

The Big Event Community and Participant Surveys Spring 2017

Background

The Big Event is a committee of the Student Government Association (SGA). According to its website (<http://bigevent.tamu.edu/>), “The Big Event is the largest, one-day, student-run service project in the nation where students of Texas A&M University come together to say ‘Thank You’ to the residents of Bryan and College Station.” The mission statement for The Big Event states:

Through service-oriented activities, The Big Event promotes campus and community unity as students come together for one day to express their gratitude for the support from the surrounding community.

The mission is accomplished by asking community members to submit ideas for personal service projects such as doing tasks within their houses, painting walls on their exterior property, and digging ditches. Students, or “participants,” sign up as individuals or with groups and receive a community task to focus on during the designated day. This year’s The Big Event was held on March 25, 2017.

The committee collected feedback from both the community members who registered a job and the student participants who registered. This report covers the responses from both groups. This is the fourteenth year The Big Event has worked with Student Life Studies to assess this program.

Method and Sample

The 8-question participant survey was produced using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates web-based surveys and databases. The participant survey included four quantitative and four qualitative questions. Due to branching, not all respondents saw all questions. The participant survey was sent to 22,737 students through an email invitation on March 25, 2017. Non-respondents were sent up to three reminders before the survey closed on April 3, 2017. Of those who were sent the survey, 6602 completed at least some part of the survey yielding a 29% response rate.

The resident survey was also produced using Qualtrics®. The survey contained nine questions, five quantitative and four qualitative. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. The resident survey was sent to 2384 residents on March 25, 2017. Non-respondents were sent up to three reminders before the survey closed on April 3, 2017. Of those who received the survey, 1915 responded to at least some part of it yielding an 80% response rate.

Data for both surveys was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

Results

Results will be reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Questions resulting in over 1000 qualitative responses were analyzed and coded, determining qualitative themes. Summary themes were determined for those questions with fewer than 1000 qualitative responses. Those themes are contained in this report; the entire list of comments can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to previous years are made throughout the report as applicable. This report contains two sections: Participant Survey and Resident Survey.

Participant Survey

First, students were asked if they participated in The Big Event. Of the 6,602 that responded, 98% said yes, while 2% indicated they did not participate. The students that suggested they did not participated were asked why they chose not to participate. Of the 162 that selected they did not participate, 146 wrote in why. A majority of the comments contained themes about being sick, not receiving correct information, having a family emergency, being out of town, or having prior commitments. However, a few of students suggested they did not participate this year because they believe that The Big Event does not focus helping people who are in need, rather they focus on having a big service event and not helping people in the poorer communities. One student mentioned that they did not participate because the opening ceremonies are too busy, and they took away the free shirts.

Students that participated were asked to rate their experience participating in The Big Event. As is seen below, in Table 1, almost all students had a positive experience with The Big Event.

	Excellent	Very Good	Satisfactory	Very Poor	Unacceptable	Mean (sd) n=6438
Please rate your experience with The Big Event	54%	35%	10%	2%	<1%	4.39 (.76)

Table 1: Rate Your Experience (Participant)

Next students were asked how they heard about The Big Event in a select all that apply format. Seen in Table 2 below, a majority of students heard about The Big Event through their organization’s past participation, or through friends. Students that selected “other” were given the opportunity to write in a way they heard about The Big Event. Of the 335 students who selected “other”, 324 wrote in a way they heard about The Big Event. Some of the themes that were identified as ways they heard about The Big Event included social media, past participation, growing up locally, FISH Camp, NSC, emails, being a member of the Corps of Cadets, and having prior knowledge of the event. Some notable responses included it is a nationally known event and a big deal to A&M, general Aggie knowledge, and it is tradition.

How did you hear about The Big Event? (select all that apply)	Percent n=6216
Because my organization participates most years	74%
Friends	47%
Recruitment signs on camps	28%
Big Event spoke at my organization	4%
Other	5%

Table 2: Big Event Marketing (Participant)

Students were then asked for suggestions on how The Big Event could reach a larger amount of students to participate next year. While some of the 2328 responses said that The Big Event already has enough students participating that nothing needed to be done to reach more students, or that they didn’t know, there were a number of reoccurring suggested themes. On the following page, Table 3 shows the 21 most common themes with the number of comments categorized within each theme:

Qualitative Themes: What are your suggestions on ways we could reach larger amount of students to participate next year?	Number of Comments
More advertising in different locations/more ads/social media	770
I don't know	284
Find ways to recruit students not in organizations	171
Reach out to organizations on campus	162
Create incentives (especially free t-shirts)	151
Announcing The Big Event in classes	138
Emailing students sooner/more	119
Nothing needs to be done to reach more students/Already enough student participating	107
Explaining to students what The Big Event is and means to the community	95
Having promo videos each year	68
Speeding up the tool gathering and distribution process	64
Having more free food and merchandise and advertise free food	60
Extend the deadlines/allow more time to apply	54
Having a concert or keynote speaker/other events connected to The Big Event	50
Miscellaneous	47
Doing service projects in the poorer parts of Bryan/College Station	31
Allowing Blinn students to participate	31
Allow participants to choose their service activity	19
Have in person sign ups around campus	18
Have professors give extra credit for participation	15
Announcing The Big Event at sporting events	12

Table 3: Participant Marketing Suggestion Themes (n=2328)

The largest number of comments fell under the more advertising in different locations and social media theme. Those suggestions included creating a larger social media presence for The Big Event and early in the year. Students also thought target marketing to student organization leaders would improve participation, through electronic and physical (visit the organization meetings and talk about The Big Event) means. Also, a number of students took the opportunity to relay their frustrations with The Big Event when answering this question. Almost all of the grievances included having to wait too long to get tools at the kick-off event, or having the feeling of being used as “free labor” for people in the upper middle class who could do the jobs themselves, instead of helping families that needed it the most.

Next students were asked if they planned to participate in The Big Event next year. Of the 6,219 respondents, 80% selected “yes”, 18% selected “no-graduating/leaving university”, and the remaining 3% selected “no”. Students that selected “no” were given the opportunity to suggest changes that could be made that would help them consider participating next year. Of the 167 students who said they will not participate in The Big Event next year, 121 students gave a reason why. Many of the comments revolved around the theme of doing work for people who are using The Big Event to get “free labor” to do chores that they do not want to do, or they feel that the people who truly needed the help didn't get it. Students also suggested that they would volunteer in The Big Event next year if

they were helping the poorer communities in Bryan/College Station instead of the “rich” neighborhoods. Some other themes included: being more organized with tool distribution, giving correct tools to do the job, and screening jobs for people “in need”. A number of students also said that they would not participate next year because this year they had a bad experience with rude Big Event staff, or because they worked for “rude” and “ungrateful” hosts.

Finally students who said they planned on participating in The Big Event next year, or selected that they were not participating because they were graduating or leaving the university were asked if there were any ways that The Big Event could be improved and if not, feel free to add any additional comments. Table 4 provides the themes derived from review of responses from 2158 participants. Feedback regarding the tool distribution garnered the most comments, and overall positive comments regarding the students’ experience were second most plentiful. Students also suggested the mission of The Big Event should focus on those in need within the community and they also offered suggestions regarding the check-in process and kick-off outside of tool distribution.

Qualitative Themes: Are there any ways that you think The Big Event can be improved? If not, feel free to add any additional comments	Number of comments
Tools: speeding up/increase efficiency of the tool gathering/ distribution/return process, correct tools for job assignment and correct amount for job	523
Positive comments, generally (Awesome, great, etc....)	407
Doing service projects for those in need; service the poorer parts of Bryan/College Station	214
Improve check-in process (excluding tool distribution)/kick-off ceremony/traffic control/parking	213
Improve site/job analysis/review before assigning participants	209
Nothing/NA	182
Improve communications/mailing students sooner/clearer communication to and about site leader/roles	160
Miscellaneous	114
Improve organization of site assignment process	101
Have more free food/water/other stuff	96
More incentives (especially free t-shirts)	45
Ask/assign participants based on skill/task preference /sex/ability	36
Outreach/Marketing ideas to residents and students	28
Start earlier in the day	17
Allow participants to choose their service activity	13
Allow org leaders to sign in/organize all their own org members participating	12
Have it more than one day per year; multiple days	12
Transportation to TBE/Sites	9
Allowing Blinn students to participate	6

Table 4: Improvements and General Comments (n=2158)

Resident Survey

First residents were asked if they have previously participated in The Big Event. Of the 1915 responses, 73% indicated they had participated before, while 27% said they had not. Next respondents were asked how they heard about The Big Event, in a select all that apply format. Table 6 below shows that similarly to the last four years, the most common responses were “past experience”, “other”, and “The Eagle”. Those who selected other could write in a response and the most frequent comments included friend, neighbors, family, co-worker and word of mouth.

How did you hear about The Big Event? (select all that apply)	2017 Percent [n=1888]	2016 Percent [n=1393]	2015 Percent [n=1988]	2014 Percent [n=2020]	2013 Percent [n=1149]
Past Experience	52%	60%	61%	61%	58%
Other	24%	20%	22%	23%	23%
The Eagle	18%	16%	15%	17%	19%
The Big Event Website	11%	10%	10%	10%	11%
Television Advertisement	9%	7%	11%	5%	8%
Facebook	6%	7%	*	*	*
A Job Request Form was Distributed to My Home	5%	8%	7%	6%	7%
Radio Advertisement	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%
Posters/Signs	4%	7%	6%	6%	12%

Table 6: Big Event Marketing (Resident)

*indicates question not asked

Next respondents were asked if they planned on participating in The Big Event next year. Of the 1890 responses collected, 87% said they would participate, 12% said they did not know if they would, and 1% said they would not participate. The respondents that said “I don’t know” or “no” were given the opportunity to suggest ways that The Big Event could improve in order for them to consider participating again. One hundred and ninety one provided comments and slightly less than half just expressed appreciation, did not have any suggestions for improvement, would not have a project next year or were moving. Those who provided suggestions for improvement mentioned the need for better communication from The Big Event organizers prior to and during the day of the event, especially to those who were on the waiting list. Others said the students needed to arrive on time or arrive at all, need to bring enough and the right tools, stay off their cell phones and wear appropriate clothing for the work they were asked to do. Quite a few of the residents suggested the job site assessment prior to the day could use improvement, as either there were not enough students or too many students assigned to their job site.

Residents were asked to rate their experience with The Big Event. Seen in Table 7 over three-quarters of respondents had an outstanding experience with The Big Event, while only 5% had a negative overall experience.

	Outstanding	Better Than Expected	Met Expectations	Below Expectations	Poor	Mean (sd) n=1832
Please rate your experience with The Big Event	76%	11%	8%	4%	1%	4.57 (.89)

Table 7: Rate Your Experience (Resident)

Next respondents were asked two qualitative questions. The first asked the residents to share ways to improve The Big Event to better their experience. One thousand twenty-four residents responded and more than half (556) provided very positive comments about the students’ work and their appreciation for The Big Event. About 16% of the respondents said they could not think of improvements or had nothing to suggest. However, half of the residents provided suggestions, and more than one-third of those comments were about communication from The Big Event coordinators and the site leaders, either immediately prior to the day or on the day. Many just wanted a better estimate regarding when to expect the students to arrive, and exactly how many students to expect so the

residents could have adequate food for them. Another 25% or so would like adjustments to the job site assignments, as the number of students they felt were needed did not arrive, those who came were not well equipped for the work that needed to be done and as heavy lifting was needed, many wanted more males to handle the heavier work. Other prevalent suggestions were about training the student volunteers for the work, students being more attentive and emphasize showing up when expected and staying for the full duration. Some suggested the students needed better tools, the correct tools or enough tools and suggested the students start and arrive earlier in the day.

Next the residents were asked if there was anything they would like to share about their experience with The Big Event. Of the 1314 residents who shared comments, 85% were positive about their experience with The Big Event and the students who participated. Residents said the students were “very thorough and did a great job”, and the students “worked hard, showed great work ethics and were pleasant to have in our home”. Many wanted the same students to return the next year. One enthusiastic resident said:

These were wonderful young people who will go far in their lives. I felt cared about and appreciated. It was a pure pleasure to meet them and I felt like we parted as friends. They were able to do things I cannot do any more. I also appreciated their enthusiasm and am sure they had other things they could have been doing (like studying) on a Saturday. I would have had to hire several people to do what they did and do not think I could have afforded it on my fixed retirement income.

About one-fifth of the residents indicated they had nothing to share about their experience and six percent shared comments about their experience as below their expectations and negative. Many of those residents indicated that not all the students who were expected showed up and some said that no students showed up. Others said the students did not want to work but rather socialize among themselves, were on their phones, or that they did not know how to perform the tasks asked of them or performed them poorly.

Lastly residents were asked if they would be interested in receiving a monthly newsletter from The Big Event that provides them with current information about what is happening within the organization throughout the year. Out of the 1915 responses, 51% said they would like to receive the newsletter, while 49% said they would not. Those that indicated they wanted to receive the newsletter were given the opportunity to give their email address. Of the 934 who said they would like to receive the newsletter, 893 gave an email address. All of the email addresses can be found in a separate document.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of both surveys, this year's The Big Event can be considered a success. Community members (residents) seem to have appreciated the service provided by The Big Event and Texas A&M students. Most students who participated in The Big Event seemed to enjoy their experience and planned to participate in The Big Event 2018.

Though the event was generally praised, there were challenges and suggestions for improvement from both the student participants and the residents that The Big Event staff may want to review. Although a few of the student participants who responded said that the tool distribution and drop off had improved compared to previous years, students and residents continued to voice some frustration regarding the length of time it takes. Others noted the lack of correct tools for the job assigned and in some cases, the quality of tools being subpar. Some offered suggestions that the staff may want to consider and investigate their feasibility, to continue improvements in efficiency of the process and in the quality of tools provided.

A number of participants and community members shared they did not have enough people for the labor-intensive jobs the day of the service. As well, some shared that an excess of students showed up to perform the work at the site. Participants and residents also indicated that lack of training for the tasks at hand was somewhat of a hindrance. Finally residents, in particular, wanted communication from The Big Event regarding the expected arrival time of the participants either a day or so immediately before or on the day. The Big Event staff may want to review their site assessment process to ensure residents' expectations are met. Also staff could look at means to connect residents to the students assigned to their site so that both can more effectively accommodate one another

on the day. Also, if possible, an app or mechanism within The Big Event website could be developed to enable both residents and participants to communicate needs throughout the day regarding number of workers or tools needed and general requests that could be addressed in real time by The Big Event staff. This may enhance both groups satisfaction with their experience on the day.

There were also several comments made by participants feeling that they were performing free labor for those that could do the work themselves instead of doing community service for those who really needed it. It is recommended that The Big Event staff discuss how jobsites selected fit with The Big Event mission as well as help students to understand the mission of Big Event and why sites are chosen. Also, the students recommended that an earlier and more frequent social media presence from The Big Event would increase student participation and enhance students' understanding and expectations regarding The Big Event.

The Big Event leadership and planning staff are strongly encouraged to read all the qualitative comments to gain a full understanding of the themes in this report. There may also be comments from both student participants and residents that The Big Event staff may want to incorporate in their marketing materials. It is also recommended that this report is shared with the new staff as during their planning for future Big Events.

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