

ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of an evaluation of the program Volunteer Maryland! Volunteer Maryland! was one of eight national demonstration programs funded by the Commission on National and Community Service in 1993. Part of the impetus for the program was research data that indicated Marylanders volunteered less than the rest of the nation. The goal of the program was to increase the number of volunteers serving at 35 Host Sites across the state. Full-time volunteer coordinators were assigned to each of these sites. The evaluation revealed that coordinators were able to have both a quantitative and qualitative impact on these sites after a year of service.

The Impact of Volunteer Coordinators On Volunteer Programs: An Evaluation of Volunteer Maryland!

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In 1985 Susan Ellis observed, "One way to describe the needs for research in volunteerism is to say that *everything* is left to do." Ten years later Ms. Ellis acknowledges that research in the field has improved in some areas such as what motivates volunteers, but she still maintains that her observation of 1985 is still largely true (personal communication, October 3, 1995). This article, a study of the effects of volunteer coordinators on volunteer programs, attempts to fill a small part of this research void.

Volunteer Maryland! was one of eight national demonstration projects funded by The Commission on National and Community Service (now called the Corporation for National and Community Service) in the year 1993. It was launched in January in large part as a response to two research studies.

The first study found that the people of Maryland volunteered less often when compared to national averages. The study also found that many people in the state simply were not asked to volunteer. Thirty-four percent of Marylanders had volunteered in the previous twelve

months as compared to 54% nationally. The report suggested that the 34% level could be increased by 5%–7% simply by asking people to volunteer (Riter, 1990).

The second study, a needs assessment, was conducted by the Governor's Advisory Board on Service and Citizenship in 1992. This poll of community groups, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies found that these entities experienced shrinking budgets and sought ways to meet the ever-increasing demands of their clients. A comment made by many was a need for a volunteer coordinator to develop a well-trained volunteer force and provide critical, direct services to clients and communities in need.

The idea behind Volunteer Maryland! was to link the people who wanted to volunteer, but did not know where, with the agencies that needed to increase their delivery of direct services to clients, but did not know how to achieve that result.

The Volunteer Maryland! program was developed, implemented and administered by the Governor's Office on Volunteerism. The initial goals of the program were to create an effective volunteer

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program that would dramatically enhance Maryland's active volunteer participation and expand volunteer opportunities, thus engaging a diverse population of Marylanders in service.

The program's objectives were to:

1. Increase the number of Marylanders engaged in meaningful volunteer service, helping people and communities in need.
2. Improve the capacity of Maryland's non-profit and government organizations to effectively manage and sustain volunteer forces.
3. Develop new service leaders in the field of volunteerism and national service.
4. Document and evaluate the training and creation of exceptional full- and part-time service leaders.
5. Create a service culture in Maryland.

To achieve these goals and objectives, the program invited Maryland non-profit organizations, community groups, and government agencies wishing to begin or expand a volunteer program to submit applications for consideration. One hundred and two applications were received, of which 35 agencies were selected as 1993 host sites. The eligibility requirements included:

1. Demonstration that the service provided by volunteers would address real needs in the community.

2. Provision of direct service in the areas of education and youth services, the environment, human services or public safety.
3. An innovation or expansion of an existing volunteer program that would continue after the service year.

Table I describes where host sites were located across the state and the type of service in which they engaged. Specific services provided included:

- Human Services - job skill training; day care and family services; health care.
- Education - literacy tutoring; youth community service.
- Environment - wildlife protection; restoration or preservation; recycling.
- Public Safety - neighborhood and community safety; community re-entry and rehabilitation.

Those host sites chosen received a full-time (40 hours per week) volunteer coordinator for one year. The task of these coordinators was to help set up or expand the sites' existing volunteer program. Thirty-five coordinators were selected from 225 applicants each assigned to a host site. Coordinators were hired by the Volunteer Maryland! program, but were supervised by a host site administrator. Coordinators received health coverage, a stipend (\$11,000), and a post-service benefit (\$5,000) to be used for further education, or the payment of

Table I
Profiles of Host Sites

Region of Maryland	#	%
Baltimore City	14	40
Central Maryland	8	23
Suburban Washington	5	15
Western Maryland	4	11
Eastern Shore	4	11
Primary Service Emphasis	#	%
Human Services	23	66
Education	6	17
Environment	5	14
Public Safety	1	3

Note: Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore are predominantly rural.

Table II
Profiles of Coordinators

Age	#	%
20-29	13	37
30-39	9	26
40-49	6	17
50-59	3	9
60-69	4	11
Gender		
Female	23	66
Male	12	34
Race		
White	28	80
African-American	5	14
Hispanic	1	3
Asian	1	3
Education		
High School	5	14
Associate Degree	1	3
Undergraduate Degree	20	57
Graduate Degree	9	26

student loans (\$2,500 of this post-service benefit was provided by the host site.) Table II presents selected demographic data on the coordinators.

Before joining their host sites the coordinators participated in a one-month intensive training which included a Volunteer Management Training Institute curriculum. It developed participants' skills in volunteer recruitment, volunteer program management, and volunteer program sustainability. Topics under these broad areas included:

- Performing a needs assessment.
- Screening and interviewing volunteers.
- Developing volunteer positions/descriptions.
- Recognizing motivations for volunteering.
- Establishing criteria for selecting volunteers.
- Developing community relations programs.
- Communicating volunteer need through the media.
- Nurturing volunteers.
- Promoting volunteers and creating promotional ladders.
- Devising and implementing dismissal strategies.

- Volunteer recognition.
- Developing long-term goals with staff to sustain and revitalize volunteers.

After this initial training, the coordinators met as a group once a month for day-long training sessions. All training was conducted by the Chrysalis Consulting Group, a private firm of consultants and trainers in Baltimore, Maryland.

To be considered as a 1993 host site for the Volunteer Maryland! program, agencies were asked to complete a questionnaire that detailed data on their existing volunteer programs. Volunteer Maryland! wanted to know how many volunteers worked with the organization and the average number of hours served, their demographics and how long they stayed with the agency.

Twenty-eight (80%) of the 35 original host sites completed the year. The primary reason for sites leaving the program was due to an incompatibility between the host site's needs and the skills of the volunteer coordinator. Whenever these situations occurred, Volunteer Maryland! staff attempted to intervene to improve the match. Over the course of the year, in seven sites, this intervention was unsuccessful.

The number of volunteers serving at the 28 host sites increased by 4,057, a 40% increase from 1992 to 1993, and an average of 145 new volunteers per host site. Table III presents the change in number of volunteers from 1992 to 1993.

While no one can quantify the value of the volunteer experience and place a monetary value on the real benefits to the clients, volunteers, and organization, it is possible to determine the amount that it would cost to pay an employee to do the same job that the volunteer is doing. Using a formula developed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting that rates the different types of volunteer work, the total number of volunteer hours contributed at the host sites was computed into a dollar value. This formula was adapted by Maryland Public Television where hourly rates are calculated for regions of the state and by type of volunteer service. The three categories of volunteer service are:

1. Administrative/Management (i.e. board member, proposal writing).
2. Direct service to clients (i.e. stream clean-up, mentoring).
3. General support service (i.e. clerical, office support).

The total dollar value of service was \$2,322,498. The average dollar value per host site was \$82,946.

The host sites were post-tested in December of 1993 at the end of the service year using the same questionnaire they filled out to be considered for the program. Also in December the host sites completed a quality assessment of their volunteer programs. This instrument asked host site administrators to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement

with 23 statements pertaining to qualitative aspects of their volunteer programs. The assessment also included two open-ended questions. The first asked the administrators for explanations if the quality of their program had not improved. The second question asked if and how they had achieved the goals they outlined in their host site application.

Susan Vineyard (1988) in a monograph on evaluating volunteer programs states that there are some basic principles to be considered when evaluating these programs. The first principle is that the "assessment must be based on clearly stated goals and objectives." The overriding goal of the Volunteer Maryland! program was quite clear: its mission was to increase the number of volunteers serving at host sites. As the results show, this goal was achieved.

A second principle that Vineyard suggests is that the "assessment must be fair." For the assessment to be fair, it must be based on multiple perspectives. People who are involved in a program should have some input as to how it will be evaluated. A short time into the Volunteer Maryland! evaluation it became clear that simply totaling the number of volunteers at the end of the year would not be an entirely true measure of the program's success or failure. Coordinators let the evaluator know loudly and clearly that there were qualitative aspects of their performance that needed to be measured as well. Coordinators were not only bringing in volunteers; they were starting new volunteer programs, breathing life into long dormant programs, and reorganizing existing programs in an attempt to make them more efficient and "user friendly." They expressed the opinion that these efforts were just as much indicators of

Table III

Volunteers Serving with Host Sites (n = 28)	1992	1993
Total Number of Volunteers	10,020	14,077
Average per Host Site	358	503

success as tallying the number of new volunteers at the end of the year.

This input from the coordinators led to the development of a quality assessment instrument which attempted to capture and reflect the qualitative aspects of the volunteer program. The instrument used a five response Likert scale. The alternative responses were: "disagree strongly," "disagree," "agree," "agree strongly," and "no change." (There was also a "does not apply" response category.) Table IV presents the categories and the percentages of responses in all categories. Listed below are the categories and percentages of host sites that responded "agree" or "agree strongly" that their programs had improved in a particular category:

1. Our volunteer program materials are better organized (100%).
2. Our organization does a better job of accounting for volunteer contributions (96%).
3. Our volunteer job descriptions are better organized (86%).
4. Our procedures and policies regarding volunteers are more clear (86%).
5. The volunteers recruited have enhanced the effectiveness of our organization (86%).
6. Our organization has improved its ability to access needed resources for our volunteer program (86%).
7. The roles and tasks of our volunteers are better defined (83%).
8. Our organization communicates more effectively with our volunteers (82%).
9. The volunteers recruited have been utilized more effectively (82%).
10. Our organization has done a better job recruiting volunteers (81%).
11. Our volunteer activities are better managed and supervised (81%).
12. Our organization has improved its ability to network and build partnerships to help sustain our volunteer program (81%).
13. The desires and skills of our volunteers are better matched to our organization's needs (78%).
14. Our organization has a better process for screening and selecting volunteers (77%).
15. Our volunteers are trained better to perform their assigned tasks (74%).
16. Our organization does a better job of recognizing the contributions of our volunteers (73%).
17. Our volunteers have been given a better orientation regarding the purpose, policies and goals of our organization (73%).
18. The handbooks and manuals used by volunteers are better organized (72%).
19. Staff responsibilities in regard to the volunteer program are more clearly defined (72%).
20. Our staff has more confidence and trust in our volunteers (68%).
21. Our staff is better able to work with and manage our volunteers (68%).
22. Our organization does a better job of retaining volunteers (59%).
23. The volunteers we have recruited have been more reliable (50%).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The importance of volunteers to non-profit and governmental agencies cannot be overstated. Volunteers can often make the difference in whether the agency will continue to exist. The hours that volunteers contribute to these organizations can be as valuable as donations of money (McCurley and Lynch, 1989). Ironically, when non-profits face fiscal pressures volunteer coordinator/director positions are often the first to be eliminated (Bartholomew, 1989).

McCurley and Lynch (1989) note that volunteering is developing into a system in which there are two distinct types of volunteers. The first type is the long term volunteer, an individual who is dedicated to a cause or to an organization. Long term volunteers tend to shape their own jobs and the duration of their work. The jobs they perform are designed to require a steady donation of time over a prolonged period.

Over the last fifteen years, however, another type of volunteer has emerged:

Table IV
Quality Assessment of Volunteer Maryland! Host Site Volunteer Programs
Listed in Descending Percentiles with "Agree Strongly" Responses

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly	No Change
Material Better Organized			55%	45%	
Job Descriptions		4%	41%	45%	10%
Procedures and Policies		4%	45%	41%	10%
Enhanced Effectiveness		4%	45%	41%	4%
Better Recruiting		4%	45%	36%	9%
Better Managed and Supervised		4%	45%	36%	14%
Ability to Network			45%	36%	9%
Screening & Selecting		4%	45%	32%	14%
Utilized Effectively		9%	50%	32%	4%
Staff has more confidence			36%	32%	27%
Access Needed Resources			54%	32%	9%
Handbooks or Manuals		4%	45%	27%	9%
Better Orientation		4%	36%	27%	27%
Staff Able to Work with and Manage		4%	41%	27%	23%
Accounting for Contributions			73%	23%	4%
More Reliable		9%	27%	23%	27%
Roles & Tasks Better Defined		4%	60%	23%	9%
Recognizing Contributions			50%	23%	23%
Desires & Skills Better Matched		4%	60%	18%	14%
Staff Responsibility Defined		4%	54%	18%	18%
Trained Better		4%	60%	14%	18%
Retention		9%	45%	14%	27%
Communicate Effectively			82%		14%

Note: The "does not apply" response category is not reported in this Table and accounts for some categories not totaling 100%.

the short term volunteer. They have a general interest in an organization or cause, but are not necessarily dedicated to it. These individuals want a well-defined job of limited duration. They tend not to stay too long with an organization, and want to control the amount of time they donate.

The recent emergence of the short term volunteer means that non-profit and governmental agencies are in greater competition for the limited number of hours individuals are willing to contribute. This competition for volunteer hours is a further argument for the need for volunteer coordinators in these agencies. To quote McCurley and Lynch (1989)

Volunteer programs do not work spontaneously, but require someone to devote the care and attention required for fitting together a complex system matching the needs of the agency with the needs of the community.

This study demonstrates that full-time, trained volunteer coordinators can have a significant impact on both increasing the number of volunteers and improving the qualitative aspects of a volunteer program. The importance of the need for paid, full-time and well-trained coordinators has been noted by others (Honer, 1986; Bartholomew, 1989; Brudney and Brown, 1990). Full-time, trained coordinators give an agency an edge on its competition. They are capable of implementing

the full spectrum of the volunteer management process—program planning, job development and design, recruitment, screening and interviewing, orientation and training, supervision and motivation, recognition, and evaluation (McCurley and Lynch, 1989)—in a competent, professional manner that achieves results.

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