

Statement of Sam Fankuchen for the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

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Introduction

When we think of America with think of access to opportunity. We think of citizen ownership. We think of our industrial achievements, and aspire to exercise our freedoms to improve a future for the world to inherit. And yet, despite these ideals, a vast opportunity remains for our public to address: most Americans want to volunteer¹, and yet 25%²-30%³ do per year. This disparity between intent and fulfilment indicates that the present is an historic opportunity to embark on a new civic engagement lifecycle, to rearchitect our system to grow and scale Americans' potential to contribute.

First as a civilian, then as a student, and now as a second-time social entrepreneur, I have made my life's work delivering a more compelling image of, greater access to, and more human connection through volunteering. Thank you for the honor of testifying before the Commission on behalf of our company, Golden. I will use this opportunity to present our view on driving greater participation in service to our Country through an expanded scope of suitable opportunities, a technology ecosystem that is accessible to organizers across sectors, and the adoption of automated workflows that optimally process civic engagement activities.

¹ Yotopoulos, Amy. "Three Reasons Why People Don't Volunteer, and What Can Be Done about It." *Longevity.stanford.edu*, Stanford Center on Longevity, 2019,

longevity.stanford.edu/three-reasons-why-people-dont-volunteer-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/.

² *Corporation for National and Community Service*, 2015, www.nationalservice.gov/vcla/national.

³ "Volunteering in U.S. Hits Record High; Worth \$167 Billion." *Corporation for National and Community Service*, Corporation for National & Community Service, 13 Nov. 2018, www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/volunteering-us-hits-record-high-worth-167-billion.

Our Idea of Service

Our simple definition of service is assuming someone else's position and putting that person or entity's objectives before one's own. In doing so, we gain a new perspective, confront challenges, develop priorities, and understand our individual relationship to addressing big-picture issues that affect quality of life. The benefits we receive when serving cannot be overstated. By gaining experience and perspective, we are able to see new pathways to addressing other challenges we personally face, perceive some of them as being less important than we previously considered them to be, and focus our efforts on more valuable pursuits. The results of regularly engaging in service include increased socialization, greater longevity, higher earning ability, improved marketable skills, expanded ability to handle responsibility, and strengthened interpersonal and family relationships⁴. Outcomes like these do not merely enhance the wellbeing of individuals, they also strengthen the health of our Nation.

As Americans, we subscribe to our fine nation's noble objectives to serve. Patriotism is national service, whether Military, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, or an enduring commitment to regular or repeating, ad hoc engagements. At Golden, our mission is to position volunteering as a natural extension of one's identity and interests by eliminating barriers to everyone participating in a continuum of "Golden Moments" through service. When finding, qualifying for, committing to, fulfilling, and repeating engagement is difficult for individuals, we not only deprive citizens, residents, and visitors of the benefits they should be able to deliver and experience, but we also erode the fabric of our communities.

Format of Service Activities

Formal Military, Peace Corps, and AmeriCorps service opportunities demand dedicated commitments of at least one year, yet this format is at least not conducive and at most prohibitive for most Americans to participate. For reference, most Americans over the age of 25 do not have a college degree⁵, and 78% of the American workforce is living paycheck-to-paycheck⁶. More

⁴ Hamblin, James. "Volunteer, for Your Own Health." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 4 Jan. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/12/altruism-for-a-better-body/422280/.

⁵ "Table 1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2018." *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2018*, United States Census Bureau, 2018,

episodic formats would enable most Americans to not only participate in an ongoing lifestyle of national service, but also equip them with essential skills, through these volunteer experiences, that increase their likelihood of sustaining prosperous domestic lives. An ideal government-sponsored system for enabling, tracking, and incentivizing civic engagement should credit participants for the broadest possible array of volunteering formats.

Actionable Opportunities

We support a digital platform where organized inventory of opportunities can be supplied by providers of services and consumed by identifiable individuals and entities in positions to satisfy clearly defined needs. In our experience at Golden, we have defined the structures of volunteer opportunities in clear, authentic, and actionable terms, so anyone can find the subject matter and scheduling logistics most suitable to her or his interests and availability, and commit to fulfilling defined objectives. Anyone who feels inspired to serve should be able to act on her or his inspiration. Anyone with the capability to be helpful should not be forced to forego her or his work, family, education, and commitments to schedule years of dedicated time to perform a civic duty. Anyone with discretionary time or who is confronted with emergent community needs should be empowered to serve. If the 20th Century is characterized by globalization and industrial proliferation, the 21st century will be defined by the Internet and associated technologies.

Volunteer Opportunities should be treated as inventory that can be allocated to participants, rather than listings of organizations to which a participant can express interest in receiving details, requirements, and logistics in the future. In our experience at Golden, we have defined the structures of volunteer opportunities in clear, authentic, and actionable terms, so that anyone can find the subject matter and scheduling logistics most suitable to her or his interests

www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/educational-attainment/2018/cps-detailed-tables/table-1-1.xlsx.

⁶ "Living Paycheck to Paycheck Is a Way of Life for Majority of U.S. Workers, According to New CareerBuilder Survey." *Press Room*, Career Builder, 2017, press.careerbuilder.com/2017-08-24-Living-Paycheck-to-Paycheck-is-a-Way-of-Life-for-Majority-of-U-S-Workers-According-to-New-CareerBuilder-Survey.

and availability, and commit to fulfilling defined needs. As a result, Golden Opportunities convert potential volunteers into participants at unprecedented rates.

Identity, Record Keeping, and Community Management

Today, many familiar online and offline processes involve a person giving permission to an entity to create a profile. A profile is used to verify the identity of the person and to append that person's preferences, history of disclosed behavior, and qualifications to a record that can evolve over time. Technology companies often refer to this approach as, "personalization," of user experiences. Since volunteer opportunities are unique and so are their participants, using a personalized approach, making recommendations to participants based on their profiles, eliminates both the need for human administration and the potential for human error to compromise personal information.

Government standards for the handling of personal information in common contexts, such as GDPR, COPPA, HIPPA, CCA, and others, have sufficiently specified and enforced best practices for technology systems, such that consumers can sensibly consider providing sensitive information to compliant service providers in order to benefit from the value they offer their subscribers. To users of other compliant online services, adopting tools to control distribution of personal data among government, corporate, educational, or affiliate group stakeholders is a learned behavior. Users would choose to participate in such a platform out of interest in appropriately sharing visibility with all appropriate audiences, in order to receive credit for their validated contributions.

Indeed, end-to-end technology is essential to complete, accurate, consistent, and reliable tracking of labor. The "Internet of Things" has enabled verifiable tracking and attribution of field-based and virtual activities, such that the results can be visualized in real time, without requiring human data entry. If a system has any dependency on human data entry whatsoever, that system has structural failures, including unstandardized submissions, absenteeism, inaccurate inputs, untimely submissions, improper permissioning, and other human errors. Moreover, systems without human data entry eliminate administrative requirements to solicit, collect, compile, analyze, and publish results. By the time such results can be posted, the material

is out of date and not useful. Civic engagement is about action, not merely administrative exercise.

The role of human service coordination should evolve into creation, curation, and celebration. Humans are uniquely able to understand a need, design an approach to addressing it, and capture it in an opportunity listing. Organizers who influence groups, such as employers, educators, and religious leaders, play a role in identifying opportunities for their constituents to support their communities' values and through recommending these opportunities on behalf of their organizations. Champions of accomplishments should have access to concrete contributions of participants, in order to proliferate contributors' efforts and achievements with their individual endorsements. Human efforts should be concentrated in production value over program administration.

The Social Sector as an Ecosystem

Realization of socioeconomic and quality-of-life improvements for the public are not the sole responsibility of government or the nonprofit sector; they are the shared imperative of a omni-sector ecosystem. Historically, each sector's resources have been immense, but segregated. Today, innovative, cross-sector partnerships exist, but are structured independently, and managed through internal tools by a nonprofit, foundation, corporate social responsibility department, or other office, rather than operated within a shared environment. Enabling stakeholders from every sector to participate in a technology-based, interoperable platform deepens connections that already exist, rather than relegating progress to slow-moving, one-off initiatives buried deep in institutional backlogs.

Digital Interfaces

Suitable technology will seem natural to consumers. With a profile, any person should be able to interact with a shared technology ecosystem from any internet connected device. Since more Americans have smartphones than have desktop computers⁷, most will prefer to interact via

⁷ "Demographics of Mobile Device Ownership and Adoption in the United States." *Internet, Science & Tech*, Pew Research Center, 12 June 2019, www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/.



their mobile devices. For organizers, first delivering programs through mobile devices is ideal. Volunteering is a mobile activity that occurs both in the physical world and in virtual spaces. Reaching a volunteer through the devices on her or his person provides the most context, timeliness, and access to appropriate permissions. Common permissions include notifications, location, payments, social media connections, and camera access. Combined, these utilities are capable of eliminating many operating costs associated with administration and staffing for mission-driven entities. Put another way, “mobility,” is accessibility; it is the revolution that will enable Americans to more naturally incorporate acts of service into the pattern of their everyday lives.

Summary

A cross-sector, technology-enabled, profile-driven ecosystem fuels the three most influential forces of participation: urgency, economic incentives, and social proof. Americans need to be able to be of immediate service both in times of emergency and on their free will, when inspired. When government, private, and public sector entities elect to supplement activities with discretionary incentives, they can access an efficient marketplace for human capital. When established and organically assembled corporate, religious, educational, and other social groups can convene, they can collectively recognize their memberships for achievements, and achieve more in concert. Providing common, efficient tools to other urban, suburban, and rural communities in the United States and beyond delivers the promise of American social innovation.

Biography

Sam Fankuchen is Founder & CEO of Golden, which is both the most popular app for volunteering and a cross-sector technology ecosystem for facilitating and monitoring civic engagement in real time. Golden has received numerous distinctions for removing barriers to volunteering and for pioneering automated, accurate, and trustworthy methods for attributing volunteer labor, including being named Global Social Good App of the Year by Facebook, A World Changing Idea by FastCompany, Top App to Simplify Your Life by TIME, and Webby



Honoree. Sam wrote his Masters thesis on reducing barriers to volunteering and optimizing lifetime value of volunteers and donors at Stanford University, where he also enrolled in the Design School and became the first undergraduate to Major in Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation. Golden is Sam's second social enterprise in volunteering technology. Between these two ventures, Sam led corporate innovation activities at a diversified transportation holding company and built a global management consulting practice in the field of corporate transformation through platform business models.