The Determinants of Volunteering at "Partners"

Paul D. Geyer Epilogue by John Hilpert

INTRODUCTION

Recently this author conducted an evaluation designed to identify the determinants of volunteering at one agency, Partners of Wake County, North Carolina. The five-member paid staff at Partners bring troubled youths and adult volunteers (Senior Partners) together in one-on-one partnerships. They were coordinating 85 partnerships at the time of this study.

Like many such programs, Partners had difficulties in recruiting and keeping volunteers active. A comparison of the actual recruitment rates with the goals for 1980 showed that 1) too many prospective volunteers (inquirees) did not continue beyond their initial inquiry, and 2) not enough male volunteers were recruited. The evaluation addressed these specific problems.

This article presents the salient details of the research project plus an account (by Partners' Director, John Hilpert) of the implementation process and outcomes resulting from the use of the research data to improve Partners' recruitment rates.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

It was assumed that by knowing what factors influence decisions about volunteering, Partners (and any other agency) could develop procedures designed to resolve their recruitment difficulties. The evalua-

tion plans reflected that assumption:

Purpose: To provide Partners with the information necessary to allay their recruitment problems.

Objective 1: To identify the determinants of volunteering at Partners.

Objective 2: To provide recommendations for allaying the recruitment problems.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Key decisions in this research were arrangements for 1) Sample Selection, including defining the point at which potential volunteers (i.e. people who have inquired about volunteering, called inquirees) decide about volunteering at Partners, and 2) Data Collection and Analysis.

Sample Selection: A research sample of 52 inquirees were obtained from a subject pool of 84 potential volunteers who inquired about volunteering at Partners between May 10 and (Out of 84 in-August 10, 1981. quirees, 30 could not be contacted. and two refused to participate in the research.) Out of the 52 subjects. 22 attended one of the three Partners' Volunteer Orientations offered monthly during the period of data collection. Those 22 Orientation attendees were defined as "volunteers" and data provided by them was compared to data provided by Orientation non-attendees who were labeled

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"non-volunteers." This method of classifying people as volunteers and non-volunteers was decided upon because data collected by Partners on Orientation attendance during 1980 indicated that decisions about volunteering seemed to occur prior to Orientation attendance.

Data Collection and Analysis: A questionnaire designed for this research aided in collecting data. Questionnaire items fell into five categories: Demographic Characteristics; Program-specific Attitudes; Reasons for Interest; Concerns; and Awareness of Facts about Partners.

Demographic Characteristics referred to relatively unchanging attributes or experiences of a person. Among the items in this category were questions related to age, educational level, religious activity level, and previous volunteer experience. For example, to probe educational level, subjects were asked: "Which of the following educational groups were you in?" Response choices were: high school graduate or less; completed two years of college or less; completed four years of college or less; completed more than four years of college. Largely, demographic variables were probed because of findings in previous research on volunteering showing that such characteristics distinguished volunteers from non-volunteers, and because it was felt they would do so in this situation, too.

The second category of questions related to Program-specific Attitudes; positive and negative feelings held by potential volunteers about key aspects of a program. searchers have demonstrated the importance of volunteers' vis-a-vis nonvolunteers' attitudes toward numerincluding features program clients, intentions to volunteer, and opportunities for growth. Questions probing attitudes about the situation at Partners focused on program requirements, the initial inquiry contact, and intentions to attend Orien-To illustrate, the question tation.

about initial inquiries asked: "Please tell me about your first contact with Partners, and how you felt about it?" Responses to that open-ended question were recorded word-for-word, and then rated as positive, negative, or neutral by the researcher. Additionally, questions probing program requirements were stated as follows: "Do you feel the one year commitment is reasonable?" (yes, no) "Do you feel the three hour per week requirement is reasonable?" (yes, no)

The next two categories, Reasons for Interest and Concerns, represent what Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt (1974) referred to as forces pulling towards and away from volunteering. No research testing their ideas could be found. Interviews with seven active Partners' volunteers helped identify the various Reasons for Interest and Concerns items on the questionnaire. Selected items from both categories as well as the corresponding instructions are listed next:

Now I will present some specific reasons a person might have for volunteering as a Senior Partner. As I name each reason, please tell me if, up to now, the reason has applied to you.

By becoming a Senior Partner, I will meet other people.

I want to help a young person because I had difficulties myself as a youth.

Becoming a Senior Partner is helping my community.

Being a Senior Partner will challenge me.

(All of the above Reasons for Interest included yes/no response options.)

Now I will read a list of concerns. For each statement, please tell me if you are "very concerned," "somewhat concerned" or "not concerned."

Unable to complete the one year requirement.

Being unable to meet my Junior Partner for three hours per week.

Costs of activities while with your Junior Partner.

Your Junior Partner quitting.

Your ability to handle sensitive situations with your Junior Partner.

Your ability to handle possible harm to you or your family due to your Junior Partner.

Your ability to handle physical harm to your Junior Partner.

The gender of your Junior Partner.

The age of your Junior Partner.

The race of your Junior Partner.

As noted, interviews with Partners' volunteers helped identify the above items. Each of those items (as well as others not shown to conserve space) were named by at least three of the seven people interviewed.

The fifth category, Awareness of Facts about Partners, was included based on views by this author as well as the Partners' staff that decisions about volunteering should be made on the basis of accurate information, not misconceptions. Based on interviews with each of the five Partners' staff, 11 "Facts about Partners" were identified, each of which were named by at least three staff as important to making learned decisions about volunteering at Partners. Instructions and illustrative items were:

Now I will present you with some basic facts about Partners. Please tell me if you were "already aware" of each fact or if I am presenting "new information."

Youths can help pick their Senior Partners.

Senior Partners can help pick their Junior Partners.

Partners expects a one year commitment from Senior Partners.

Partners expects Senior Partners to spend three hours a week with their Junior Partners.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of seven active Senior Partners to establish the clarity of items and instructions. The final questionnaire, consisting of 64 items, was administered by telephone to 52 inquirees.

The response patterns for the 22 volunteers and 30 non-volunteers were examined statistically to identify differences on each item. A .1 probability level was set as the level at which the two groups would be said to differ significantly for any particular question. The more traditional .05 level was not employed due to the small sample and to the exploratory and situation-specific nature of the study. Statistical comparisons of the two groups' responses were made for the entire sample (i.e. without gender distinctions) and for the male subsample. Only results representing statistically significant differences are reported. (Full results can be obtained on request by writing to this author.)

RESULTS FOR THE FULL SAMPLE

Univariate analyses of the full sample indicated that 12 questionnaire items indicated important determinants of volunteering at Partners. Volunteers and non-volunteers responded differently to each of the 12 items. Table 1 lists these items and shows the exact results.

One important finding was that the level of education differed for volunteers and non-volunteers. With regard to this Demographic Characteristic, volunteers were much more

TABLE 1

RESPONSE RATES FOR ITEMS THAT SIGNIFICANTLY DISCERNED VOLUNTEERS FROM NON-VOLUNTEERS IN THE FULL SAMPLE*

VARIABLES	VOLUNTEERS N N=22	N=30
Demographic Characteristics		
Educational Level		
2 years of college or less	23%	53%
4 years of college or less	45%	33%
More than 4 years of college	32%	13%
Reasons for Interest		
I will meet other people as a Senior Partr	er 41% (yes)	80% (yes)
By becoming a Senior Partner I can help my community	64% (yes)	83% (yes)
Awareness of Facts about Partners		
Senior Partners can help pick their Junion Partners**	86% "Alre	eady 46% "Already are" Aware"
Partners expects Senior Partners to spend three hours per week with their Junior Partners	91% "Alro Awa	eady 70% "Already are" Aware"
Concerns		
The gender of your Junior Partner		
Somewhat Concerned	50%	27%
Not Concerned	50%	73%
The age of your Junior Partner**		
Somewhat Concerned	41%	16%
Not Concerned	59%	83%
Unable to complete the one year requirement**		
Very Concerned	5%	37%
Somewhat Concerned	23%	20%
Not Concerned	73%	43%

VOLUNTEERS NON-VOLUNTEERS

Unable to meet Junior Partner for three hours every week**			
Very Concerned	5%	27%	
Somewhat Concerned	14%	23%	
Not Concerned	82%	50%	
Your Junior Partner Quitting			
Very Concerned	18%	47%	
Somewhat Concerned	41%	20%	
Not Concerned	41%	33%	
Costs of activities with your Junior Partner**			
Somewhat Concerned	23%	50%	
Not Concerned	77%	50%	
Program-specific Attitudes			
How did you feel about your first contact with Partners?**			
Positive	68%	40%	
Neutral	32%	60%	

^{*} All twelve items were significant at a probability level of .01 based on chi-squares, Fisher Exact Probabilities, or t-tests.

^{**} These items were significant at .05 level of significance.

likely than non-volunteers to have completed two or more years of college. The two groups also differed in their responses to one Programspecific Attitude item: "How did you feel about your first contact with Partners?" Most volunteers gave a positive response to this question, whereas non-volunteers more often than not gave a neutral statement.

They also differed in their Reasons for Interest, at least with regard to these two items: 1) I will meet other people as a Senior Partner; and 2) By becoming a Senior Partner, I can help my community. Fewer volunteers than non-volunteers cited these two items as important.

The most discriminating set of questions were the Concerns; six were important determinants of volunteering at Partners. Volunteers were much more concerned about the age and gender of their Junior Partners compared to non-volunteers. On the other hand, non-volunteers were "very" and "somewhat" concerned far more frequently than their counterparts with regard to each of these Concerns: completing the one year commitment that is required of volunteers; meeting with their Junior Partner for three hours per week (as the agency requires); their Junior Partner quitting; and the costs of activities.

Additionally, there were two Awareness of Facts about Partners items to which volunteers and non-volunteers responded differently: they can help pick their Junior Partners; and there is a three hour per week requirement. Respondents not aware of these two facts rarely volunteered, while those people who were "already aware" of these facts usually did volunteer.

Since at least one item from each category of the proposed model was found to determine volunteering at Partners, the model was judged useful in guiding this research with regard to discerning volunteers and non-volunteers from the full sample.

RESULTS FOR THE MALE SUB-SAMPLE

Since Partners was having difficulty in recruiting male volunteers, the responses of the male subgroup were analyzed, too. Twenty-four males were in the subgroup, eleven of whom were classified as volunteers. The male volunteers differed significantly from their counterparts, the male non-volunteers, on 13 items, as Table 2 displays.

As with the full sample, males with more than two years of college education were much more likely to volunteer. Similarly, in response to the Program-specific Attitude item, "how did you feel about your first contact with Partners?," the results replicated those of the full sample. That is to say, males who gave a neutral response to this item rarely volunteered, but males who gave a positive remark usually volunteered.

Regarding Reasons for Interest in volunteering at Partners, the two groups of males differed on one item: "By becoming a Senior Partner, I will be helping my community." Most males who cited this item as a motivating force failed to volunteer. Those inquirees who said that this item was not a motivator did volunteer.

Concerns were frequently different for the two groups of males, as they were in the full sample. Seven Concerns were important determinants of volunteering by males. For each of the following Concerns, non-volunteering males reported being "very" or "somewhat" concerned much more often than their male counterparts: unable to complete the one year requirement; unable to spend three hours per week their Junior Partner; Junior Partner quitting; costs of activities; ability to handle sensitive situations that may occur while with their Junior Partner; ability to handle possible harm to you or your family; ability to handle situations involving physical harm to their Junior Partner.

Lastly, three Awareness of Facts about Partners items were important. Males who were unaware that youths help pick their Senior Partner rarely volunteered. Likewise, few non-volunteers were aware that they could help pick their Junior Partner. And males who were unaware of the one year commitment that is required by Partners never volunteered. On the other hand, males who were aware of these three items usually volunteered.

CONCLUSIONS

The results indicated that potential volunteers were not volunteering because:

- 1. Non-volunteers lacked confidence about their ability to help a youth. Their lower educational levels, concerns about their ability to handle certain situations (at least for the males), and concern about their Junior Partner quitting support the view that they felt insufficiently skilled--unable--to help.
- 2. Non-volunteers were more concerned than volunteers about being able to satisfy the program's requirements: the one year commitment, the three hours per week commitment, and the costs of activities. (Although many of the activities offered by Partners are free, non-volunteers seemed to think that the overall role could not be assumed without financial burden.) These concerns inhibited some people from volunteering.
- 3. Non-volunteers felt their interests would not be met as Senior Partners. Male non-volunteers reported an interest in meeting other people, but apparently they did not see how helping a youth would lead to meeting others. And for the full sample as well as the male subsample, there were interests in helping their community that they seemingly perceived as unattainable as a volunteer at Partners.
- 4. Non-volunteers were not satisfied with the information they received (or did not receive) during

their initial inquiry. Non-volunteers typically responded with a neutral statement when asked how they felt about their first contact with Partners. Plus non-volunteers were unaware of certain facts about program requirements. They seemed to want more information than they were getting during their inquiry, and this gap explains to a certain degree why they did not volunteer.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PART-NERS

On the basis of the conclusions, three recommendations aimed at reducing the loss of potential volunteers and recruiting more male volunteers were provided: 1) staff's response to inquirees could incorporate the information desired by inquirees: 2) recruitment advertisements could stress the ways in which volunteers' needs can be met at Partners, as well as stressing other pertinent information; and 3) the information about volunteer/non-volunteer differences could be utilized to identify potential non-volunteers for consultive and educational purposes. Each of these three recommended recruitment tactics warrant elaboration.

Restructuring the Staff's Response to Inquiries

It is possible to train the staff to respond to inquirees with a preconceived strategy involving the presentation of key information plus a procedure for evoking and addressing the concerns of each inquiree. The staff needs to inform all inquirees of such desired information as their right to help pick their Junior Partner and the time requirements they will face. Plus, the staff needs to let inquirees know that concerns are commonplace, and that the staff is interested in talking with them about their concerns.

To address individual concerns, preparation of a guide that includes responses to common concerns would help. This guide could be followed as needed, but should include responses

TABLE 2

RESPONSE RATES FOR ITEMS THAT SIGNIFICANTLY
DISCERNED MALE VOLUNTEERS FROM MALE NON-VOLUNTEERS*

VARIABLES	VOLUNTEE N=11	RS NON-	VOLUNT	EERS
YARIABLES	14=11		14=13	
Demographic Characteristics				
Educational Level**				
2 years of college or less	9%		62%	
4 years of college or less	36%		23%	
More than 4 years of college	55%		15%	
Reasons for Interest				
By becoming a Senior Partner I can help my community**	55%	(yes)	92%	(yes)
Awareness of Facts about Partners				
Youths can help pick their Senior Partners**	45%	"Already Aware"	8%	"Already Aware"
Partners expects a one year commitment from Senior Partners**	100%	"Already Aware"	62%	"Already Aware"
Senior Partners can help pick their Junior Partners**	91%	"Already Aware"	23%	"Already Aware"
Concerns				
Unable to complete the one year requirement	t**			
Very Concerned			31%	
Somewhat Concerned	9%		31%	
Not Concerned	91%		38%	
Unable to meet Junior Partner for three hours every week				
Very Concerned			23%	
Somewhat Concerned	18%		31%	
Not concerned	82%		46%	

	VOLUNTEERS NON-VOLUNTEERS	
Your Junior Partner Quitting		
Very Concerned	10%	46%
Somewhat Concerned	45%	31%
Not Concerned	45%	23%
Costs of activities with your Junior Partner**		
Very Concerned		15%
Somewhat Concerned	18%	46%
Not Concerned	82%	39%
Ability to handle sensitive situations with your Junior Partner**		
Very Concerned		31%
Somewhat Concerned	27%	46%
Not Concerned	73%	23%
Ability to handle possible harm to you or your family due to your Junior Partner**		
Very Concerned		54%
Somewhat Concerned	36%	15%
Not Concerned	64%	31%
Ability to handle physical harm to your Junior Partner**		
Very Concerned	9%	62%
Somewhat Concerned	36%	31%
Not Concerned	55%	7%
ogram-specific Attitudes		
How did you feel about your first contact with Partners**		
Positive	73% (8/11)	23% (3/13)
Neutral	27% (3/11)	77% (10/13)

^{*} All thirteen items were significant at a probability level of .01 based on chi-squares, Fisher Exact Probabilities, or t-tests.

^{**} These items were significant at .05 level of significance.

to concerns over cost, age, gender, ability to help, ability to meet the time requirements of the program, and how to meet people as a Senior Partner.

Advertisement Strategies

The information about why non-volunteers withdrew from the program can be utilized during advertisements. Advertisements could stress the ability to meet people at activities, the possibility of actively helping to pick a Junior Partner, the availability of many cost-free or low cost activities, or the fact that all types of people are able to help.

Identification of Likely Drop-Outs

Many non-volunteers had strong concerns about becoming a Senior Partner. By identifying these people, and their concerns, staff would have the opportunity to address the concerns. A questionnaire utilizing Concern statements in the same manner as they were utilized in this evaluation could be used to identify inquirees with strong concerns. questionnaire in the Appendix is comprised of the Concerns that were found to differentiate significantly volunteers and nonbetween volunteers. It employs the same instructions as well.

Inquirees who are very concerned about any of the items presented in the questionnaire could be targeted for personal interviews aimed at addressing specific concerns. This eight item questionnaire could be used during or after a person's in-A suggested method is to inform the inquiree that there will be a follow-up call in a few days. Inquirees can be informed of the purpose of the follow-up call during the initial inquiry: "We have discovered that the best way to identify and address your concerns is through the use of a short, structured questionnaire. May we call you on (fill in date) to ask you a few questions about your concerns and to talk about them?"

RELEVANCE TO FUTURE RE-SEARCH AND OTHER PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

This research was directed at resolving Partners' recruitment needs, and the data are not generalizable. Still, some of the strengths and weaknesses of this research warrant discussion. One positive feature of this research was that it provided a systematic means of addressing a problem. Partners identified a weak area and identified possible solutions. One of those solutions was the inquiry guide described below. felt that a systematic means for responding to inquirees would reduce attrition. Yet they did not know for sure that that was the needed change, nor did they know what to include in the guide even if it was needed. The research helped confirm the need for an inquiry guide, and showed what it needed to cover.

A second important aspect of this research was that data were maintained on a regular basis by the program so that weak areas could be identified and so that the effects of change could be monitored. Without data on Orientation attendance by inquirees, they would not have known that their recruitment goals were not being reached.

A third key to this research was the close liaison between the researcher and the program director. Effective communication and supportiveness enhanced the research process.

Finally, a key to identifying potential determinants of volunteering was reliance on previous research and theory. As it turned out, Schindler-Rainman and Lippitts' theory (that positive and negative forces influence decisions about volunteering) proved useful—especially with regard to negative forces, or Concerns.

Some weak areas or pitfalls to keep in mind also emerged from this study. First, the questionnaire used in this study included too many items. Rather than the 64 items on the questionnaire, 40 items would be a better amount.

Second, this research took longer than at first estimated, which was not conducive to positive relationships between the researcher and Program Director. In this case the delay did not adversely affect relationships, but other situations may turn out less well. Researchers need either to work faster to keep within time constraints, or to provide more realistic time estimates. This advice is especially important when research problems are of a nature where delays are not possible.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

by John Hilpert Director of Wake County Partners

Paul Geyer presented his conclusions and recommendations to the Wake County Partners' Council, who endorsed them. Subsequently, staff met with Paul for an in-depth discussion of the results and recommendations, with the goal of advising the staff in their effort to implement change based on the data. Our response to each of Paul's recommendations follows:

1. Restructuring the Staff's Response to Inquirees

It was clear from the study that we were not addressing some key concerns expressed by people inquiring about the program, primarily because we were not eliciting discussions of that kind. Reflecting on how we normally handled a phone inquiry, it became clear that we were talking most of the time with what was a fairly standard "pitch."

I drafted the attached "Inquiry Guide" which was discussed and adopted by Staff (See Appendix B). On Paul's recommendation, we were to begin with some type of affirming statement to set the tone. The key change then was to get the person to talk about themselves and, through active listening, begin to set a climate where the inquiree would feel

comfortable raising concerns. Our "pitch" was also revised by eliminating some rather minor points, and instead touching on some common needs as shown in the study. If concerns had not been raised by the end of the talk, then we were to raise a couple as examples to see if we could trigger further discussion of concerns by inquirees. To help us learn this new approach, Paul conducted some training with the staff, primarily involving role plays.

We also developed a handout for our mailings to inquirees. The format, "Some Questions You May Have about Partners But Were Afraid to Ask," seems to be useful to inquirees.

2. Revise Advertisements

Since our primary source of volunteers is from our existing Senior Partners, via word of mouth, we did not focus too much attention here. However, radio spots and presentations to groups were altered. The major change was the revision of our outlines for group presentations so as to cover the major concerns that the study identified.

3. Identify Likely Dropouts

Paul recommended a follow-up phone call to survey people about their concerns. We have not done this in that format. Rather we strive to address concerns during the inquiry, by following the guide. Also we have an experienced Senior Partner do our regular follow-up calls to find out if people intend to attend Orientation. Having a volunteer do this seems to make it easier for an inquiree to talk about concerns.

IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS

I will present both objective and subjective outcomes. Objectively, the above actions appear to have resulted in a moderate increase in the number of inquirees who actually attended Orientation. For the first half of 1981, the rate was 35%, with the rate going to 50% for the first half of 1982 when the Guide was

used. The rate was trending upward so it is difficult to separate the impact of our changes. We just got our results from the last half of 1982 and the rate has dropped back below 40%. Informally, we sense that we may have slipped back into the old way of operating. No follow-up training was planned at the time. This will be done shortly.

Note that our success in getting more people to Orientation did not adversely affect the rate at which people became active volunteers. This rate of conversion has remained at its usual high of about 80%. The use of the Guide to attract more people to Orientation would have achieved nothing if that rate of conversion had dropped.

Subjectively, shifting to a greater emphasis on listening, instead of talking at, the person inquiring has had two positive results. First, staff enjoys these contacts more since we are hearing a person's story and not becoming so rote ourselves. Second, we can more clearly identify "hot prospects" and thereby can focus increased efforts at getting them to Orientation. In summary, Paul's study was a valuable part of our ongoing efforts to strive for excellence.

APPENDIX A

We would like to ask you a few questions regarding some concerns you might have about volunteering at Partners. I will read a list of concerns. Some of them you might have thought about before, and others you might not have thought about. Either way, try to think now about how much a particular statement concerns you. And for each statement, please tell me if you are "very concerned," "somewhat concerned," or "not concerned."

	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not Concerned
 I will meet other people through Partners. 			
Being qualified to be a Senior Partner.		****	
Being able to help your Junior Partner.			
4. The gender of your Junior Partner.			
The age of your Junior Partner.			
6. Being unable to complete a full year as a Senior Partner.			
 Being unable to meet with your Junior Partner for three hours a week. 			
8. The cost of what you and your Junior Partner will do.			

APPENDIX B

INQUIRY GUIDE

1. AFFIRM

- * I'm glad you decided to check us out
- * Name & our name

2. GET THEIR STORY

- * How did you hear about Partners?
- * What's your interest in kids?
- * Sounds like you want to help--we need you
- * Lots of Active Listening

3. SHARE OUR STORY

- * (Stop for air & let them react)
- * Youth beginning to have difficulties
- * Recent examples of youth that touch their story
- * 10-18; boys & girls--so you have a choice
- * Help them through problems of growing up through fun, friendship & as a role model
- * Support available
- * You as an individual can make a difference

4. ADDRESS CONCERNS

- * (Whenever they arise--glad you were able to share that)
- * Concerns are normal (give 1 or 2 examples)

ncerns are normal (give 1 or 2 example Don't have to be a counselor

You can pick your Junior Partner -- & the process we use

Not violent youth--twice screened

Doesn't cost much

Don't do it alone--counseling, activities

Meet people, have fun

5. DATA

- * Correct spelling of name
- * Address--tell what we will send
- * Both phone numbers
- * Referred by _____

6. AFFIRM

- * Looking forward to meeting you at Orientation
- * Emphasize need

Wake County Partners 1/81