ABSTRACT

A major challenge of volunteer driven organizations is the need to document the impact of volunteer efforts and accomplishments. Assessment and documentation are important to the organization, volunteer administrator(s), clientele, stakeholder groups and volunteers. Determining the impact of volunteer programs requires assessing the outcomes in terms of both the project and the growth and development of the volunteer. When evaluation is a planned part of program development and goals are determined for the impact on the target audience, the community as well as the volunteers, it is possible to truly assess the outcomes of the program.

Evaluating the Impact of Volunteer Programs

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INTRODUCTION

A major challenge facing volunteer-driven organizations is the need to document the impact of volunteer efforts and accomplishments. Because volunteer administrators expend time, money and resources on volunteer involvement and development, it is essential to assess and document the impact of volunteer accomplishments as well as to justify the expense of volunteer programs (Ellis, 1986). Both assessment and documentation are of great importance and interest to the organization, volunteer administrator(s), clientele, stakeholder groups and funders, as well as the volunteers themselves. No one wants to contribute time, energy or resources to something which has no benefit, impact or useful outcome.

One of the most uncreative — and least helpful — questions posed to volunteer administrators is: "How many volunteers do we have and how many hours did they give us last year?" (Ellis, 1986). For many volunteer administrators, documentation consists of counting numbers: of volunteers, volunteer hours served, program participants and clientele reached. However, simply presenting the number of hours served without analyzing what was accomplished during those hours is not worth compiling. One of the problems in evaluating volunteer achievement is that certain types of volunteer positions require services which are described in terms of quality rather than quantity such as mentoring, counseling and youth development roles. (Bradner, 1999). These usually have long-term outcomes that make annual assessment of impact impractical.

The increasing pressure to provide evidence of the effectiveness of social programs and initiatives has led to a strong focus on outcome evaluation. Demonstrating effectiveness and measuring outcomes and impact are important and valuable components of vol-

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unteer programs (Curnan & LaCava, 1998).

Part of the evaluative challenge facing volunteer administrators is to move beyond counting numbers of volunteers, program participants and hours served toward understanding other aspects of volunteer program evaluation. Another challenge facing volunteer administrators and leadership educators lies in helping program coordinators understand, interpret and articulate the differences between the terminology which is utilized in the profession to describe volunteer program evaluation as well as to determine the value of volunteer efforts. These terms include *evaluation, program assessment* and *impact.* Finally, volunteer administrators need to assess the level of evaluation which their organization is currently utilizing, as well as determining the most appropriate level for the volunteer program which is being conducted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature will be divided into two sections. The first section will focus on defining the terms which are often utilized in volunteer program evaluation. The second section includes a discussion of three different program evaluation models.

Definition of Terms, as defined by Neufeldt and Guralnik (1988):

- **Evaluation:** 1) to find the value or amount; 2) to judge or determine the worth or quality; 3) to find the numeric value; expressed in numbers; 4) estimate.
- **Assessment:** 1) to set an estimate or value; 2) to estimate or determine the importance or value.
- **Impact:** 1) the power of an event or program; 2) to produce changes, move the feelings.

A comparison of terms finds three key similarities in the definitions of evaluation and assessment. These include the words "value," "estimate" and "determine." According to Neufeldt & Guralnik (1988), these terms are nearly synonymous. Impact, however, has a different meaning. Whereas the definitions of evaluation and assessment involve establishing relative or immediate worth, or placing or estimating the value on a project, activity or program, the definition of impact focuses upon programmatic strength and the ability to produce change. Impact, therefore, is likely to involve an assessment or evaluation in the future.

Evaluation consists of gathering information to determine value and make decisions about program effectiveness. Data are often collected in order to make immediate programmatic adjustments. This is called process evaluation. Collecting data for use in long-term decision-making is called impact evaluation. Impact evaluation provides information that will assist the volunteer administrator in determining the current value or worth of a program or activity, as well as making a judgment about the power of the program and its ability to produce intended changes in the target audience—impact.

EVALUATION MODELS

Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) Model

Rockwell and Bennett (1999) proposed a seven-step model that integrates volunteer activities (including volunteers and program participants, as well as their level of participation) into a hierarchy of evaluation, assessment and impact (see Figure 1.) The data collected at each level builds on information provided at the previous level of assessment, thus providing additional evidence of the program's effectiveness at each successive level (Rennekamp, 1998). The Rockwell and Bennett Model is a logic model for collecting evidence of program effectiveness leading to long-term impact. Data collection becomes increasingly difficult and expensive as the evaluator moves from assessing resources (the lowest level) to determining social, economic or environmental conditions that have changed over time (the highest level).

FIGURE 1.

Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) Model (Rockwell & Bennett,1999)

Resources focus on inputs expended. Resources may include the number of volunteers who staff the activity, the number of volunteer or staff hours contributed, the number of dollars (either actual or in-kind) spent, etc. Resources may also include educational materials, communicarion costs and transportation (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999).

Activities include inputs which are done in order to engage the volunteers and program participants (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). Activities include educational programs, events and activities, workshops, conferences and events, service, etc. Activities must be linked to KOSA (Knowledge, Opinions, Skills and Aspirations), Practice and SEEC (Social, Economic or Environmental Conditions) in order for a successful evaluation to be conducted and for any impact dara to be gathered.

Participation, the first output level, focuses on the target audience, program deliverers as well as actual attendees (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). Simply stated, participation is who comes, who is expected to come and who delivers the program. This may include individuals, organizations, families or communities.

Reactions are an immediate participant response to the activity (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). Reactions are often collected quantitatively via a written questionnaire or qualitatively by responding either in writing or verbally to open-ended questions. Reactions may also be collected qualitatively by debriefing or collecting feedback at the conclusion of the activity. The key information being sought at this level is "What is the participant's reaction to the activity?"

KOSA provide initial impact data (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). This data is collected at the conclusion of the activity and focuses on four key questions:

"As a result of participating in this activity...

- what new knowledge did the participants gain or learn?"
- what opinions did the participants change?"
- what skills did the participants develop?"
- what aspirations do the participants have?"

Practices are a modification or change in a practice in the participant's behavior or lifestyle. Practices are intermediate outcomes which are determined with some type of follow-up evaluation (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). In order to reach the Practices level, participants must maintain a behavioral change over a period of time. For example, if a volunteer presented a lesson on healthy after school snacks to a group of youth, the program could be evaluated initially by gathering Reactions and measuring KOSA.

Assessment of the degree to which the youth actually began choosing healthy snacks, i.e., practicing recommended behaviors, cannot be determined at an end-of-meeting evaluation. It requires follow-up measurements which allow the youth to have an opportunity to choose a healthy snack, thus indicating a change of practice. Knowing and doing are two different levels. A person may know what foods are healthy, but may choose less healthy alternatives. Assessment at this level builds on KOSA and indicates practices, a higher level of evaluation.

Social, Economic or Environmental Conditions (SEEC) must be both observable and measurable and are improved as a result of having participated in the activity (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999). These are long-term outcomes which impact either social, economic or environmental conditions. The three foci of this impact level will not be obtainable for every activity and rarely on an annual basis. However, volunteer administrators should consider at least one foci (social, economic or environmental) during program planning in order to arrive at a measurable outcome in the future.

The authors expanded the TOP Model (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999) to categorize the type of measurement which can be collected at each level and the length of time needed to collect the necessary data at each level of program evaluation. To satisfy the request of an increasing number of funders, measurement at the impact level is necessary. Not only is impact measurement the most time-consuming and expensive information to collect and document, but it also depends upon the collection of information at previous levels (see Figure 2.)

STRATEGY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY:

Ladewig (1999) described three performance measurement categories. These three categories include relevance, quality and accomplishments. Ladewig's performance measurement categories were further defined by Nall (1999).

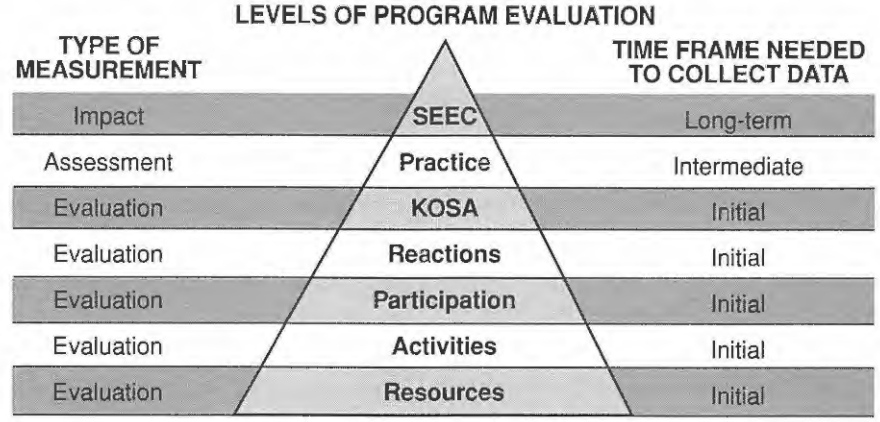
Relevance includes the processes used to identify issues and develop educational activities. Program relevance would include a description of the factors which led to the identification of the issue or need as well as the creation of the program or activity. Describing the target audience, involving planning groups, creating collaborations, conducting needs assessments, establishing priorities and projecting outcomes all provide data related to program relevance. Examples of measurable program relevance include: describing the situation which led to needs identification; the specific people or groups involved in developing and/or conducting the educational program or activity, and the process utilized to develop and implement the educational program or activity (Nall, 1999.)

Quality measurements include a variety of data. These include:

- Frequency and types of participation of target audiences
- Importance of the educational program or activity to the participants and stakeholders
- Educational methods utilized to deliver the educational activity
- Demographic information about the participants (including race, gender, age and economic status)

FIGURE 2.

TOP Model (Rockwell & Bennett,1999)



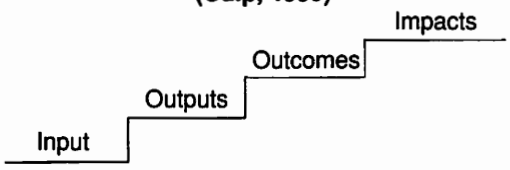
- Level of appropriateness (age, cultural and educational) of the educational activities for the participants
- Standards, criteria or goal achievement in certification programs or curricula
- Participant reactions (Nall, 1999).

Accomplishment measurements provide evidence and data which answer the question: What difference did this activity make to the participants? The accomplishment performance measurement determines if the participants made behavioral or practice changes. Questions to be answered may include: Did the public benefit? Was capacity built through knowledge gained, skills developed or opinions changed?" (Nall, 1999.)

STAGES OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAM EVALUATION:

Culp (1999) identified four stages of volunteer program evaluation (see Figure 3.) These four stages included: inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. As illustrated in Figure 3, the Stages of Volunteer Program Evaluation are steps, whereby each build upon the previous.

FIGURE 3:
Four Stages of Volunteer Program Evaluation (Culp, 1999)



Inputs are the initial stage and include those resources that are necessary to obtain the desired outputs. Examples of inputs include: the number of volunteers, the number of hours which the volunteers devoted to an activity, the value of the volunteer's time, specific volunteer performance, financial and curricular educational resources (Culp, 1999).

Outputs are the second stage of volunteer program evaluation and are needed to achieve the expected outcome of the activity. Output examples include: the numbers and demographic profiles of program participants who were reached or served through volunteer efforts and the participants efforts which result from the programs or activities delivered through volunteers efforts (Culp, 1999).

Outcomes are the third stage and are the output results. Outcomes are necessary in order to impact the participants. Examples of outcomes include tangible results which are expressed in numbers — the number of homes built, the amount of food collected for a food drive or the dollars realized in salary savings as a result of volunteer contributions (Culp, 1999). Additional examples of outcomes include the number of homeless people who received housing and the number of pre-cancer cases that were identified through cancer-awareness screening.

Impacts constitute the fourth stage of volunteer program evaluation. Impacts document the resulting impact of the program or activity upon the participants, the volunteers, clientele, stakeholders, community and the sponsoring organization. Examples of impacts include: the number of homeless people who became employed and improved their lifestyle and standard of living as a result of receiving housing or the number of individuals who underwent cancer screening, were diagnosed with pre-cancer and began initial treatment (Culp, 1999).

DISCUSSION

The work of volunteer administrators and leadership educators is often multi-faceted. Volunteer administrators need to serve the needs of clientele and fulfill the mission of the volunteer organization. They teach concepts related to the task or project such as program management, organization and leadership development. Volunteer administrators provide an opportunity for individuals to gain subject matter knowledge and skills necessary to reach a goal as well as organizational/management skills to facilitate a process also needed to reach the goal.

Volunteer administrators and leadership educators develop curriculum and teach topics such as: planning, delegation, communication, collaboration, meeting management, parliamentary procedure, group decision making, critical thinking, active and reflective listening, teamwork, group work and dynamics, conflict management, community structures and creative thinking. This infinite list of topics reflects the knowledge and skills needed to serve in various volunteer and leadership roles. There is a body of knowledge and experiences that lead to skill development that the administrator facilitates. This is usually in addition to the subject matter and content related to the project or activity. Thus, the *impact* of educational programs include what the volunteer knows and does (KOSA and Practice) as well as the social, economic or environmental conditions that are changed (SEEC) as a result of the volunteer's service (Practice).

The challenge in determining the *impact* of volunteer programs is in determining what happens as a *result* of the educational program. Accountability requires that volunteer administrators know what happens as a result of the professionals' educational efforts and what happens as a result of the volunteers' efforts. At best, volunteer administrators need to determine the accomplishments related to their programs. Volunteer administrators may know that a volunteer will use the skills and knowledge learned from educational efforts and later provide service in the community, but volunteer administrators cannot always document it.

Volunteer administrators feel the pressure to determine the outcomes and impact of volunteers who have participated in our programs. Accomplishments described in terms of what was taught, who participated and participant reactions may help volunteer administrators to determine cost effectiveness, appropriateness of methodology and the degree to which target audiences were reached (Rennekamp, 1995). However, for many stakeholders and program administrators, this is considered insufficient. Most want additional information related to knowledge gained, practices changed and social, economic or environmental conditions that are changed as a result of the volunteer administrator's efforts. To truly *evaluate* the program and determine impact, higher level data is required.

The Rockwell and Bennett hierarchy (1999) is a model for targeting outcomes of programs and has been adapted as a program development model used in planning and evaluating programs. Data may be collected at each level of the hierarchy. The data collected at the KOSA level provides stakeholders some evidence of impact and is a "stair step" to determining practice change (Rockwell & Bennett). As volunteer administrators work toward assessing impact at the SEEC level, the resources that are necessary in order to collect data and determine impact also increase. As the hierarchy is ascended, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify program outcomes that directly result from educational efforts. Because of the time lag required to determine practice changes and SEEC outcomes, it is difficult to separate program impacts from other sources of change.

See Appendix for examples of data at each level for three types of volunteer development efforts: a series of workshops, a day camp and an advisory council.

GETTING TO IMPACT

If measurable goals and objectives are articulated for the volunteer leadership program in the beginning, it will obviously be possible to ask whether these have been met (Ellis, 1986). Determining impact begins with the planning process. In order for any program evaluation or assessment to be effective, the initial step must be an identification of measurable goals and objectives. If it is important to know what the participants learned, the volunteer administrator must determine what is to be taught. This determination must be

APPENDIX

Examples of Data Gathered DuringProgram Evaluation

Targeting Outcomes of Programs Model Rockwell & Bennett (1999)	Four Stages of Program Evaluation Culp (1999)	Workshop Series	Day Camp	Advisory Council
Social, Economic or Environmental Conditions (SEEC)	**Impacts**	One year later, seven of the participants reported being elected to office (for the first time) in a church or civic group or community club.	After 12 months, the school recycling project reduced the amount of trash in the county landfill by 3,000 cubic yards and raised $1,400 from the sale of recycled aluminum.	After six months, council meetings (which formerly had lasted over three hours) were concluded in 90 minutes.
Practice Change	**Impacts**	Three individuals teamed up to teach parliamentary procedure to civic groups and school clubs.	12 youth organized a school-wide recycling project.	All council members were observed using active listening techniques of restating, clarifying and questioning to improve communication within the council.
Knowledge, Opinions, Skills & Aspirations (KOSA)	**Outcomes**	Following the parliamentary procedure workshop, all participants could correctly sequence agenda items as well as make and amend a motion.	All youth were able to group different categories of recyclables and differentiate between non-recyclables.	Following each mini-lesson, council members were asked to identify three things they planned to do to improve communication.
Reactions	**Outcomes**	Following each workshop, participants indicated that the material was helpful	The youth all said they enjoyed the environmental day camp and would start recycling at home.	Council members reported that they liked the mini-lessons and learned a lot.
Participation	**Outputs**	25 people participated in each of the four workshops.	30 youth participated in the environmental day camp.	15 council members were present for all 12 lessons and another 10 were present for 7 – 9 lessons.
Activities	**Inputs**	A series of four workshops were held to teach skills.	An environmental day camp was utilized to teach youth how to recycle.	One mini-lesson was taught each month for a year to achieve educational goals.
Resources	**Inputs**	14 staff days went into planning the event.	A $5,000 grant provided resources to teach recycling.	12 mini-lessons each required two hours of planning and preparation.

done as a part of program planning. Writing goals and objectives is not a new or unfamiliar activity for most volunteer administrators.

What is new, however, is that volunteer administrators must write plans, set goals and determine objectives with the end result (outcome) in mind. Using the KOSA, Practice Change and SEEC levels in program planning provides a framework for determining program outcomes. If participants learn this concept or develop these skills, they can make these changes in what they do. If participants change behavioral practices, then these changes in social, economic and environmental conditions) may result.

All three models of evaluation share some similarities. Each model provides a vehicle to reach and begin measuring impacts. Although the vehicle names are different, their destination is similar, whether they are called KOSA, Practice or SEEC (Rockwell & Bennett, 1999); Accomplishments (Ladewig, 1999); or Outcomes and Impacts (Culp, 1999). To measure any impact, volunteer administrators must begin with determining what knowledge was gained or which skills, opinions or aspirations were developed.

The failure to specifically articulate goals for the project (content) as well as the individual's growth and development severely limits the potential of any evaluation or assessment activity or impact determination. Volunteer administrators often focus on the outcomes of the project rather than focusing on the long-, intermediate- or short-term benefit to the program participants. The authors suggest that volunteer administrators plan for the long-term impact upon both the program participants as well as the volunteers who deliver the program or activity.

Evaluating volunteer leadership program effectiveness is dependent upon the identification of goals that clearly articulate a benefit to the volunteers who deliver the activities to the program participants. In most cases, the volunteers themselves are not identified as an audience. Rather, the volunteers are seen largely as a vehicle by which services, activities, educational programs or subject matter are delivered to a target audience.

To effectively assess the impact of volunteer leadership education, assessment must exist on two planes. The impact of the program, service or activity on the target audience as well as the impact upon the volunteer. Volunteer leadership development should not happen by accident. Goals and objectives related to the growth and development of the volunteer should be clearly articulated in the planning process. While it is certainly important to evaluate the outcome of the activity and its impact upon the target audience, it is equally important to plan for and assess the benefit to the volunteer. For volunteer administrators who plan for and measure the benefits upon both audiences, the impact of a single activity can be doubled!

Effective volunteer administrators should make an effort to develop knowledge and skills in those volunteers who deliver educational activities. An assessment of both the activity ("How well did the activity achieve its goals with the target audience?") as well as the impact of the activity upon the volunteers who delivered it to the target audience ("Through this experience and the training provided by the professional, what knowledge was gained, what skills were developed, or what practices were implemented by the volunteers?") must be conducted.

This constitutes a key difference between *volunteer development* and *volunteer management.* In volunteer development, volunteer administrators consider and plan for the growth and development of the volunteers who participate in and deliver activities or programs. Conversely, volunteer managers utilize volunteers to deliver programs to target audiences and often fail to plan or evaluate the benefit that the volunteers themselves might gain.

IMPLICATIONS

1. The impact of the educational activity upon volunteers becomes an intentional, planned component of programs. Anticipated impacts are clearly articulated during the planning process.
2. Volunteer administrators should focus on evaluating the impact of a volunteer education program while developing annual program plans or goals.
3. Effective program evaluation is ongoing and continuous, consisting of multiple assessments. Long-term impact requires long-term measurements.
4. Each volunteer administrator must realize that impact is not measured only in terms of quantity or numbers only, but rather in the long-term benefit or impact.

To effectively evaluate the impact of volunteer programs, multiple assessments will be needed. Additionally, volunteer administrators will double their evaluative information if they measure the impact of the educational program or activity on those volunteers who deliver it as well as on the program participants themselves. Finally, volunteer administrators who consistently measure the impact of their programs on the volunteers who deliver it in addition to the impact of the activity or the benefit to the program participants will have engaged in the business of developing as opposed to simply managing volunteers. Over time, volunteer development should improve both volunteer retention rates as well as program effectiveness.

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