

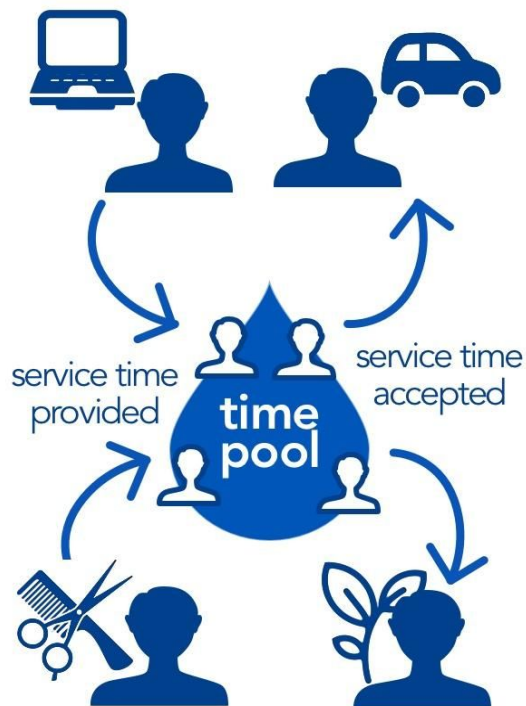
# Valley Time Trade Case Study

Gina Coburn

## Overview of Valley Time Trade and Time Banking

Valley Time Trade (VTT) is an organization that tracks hours of service between members, referred to as a time bank. It is located in the north-central part of the Pioneer Valley, a western region in the state of Massachusetts.

Members of Valley Timetrade offer and search for exchanges by accessing a [central website](#). Prospective members can use this central site to sign up and subsequently attend an orientation meeting in person. After the orientation, all transactions happen through the website. People offer what they would like to trade. Everyone's hours, no matter the skill level, count the same - that is to say an hour of one person's time is equal to an hour of every other person's time. When a trade occurs the people involved in the trade enter the transaction on the website so a credit is made to the provider of the service and a debit against the receiver of the service. This [Good Morning America clip](#) further explains the notion of Time Banking.



### **Diagram of Time Banking**

There are very few expenses to run the time bank, the main one being minimal costs for developing and hosting the website. No money changes hands among the membership.

Time bank organizations are popping up all over the world thanks to free software that makes it easy to track hours and update services.

## History of Valley Time Trade

Valley Time Trade was founded by a core group of volunteers in 2012 and has about 600 members. only about 200 of them are currently active.

It seemed that things were running well until 2016 when the leadership called a meeting of members and announced they were going to disband because they were burnt out. A small group of volunteers decided they would take over the organisation knowing that there was an easier way to run it - using Sociocracy. The founding leadership had no concerns in passing the organisation on to the group of volunteers and dropped a big box of materials off to Jennifer Rau, a resident of the area - and skilled sociocracy trainer.

## Use of Sociocracy at Valley Time Trade

The small group of new volunteers wanting to use Sociocracy as their governance model, attempted to receive consent from the membership by sending out multiple emails. Upon receiving no responses, they decided to interpret this as consent and forged ahead.

The first thing the new volunteers did was to form a transition team. They met a few times to understand what needed to be done and how all the tasks related to each other. They did this by drawing diagrams and tried to fit everything into 3 circles. After about 9 months they revised their initial plan when they realized it was better to split the IT circle amongst the existing circles so each circle had their part of the IT inside their circle. For example, the people tending to new members on the website are now the same people that help with questions regarding how to use the Time Trade application.

Currently there is a General Circle, 3 Working circles and no Top circle, although they aspire to having one. There are about 7 people on the all-volunteer leadership team with only 1 remaining member from the founding group.



***Structure of Pioneer Valley Time Trade***

2 people on the leadership team were interviewed as part of this case study: Jennifer Rau and Lisa Aiken. Jennifer is a Sociocracy trainer and also runs the orientations as part of

Outreach Circle. Lisa works on the Management Circle running the website. They both agree that the organization is running smoothly in fact it almost runs itself. There is a short list of tasks the leadership team attends to and these tasks are divided among the 3 work circles:

1. Maintain the website- Management Circle
2. Address issues members may have, such as lost passwords- Outreach Circle
3. Monitor the services offered, sometimes people have a funny idea of what to trade- Management Circle
4. Present orientations to new members- Outreach Circle
5. Cull the membership list of inactive members so members don't get frustrated with items that aren't currently available for trade- Management Circle
6. Present very occasional events- Outreach Circle

## Conclusions

When they first got started, Jennifer was the facilitator for the General Circle and attended all the working circle meetings to help the all-volunteer team learn how to apply Sociocracy on the fly.

Both interviewees agree that running the time bank now feels more relaxed. Each work circle only attends to its' domain, meaning meeting times are short and the outcome effective. The General Circle meets rarely because there is little need now that VTT is set up.

Lisa and Jennifer agree that the beginning of their time leading VTT was shaky because of the lack of continuity between the founders and the new leaders. Without the last ditch offer of Jennifer, Lisa and the new volunteers, VTT would have been abandoned a number of years ago. The transition to using Sociocracy was bumpy but now that it's been instituted the group is enjoying a period of stability.

Lisa expressed her feeling that she would never want to go back to the way things were organized before Sociocracy. She attended a short course taught by Jennifer and Jerry and is familiar with the principles. She said it feels like they are barely using Sociocracy in VTT now that the policies are set up and things just run. She made an interesting comment that it is her feeling that there is a bigger emotional stake when using Sociocracy then when using traditional ways of governing. I think what she's referring to is that people have to be willing to enter the process more transparently, more honestly, more clearly.

Jennifer and Lisa both acknowledged that they are struggling at some level because of lack of volunteers. Jennifer would like someone to take over her role orienting new members because she is so busy. They both expressed a desire for more social activities, but no one has time to organize them. They also both felt that the area covered by VTT is very large and the distance between members can be an obstacle to using the time bank when there might be 30-45 minutes of driving. In time I can imagine the group will experience another spurt of energy and rally more support to survive and grow.