reimagining-service.org/principles>.

Another founding principle of Reimagining Service was that it would be a time-bound campaign. Silten explains that the goal was “to approach change making by leveraging the power of the collective,” with the hope of producing practical tools for the field in around six months. However, once underway, it became apparent that it would take more time. “We discovered the work was harder than anticipated,” she says, “so we revised our thinking to make it a three-year endeavor.”

## ACCESSING RESOURCES

It was also critical to bring resources to the table. Although Reimagining Service was a lean operation and did not hire a staff person until March 2011, it had made a commitment to using data and would need to commission research to inform the field. Funding and/or significant in-kind support was contributed by Gap Inc., Bank of America, and Deloitte, each of which had representatives on the Council.<sup>2</sup> Points of Light and later the Presidio Institute each played a critical role as fiscal sponsors and operational partners for Reimagining Service, in addition to participating on the Council.

## LEADERSHIP

To facilitate decision-making, an executive committee was formed, and Kaira Esgate was hired as executive director in 2011. The executive committee was instrumental in teeing up decisions and advancing recommendations in order to move along the agenda. This worked because the executive committee was made up of individuals whom other Council members recognized as being able to speak for their interests and because of an action-oriented, decision-making style. Silten explains: “I always felt that we’d never all agree, so I suggested we aim for alignment, and as long as there wasn’t anything someone couldn’t live with, then we moved forward.” The executive committee included and worked closely with the executive director, who also used one-on-one conversations to elicit individual Council member input and agreement on key decisions when necessary.

Leadership was a dynamic process of bringing everyone along in advancing the goals of the initiative. This flexibility was also reflected in the initiative’s use of committees. Initially, it used a traditional standing committee structure, but later shifted to a more nimble task force format to address topics as they emerged and evolved.

Silten says that although it was probably helpful in cementing the Council members’ commitment to share the work among themselves at the beginning, it was a critical move to eventually bring on a dedicated staff person. “We all had day jobs, and were trying to do this off the corner of our desks,” she recalls, acknowledging the advantage of having “someone whose job it was to drive this, to think about it all day long, and to keep others accountable for what they’re supposed to deliver.” Amy Smith seconds this observation, saying “the opportunities for us to move the agenda were exponentially increased” by hiring staff “who could take it and run it forward.”

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<sup>2</sup> Deloitte contributed approximately \$1M in pro bono support to the launch of the campaign and were critical in helping the initiative take shape, crafting the inaugural report and conducting additional research. Bank of America provided multi-year funding to establish the Leadership Fellows Program (described on page 11).



## COUNTERING SKEPTICISM

When Reimagining Service was first launched, some in the field regarded the initiative with skepticism: *Would it be more of the same, just in a new package? A lot of talk, with no practical results?* For many, expectations were low because of similar efforts that turned out to be more hype than substance. Even Council members were acutely aware that others had tread this path before without achieving all they had promised.

Although it may not have won over all the skeptics, Reimagining Service possessed qualities that set it apart and contributed to its value.

- Its **cross sector composition** lent substance, heft, and ultimately impact. While some earlier initiatives were seen as business-centric, Reimagining Service included strong non-profit representation. At the same time, the involvement of corporations, funders, and academic partners brought rigor and perspective to the effort.
- It adopted a learning posture and **willingness to learn**, using data to inform its priorities, even when the findings were not what were expected. Rather than position itself as a body of experts, the Council prioritized objective research, which helped Reimagining Service to build credibility in the field.
- Its **ability to develop usable products** (studies, tools, and resources), as well as to inform products launched by others, demonstrated a commitment to move from ideas to action, from deliberation to deliverables. This signaled to the field that the effort was a genuine one, aimed at advancing the field in practical ways.

# UNLOCKING INNOVATION

**Facilitative leadership and a balance of shared and individual ownership created the conditions for turning ideas into action.**

## THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

Executive Director Kaira Esgate and Council Chair Bobbi Silten each brought unique and complementary leadership skills and attributes to the work of Reimagining Service.

Silten had the experience and presence to be able to convene and guide a group of professional peers, and a facilitative style of engaging others. David Smith describes the qualities that she brought to her leadership role as: “presence; having a point of view, but open to feedback; advocating when necessary, calling the right questions, synthesizing; owning the authority of her experience, but also willing to defer to those with greater experience,” all of which speak to the balance of critical skills needed for leading a cross sector collaboration.

Esgate had not been an executive director before being selected as the staff lead for Reimagining Service, but knew the field well and proved to be highly adept at a subtle and multidirectional leadership that expertly aligned the interests and resources of the Council to get things done. More than one Council member reference the notion of a “backbone” (typically used to refer to an organization in a collaboration) in citing the importance of her role. David Smith describes her talents as “being able to allow the conversations to be fully owned by the Council” though “she’d push at the right times...and was able to get more out of this group than any advisory council or board that I’ve ever seen.”

It is these visionary, relational, and operational aspects of leadership that are so essential to effective cross sector collaboration. (For additional perspective on cross sector leadership skills, see Appendix B.)

## THE CROSS SECTOR DIFFERENCE

Although Reimagining Service convened a group that could bring together different sectoral perspectives on service to better understand and address the issues, this was before “collective impact” became a buzzword drawing greater attention to cross sector collaboration. Those on the Council were pioneering ways of working across sectors to have a greater impact.

Three major advantages of this cross sector participation were:

- **More honest and constructive conversations.** Having diverse perspectives around the table pushed everyone to challenge their assumptions about what was possible, and moved them out of their comfort zones — where things can get difficult and thinking starts to change.
- **A systems approach to change.** David Smith says participants recognized that “we don’t just need to think about how we engage volunteers as organizations, but as a field,” and describes the initiative as “a real blend of everyone along the entire pipeline of the problem we were trying to solve.”
- **Broader impact.** Participation breeds buy-in, so it was critical to involve those sectors that would need to be part of implementing a solution. In addition, the involvement of such a diverse range of players with influence in their sectors had a multiplier effect, expanding the initiative’s potential impact.

## SHARING OWNERSHIP

One of the most dynamic aspects of this initiative was its willingness to share (and even cede) ownership of products and results.

Although Reimagining Service was directly responsible for numerous research reports and case studies, it also “spun off” or contributed to other products that live on under the aegis of others. (For a list of these, see the textbox on Reimagining Service’s legacy on page 11.) David Smith says: “Part of the agreement was that you weren’t just adding something on top of your day job, but making what you were doing for your day job *better*. You could take what

you wanted and run with it. In the end, it wasn't about building the Reimagining Service brand, but about unlocking insights for the field."

Baldwin characterizes this as an "open source" aspect of the collaboration, and others join him in noting that while the limits of ownership at times were not well-defined, it was both a motivator for participation and an engine for product development. The opportunity to get

"It wasn't about building the Reimagining Service brand, but about unlocking insights for the field."

- David Smith, Presidio Institute

something out of the initiative was a valuable incentive for putting time into it. This helped drive ideas to action, ensuring that Reimagining Service was able to produce deliverables to show for its efforts. It also demonstrates how, in David Smith's words, "collaborations can spawn a bunch of ideas, and the infrastructure sunsets while the ideas live on."

Silten describes the intent behind this sharing of ownership: "Having been involved in a collaboration before where I felt like our shared purpose was more about the lowest common denominator and who was going to get the most credit...that's not what I was interested in. With Reimagining Service, it was about making sure there was substantial impact to ensure there was enough credit to go around, that participants could see their fingerprints on it and claim some ownership."

## LEGACY: PRODUCTS AND PROGRAMS CREATED OR INSPIRED BY REIMAGINING SERVICE

[The Service Enterprise Initiative](#) (SEI) is a national initiative led by Points of Light that was started by CaliforniaVolunteers based on initial framing and research conducted by Reimagining Service. The SEI serves to strengthen the capacity of non-profits to fundamentally leverage volunteers and their skills to address community needs.

Through the research efforts of TCC Group, Algorhythm, and RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service, funding from the Corporation for National Community Service and CaliforniaVolunteers, and the programmatic expertise of Points of Light and the Taproot Foundation, hundreds of non-profits have been trained and are working towards certification as non-profit service enterprises.

Reimagining Service informed the seven scoring dimensions of [The Civic 50](#), an initiative created in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, Points of Light, and Bloomberg LLP as a comprehensive ranking of the 50 most community minded companies in the nation with revenues of \$1B or more.

Reimagining Service established the [Bank of America Service Leadership Fellows Program](#) through a generous multi-year grant from Bank of America. The program provided the opportunity for 14 graduate students — from Georgetown University's Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership, the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, and the Center for Nonprofit and Public Leadership at University of California, Berkeley — to develop and apply their skill sets in support of volunteer engagement.

Reimagining Service developed a collection of [13 case studies](#) of organizations that are effectively engaging volunteers to achieve greater impact.

## SUNSETTING THE COLLABORATION

**Staying true to the original mission — and to the commitment to a limited life span — gave the collaboration urgency, focus, and integrity.**

Reimagining Service was always intended to be a time-bound initiative. Its cofounders were not interested in creating a new organization or corporate entity, but aimed to inform the work of those already active in the field.

In 2010, the Council identified a three-year timeline for the work of the initiative. Within that time frame, it established guiding principles, hired an executive director, completed four research projects and nine case studies, coined the term Service Enterprise, and engaged in partnerships with philanthropic affinity groups and associations to share its learnings.

When it convened for its yearly summit in 2013, held in conjunction with the Conference on Volunteering and Service, the Council had much to look back on in the way of accomplishments. In considering the commitment to sunset after three years, members asked themselves if Reimagining Service had achieved its goals or if it still had work yet to finish. David Smith recalls that having launched the non-profit Service Enterprise, which was both a heavy lift and a major achievement, the Council was asking the question, *“Where might Reimagining Service go next?”*

There were also practical matters to consider. Points of Light, which had provided back office support and fiscal sponsorship since 2010, saw through fundability analysis that there was not a readily identified pipeline of new funders over the long term. The Presidio Institute then offered to house the initiative, which suggested an opportunity to pivot: the Institute was launching a

### BENEFITS OF A TIME-BOUND COLLABORATION

- Changes how to think about/approach the work, lending a sense of urgency
- Limits resource competition with existing organizations in the same space
- Allows some work to be completed independent of a permanent structure
- Encourages other work to continue to evolve and outlive the collaboration

distinctive focus on providing educational programs to strengthen cross sector leadership. The Council discussed this potential, and while some expressed interest, others felt it would take Reimagining Service too far from its original charge. The majority (including funding partners) being among the latter group, the Council decided to continue another year to do some culminating research and convening, and then to sunset.

As 2014 drew to a close and Reimagining Service published a last round of studies, tools,

**“We were keeping ourselves honest to our commitment to the field, but letting go was still an emotional decision.”**

**- Executive Director Kaira Esgate**

and resources, the Council met to review its goals and accomplishments. This time when the question was called, the decision to sunset was decided more quickly — though no more easily. Esgate describes the moment: “We were keeping ourselves honest to our commitment to the field, but letting go was still an emotional decision.”

Again, the decision was strategic as well as pragmatic. On one hand, it was not obvious what priority or product the group should take on next that would truly move the field forward. In addition, part of its goal at the outset was that Reimagining Service would seed ideas and inspire action by others, which had already begun to bear fruit. Finally, the three key funders who had supported the initiative since its inception were not prepared to fund the effort indefinitely, and no others had stepped in to carry the torch.

As described by Baldwin, this funding piece highlights a critical dilemma for collaborations involving non-profits:

*“You’re invited to join a collaboration, and before you know it, it’s just another competitor for the fixed pie of resources. When people come together around a common purpose, at some point they have to start raising money. That’s why you have so many collaborations that attract funding early on, but a few years later they’re either dead or competing with the very organizations that put them together. Although I’m sad not to have Reimagining Service anymore, I’m glad of our decision not to be just another entity competing for funding in the volunteering space. The commitment to being time-limited inoculated it from becoming that threat.”*

Not every aim needs to be — or should be — addressed by creating a new 501c3. As Reimagining Service was able to demonstrate, much can be achieved through a time-bound collaborative effort. The fluidity and flexibility of this form is part of its strength and enabled this initiative to be as effective as it was with the resources it had.

## **ENDING WITH INTENTION**

After its decision to disband, the Council took two days in November 2014 to approach its wind-down thoughtfully and deliberately. Members met at the Presidio to discuss and capture the history of the initiative, the lessons learned, and how to apply these lessons within their

own respective organizations. Many of the lessons learned survive through its Summary Report, published in January 2015, which also identifies needs still to be addressed by the service and volunteering sector. This final convening was also an opportunity for Council members to acknowledge and appreciate what they each brought to the work before bringing it to a close.

## CONCLUSION

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Reimagining Service capitalized on a specific moment in time when the issue of service and volunteering had gained new visibility and momentum. Forming a collaboration and assembling resources to take advantage of this opportunity was an act of initiative. It was also about taking responsibility for a challenge in which all sectors faced a shared problem and worked together to foster a solution. Facilitative leadership, a predisposition toward taking action, and openness to shared and individual ownership enabled this time-bound initiative to produce and help give rise to several resources, tools, and new knowledge for the field. In addition, its commitment to sunset within a 3-5 year period was, itself, a key to unlocking previously untapped potential without becoming a drag on the sector it was created to serve.

### AN UNEXPECTED “META” LESSON

Formed to advance the meaningful engagement of volunteers in creating social impact, Reimagining Service is an example of that very principle at work. Apart from the lessons it yields on the importance of assembling the right team, taking a systems approach to change, and aligning values to accelerate impact, one of the key successes — and a challenge — of the initiative was its ability to put participants’ skills and interests to best use. Council members were, in fact, volunteers in their own right. And each brought a unique perspective and set of strengths to the table. At the same time, the initiative itself evolved along a life cycle (one made even more rapid by its limited-life timeline) from idea generation to execution. Aligning participant skills, desires, and expectations with the needs of the collaboration was a constant balancing act that mirrored the work it was trying to encourage in the sector.

Silten reflects: “One thing I’d have done differently is to be more clear upfront that there would be different phases of the work...of ideation and development...and to say, ‘here’s a body of work we think you could really contribute to, and if you want to continue beyond that, it’s great, but we’ll also need folks who can do this other work.’ Then we could avoid the awkward moments where you’ve got folks who have made their contribution but then become less critical as the needs change. We were breaking our own philosophy of asking volunteers to contribute their best skills!”

Amy Smith reflects on the less intentional process that did unfold and its ultimate success: “Everyone found a place, a way to show up. Some folks fell away or got added when we

started making it more tactical, tangible, and having a product associated with it. But the core was kept intact.”

## APPENDIX A: COUNCIL MEMBERS

Bobbi Silten, Gap Inc.  
Mark Andrews, Habitat for Humanity  
Gary Bagley, New York Cares  
Karen Baker, CaliforniaVolunteers  
Greg Baldwin, VolunteerMatch  
Sarah Beaulieu, Opportunity Nation  
Elizabeth Blake, Habitat for Humanity  
Ronna Brown, Philanthropy New York  
Katie Campbell, Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration  
Patrick Corvington, The Campaign for Grade Level Reading  
Suzanne DiBianca, Salesforce Foundation  
Meg Garlinghouse, LinkedIn  
Chris Gates, Sunlight Foundation  
Evan Hochberg, United Way Worldwide  
Jeff Hoffman, Jeff Hoffman & Associates  
Aaron Hurst, Imperative  
Jane Leighty Justis, The Leighty Foundation  
Farron Levy, True Impact  
Gail Nayowith, SCO Family of Services

Jackie Norris, Points of Light  
David Paine, MyGoodDeed  
John Power, The Volunteer Center of San Francisco and San Mateo Counties  
Barb Quiantance, AARP  
Sarah Jane Rehnborg, RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service, University of Texas at Austin  
Jon Rosenberg, Hebrew Charter School Center  
Shirley Sagawa, sagawa/jospin  
Jill Silliphant, Deloitte  
Amy Smith, Points of Light  
Chris Smith, HandsOn Suburban Chicago  
David Smith, Presidio Institute  
Lisa Spinali, Ripple Effects Consulting  
Betty Stallings, Betty Stallings & Associates  
Joshua Steinberger, Presidio Trust  
Kerry Sullivan, Bank of America  
James Weinberg, FUSE Corps  
Peter York, Algorhythm

The Council numbered 26 at its inception, 19 at the time of its sunset. Council membership shifted over the five years of Reimagining Service as the work of the collaboration evolved and benefited from different kinds of skills, perspectives, and contributions.

# APPENDIX B: 9 CROSS SECTOR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The Presidio Institute is dedicated to building the practice of cross sector leadership. Its [Presidio Institute Fellows program](#) blends a conscious approach to leadership development with the cultivation of what it has defined as “9 Cross Sector Leadership Skills.” The Reimagining Service experience informed the Presidio Institute’s development of this skills framework, which is another example of its legacy effect on the sector.

The outline below describes these nine skills — grouped into three domains — and their alignment with key findings from this Reimagining Service case study.

## BUILDING TEAMS

1. **Developing Trust**
2. **Managing Power Dynamics & Conflict**
3. **Fostering an Innovation Culture**

“The right people and right facilitation can yield amazing results,” says David Smith, Council member, summarizing the importance of building an effective team. Reimagining Service brought together not only professionals from across sectors, but individuals who were eager to work together and learn from each other, each of whom brought something different to the table, whether expertise, personality type, skill set, etc.

Although Council members shared a strong rapport and high level of mutual trust, part of leadership’s role was to watch out for and manage conflict. Council member Amy Smith describes the importance of “balancing the desire for debate with the need to make decisions, managing different work styles, and coming to collective agreement on the way we wanted to show up in this particular space.” She adds that a benefit of constructively addressing conflict is “the more you can get done and the more people enjoy being a part of it.”

For Reimagining Service, fostering a culture of innovation was about creating a space for collective and individual ownership. This meant driving toward deliverables for the collaborative itself as well as allowing participants to take ideas and run with them to advance their own work. This can be a tricky prospect, and may be unique to a collaboration that is time-bound and needs not build a brand of its own. However, it also emphasizes the importance of results over that of creating or maintaining an organizational entity.

## SOLVING PROBLEMS

4. **Understanding Impact on People**
5. **Taking a Systems Approach**
6. **Defining Results and Using Data**



Reimagining Service was started by a group of people who had a perspective on the issue of volunteering that challenged the status quo, and who recognized cross sector culpability as part of the problem — and as a necessary part of the solution. Bobbi Silten, Council chair, explains: “Coming from the corporate side, I was from a sector contributing sometimes unknowingly to the lack of impact. What was needed wasn’t more, but fewer and more skilled, volunteers. But, non-profits weren’t always given incentives to think in those terms either.”

This recognition led to a systems approach. “We felt strongly that we needed to think about the ecosystem of volunteer engagement,” Silten says. “We tend to focus mainly on what non-profits need to do, but really it’s an ecosystem that doesn’t always conspire to have the best results.”

Reimagining Service’s embrace of research and data helped to better understand the problem and bring to light potential solutions. Executive Director Kaira Esgate describes this as a distinguishing value-add provided by the initiative: “In the service and volunteering field, the previous data had been mostly anecdotal; the focus of our research efforts was to get the data behind telling our story.” This also required a willingness to learn and to have prior assumptions challenged or even proven wrong.

## **ACHIEVING IMPACT**

- 7. Aligning Motivations & Values**
- 8. Using Leverage Points**
- 9. Sharing Knowledge & Learning**

Aligning human capital to produce social change was not only what Reimagining Service was trying to advance in the field, but an overarching lesson of the collaboration itself. Coordinating Council members’ skills, interests, and contributions with the needs of the collaboration was a balancing act similar to the one it was trying to help the service and volunteering field to master.

Flexibility was key to helping the initiative achieve impact because it allowed leaders to focus energy where momentum was greatest. Amy Smith says, “We came in with an agenda, but it was loose enough to be responsive.” Esgate adds: “We focused our energy on areas that seemed most promising; if something was stalling out, we’d double down on the things that were working. We were opportunistic.”

Reimagining Service had a strong focus on sharing knowledge and learning, making results accessible across the field and across sectors. It also urged others to take up the cause. Council member Greg Baldwin reflects: “The best thing was the open honest exchange of ideas, shared research agenda, and ability to reframe the public conversation. Now more people are aware of the challenge, that it’s not just a one-dimensional problem. It’s not solved, but there’s greater shared appreciation for the reality, and greater ability to avoid false solutions.”