The 2013 Women and Philanthropy Workshop included a volunteer panel moderated by Becky Kresowik that included Carolyn Jons, Yvonne Kinzler and Maureen Lyon.

To begin the session Carolyn, Yvonne and Maureen all provided a brief overview of the organizations in which they are involved.

**Becky:** What is the most challenging part of volunteering?

**Yvonne:** I think finding time and making sure the time I devote is actually a valuable use of my time. I’ve also learned that I can’t do it all and sometimes I am best served to find someone else that can help out as well.

**Becky:** What motivates you to support your organization?

**Maureen:** I like seeing Marshalltown become a better community. I feel like the work I do is actually helping provide a better quality of life for the community on all age and income scales.

**Becky:** What do you find are your biggest challenges as volunteers?

**Maureen:** When (board or committee) meetings are not efficient. I want people to keep on task and there needs to be an agenda. I was on a Board that didn’t even ever have an agenda, so we would end up talking about the same topics as the time before. I also want to start on time and make sure my time is well spent.

**Participant:** Sometimes even though I may have a passion, I don’t have any idea how to help.

**Participant:** Little things help people get hooked and you find yourself wanting to be more involved.

**Participant:** For me, training is important. What do I have to learn to help out? Organizations need to be able to train volunteers, so they know how to help. You really want to be successful with the organization and ultimately help as much as possible.

**Becky (addressed to audiences):** What are your passions?

**Participant:** Story County Dental Clinic (explained why participant was passionate about the program)

**Participant:** AAUW and Educating women. They conducted a study involving Latino women and higher education completion rates, learned the process was different than for Caucasian women. It was very eye opening, it is the idea of listening to the community to seeing the needs and challenges people have. It is also important to try to expand the network to get more people involved.

**Becky (to audience):** That’s a good question, how do you gain new volunteers, especially on a younger engagement level?
Maureen: Well for instance on the YWCA Board, there is a requirement to have volunteers of certain age levels. I think once you bring one younger volunteer in, others seem to follow.

Participant: I’m a Hospice volunteer and I’m amazed that people don’t often know there are all sorts of ways that you can help. Not everyone is comfortable sitting next to the bed and being with family when a loved one is dying, but can you fold laundry or help in another way? We have actually partnered with a Community College—I believe a philosophy class, which talks about mortality and we actually go to the class and talk about what we do. The students usually ask really good questions and seem to be interested.

Student Participant: Well at ISU it is becoming more of a requirement in classes to have service learning credits. I’ve taken some classes and really they focus on making us more active citizens, so not only do we have to volunteer, but we are learning the background of how there came to be a need within society.

Participant: For me, as a member of several boards, I want the time I give to be efficient. With busy family commitments and work of my own, my time is valuable and I want to know it being used well and I also want to see an impact on what I’m doing. I want to see, 1. well run meetings, 2. growth, and 3. see progress with our goal.

Participant: We are really seeing that in _______ organization in Belmond, we do not have any younger members. We used to have Jaycees and Junior Jaycees, but it seems it is too much commitment for young people and they are just too busy. I’m worried that all of the members are getting older and we may have to disband at some point.

Participant: I think we need good ideas to start getting new blood.

Participant: Young volunteers come with a lot of energy, but it doesn’t always sustain. It can seem to level off quickly. I think sometimes, what we are seeing is that they want to fundraise online. Some of the tenured members hold out on wanting to do that, but ultimately we need to keep up with the times and that’s the world now.

Participant: I think we need to allow change and not get into a rut of “we’ve always done it that way.” We really do need to be able to keep up with change.

Participant: I think boards need to self-evaluate sometimes. It can be a really hard thing to do, but in order to keep moving forward it is necessary. You need to keep term limits, so you have new people and you aren’t having meetings for the sake of meetings and rehashing the same information.

Participant: What I learned from my 17 year old son is that “wise doesn’t always mean older.” We need to be able to talk on the same level as younger volunteers and not talk down to them—plus they are needed. They come with huge social networks to disseminate information.

Participant: (when on a board) You must DO, not just talk about doing.
Participant: Listen to your young volunteers.

Becky: So how do you decide, what to volunteer for?

Yvonne: It is difficult. There was a time when my husband and I had young kids, a family business and were involved in everything-I think at one time, 16 different volunteer efforts between us. But, I’ve learned that I lean towards the programs that have the most to offer and where I am the most effective. You have to say no sometimes and we’ve narrowed it down to being involved in about 3 major organizations. I find I tend to “follow my money” I want to see how it’s being used and I tend to lend my time to those organizations the most.

Maureen: I tend to use the qualifier that if I would actually go out and ask for money for the organization, that’s what I feel is worth my time. If I make a connection, that will often be my focus.

Carolyn: Passion really drives my influence and you have to decide what really motivates you to actually act. It is also important to me that you are able to measure the impact of your volunteer hours.

Participant: I evaluate in my mind where to spend my time and money and focus there. You have to isolate where your heart it.

Participant: We used to give to everything...if a letter came or if someone knocked on the door we would write a check. But, over time we determined we needed to pick a few things that were really our passion. Education and scholarships really ended up being very rewarding for us and we have continued giving this way. In fact we’ve actually expanded our involvement because it seems like it has made such an impact. It’s been much more satisfying since we’ve focused our passions.

Participant: I learned that if an organization is very poorly run, that can make the decision (not to be involved) much easier. I had a group who really solicited me about becoming involved; I finally did and it only took one meeting to realize it wasn’t for me and not worth my time.

Participant: What I find frustrating, having recently joined a Board, no one slows down to teach you the “lingo.” They use a lot of acronyms and sometimes it can be really confusing trying to keep them straight. It seems organizations have to work really hard to recruit new volunteers, but they should work harder at retaining volunteers.

Participant: Younger populations move faster and that’s great, but we still need to be able to organize the ideas for others who don’t have the use of technology (social media).

Participant: Often I support the goals of an organization, but I have a hard time determining how I fit in.

Participant: I think it is important for a board or committee member to have a clear understanding what is expected out of the volunteer relationship. I think a Board Contract is important; it allows members to understand exactly what is expected out of them and even be able to detail what they can expect out of the organization. Are both parties getting desired results on an annual basis? This way it becomes a positive and productive relationship.
**Yvonne:** Yes, I don’t like being a figurehead for an organization, rather than an active party. (General group consensus after this statement)

**Maureen:** I know with the YWCA our Executive Director actually sits down and has a one on one with new volunteers after they have gone through the orientation process. They want to hear what their impressions are and if there are expectations not being met.

**Carolyn:** I also think it is important to continue education within an organization. It’s not every meeting, but we do have a few times a year that we have learning sessions to review our data or even get together to ensure we are all of the same page.

Session end