

MAKING THE MOST OF VOLUNTEERS

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I

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are recognized as a vital national resource, but they are not without their critics. Many view volunteering as being more about socializing than about ameliorating social problems. Many others, however, particularly in the social service arena, recognize the value of volunteers and are giving them increasing responsibility for delivering services. In these settings, the effectiveness of volunteers depends critically on the support they receive from the programs in which they work.

This essay discusses the elements that experience has shown need to be in place to allow volunteers to be most effective, whether it be at a host organization, like a school, where volunteers affiliated with a particular agency or program are placed, or within the mentoring relationship, itself. Informed by extensive research on mentoring and youth service over the past twenty years, this article discusses effective volunteer practices, illustrating them with evaluation data and practical examples gleaned from both fields. It is apparent from this research that volunteers cannot simply be turned loose and left to their own devices without training and supervision. Programs need to provide infrastructures that foster and support effective volunteering.

II

BACKGROUND

Every year, more than ninety million Americans donate more than twenty billion hours of their time to providing services.¹ These volunteers serve on nonprofit boards, sing in their church choirs, participate in neighborhood clean-ups, deliver meals to the elderly, and provide countless other services. Without this donated labor, organizations dependent on volunteers would not reach nearly the number of people or provide the level of service they do.

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1. *See generally* LINDA JUCOVY & KATHRYN FURANO, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, UNITING THE EFFORTS OF VOLUNTEERS AND PAID SERVICE PROVIDERS: CURRENT PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD (1998).

Volunteering not only helps the recipients of services, it often benefits the volunteers themselves. Most volunteers 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 whom one does not belong, is a powerful way of connecting people from these different spheres. For example, volunteer programs that bring the middle class public into the classrooms of low income children open the volunteers' eyes to the challenges that teachers and children in poor schools face. Service also makes many volunteers feel useful. For isolated adults, such as the elderly, it can provide needed social connections. Volunteering can even provide physical benefits. A twenty-five-year National Institute of Mental Health study found "that 'highly organized' activity [such as regular volunteering] is the single strongest predictor, other than not smoking, of longevity and vitality."² Results from a recent senior service program, Experience Corps (whose volunteers are primarily in their fifties and sixties), found that while thirty percent of their volunteers reported to be in "excellent" or "very good" health before they started volunteering, forty-two percent reported such health after their volunteering experience.³ Similarly, after volunteering for one year, these participants reported less difficulty in reading a map, driving, taking medications, using a calculator, and shopping for groceries.⁴

Citing the many good outcomes that can result from volunteers, politicians from both parties advocate voluntarism. After taking office, 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. Also during Bush's Administration, Congress passed the legislation that created the Commission for National Service. During the Clinton Administration, Congress pre-authorized the National Service legislation and established the Corporation for National Service that would oversee the newly created AmeriCorps program as well as oversee other existing service/volunteer programs, including Foster Grandparents and VISTA. In 1996, President Clinton spoke of his vision of a million people serving as volunteer tutors in furtherance of his America Reads Challenge, which seeks to ensure that every child is an able reader by the time she or he enters the third grade. In 1997, the four living presidents backed a call for voluntarism and charity to help America's youth.⁵

2. MARC FREEDMAN, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, SENIORS IN NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY: A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE COMMONWEALTH FUND'S AMERICANS OVER 55 AT WORK PROGRAM ii (1994).

3. See MARC FREEDMAN & LINDA FRIED, CIVIC VENTURES, LAUNCHING EXPERIENCE CORPS 65 (Jan. 1999). Experience Corps seeks to mobilize a cadre of older adult volunteers to help elementary school children improve their reading skills. Experience Corps is also a means of both enhancing childhood literacy and engaging elders in meaningful activity.

4. See *id.*

5. The President's Summit for America's Future, held in Philadelphia in April 1997, called on philanthropies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, individuals, and entire communities to expand

Admittedly, 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. In 1993, only 9.7% of the ninety-three million volunteers worked in "human services," aiding the homeless, staffing crisis hot lines, or working with elderly.⁶ The Institute for Policy Studies estimates that only seven to fifteen percent of the volunteering done through churches (which one would expect to be more socially minded than many other organizations) extends beyond the walls of the church into the community. Pastor Eugene Rivers III of the Azusa Christian Community in Boston, who combines street outreach and the redemptive power of faith to reclaim high-risk youth in a Dorchester neighborhood, has challenged, "If there are really 993 million volunteers in American then why are our cities worse than they ever have been?"⁷ Other critics fear that governmental backing of voluntarism is motivated only by a desire to cut the federal budget, and they ridicule the notion that volunteers can solve serious social problems.

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

Indeed, the nature of volunteering is in transition. Not only is society asking volunteers to coach youth events and organize fund-raisers, but, increasingly, society is asking volunteers to undertake more complex tasks. This trend is particularly apparent in the social service arena as the responsibility for delivering a range of services transfers to the local level. Rather than supplementing and supporting the efforts of paid staff members, more organizations today are asking volunteers to serve in more staff-like roles to control costs.

Given this trend, organizations that utilize volunteers are beginning to realize that many staff issues, such as pay, working conditions, and training, also apply to volunteers who play critical roles or make major time commitments. In the past, whether volunteers personally benefited from the experience was not considered; today, if volunteers are expected to be dependable and dedicate more of their time, programs need to think about the personal benefits their unpaid workforce receives. Similarly, as more services are delivered by volunteers—for example, the number of mentors who volunteered with Big Brothers

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. See Jonathan Alter, *Powell's New War*, NEWSWEEK, Apr. 28, 1997, at 33–34.

6. See II VIRGINIA A. HODGKINSON ET AL., INDEPENDENT SECTOR, GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING IN THE UNITED STATES 138 (1995).

7. Michael J. Gerson, *Can Do-Gooders Do Much Good?*, US NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 28, 1997, at 27.

Big Sisters of America increased by nearly fifty percent in 1996 and 1997⁸—the more an organization's reputation is affected by the quality of work being done by volunteers.

The insights shared in this essay come from twenty years of studying 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 the success of a volunteer program: screening, training, and ongoing management and support. The screening process provides organizations the opportunity to select those adults who are most likely to be successful as volunteers by finding individuals who already have the appropriate attitudes or skills necessary to succeed. Orientation and training ensure that volunteers build the specific skills necessary to be effective and that they have realistic expectations of what they can accomplish. Ongoing management and support of volunteers is critical for ensuring that volunteer hours are not squandered, weak skills are strengthened, and volunteers are used most effectively.

III

SCREENING

Operating a successful volunteer effort begins with the selection of volunteers. Not every well-intentioned person makes a good volunteer for every task. Programs should therefore screen applicants with the 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. This is especially true for volunteers who work with vulnerable populations such as children, the mentally retarded, and the fragile elderly. To help ensure the safety of the population they are serving, many mentoring and other volunteer programs operating in schools require references and conduct police background checks. All AmeriCorps programs that provide service to vulnerable populations are required to conduct criminal history background checks on AmeriCorps members.⁹ Similarly, if the volunteer's role includes driving others, his driving record should be checked.

A second and equally important screening criterion should be the level of skills the applicant possesses. Volunteers can play significant roles in complex jobs but not without the appropriate skills. Programs can teach volunteers

8. See BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA, BUSINESS GROWTH PLAN FOR BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA 4 (June 29, 1998).

9. Protecting service recipients from harm is a responsibility of all service providers. Beginning in 1996, the Corporation for National Service (one entity that administers the AmeriCorps program) attached a special condition related to criminal history record checks to the grants it awards. All programs in which 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 ensure the safety of service recipients as well as the reputation of service providers. See John C. Patterson, *Criminal History Record Checks*, Nonprofit Risk Management Center, 1998 Washington, D.C., at 2.

needed skills (which can be both costly and time-consuming),¹⁰ screen for those who already have the requisite 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, however, programs need to be explicit about what skills or attitudes applicants need to bring with them. For example, mentoring programs have learned it is difficult to teach volunteers who want to “fix” a child how to spend sufficient time building the relationship to make the child receptive to the mentor’s efforts. This type of volunteer is more suited to be 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 with a youth.

Understanding how great a time commitment a volunteer is able to make is essential. Some volunteer opportunities, such as one-day clean-ups or beautification activities, require little time or skill. However, activities that are more likely to have enduring impacts require persistence. It is a waste of time and resources to train and supervise a volunteer who leaves the program soon after starting. Such attrition can also seriously damage a volunteer program’s relationship with a host organization.

Selecting a volunteer who can honor his time commitment is particularly important when the volunteer’s job, whether primarily or secondarily, is to form a relationship with others. Vulnerable individuals, such as the youth or the elderly, can be emotionally damaged when good-hearted volunteers who start befriending them decide they really do not have the time to continue. Feelings of rejection and disappointment, on the part of the children, in particular, may lead to a host of negative emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.¹¹

Studying the effects of volunteer mentoring over time, Jean Grossman and Jean Rhodes found, as reported in Table 1, 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 the randomly selected control group youth who did not receive a mentor.¹²

10. Carla Herrera *et al.*, *Mentoring School-Age Children: Relationship Development in Community-Based and School-Based Programs*, P/PV, Apr. 2000, at 20–21. Depending on the nature of the tasks to be performed and the skills and experience the volunteers bring, 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 tours of service, with many also spending from several days to an entire week engaged in relatively intensive pre-service training. See Corporation for National and Community Service, *Principles for High Quality Service Programs* (Jan. 1994).

11. See G. Downey *et al.*, *Rejection sensitivity and children’s interpersonal difficulties*, 1998 *CHILD DEV.* 69.

12. See JEAN BALDWIN GROSSMAN & JEAN E. RHODES, *PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, THE TEST OF TIME: PREDICTORS AND EFFECTS OF DURATION IN YOUTH MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS* 29 (1999).

TABLE 1
ESTIMATED IMPACTS OF BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS
BY THE LENGTH OF MATCH

Outcome	Length of Match			
	<3 Mos	3-6 Mos	6-12 Mos	>12 Mos
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: JEAN BALDWIN GROSSMAN & JEAN E. RHODES, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, THE TEST OF TIME: PREDICTORS AND EFFECTS OF DURATION IN YOUTH MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS 29 (1999).

Note: The numbers in the table indicate the estimated effect of length of match, in comparison to the control group, for each outcome indication.

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .01$

These findings are consistent with previous work that demonstrated the particular vulnerabilities of youth related to relationships that are disrupted.¹³ Yet, it is unclear whether these negative effects stemmed from the youth's feelings of rejection and disappointment or from some other sort of self-selection processes or contextual influences.¹⁴

Given these risks, program staff should review potential volunteers' life commitments and ask the volunteers how they intend to fit their volunteering responsibilities into their schedules. If the staff remained concerned that the individuals' other commitments suggest they will have difficulty serving on a consistent basis, the staff should assign the volunteers to roles other than mentoring or other relationship-intensive roles.

13. See Downey et al., *supra* note 11, at 69.

14. 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 (zero-six months) were insignificant, but the pattern of impacts still primarily held. There were no significant, positive effects for 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 twelve-month or longer group, an increase in perceived scholastic competence and reductions in substance use. See GROSSMAN & RHODES, *supra* note 12, at 20.

IV TRAINING AND SKILLS

No program can expect volunteers to walk “on the job” without any instruction. Although the need for training is obvious in some programs—such as in crisis phone centers or medically related tasks—many programs underestimate the training needs of their volunteers. For example, at first blush, one would think that mentors do not need training—they are simply asked to befriend a child with whom they will meet for a few hours a week. Yet forming a relationship between a child and an adult stranger is actually quite difficult and often frustrating.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ The volunteers’ initial understanding of the program’s 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.¹⁷ Volunteer mentors also greatly benefit from learning about basic youth development, communications, trust-building, and handling common challenges.¹⁸ As shown in Table 2, mentors who received good orientation and training—including, but not limited to, 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 satisfying “developmental relationships.” Developmental relationships are defined as those in which the mentor holds expectations that vary over time in relation to their perception of the youth’s needs. These relationships tend to last longer and the mentors ultimately provide their youth with more guidance and advice than “prescriptive” mentors. Prescriptive mentors view their goals for the relationship as primary over the youths’.

15. See generally KRISTINE V. MORROW & MELANIE B. STYLES, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH IN PROGRAM SETTINGS: A STUDY OF BIG BROTHER/BIG SISTERS (1995); MELANIE B. STYLES & KRISTINE V. MORROW, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUTH AND ELDERS FORM RELATIONSHIPS: A STUDY OF FOUR LINKING LIFETIMES PROGRAMS (1992).

16. See CYNTHIA L. SIPE, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, MENTORING: A SYNTHESIS OF P/PV’S RESEARCH: 1988-1995, at 9 (1996).

17. See MORROW & STYLES, *supra* note 15, at iii.

18. See *id.* at 108.

TABLE 2
MATCH TYPE BY TRAINING

Type of Match	Received Good Orientation and Training?	
	YES	NO
Developmental ^a	75% (n=45)	41% (n=9)
Prescriptive ^b	25% (n=15)	59% (n=13)

Source: KRISTINE V. MORROW & MELANIE B. STYLES, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH IN PROGRAM SETTINGS: A STUDY OF BIG BROTHER/BIG SISTERS 111 (1995).

^a Developmental features include avoiding lectures, providing mentees opportunities to suggest activities, and spending time pursuing shared interests as a means of building trust and forging a connection.

^b Prescriptive approaches involve a focus on what the mentor believed to be in the best interest of the mentee, featuring lectures about the evils of drinking or using illicit drugs, or mentors deciding what activities to engage in.

In a study of a career preparation/career mentoring program, Wendy McClanahan found that volunteers who received more hours of formal training at the beginning of the relationship increased the length of the youth's and volunteer's involvement in the program.¹⁹ Mentors who received more training also engaged in more activities encouraged by the program, such as career mentoring, social activities, and career preparatory activities.²⁰ Table 3 illustrates the extent to which hours of formal training are positively correlated with desirable features of the mentoring relationships McClanahan studied.²¹ Three of those features—match length, engagement in social activities, and career preparatory activities—are correlated at a 0.01 level of significance, indicating that there is only a one percent chance that the relationship between these variables happened by chance. There is a five percent chance that the statistical relationship between hours of training and engagement in career mentoring happened by chance. There was no statistically significant correlation between the amount of training received by the mentor and the volunteers' engagement in work activities.

19. See WENDY S. MCCLANAHAN, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, RELATIONSHIPS IN A CAREER MENTORING PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE HOSPITAL YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM 39 (Sept. 1998) (explaining a study that involved interviewing 266 mentors and 376 students in 15 hospital-based career mentoring programs).

20. See *id.*

21. See *id.*

TABLE 3
MENTOR TRAINING AND RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Relationship Characteristics [†]	Hours of Formal Training
Length of match	.28**
Engage in career mentoring	.16*
Engage in social activities	.23**
Engage in career preparatory activities	.18**
Engage in work activities	.01

Source: WENDY S. McCLANAHAN, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, RELATIONSHIPS IN A CAREER MENTORING PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE HOSPITAL YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM 39 (Sept. 1998).

Note: Numbers shown are correlation coefficients

[†] All but the "length of match" characteristic reflect self-reported values.

* 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.

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. While volunteer organizers may underestimate the breadth of content-focused training needed, the need for process-oriented training is often overlooked completely. Tutoring programs may train volunteers in how to read with a child, but the effectiveness of the volunteers also critically depends on how well they fit into the school.²² For example, when a volunteer tutor arrives, does he know where he is supposed to go? Is there a location set aside for him to meet with the youth he is scheduled to tutor? More generally, do teachers and administrators perceive volunteers as interlopers or as valuable assets for the school and its students? One key to this perception is whether volunteers know, and feel comfortable operating within, the school culture. Recognizing if and when a teacher can be interrupted during class time or knowing whom to ask in order to use the copy machine, for example, suggests that the volunteer is an asset rather than a nuisance.²³

When volunteers are well-prepared, they not only know what is expected of them and what they are likely to face on-site, but they can also be confident that

22. See generally Barbara A. Wasik, *Using Volunteers as Reading Tutors: Guidelines for Successful Practices*, 51 *READING TEACHER* 562 (1998); Barbara A. Wasik, *Volunteer Tutoring Programs: Do We Know What Works?* 1997 *PHI DELTA KAPPAN* 282.

23. See KATHRYN FURANO & CORINA CHAVEZ, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, *COMBINING PAID SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERISM: STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN SCHOOL SETTINGS* 8 (1999).

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 and of the person with whom to communicate any problems. Such training not only makes the volunteers more effective "on-the-job," but also provides them with more information about the program environment, allowing them to leave the program if they are not really up to the required tasks. A practically 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.

V

ONGOING MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Quality management is essential for effective volunteering. This section of the article discusses three aspects of management: volunteer assignment, supervision, and communications.

A. 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 designed carefully to provide volunteers with meaningful work and to provide both volunteers and paid staff an understanding of how the volunteers' contributions help achieve the mission of the organization.

It is useful for programs to provide a range of well-defined tasks from which volunteers can choose.²⁴ While not all volunteer programs can do so (for example, some mentoring programs provide only one type of mentoring opportunity), many programs can provide volunteers with a wide selection of opportunities. As reported in Jucovy and Furano,

[t]asks should range widely in terms of both the kind of service being performed and the amount of time they are expected to commit to that service. Many programs develop a hierarchy of volunteer positions that leave room for several levels of involvement and that also appeal to a range of interests and strengths. For example, volunteers in Lincoln, Nebraska's Comprehensive School Health Initiative ("CSHI") provide youth with skills in language arts, science, fine arts, social interactions, and physical fitness, as well as offering them special interest clubs and classes. This range of activities provides the children as well as the volunteers niches to accommodate their interests.²⁵

Similarly, Experience Corps, which initially required volunteers to make a

24. See JUCOVY & FURANO, *supra* note 1, at 5-6.

25. See *id.* at 6.

minimum fifteen-hour per week commitment, later allowed lesser commitments to accommodate volunteers who could not make such large time commitments.²⁶ By blending full- and part-time volunteers, the program was able to continue to use volunteers as their interests and life circumstances changed.²⁷

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. For example, some programs recruit volunteers with limited experience with either work or service. These programs must ensure that the range of opportunities they offer will allow the novice service providers to succeed. The CSHI program has successfully used many of the parents of the CSHI youth even though their backgrounds were quite limited. The parents' roles in the after-school program have been carefully designed 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 to provide various child care services, giving the parents the specific training and support they need to fulfill their duties.

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 for older individuals as a means of recruiting volunteers who may not otherwise participate in service programs. 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, the West Seneca AmeriCorps program recruits and maintains a large, diverse pool of volunteers, taking advantage of disparate culture, racial, and age differences by connecting individuals to volunteer opportunities that suit their respective experience and backgrounds, which, in turn, are believed to enhance the work they do.

Linking the right volunteers 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 the volunteer jobs and the qualifications and characteristics of the volunteer applicants well enough to know which assignments to give to which volunteers. While some of the necessary information could be obtained in writing, 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. Finding out the youth preferences is especially important. By doing so, programs can both contribute to the development of effective relationships and

26. See FREEDMAN & FRIED, *supra* note 3, at 72.

27. See *id.* at 79.

prevent youth from “voting with their feet,” that is, failing to show up for meetings or withdrawing from the relationship altogether.²⁸

In other programs, coordinators also interview applicants to learn about their level of commitment and skill, being sure to ask questions about other potentially competing time obligations, as well as employment, educational background, and life experiences. 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 the volunteers, and the nature and content of the work the volunteers 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.

B. Support and Supervision

Regular supervision or monitoring is crucial to ensure the effective use of volunteers. When professional staff spend time interacting with volunteers, the volunteers have better “attendance” and do a better job. Volunteers especially need substantial assistance and guidance early in their assignments. Access to either professional staff or experienced volunteers can help volunteers get through the rough spots that might otherwise lead to frustration and departure.

The most systematic research on the supervision of volunteer mentors shows that ongoing supervision is the most important program element in achieving a high rate of interaction among mentoring pairs. In 1992, Public/Private Ventures conducted an implementation study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, examining mentoring matches in eight cities.²⁹ A telephone survey was conducted with a randomly selected subset of the mentors (821 of the 2,948 actively matched with youth in 1992). The data show that agencies providing staff-initiated professional supervision—that 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. (Table 4.) In another mentoring program where supervision was grafted onto existing staff’s jobs with no reduction in other responsibilities, only twenty-six percent of the matches met on a regular basis for a minimum of six months where a one-year commitment was expected.³⁰ Programs in which mentors are not contacted regularly by program staff reported the most failed matches—those that did not meet consistently

28. See MORROW & STYLES, *supra* note 15, at 18.

29. See KATHRYN FURANO ET. AL., PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS: A STUDY OF PROGRAM PRACTICES 11 (1992). There are more than 500 Big Brothers/Big Sisters (“BBBS”) agencies across the United States. P/PV solicited participation of a group of agencies that would reflect the variations in BBBS operations. Staff visited 26 agencies, and 15 were selected for four studies based on the following: willingness to participate in the research, size, geographic distribution, gender of participants served, and variation of program characteristics. For their study, variation in practices was the overriding criterion. See *id.*

30. See CRYSTAL A. MECARTNEY ET AL., PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, MENTORING IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: FINDINGS FROM TWO PILOT PROGRAMS iii (Winter 1994).

and, thus, never developed into relationships.³¹ In general, the research shows that mentoring programs that provide regular supervision were the most likely to meet most frequently for the longest periods—and regular meetings over an extended period of time are essential if the relationship is going to be a success.³² 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.

TABLE 4
MEETING VARIABLES DURING 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
Interns supervise	12.4	27.0
	#	##
Face-to-face caseworker contact	9.3	10.3
Telephone contact	13.3	22.6

Source: KATHRYN FURANO ET AL., PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS: A STUDY OF PROGRAM PRACTICES 51 (1992).

Indicates that the percentages or averages of the two numbers listed below that symbol differ with respect to this variable at a 0.10 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.

31. *See id.* at 53.

32. *See generally* AMY W. JOHNSON, MATHEMATICA POLICY RESEARCH, INC., AN EVALUATION OF THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF THE SPONSOR-A-SCHOLAR PROGRAM ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE: FINAL REPORT TO THE COMMONWEALTH FUND (1998); DAVID E. VANPATTEN, DARE MIGHTY THINGS, INC., TEAM WORKS EVALUATION PROJECT REPORT (1997); Leonard LoScuto et al., *An Outcome Evaluation of Across Ages: An Intergenerational Mentoring Approach to Drug Prevention*, 11 J. ADOLESCENT RES. 116 (1996); SIPE, *supra* note 16.

Research on volunteer mentoring programs also shows that supervisors can be instrumental in helping mentors perform better and forge appropriate roles.³³ Mentors often need to be reminded to be patient and take the youth's interests into account rather than push their goals, agenda, and values onto the youth. Regular interaction between volunteers and staff not only ensures that the youth and the mentor are meeting, but can help promote the development of positive and lasting relationships.

In a study of 266 mentors and 376 students in thirteen hospital-based career mentoring programs, McClanahan found that mentors who attended more of the discussion groups used for ongoing support in these programs were more likely to be rated by their mentees as taking a developmental approach to the relationship. In other words, these mentors, rather than being "prescriptive"—for example, focused on doing what they believe to be in the best interest of the mentee and delivering lectures about the evils of drinking or using illegal drugs or deciding themselves what activities to engage in—are instead focused on accentuating the "developmental" features of the relationship—avoiding lectures, providing an opportunity for the mentee to suggest activities, and spending time pursuing shared interests as a means of building trust and forging a connection. Table 5 illustrates the correlation between desirable match features and the number of ongoing support meetings that mentors attend with their peers.

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 [†]	.24***
Engage in social activities [†]	.40***
Engage in career preparation activities [†]	.27***
Engage in work activities [†]	-.04

Source: WENDY S. MCCLANAHAN, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, RELATIONSHIPS IN A CAREER MENTORING PROGRAM: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE HOSPITAL YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM 37 (Sept. 1998).

Note: Numbers shown are correlation coefficients.

[†] Indicates mentor-reported values.

* 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.

33. See generally sources cited *supra* note 34; MCCLANAHAN, *supra* note 20; SIPE, *supra* note 16.

As Tables 4 and 5 indicate, volunteers, and consequently those they serve, benefit considerably from the advice and guidance they receive from the program staff and their peers (for example, matches are longer and the kinds of activities engaged in are those intended—and desired—by the program). Most volunteers experience some level of frustration, especially early on in the job. For example, the teacher with which a volunteer is working gives the volunteer menial tasks, the volunteer does not know how to accomplish a certain task, or rules of the host organization get in the volunteer's way. Access to either professional staff or other more experienced volunteers can help volunteers overcome the frustration and succeed.

Similarly, ongoing staff support can greatly leverage the value of the volunteers' time by ensuring that the volunteers spend their limited time doing their primary jobs that typically are direct contact with the people being served. The professional 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.³⁴

Some programs that do not employ sufficient staff to maintain regular contact with volunteers provide support that partially compensate for lack of staff. For example, they have established regular meetings between mentors and mentees and provided transportation assistance. The programs that established these program structures found that their volunteers' attendance improved, but the structural program did little to foster the development of or improvement in the volunteers' skills.³⁵ 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.

Another supervision strategy some programs have tried is using long-term or more experienced volunteers to supervise new volunteers. For the last three years, the Ford Foundation has funded the Spectrum of Service ("SOS") project, a national demonstration comprising seven service programs that explore ways of combining long-term volunteers who receive stipends with unpaid service providers.³⁶ In many of these programs, the AmeriCorps members, who have committed to serve for at least one year, establish a cohesive structure and provide supervision for hundreds of volunteer tutors. Similarly, some mentoring programs operate 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. Inadequately trained support groups and volunteer supervisors can reinforce unproductive practices or fail to identify or deal adequately with problems.

34. See JUCOVY & FURANO, *supra* note 1, at 7.

35. See NETWORK TRAINING AND RESEARCH GROUP, EVALUATION OF THE MENTORING CENTER AND BAY AREA MENTORING EFFORTS: FIRST EVALUATION REPORT (1996).

36. The volunteers with stipends are either AmeriCorps or Experience Corps members. See JUCOVY & FURANO, *supra* note 1, at 1. Experience Corps members are adults age fifty-five and older.

Many institutions utilize volunteers, such as mentors, to extend services without allocating any additional resources. These volunteers can strain employee resources, however, because the employees are expected to supervise the volunteers or the mentor-youth matches without any reduction in their other responsibilities. For example, the institutionally based programs we studied that did not devote specialized resources to supervising volunteers were for the most part unsuccessful. In two such mentoring programs located in residential institutions for juvenile offenders, only thirty-eight percent of matches met for longer than six months, while the remainder lasted six months or less (twenty-eight percent lasted between four and six months, and thirty-four percent lasted three months or less). Even among those matches that lasted six months or more, about thirty percent met only sporadically, that is, less than two times per month, on average, across the life of the relationship.³⁷

Employees given the responsibility for overseeing volunteers were often hampered by several factors. First, and foremost, the addition of volunteer supervision to existing responsibilities was burdensome. This is a phenomenon that is evident not only in juvenile facilities but in a variety of cash-strapped agencies that recognize the value of volunteers to their work 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. For example, in the juvenile institution mentoring program mentioned above, 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 an extraneous 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 was the essential downfall of these mentoring efforts. Setting aside dedicated staff time for related tasks such as volunteer orientation, training, and supervision is essential but often overlooked, especially by those organizations for whom effective program implementation is familiar but volunteer management (or mentoring) is not.

C. Communication

Another critical element of an effective program's infrastructure is good communication, both internal and external. The need for internal communication is more obvious, though not always adequately staffed. One of the most important elements of communication concerns scheduling. Volunteers need to have advance notice of when and where they are needed. They also need to know if they are not needed on a particular day, perhaps because the youth they

37. See MECARTNEY ET AL., *supra* note 30, at iii.

regularly meet with is sick, the school is closed, or materials that are needed for their project have not arrived. Volunteers express frustration when they arrive at the appointed time and are unable to do the work assigned to them.³⁸ 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. While this is not dissimilar to what is expected of employees in the workplace, what makes this lack of communication particularly vexing for school settings is that the volunteer is already an outsider who has asked to be part of the school environment. As such, this individual needs to be integrated into an otherwise typically regimented day. When a teacher includes a volunteer tutor in the lesson plan and, without notice, the volunteer fails to show up, the teacher is forced to re-adjust the class schedule. As a result, the volunteer can feel more like a burden than a blessing to the teacher which, in turn, can generate resistance on the part of teachers who might not feel the benefit is ultimately worth the cost. In the face of this resistance, the volunteer can become frustrated and choose to withdraw.

External communication is also often underemphasized by volunteer programs. To foster collaboration, volunteer programs need both initial “buy-in” support 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 take a variety of approaches to meeting these challenges. For example, the Providence Summerbridge program, one of Public/Private Venture’s SOS demonstration sites, met with officials from the city’s board of education before implementing the program to provide information about what the program sought to accomplish, who it would help and how, and, most importantly, what the outcomes had been for program participants elsewhere in the country.³⁹

Many factors affect the initial “buy-in” support. One of the most important is that the staff of the host organization clearly understand how the volunteers will help it better achieve its missions. When the volunteer program’s objectives align with the 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 before approaching the schools with whom the programs seek to work, many of the more successful programs identify the ways their program designs

38. See FURANO & CHAVEZ, *supra* note 23, at 8.

39. Providence Summerbridge, which is one of forty Summerbridge sites nationwide that are currently funded by the Corporation for National Service, among others, seeks to provide academic and social support to motivated middle school students in the Providence public school system and to help those students enter and succeed in college preparatory high schools. Providence Summerbridge also provides opportunities to talented high school and college students to teach and contribute to community empowerment.

Id. at 3.

might contribute to existing educational plans or priorities.⁴⁰ 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 to enhance educational outcomes and to be consistent 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 SOS demonstration in schools have devoted significant time to providing information and materials to prospective school partners. In Philadelphia, before the program was implemented, the staff met with the principal, reading specialist, and all the teachers whose students were to be tutored, to explain not only the structure and content of the program, 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 beforehand and explained what they sought to accomplish and what the responsibilities would be for each party, including the volunteers, paid service providers, youth, and school personnel.

Philadelphia’s Experience Corps further accomplished school-level “buy-in” by involving

teachers and administrators in project planning and developing individualized frameworks for integrating volunteers into each school’s environment. This effort to address issues specific to individual schools, such as scheduling, staff meetings and the level of in-school support for volunteers is an essential step toward earning school “buy-in.” Leaps in Literacy similarly meets with school principals before the school year begins in order to “iron out” potential problems, a process that school administrators feel is extremely useful.⁴¹

Volunteer Maryland also lays the 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 pre-service training. As a result, programmatic goals and objectives, as well as each partner’s roles and responsibilities, are clear to all involved.⁴² Programs that do not take the steps necessary to achieve this initial “buy-in” support 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 his commitment, he 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 intended services.

40. *See id.* at 5.

41. JUCOVY & FURANO, *supra* note 1, at 7.

42. *See id.* at 5.

VI

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 regular regimen. While volunteering has long been a staple of the productivity of American nonprofit organizations, the kinds of things volunteers are asked to do are becoming increasingly complex, particularly as the federal government transfers responsibility for delivering a range of social services to states and localities. Although Public/Private Ventures' report on mentoring showed that volunteers can address many of these tougher issues, benefits are not automatically bestowed when volunteers show up.⁴³ No matter how well-intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct their efforts, they will remain at best ineffective or, worse, become disenchanted and withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process.

Unfortunately, this infrastructure is not free. Staff time and program resources must be explicitly devoted to these tasks. Although there is relatively little information on the cost of good quality infrastructures, inferring from a study conducted by Douglas L. Fountain and Amy Arbretton on the cost of mentoring, they are likely to cost programs approximately \$300 per year per volunteer.⁴⁴ The Fountain/Arbretton study examined the costs of fifty-two mentoring programs that had, on average, 178 volunteers. It found that, on average, the staff spent fifty-two hours per week screening and training volunteers and twenty-eight hours per week supervising those 178 volunteers. This data suggest that approximately twenty-three hours per volunteer per year was devoted to screening, training, and management.

The program staff of effective volunteering programs reside at the intersection of busy administrators and overworked employees (such as teachers and hospital staff), dedicated volunteers, and service recipients (such as patients and students who need academic help and individual attention). The 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

43. See JOSEPH P. TIERNEY ET AL., PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, MAKING A DIFFERENCE: AN IMPACT STUDY OF BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS 51 (Nov. 1995) (reporting that program participants, after 18 months in the program, were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol or hit someone than control group youth, and had improved school attendance and performance, felt better about school, and had improved relationships with peers and family, *see id.* at 1).

44. See generally Douglas L. Fountain & Amy Arbretton, *The Cost of Mentoring*, in CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN MENTORING 48 (Jean Baldwin Grossman ed., 1999). The \$300 per volunteer per year figure was approximated using the typical staff pay in the sample (\$23,000 per year) and the cost of the critical elements that make volunteers effective above and beyond recruitment, fundraising, and other administrative tasks. (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.) *See id.* at 62 (finding that the unit cost of these programs did not diminish as the size of the program grew; the cost of screening, training, and management is likely to be fairly constant across programs of different size).

achieve this goal. For, as Marc Freedman said, “Without [infrastructure], all that remains is fervor. And fervor alone is not only evanescent and insufficient, but potentially treacherous.”⁴⁵

45. MARC FREEDMAN, PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS: REFLECTIONS ON THE MENTORING MOVEMENT 60 (1992).