P/PV *Briefs*

Making the Most of Volunteers

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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

Introduction[1]

The call for volunteers is getting louder. During President Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, he asked every American to give at least two years to serving others. He is not the first president to stress civic engagement, but is offering concrete encouragement—expanding volunteer opportunities, enhancing incentives for volunteering and adding the use of volunteers as a criteria in many government grants.

While the need for—and value of—volunteers is self-evident, making good and appropriate use of volunteers' time can be challenging for organizations whose resources are already stretched to the limit. Recruiting and managing volunteers is time consuming but essential. Without a sturdy infrastructure to provide ongoing support and direction, volunteers' time and talents are squandered, and their enthusiasm dampened. And because volunteers themselves are often in short supply—and may leave if they are dissatisfied—it is essential that procedures are developed to ensure that volunteers are clear about what is expected of them and how they fit in.

This essay discusses the elements that experience has shown need to be in place to allow volunteers to be most effective. Our insights come from studying hundreds of programs that use volunteers heavily—mentoring programs, service programs and local community change initiatives. We present both research findings and practical field examples that highlight the importance of screening, training and volunteer management. Across the different programs we have visited and studied, the extent to which they included these procedures varied tremendously. Some programs included virtually no volunteering infrastructure, while others were highly structured. From our observations, we believe that these three practices are vitally important to the success of any program that uses volunteers. Without adequate infrastructure, the hours of labor contributed by well-intended individuals can be wasted, or even cause damage.

Background

Every year, over 90 million Americans contribute more than 20 billion hours of their time to providing services that range from coaching Little League teams to restoring communities after natural disasters.[2] These volunteers organize fundraising events, lead museum tours, teach adults to read, act as coaches and mentors for youth, and provide countless other services. Without volunteers' donated labor, these organizations would not reach nearly the number of people or provide the level of service that they do.

Voluntarism not only helps the recipients of services; it often benefits the volunteers themselves. Talk to volunteers and most will tell you how much they get out of their involvement. For some, it rekindles a sense of community and bridges the gulfs that exist within American society. Individuals tend to move within relatively small spheres, stratified by age, race, class and location. Volunteering, especially in organizations to which one does not belong, is a powerful way of reconnecting people with reality outside their own worlds. Volunteer programs, for example, bring the middle-class public into the classrooms of low-income children and open the volunteers' eyes to the challenges faced by teachers and children in poor schools. Similarly, mentors of low-income children learn on a regular basis about the difficulties of growing up poor. For many volunteers, service makes them feel useful. For isolated adults, such as the elderly, it can provide needed social connections. Volunteering can even provide physical benefits. A 25-year National Institute of Mental Health study finds, for example, that "highly organized activity [such as regular volunteering] is the single strongest predictor, other than not smoking, of longevity and vitality."[3] Results from a recent senior service demonstration, Experience Corps, found that while 30 percent of its volunteers (who were primarily in their 50s and 60s) reported they were in "excellent" or "very good" health before they started volunteering, 42 percent of them felt this way after their volunteering experience. Similarly, after volunteering for a year, these participants reported less difficulty in reading a map, driving, taking medications, using a calculator and shopping for groceries than they did at the beginning of the program.[4]

Citing the many good outcomes that can result from volunteering, politicians from both parties advocate voluntarism. Former President Bush set up a White House office to promote voluntarism and supported the creation of the Points of Light Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to advancing voluntary efforts to solve social problems. During his administration, Congress passed legislation that created the Commission for National Service. During President Clinton's administration, Congress reauthorized the National Service legislation and set up the Corporation for National Service that would oversee his newly created AmeriCorps program as well as oversee other existing service/volunteer programs, such as Foster Grandparents and VISTA. Most recently, President George W. Bush established the USA Freedom Corps to foster a culture of service and has repeatedly called on every American to volunteer. In 1997, the four living presidents backed a call for voluntarism and charity to help America's youth.[5]

But not everyone is sanguine about voluntarism's ability to address major social problems. Historically, there is little evidence that volunteers choose to donate their labor to human services. Only 8.4 percent of the 93 million volunteers work in "human services"—aiding the homeless, staffing crisis hot lines or working with the elderly.[6] The Institute for Policy Studies estimates that only 7 to 15 percent of the volunteering done through churches (which one would expect to be more socially minded) goes outside the walls of the church into the community. Other critics fear that governmental backing of voluntarism is motivated only by a desire to cut the federal budget. They ridicule the notion that volunteers can solve serious social problems. One such critic likened calls for voluntarism to "putting the war on poverty in the hands of vigilantes."[7]

Thus, one segment of America sees voluntarism, if widely adopted, as a way of eradicating poverty, while another segment sees it an inefficient way of addressing the nation's social problems. Reality lies in the middle. Some social problems are too complex or acute to be adequately addressed solely by volunteers; but there are also many social needs that volunteers can respond to—providing disadvantaged youth with mentors or tutors, staffing domestic abuse and rape hot lines, immunizing children and rehabilitating homes, to name a few.

Indeed, volunteering is in a time of transition. Not only is society asking volunteers to coach youth and organize fundraising events but, increasingly, more complex tasks. This trend is particularly apparent in the social service arena, as the responsibility for delivering a range of services devolves to the local level. Rather than supplementing and supporting the efforts of paid staff members, volunteers in more organizations nowadays are being asked to play more staff-like roles in order to control costs.

As a result, organizations that rely on volunteers realize that many of the same issues they address for their staffs—pay, working conditions, training—apply to volunteers who play critical roles or make major time commitments. In the past, whether volunteers personally benefited was not really considered; today, if volunteers are expected to be dependable and provide more of their time, programs do need to think about the personal benefits available to their unpaid workforce. Similarly, as more service delivery is done by volunteers (for example, there was a 50 percent increase in the number of mentors who volunteered with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America between 1996 and 1997),[8] the more an organization's reputation is affected by the quality of their volunteers' work. Thus, just as effective companies train and manage their staffs, organizations that wish to use volunteers effectively need to pay more attention to training and managing them than ever before.

Based on our studies of programs that use volunteers in major ways (mentoring programs, service programs and community-based initiatives), we have concluded that three areas are vitally important to their success: screening, training, and ongoing management and support. The screening process provides organizations the opportunity to select those adults most likely to be successful as volunteers by finding individuals who already have the appropriate attitudes or skills needed to succeed. Orientation and training ensure that volunteers build the necessary skills and have realistic expectations of what they can accomplish. Management and ongoing support of volunteers by staff is critical for ensuring that volunteer hours are not squandered, that weak skills are strengthened and that the volunteers are maximally effective.

Screening

Operating a successful volunteer effort begins with the selection of volunteers. Not every well-intended person makes a good volunteer for every task. Programs do well to screen applicants with their intended tasks in mind, considering such factors as safety, skills and commitment.

First and foremost, the *safety* of those receiving services must be taken into account, especially if they are in vulnerable populations, such as children, the mentally retarded and the fragile elderly. Many mentoring and other volunteer programs operating in schools, for example, require references and conduct police background checks. Similarly, if the volunteer's role will be driving others, the driving record should be checked. All AmeriCorps programs that provide services to vulnerable populations are required to conduct criminal history background checks on AmeriCorps members.[9]

A second, equally important screening criterion should be the level of *skill* the applicant brings. The volunteers can play significant roles in more complex jobs, but not without the appropriate skills. Programs can teach volunteers needed skills (which can be both costly and time consuming),[10] screen for those who already have the skills (which limits the pool of volunteers), or do a bit of both—which is what most programs do. If the mixed strategy is chosen, though, programs need to be explicit about what skills or attitudes applicants need to bring with them. For example, mentoring programs have learned that it is difficult to teach volunteers who want to "fix" a child how to spend sufficient time building the relationship so the child will be receptive to the mentor's efforts. This type of volunteer is more appropriately a tutor or instructor who can teach skills, often to groups of youth, rather than a mentor who is expected to develop a solid one-to-one relationship, typically with a single youth.

Understanding how great a *time commitment* a volunteer is able to make is essential. Some volunteer opportunities require little time or skill—one-day clean-up or beautification activities, for example. However, activities that are most likely to have enduring impacts require persistence. It is a waste of time and resources for a program to devote the training and supervision needed to bring a volunteer up to speed only to have her leave soon after starting. It wastes the program's resources and the volunteer's time, and can also seriously damage a volunteer program's relationship with a host organization.

Selecting volunteers who can realistically keep their time commitments is particularly important when the volunteer's job is primarily, or even secondarily, to form a relationship with others. Terminations may touch on vulnerabilities that other, less personal interventions do not. Vulnerable individuals, such as youth or the elderly, can be damaged when good-hearted volunteers who start befriending them decide they really do not have the time to continue. This may be particularly true for children living in single-parent households who are referred to relationship-based interventions. These children have already sustained the loss of regular contact with a nonresidential parent and often feel particularly vulnerable to, and responsible for, problems in subsequent adult relationships.[11] Feelings of rejection and disappointment, in turn, may lead to a host of negative emotional, behavioral and academic outcomes.[12]

Studying the effects of volunteer mentoring over time, Grossman and Rhodes found that youth who were in matches that terminated within the first three months had significantly lower levels of global self-worth and perceived scholastic competence than did the randomly selected control group youth who did not receive a mentor (Table 1).[13] The findings regarding early terminations are consistent with previous work, that has demonstrated the particular vulnerabilities of youth to relationship disruption.[14] Still, it is unclear whether these negative effects stemmed from youth's feelings of rejection and disappointment or from other self-selection processes or contextual influences.[15]

Inconsistency may also damage the youth's future ability to trust. Therefore, program staff should review volunteers' life commitments and discuss how they intend to fit their volunteering responsibilities into their overall schedules. Individuals whose other commitments indicate they will have difficulty serving on a consistent basis should be screened out of mentoring or other relationship-intensive roles. Instead, as discussed below, these individuals may be useful to programs in other roles.

Table 1: **Estimated Impacts of Big Brothers Big Sisters by the Length of Match**

Outcome	<3 Months	3-6 Months	6-12 Months	12+ Months
Self-Worth	-2.24**	0.30	0.08	0.76*
Perceived Scholastic Competence	-1.83*	0.58	0.53	0.93*
Value of School	-1.16	0.58	-1.15	1.85**
Hitting Someone	-1.28	-2.08*	-1.06	0.17
Frequency of Drug Use	0.21	0.39	-0.40**	-0.34
Frequency of Alcohol Use	0.29	0.18	-0.12	-0.57*

Source: Grossman and Rhodes, 1999.

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .01$

Training and Skills

No program can expect volunteers to just walk "on the job" without any instruction. The need for training is obvious for some programs, such as crisis phone centers or medically related tasks. But a mistake that far too many programs make is to underestimate the training needs of their volunteers. For example, at first blush one would think that mentors do not need training. They are just asked to meet with a child a few hours a week and be a friend. Yet, forming a relationship between a child and an adult stranger is actually quite difficult and often frustrating for the adult.[16]

Years of study have shown that without at least some training (at the beginning or, better yet, on an ongoing basis), most mentoring matches will not work.[17] Volunteers' initial understanding of program goals and their role in achieving those goals shapes the way in which they interact with youth and, in turn, the type of relationships that form and the overall effectiveness of the mentoring experience.[18] In addition, mentors greatly benefit from learning about basic youth development (what an 8-year-old is like), communications, building trust and handling common challenges. As shown in Table 2, mentors who received a good orientation and training (including the provision of information about the young person with whom they would be matched, general youth development principles, expectations about the nature and content of mentoring activities, and lessons from the experiences of other mentors in the program) were much more likely to form "developmental" relationships, a type of relationship that was found to be particularly helpful to the children. These relationships tended to last longer and these mentors ultimately provided their youth with more guidance and advice than did "prescriptive" mentors who, unlike the developmental mentors, viewed *their* goals for the match, rather than those of the youth, as primary.

In a study of a career preparation/career mentoring program, McClanahan found that volunteers who received more hours of formal training at the beginning of their involvement with a youth increased the length of the youth's and volunteer's program involvement and encouraged the mentors to engage in more types of activities that were encouraged by the program—career mentoring, social activities and career preparatory activities.[19] Table 3 illustrates the extent to which hours of formal training are positively correlated with desirable features of the mentoring relationships that McClanahan studied—match length, and engagement in social and career preparatory activities.

Table 2: **Match Type by Training**

	Developmental	Prescriptive
Training	75% (n=45)	25% (n=15)
No Training	41% (n=9)	59% (n=13)

Source: Morrow and Styles, 1995 p.111

Two types of training have proven to be valuable for volunteers:

- Content-focused training in how to do the tasks, such as tutoring; and
- Process-focused training in how to work well in the host environment, such as a school or hospital.

While volunteer organizers may underestimate the breadth of content-focused training needed, all too often the need for process-oriented training is completely overlooked. Tutoring programs, for example, may train volunteers in how to read with a child, but the effectiveness of the volunteers also critically depends on how well they "fit in" to the school.[20] For example, when a volunteer tutor arrives, does she know where she is supposed to go? Is there a location set aside for her to meet with the young person she is scheduled to tutor? More generally, do teachers and administrators perceive volunteers as interlopers or as valuable assets for the school and its students? In addition, being aware of the school culture and rules can make or break a program. Volunteers need to know about rules for "checking in," using school equipment, honoring the dress code, understanding when and how to access teachers.[21]

When volunteers are well-prepared, they not only know what is expected of them and what they are likely to face on-site, they can also be confident that their work will be meaningful and have value for the students they serve. At a minimum, volunteers need to be thoroughly briefed about the rules and procedures of the program. If volunteers are working within an institution (school, library, hospital), they should be made aware of the institution's rules. They need to know how and with whom to communicate if they have a problem—they cannot make it or there is a problem on the job, for example. Such training not only makes the volunteer more effective on the "job," but also provides trainees with more information about what the environment will be like—allowing them to drop out if they discover they are not up to the required tasks. A practical, effective way of delivering this latter type of information is to have a current volunteer come to the orientation or training sessions and describe and answer questions about their experience.

Table 3: **Mentor Training And Relationship Characteristics**

Relationship Characteristics	**Hours of Formal Training**
Length of match	.28***
Engage in career mentoring (mentor report)	.16**
Engage in social activities (mentor report)	.23***
Engage in career preparatory activities (mentor report)	.18***
Engage in work activities (mentor report)	.01

Source: McClanahan, 1998.

** Indicates that the correlation is statistically different from zero at the 0.05 level of significance.

***Indicates that the correlation is statistically different from zero at the 0.01 level of significance.

Ongoing Management and Support

Just as the quality of management makes or breaks a business, management is essential for effective volunteering. We discuss three aspects of management: volunteer assignment, supervision and communications.

The Right Person for the Right Task

Having well-defined tasks laid out and communicated to the volunteer (and to those with whom the volunteer will work) is the first step in attracting and retaining effective volunteers. Ill-defined tasks, like "Help the teacher," communicates to both the volunteer and the teacher that their work really is not critical. Volunteer jobs should be carefully designed to provide the volunteer with meaningful work in which both he or she and paid staff who may work beside them know how the volunteer's contributions help to achieve the mission of the organization.

It is useful for programs to provide a range of well-defined tasks from which volunteers can choose.[22] While not all volunteer programs can do this (for example some mentoring programs only provide one type of mentoring opportunity), many programs can provide volunteers with a wide selection of opportunities. It is advantageous if tasks range widely in terms of both the kind of service the volunteers are performing and the amount of time they are expected to commit to that service. Many programs develop a hierarchy of volunteer positions that leaves room for several levels of involvement and that also appeals to a range of interests and strengths. For example, volunteers in Lincoln Nebraska's Comprehensive School Health Initiative (CSHI) provide youth with language arts, science, fine arts and social skills, and physical activities, as well as special interest clubs and classes. This range of activities provides niches to accommodate the interests of the children who attend and of the volunteers who serve.[23] Similarly, Experience Corps began by requiring volunteers to make a minimum 15-hour per week commitment. However, as the project evolved, it opened itself up to volunteers who could not make such large time commitments. By blending full-, half- and part-time volunteers, the program was able to continue to use volunteers as their interests and life circumstances changed.[24]

Providing a range of opportunities can include more than consideration of volunteers' time and interests. Some programs that recruit volunteers from poor communities—including people who have limited experience with either work or service—are taking particular care to craft opportunities in which novice service providers can be successful. Many of the parents of CSHI youth (who were expected to volunteer in the program) are examples of these novice service providers. Their roles in the afterschool program have been carefully designed both to take advantage of their individual strengths and to help them build parenting skills. Similarly, a program in Denver uses parents of Head Start children as volunteers. Parents provide various child care services, and all receive the training and support they need to fulfill their duties.

Providing a range of opportunities and levels of commitment can help programs attract volunteers from a variety of economic, educational, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, who offer different skills, expertise and life experiences. Temple University's Experience Corps, which mobilizes older adult volunteers to help schools achieve their stated educational objectives

by fostering literacy skills among elementary school students, has partnered with residential facilities as a means of recruiting volunteers who may not otherwise participate in service programs. By targeting these facilities in particular neighborhoods, Experience Corps staff can solicit volunteers who may not typically consider doing so (or who may not typically be asked). For example, a team of Spanish-speaking older adults from a senior center created a storytelling troupe that regularly visits a Philadelphia elementary school to help bilingual children gain a greater appreciation of their cultural heritage. In New York state, the West Seneca AmeriCorps program recruits and maintains a large, diverse pool of volunteers and then has the flexibility to link them to activities where their backgrounds contribute to their effectiveness.

Linking the right volunteer to the right job is also a critical step in making a successful program. Just as any corporate executive will tell you that hiring the right people is the key to profitability, so "hiring" the right volunteers is critical to the effectiveness of a volunteer program. The volunteer coordinator needs to understand the requirements of volunteer jobs, as well as the qualifications and characteristics of the volunteer applicants, well enough to know which assignments to give to which volunteers. While some of this information could be obtained in writing, most effective coordinators talk to both the volunteers and those who will use them in order to make the best match. In most mentoring programs, for example, the coordinator often interviews both the youth and the volunteer applicants to get a sense of their interests and personalities. By doing so, programs can both contribute to the development of effective relationships and prevent youth from "voting with their feet"—that is, failing to show up for meetings or withdrawing from the relationship altogether.[25] In other programs, volunteer coordinators interview applicants to learn more about their level of commitment, skills, and competing time obligations to ensure a "good fit" between the volunteer and the job.

Host agencies are asked about the extent to which they already use (and therefore are accustomed to working with) volunteers, whether there is dedicated staff assigned to manage them, and the nature and content of the work the volunteer will be expected to perform. By gathering the most complete information available, organizations that provide volunteers can identify a "good fit," which will help ensure the satisfaction of both the volunteer and the host agency.

Support and Supervision

Regular supervision or monitoring is crucial to ensure that volunteers are being effective. When professional staff spend more time interacting with volunteers, the volunteers have better "attendance" and do a better job than do volunteers without supervision. Especially early in the volunteers' assignments, they need substantial assistance and guidance. Access to either professional staff or other experienced volunteers can help volunteers get through the rough spots that might otherwise lead to frustration and departure.

The most systematic research on supervision examines its effect on volunteer mentors. This research shows that ongoing supervision is the most important program element in achieving a high rate of interaction among pairs. In 1992, P/PV conducted an implementation study of Big Brothers Big Sisters, examining matches in eight cities.[26] A telephone survey was conducted with a randomly selected subset of the mentors (821 of the 2,948 actively matched with youth in 1992). Table 4 shows that agencies providing staff-initiated professional supervision—which a staff member, rather than the volunteer, initiates as a means of supervising the progress of the match—had a lower percentage of failed matches. In another mentoring program, in which supervision was grafted onto existing staff's jobs with no reduction in other responsibilities, only 26 percent of the matches met on a regular basis for a minimum of six months (a one-year commitment was expected).[27] Programs in which mentors are not regularly contacted by program staff

reported the most "failed" matches—those that did not meet consistently and, thus, never developed into relationships.[28] In general, the research shows that mentoring pairs in programs that provide regular supervision were the most likely to meet frequently for the longest periods—and regular meetings over an extended period of time are essential if the relationship is to be a "success."[29] Supervisors help mentors deal with situations in which youth fail to show up for scheduled meetings, do not talk about personal issues or are not interested in the activities the mentor has planned.

Research on volunteer mentoring programs also finds that supervisors can be instrumental in helping mentors do a better job and forge appropriate roles.[30] Mentors often need to be reminded to be patient and take the youth's interests into account rather than to push their own goals, agenda and values onto the youth. Regular interaction between volunteers and staff not only ensures that pairs are meeting, but can help promote the development of positive and lasting relationships.

In a study of 266 mentors and 376 students in 13 hospital-based career mentoring programs, McClanahan found that volunteers who attended more of the mentor support groups were more likely to take a developmental approach to the relationship. Table 5 illustrates the correlation between desirable match features and the number of ongoing support meetings that mentors attend with their peers.

As the tables indicate, volunteers (and consequently those they serve) considerably benefit from the advice and guidance they receive from both program staff and their peers (e.g., matches are longer and the kinds of activities engaged in are those

Table 4: **Meeting Variables During the Four Weeks Prior to Survey (by Supervision Factors)**

Supervision	Match Not Meeting (%)	Failed Matches (%)
	##	###
Caseworker initiates contact	10.4	12.8
Volunteer initiates contact	19.2	42.9
	###	#
Caseworkers have hands-on role	9.7	12.7
Caseworkers use referrals	17.3	27.6
		###
Caseworkers supervise	10.6	10.9
Supervision done by interns	12.4	27.0
	#	##
Face-to-face caseworker contact	9.3	10.3
Contact by phone	13.3	22.6

Source: Furano et al., 1992. p.51.

\# Indicates that the percentage or averages of the two numbers listed below that symbol differ with respect to this variable at a0.10 level of significance.

Indicates that the percentages or averages of the two numbers listed below that symbol differ with respect to this variable at a 0.05 level of significance.

Indicates that the percentages or averages of the two numbers listed below that symbol differ with respect to this variable at a 0.01 level of significance.

intended by the program and desired by the youth). Most volunteers experience some frustration, especially early on the job as they learn the role. Access to either professional staff or other more experienced volunteers, through a volunteer support group, can help volunteers get through the rough spots.

Similarly, ongoing staff support can greatly leverage the value of volunteers' time by ensuring that they spend their limited time doing their primary job—which tends to be direct contact with people. Staff should do the background work, such as ordering materials, or tasks that require more specialized knowledge, such as preparing individualized lesson plans for one-on-one tutoring sessions.[31]

Some programs that do not employ sufficient staff to maintain regular contact with and provide support to volunteers have developed program structures (e.g., preestablished regular meetings between mentors and mentees, and transportation assistance) that partially compensate for lack of staff. For volunteers with busy schedules, having a specific time to meet helps build their volunteering obligation securely into their overall commitments. The programs that relied on these program structures found that "attendance" by volunteers improved with these structural supports.[32] However, reliance on structural program features does little to foster the development of or improvement in volunteers' skills. Thus, while set volunteer times and transportation assistance are useful practices, they are less effective than the provision of regular, ongoing support from professional staff.

Table 5: **Mentor Training and Relationship Characteristics**

Relationship Characteristics	**Number of Meetings with Other Mentors**
Length of match	.35***
Developmental style	.16*
Youth input	.02
Mentor support	-.08
Engage in career mentoring (mentor report)	.24***
Engage in social activities (mentor report)	.40***
Engage in career prep activities (mentor report)	.27***
Engage in work activities (mentor report)	-.04

Source: McClanahan, 1998.

* Indicates that the correlation is statistically different from zero at the 0.10 level of significance.

** Indicates that the correlation is statistically different from zero at the 0.05 level of significance.

*** Indicates that the correlation is statistically different from zero at the 0.01 level of significance.

Another supervision strategy some programs have tried is using long-term or more experienced volunteers to supervise others. For example, in the late 1990s, The Ford Foundation funded the Spectrum of Service project, a national demonstration of seven service programs that explored ways of combining stipended long-term volunteers with unpaid service providers.[33] In many of these programs, the AmeriCorps members (who had committed to serve for a year) provided a cohesive structure and supervision for hundreds of volunteer tutors. Similarly, some mentoring programs operated mentor support groups headed by a long-term mentor. While this strategy is cheaper than a staff-supervision model, care must be taken to ensure that the senior volunteer who is providing the supervision is adequately trained. While it is unclear how frequently this occurs within volunteer programs, support groups and volunteer supervisors can end up being "the blind leading the blind," reinforcing unproductive practices or failing to identify or adequately deal with problems. Providing volunteer labor without sufficient resources to support and supervise this work is likely to be ineffective and possibly damaging.

Many institutions take on volunteers, such as mentors, as a way to extend services without allocating any additional resources. Existing employees are expected to take on supervision of the volunteers or the mentor-youth matches without any reduction in their other responsibilities. Not surprisingly, the institutionally based programs we studied that did not devote specialized resources to supervising volunteers were, for the most part, not successful. For example, in two such mentoring programs, located in residential institutions for juvenile offenders, only 38 percent of matches met for longer than six months, while the remainder lasted six months or less (28 percent lasted between four and six months, and 34 percent lasted three months or less). Even among those matches that lasted six months or more, about 30 percent met only sporadically; that is, less than twice a month, on average, across the life of the relationship.[34]

Employees given the responsibility for overseeing volunteers were often hampered by several factors. First and foremost was the addition of volunteer supervision to their existing responsibilities—this is a phenomenon not only evident in juvenile facilities, but in a variety of cash-strapped agencies that recognize the value of volunteers but are often ill-equipped to manage them. Second, supervisors often felt they had no authority over volunteers and were thus reluctant to follow up with those who failed to keep meeting with their youth. Finally, volunteers' roles within the institution were not clearly defined. In the juvenile institution example, supervisors did not know if the mentoring program was part of a youth's treatment plan or an activity that was simply an add-on and therefore not subject to formal oversight or tracking. Those supervisors who saw the program as extraneous (an add-on) provided mentors with far less information and support than did supervisors who saw the program as an integral part of the youth's treatment.

Failure to allocate additional resources to fund the supervision necessary for effective mentoring brought the downfall of these mentoring efforts. Other institutions need to avoid this mistake if efforts to develop volunteer components are to succeed. Setting aside dedicated staff time for the related tasks of volunteer orientation, training and supervision is essential and often overlooked, especially by those organizations for which effective program implementation is familiar but volunteer management (or mentoring) is not.

Communication

Another critical element of an effective program's infrastructure is good communication, both internal and external. One of its most important areas of internal communication is on scheduling. Volunteers need to have advance notice of when and where they are needed. If they are not needed on a particular day (perhaps because the youth they meet with is sick, the school is closed or materials that are needed for their project have not arrived), they

also need to know. Volunteers express frustration when they arrive at the appointed time and are unable to do the work assigned them.[35] Similarly, if a volunteer cannot show up because of work or sickness, the student, work crew or teacher who expects the volunteer needs to know about it in advance so they can readjust their plans. Without advance warning (and the more the better), both volunteers and the service recipients get frustrated, and the volunteer program gets marginalized by both.

Another type of communication that is often underemphasized by volunteer programs is the need for good external relations. To foster collaboration, volunteer programs need both initial "buy-in" and ongoing support from the partner agencies where volunteers are placed. Large institutions, such as schools, can present particular challenges because they are traditionally hierarchical and somewhat insular. Programs we have studied have taken a variety of approaches to meeting these challenges. For example, the Providence Summerbridge program, one of P/PV's Spectrum of Service demonstration sites, met with officials from the city's Board of Education prior to program implementation to provide information about what the program sought to accomplish, who it would help and how, and, most important, what the outcomes had been for program participants elsewhere in the country.[36]

Many factors affect buy-in. One of the most important is that the staff of the host organization clearly understand how the volunteers will help it better achieve its mission. When the volunteer program's objectives align with an institution's goals, administrators and staff are more likely to work constructively with the volunteer program. Programs seeking access to schools, for example, need to illustrate how they will contribute to student success—what services the volunteers will deliver, who will benefit and what the outcomes will be.

Even prior to approaching the schools with whom programs seek to work, many of the more successful programs we have studied identify the ways their program designs might contribute to existing educational plans or priorities.[37] The sites articulate this "fit" on several administrative and operational levels, from state departments of education to individual school buildings. For example, Providence's Summerbridge program designed its initiative both to enhance educational outcomes and to be in line with Rhode Island's school reform efforts. Volunteer Maryland initiated its outreach to schools at the state level as well, ensuring buy-in at the top, and counting on the fact that schools would be more likely to pay attention to information coming from a source they recognize and respect than they would to information from an outside entity.

Sites in the Spectrum of Service demonstration in schools have devoted significant time to providing information and materials to prospective school partners. In Philadelphia, prior to program implementation, staff met with the principal, reading specialist and all the teachers whose students will be tutored, to explain not only the structure and content of the programming, but also the recruitment and training process for the service providers and volunteers. Similarly, in Boston, staff from Generations, Incorporated, a program that seeks to improve the literacy skills of second- and third-grade students, met with school personnel prior to program implementation and explained what they sought to accomplish and exactly what the responsibilities would be for each player, including the volunteers, paid service providers, youth and school personnel.

Philadelphia's Experience Corps got school-level buy-in by involving teachers and administrators in project planning and developing individualized frameworks for integrating volunteers into each school's environment. Leaps in Literacy similarly meets with school principals before the school year begins to "iron out" potential problems, a process that school administrators feel is extremely useful. Similarly,

Volunteer Maryland staff lay groundwork for the program through an extensive process of service site preparation that includes the development of a written plan, site visits by Volunteer Maryland staff and preservice training. As a result, programmatic goals and objectives, as well as each partner's roles and responsibilities, are clear to all involved.[38]

The effort to address issues specific to individual schools—such as scheduling, staff meetings and the level of in-school support that can be provided for volunteers—is an essential step toward earning school "buy-in." In the absence of "buy-in," programs run the risk of having to work with school administrators and teachers who are uninterested in, or in the worst cases, hostile toward, the support they seek to provide through the work of their volunteers. This can translate into an environment that the volunteer perceives as inhospitable. When the volunteer abandons her or his commitment, he or she is disillusioned, the school is disappointed (and, perhaps, somewhat more resistant to the next volunteer who appears), and the young people do not receive the services intended for them.

Summary and Cost Implications

To close the gap between rhetoric and reality, effective volunteer programs need to incorporate the critical elements of infrastructure into their regimen. While volunteering has long been a staple of American productivity, the kinds of things that volunteers are asked to do are becoming increasingly complex, particularly as the federal government devolves responsibility for delivering a range of social services to states and localities. Volunteers can address many of these tougher issues, as P/PV's reports on mentoring show.[39] But benefits are not automatically bestowed when volunteers show up. No matter how well intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct their efforts, they will remain ineffective at best or, worse, become disenchanted and withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process.

Our research indicates that three elements are vitally important to the success of any volunteer program:

1. The screening process provides programs with an opportunity to select adults most likely to be successful as volunteers by looking for individuals who have the appropriate attitudes, time and skills needed to succeed.

2. Orientation and training ensure that volunteers have the specific skills needed to be effective, and realistic expectations of what they can accomplish.

3. Management and ongoing support of volunteers by staff ensure that volunteer hours are not squandered and that the volunteers are as effective as possible.

Unfortunately, this infrastructure is not free. Staff time and program resources must be explicitly devoted to these tasks. There is relatively little information on the cost of good quality infrastructure, but inferring from a study conducted by Fountain and Arbreton on the cost of mentoring, infrastructure is likely to cost a program approximately $300 per year per volunteer.[40] This study examined in detail the costs of 52 mentoring programs that had, on average, 178 volunteers. They found that, on average, staff spent 52 hours per week screening and training volunteers, and 28 hours per week supervising those 178 volunteers. This suggests that approximately 23 hours per volunteer per year was devoted to screening, training and management. Valuing this time using the typical staff pay in the sample ($23,000 a year plus benefits), the infrastructure cost comes to approximately $300 per volunteer.[41] (Obviously, in more expensive labor markets, the cost would be more; if volunteers provide some of the supervision, costs would be less—but paid staff would have to spend extra time training the volunteer managers.)

Program staff of effective volunteering programs reside at the junction where busy administrators and overworked employees (such as teachers, hospital staff), dedicated volunteers and service recipients (such as patients and students who need academic help and individual attention) intersect. Staff ensure that qualified volunteers show up consistently when they are expected to do meaningful tasks that accomplish the mission of the program, without burdening employees of the host organization. Programs with the necessary structure can achieve this goal.

As Marc Freedman has written, "Without [infrastructure], all that remains is fervor. And fervor alone is not only evanescent and insufficient, but potentially treacherous."[42]

Endnotes

1 This article was commissioned for the School of Law, Duke University. A similar version may also be found in *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 62:4 pp. 199-218 or at http://www.law.duke.edu.journals/621LCPG rossman or at http://www.ppv.org. The authors thank Charles Clotfelter for his patience and persistence in making this a better paper.

2 Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray Weitzman, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1996.

3 Marc Freedman, *Seniors in National and Community Service*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1994.

4 Marc Freedman and Linda Fried, *Launching Experience Corps*. Oakland, Calif.: Civic Ventures, 1999. Experience Corps seeks to mobilize a cadre of older adult volunteers to help elementary school children improve their reading skills, and aims both to enhance childhood literacy and engage elders in meaningful activity.

5 The President's Summit for America's Future, held in Philadelphia in April 1997, called on philanthropies, corporations, nonprofits, individuals and entire communities to expand the reach and impact of five essential features of effective youth development programming: caring adults; safe places and structured activities; a healthy start for a healthy future; marketable skills; and opportunities to give back through service to one's community.

6 Virginia A. Hodgkinson et al., *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, Volume II. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1995.

7 Brent Staples, "Editorial Notebook: Mr. Bush's Voodoo Urban Policy, Nobless Oblige Alone Dooms Our Children." *The New York Times*, April 25, 1991.

8 *Business Growth Plan for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America*. Philadelphia: Replication and Program Strategies, Inc., June, 1998.

9 Protecting service recipients from harm is a responsibility of all service providers. Beginning in 1996, the Corporation for National Service (the entity that administers the AmeriCorps program, among others) attached a special condition related to criminal history record checks to its grant awards, noting that all programs where there is substantial, direct contact with children are required to conduct criminal record checks, to the extent permitted by state and local law, as part of the screening process. While by no means a panacea, criminal record checks are an essential tool that helps to ensure the safety of service recipients, as well as the reputation of service providers.

10 Depending on the nature of the tasks to be performed and the skills and experience that the volunteer brings, training can be rather informal or quite intensive. In mentoring programs, volunteers receive anywhere from two to eight hours of pre-match training, plus ongoing support from peers or staff. AmeriCorps members, regardless of the type of service performed, participate in weekly training sessions during their tour of service, with many also spending from several days to an entire week engaged in relatively intensive pre-service training.

11 Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.

12 G. Downey et al., "Rejection Sensitivity and Children's Interpersonal Difficulties." *Child Development*, 69, 1998.

13 Jean Baldwin Grossman and Jean E. Rhodes, "The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 2000.

14 See endnote #12.

15 When Grossman and Rhodes statistically adjusted for the possibility of self-selection bias through two-stage least squares (2SLS), they had to combine the less than three-month group with the three- to six-month group. The 2SLS investigation found that most of the early termination estimates (0 to 6 months) were insignificant, but the pattern of impacts still primarily held. There were no significant, positive effects for short matches lasting less than six months and, in fact, the only significant finding for this group was an increase in alcohol use. The largest number of significant, positive effects emerged in the 12-month or longer group, an increase in perceived scholastic competence and reductions in substance use.

16 Kristine V. Morrow and Melanie B. Styles, *Building Relationships With Youth in Program Settings: A Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1995; Melanie B. Styles and Kristine V. Morrow, *Understanding How Youth and Elders Form Relationships: A Study of Four Linking Lifetimes Programs.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1992.

17 Cynthia L. Sipe, *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1996.

18 See endnote #16.

19 Wendy McClanahan, *Relationships in a Career Mentoring Program: Lessons Learned From the Hospital Youth Mentoring* Program. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1998. This study involved interviewing 266 mentors and 376 students in 13 hospital-based career mentoring programs.

20 Barbara Wasik, "Volunteer Tutoring Programs: Do We Know What Works?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 1997; Barbara Wasik, "Using Volunteers as Reading Tutors: Guidelines for Successful Practices." *The Reading Teacher*, 1998.

21 Kathryn Furano and Corina Chavez, *Combining Paid Service and Volunteerism: Strategies for Effective Practice in School Settings.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.

22 Id.

23 Id.

24 See endnote #4.

25 See endnote #16.

26 Kathryn Furano et al., *Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Program Practices.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1992. There are more than 500 BBBS agencies across the United States. P/PV solicited the participation of a group of agencies that would reflect variations in the BBBS operation. Staff visited 26 agencies and 15 were selected for four studies based on their willingness to participate in the research, size, geographic distribution, gender of participants served and variation in program characteristics.

27 Crystal A. Mecartney et al., *Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System: Findings from Two Pilot Programs.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1994.

28 Id.

29 Amy W. Johnson, *An Evaluation of the Long-Term Impacts of the Sponsor-A-Scholar Program on Student Performance. Final Report to The Commonwealth Fund.* Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. 1998; David E. VanPatten, *Team Works Evaluation Project Report.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Dare Mighty Things, Inc.,1997; Leonard LoSciuto et al., "An Outcome Evaluation of Across Ages: An Intergenerational Mentoring Approach to Drug Prevention." *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 11, 1996; Cynthia Sipe, "Mentoring Adolescents: What Have We Learned," in

Contemporary Issues in Mentoring (Jean Baldwin Grossman, ed). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999, *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research 1988-1995*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1996.

30 Kathryn Furano et al., *Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Program Practices*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1993; Cynthia Sipe, *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1996; Wendy McClanahan, *Relationships in a Career Mentoring Program: Lessons Learned From the Hospital Youth Mentoring Program*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1998.

31 See endnote #21.

32 *Evaluation of the Mentoring Center and Bay Area Mentoring Efforts. First Evaluation Report*. Redwood City, Calif.: Network Training and Research Group, 1996.

33 The stipended volunteers are either AmeriCorps or Experience Corps members. Experience Corps members are adults aged 55 and older.

34 See endnote #23.

35 See endnote #21.

36 Providence Summerbridge provides academic and social support to motivated middle-school students in the Providence public school system and helps those students enter and succeed in college preparatory high schools. Providence Summerbridge also provides opportunities for talented high school and college students to teach and contribute to community empowerment. Summerbridge operates in more than 40 cities nationwide, and receives funding from the Corporation for National Service.

37 See endnote #21.

38 Id.

39 Jean Baldwin Grossman and Joseph P. Tierney, "Does Mentoring Work? An Impact Study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program." *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 22:3, June 1998, 402-425. This article reports that BBBS participants, after 18 months in the program, were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol or hit someone than were control group youth, and had improved school attendance and performance, felt better about school, and had improved relationships with peers and family.

40 Douglas L. Fountain and Amy J.A. Arbreton, "The Cost of Mentoring," in *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring* (Jean Baldwin Grossman, ed.). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.

41 The cost of screening, training and management is likely to be fairly constant across programs of different size: Fountain and Arbreton found that the unit cost of these programs did not diminish as the size of the program grew.

42 Marc Freedman, *The Kindness of Strangers: Reflections on the Mentoring Movement*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1992, p.60.

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