



# Summit Promotes Volunteerism in Spain

By Jeffrey Galvin, public affairs office, U.S. Embassy Madrid

Two hundred experts on citizen service and volunteerism at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid's Service Innovation Summit in March sought to develop creative, practical solutions to social problems. The summit occurred at a time when Spain's economic crisis and budget cutbacks had led to labor unrest, including a general strike. Summit organizers decided to proceed, but made a few changes. A service project planned for the day of the strike was rescheduled as a post-summit effort, but organizers replaced it with sessions on engaging youth and increasing public participation. In the end, the summit went off without a hitch.

In fact, government and opposition leaders, as well as Spain's crown prince and representatives of civil society, all sat together on the dais on the summit's opening day. The controversy helped summit participants focus on the value of civic engagement and public-private partnerships.

At the conference, the embassy announced a \$5,000 grant competition for grassroots community service projects, and Madrid's mayor announced that her city had joined Cities of Service, a coalition founded by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to leverage volunteerism.

A public-private partnership between the embassy and the Meridian International Center, the summit reflected Ambassador Alan Solomont's effort to promote greater civic engagement. Hosted by the Rafael del Pino Foundation, the event sought to build bridges among service leaders from government, the private sector and NGOs, and to foster an information exchange on increasing the role of citizens in problem solving.

The summit attracted American community service experts such as City Year founder Alan Khazei, Jonathon Greenblatt from the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation and Diahann Billings-Burford, New York City's chief service officer. Other participants included Assistant Secretary of State Ann Stock, Special Representative for Global Partnerships Kris Balderston and Ambassador Solomont, former chair of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Spanish participants included representatives of the Madrid city government, the Spanish National Volunteerism Platform and the SERES Foundation, representing Spanish companies committed to corporate social responsibility. Civil society organizations and government, volunteerism experts and Spanish and American executives also participated.

The three-day event was streamed live on the Web, and featured sessions where private- and public-sector officials and NGO representatives discussed recommendations for action.

There was also an informal reception at the ambassador's residence and a museum tour. For promotion, the summit used a public awareness campaign, a website/blog and donated ads promoting citizen service in Spain, and an embassy-built social media platform. Participants contributed blog entries, tweeted and posted videos to the summit website, the embassy's social media pages and elsewhere.

Several summit attendees came together again in April for a service project at a bilingual school in the working-class neighborhood of San Blas. The Realmadrid Foundation organized exercise demonstrations, and volunteers gave English lessons and worked on park and neighborhood beautification projects.

The embassy grant will go to the community NGO with the most innovative idea for using volunteers to improve their neighborhood or helping solve a community problem. ■



**Above:** Ambassador Solomont talks about the potential of citizen service with President of the Region of Madrid Esperanza Aguirre. *Department photo*  
**Below:** Protesters fill Puerta del Sol and the surrounding streets to hear speeches by union leaders during the General Strike, March 29, 2012, in downtown Madrid. *Photo by Ethan Klosterman*

