

## **Community Volunteer Leadership in West Virginia: Key Incentives and Influences that Enhance Involvement**

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### **Abstract**

*Many organizations must count on volunteers to provide core services (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992). Since community organizations play a vital role in a community's quality of life, it is important to learn about community leader characteristics and what incentives and influences motivate them to volunteer. The purpose of the study reported here was to identify incentives and influences that enhance volunteer leader participation in West Virginia communities. The target population consisted of members from the West Virginia Regional Planning and Development Council and the West Virginia Economic Development Council. Findings revealed top incentives and indicate distinctive preference for volunteering in leadership roles. A unique disparity to the national data regarding educational level and amount of hours volunteered was realized. The information from the study provides empirical data that can be used for effective volunteer recruitment practices and guide programming designed to improve job satisfaction of community volunteer leaders.*

**Key Words:** volunteer leadership, community leadership, leadership motivation

### **Introduction**

The volunteer rate in West Virginia is declining. As a source of possible leaders, volunteers are perhaps the most essential, yet ignored, resource in all communities, especially in those with limited or no professional staff. Because good leadership is a key to a strong community, it is imperative to understand incentives and influences that enhance volunteer leader involvement for successful recruitment, placement and retention; ultimately leading to stronger communities and quality of life. This article presents unique community leader characteristics as well as key incentives and influences that enhance volunteer involvement.

### **Review of Literature**

When it comes to civic voluntarism, Verba, Schlozman and Brady's (1995)

identified two main factors for active volunteer participation. These factors include motivation and the capacity to participate in political life. A volunteer must want to be active given that participation is a choice in America. Resource considerations should be taken seriously when it involves volunteer participation, such as how much time and money an individual has, and their individual strengths. If an individual has motivation and resources, they are more likely to volunteer when asked (Verba et al., 1995). Because community leader volunteers play a valuable role in the functioning of communities, it is important for organizations to understand what motivates volunteers to hold leadership roles. For the purpose of this study, the definition used for community leadership was developed by the National Extension

Task Force on Community Leadership. This definition states:

...community leadership is that which involves influence, power, and input into public decision-making over one or more spheres of activity. The spheres of activity may include an organization, an area of interest, an institution, and/or activities organization. The leadership skills include those necessary for public decision-making, policy development, program implementation, and organizational maintenance. (Langone, 1992, p. 1)

Incentives for community volunteer leaders include working together to reach a common goal, making connections and building networks. Putnam (2000) refers to social capital as the connections among individuals such as social networks and the norms of mutual benefit and trustworthiness that result from them. Social capital is related to "civic virtue" that is the cultivation of habits of personal living. These collective habits are important for the success of the community and are most powerful when embedded in a concentrated network of social relations (Putnam, 2000). Coleman (1988) examined social capital in the family and in the adult community surrounding high school and revealed evidence of value in decreasing the probability of dropping out of high school.

A number of studies on volunteer leadership motivation focus on the baby boomer population due to the retirement age of this population. Baby boomers are more financially well off and have more expendable income than other previous generations of retirees. Furthermore, baby boomers are more educated and skilled and exhibit greater independence (Culp, 2009). The findings of these studies emphasize the importance of identifying a good fit for the volunteer and the organization based on the

volunteer's skills and interests and indicates that they will seek volunteer opportunities that use their skills (Culp, 2009; Lindblom, 2001). Baby boomers are looking for volunteer leadership opportunities that will work with their schedules. They identify opportunities through faith communities, because they were asked directly, or through participating in their children's activities (Culp, 2009; Lindblom, 2001). Culp (2009) also found that the socio-economic characteristics of the baby boomer generation are distinctly different from that of earlier generations.

Age is a factor in the way in which volunteers are recruited and motivated. Culp (2009) discovered the importance of considering different skills and administrative strategies when working with multi-generational volunteers. He indicated the importance of tailoring community leadership recruitment strategies to particular volunteer groups. Specifically, baby boomers are different in terms of their demographics and motivation from other generations and will seek different volunteer experiences. Baby boomers seek experiences that will use their skills, fulfill their interests, and fit their schedules (Culp, 2009).

Lindblom (2011) conducted a study in Minnesota to assess baby boomer involvement through current and past volunteer activities, in both the metro area and rural community. A literature review was conducted to create the basis for the study. This framework was then used to develop questions for individual interviews and focus group sessions. Twenty-three baby boomers were involved in the study. Information was gathered in three areas that included motivations to volunteer, volunteer recruitment, and how they view retirement. The findings revealed incentives are much more important than traditional volunteer recognition activities or rewards for baby

boomers. These incentives are both tangible and intangible. For instance, tangible incentives include asking someone to return a service or receiving free or discounted tuition for continued education. Intangible incentives include companionship or opportunities to volunteer as a group (Lindblom, 2001).

In a study of 346 adults aged 50 years and over, Rouse and Clawson (1992) found older adult volunteers were motivated by preferred purposive incentives and affiliation. The participants identified achievement motives as inspiring them to use their time constructively by drawing on their skills and learning new things. Purposive incentives helped their volunteer organization because volunteers received satisfaction from being involved in making a difference in their community. The affiliation motives consisted of working with others with warmth and friendliness and an interest in helping others. For example, of the 346 participants 85.5% 4-H youth volunteers said they want to spend time with youth (Rouse & Clawson, 1992).

Culp and Schwartz (1999) found that every volunteer administration model includes motivation as a key component. The research on motivation suggests that while some individuals are driven by material concerns, others are motivated by experiences and identities rather than material goods making a significant difference in the lives of others or affecting a cause to which they are strongly committed (Frey & Osterloh, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Grant, 2007). Not only do positive childhood experiences, religion and professional life have an effect on volunteer motivation, concerns for society's welfare, community and social ties were included. Personal values, humanistic concerns and enhanced relationships also emerged as motivators. Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992) concluded in order to retain

volunteers over time, helping volunteers recognize compensation must outweigh the costs. Motivation was also linked to personal values. In a study seeking to understand county-level Extension leadership as it relates to volunteer board member motivation, Farris, McKinley, Ayres, Peters and Brady (2009) found that volunteer leaders were motivated by the community-related aspects of their service. Sixty-seven percent of volunteer leaders indicated they served on the County Extension Board because their work was benefiting others in the community. In this same study, 75% of the participants perceived increased knowledge, more awareness and satisfaction and enhanced relationships as a result of serving on the board. Inglis and Cleave (2006) found similar results in a study assessing volunteer board motivation conducted in a Canada metropolitan region. They found community board members most motivated were those with a community focus and with the understanding that their efforts would help others rather than by increasing their own self-worth. The highest motivational factors were associated with "opportunity to work toward a good cause", "opportunity to respond to community needs" and "opportunity to make a difference in the quality of life in my community". A Minnesota study (Byrne & Caskey, 1985) asked volunteers what incentives motivated them to volunteer for 4-H. Eighty-eight percent indicated that knowing they have done a good job, or making a contribution to something important was the main motive. Seventy-eight percent indicated that receiving an expression of appreciation from a 4-H member was the motivation. In addition, 48% said they would be motivated by receiving training that helps them do their job well (Byrne & Caskey, 1985).

Individuals are motivated in different ways because of the many different human

needs. Perry (1997) studied motives for public service with regard to several hypothesized antecedents. He used an instrument to measure public service motivation (PSM) by investigating the relationship of PSM to five sets of correlates. These correlates include parental socialization, religious socialization, professional identification, political ideology and individual demographic characteristics. The results indicated that volunteer motivation comes from being exposed to many different experiences. These experiences were associated with childhood, religion and professional life (Perry, 1997). Clark and Wilson (1961) studied incentive systems and identified three types that included material, solidary, and purposive. Their research revealed incentives related to social status, sociability and “fun” positively influenced the organizations and efforts to become wealthier were negatively influential.

The review of literature looked at demographic characteristics that make up a community volunteer leader. Individuals 35-44 years of age were more likely to volunteer than those older or younger without pay. Adults with a college degree and employed were more likely to volunteer as well as individuals with a higher income. There was little difference in the number of men and women volunteers. The review revealed Baby Boomer volunteers (born between 1946 and 1964) were more educated, skilled and financially well off as well as required greater independence. Additionally, Baby Boomers were motivated by incentives and not as motivated by traditional volunteer recognition activities or rewards. Adults 50 years of age and older were motivated by preferred purposive incentives and affiliation, such as working with others with warmth and friendliness and an interest in helping others.

Studies associated with motivational desires and incentives were part of the review of literature. Not only do positive childhood experiences, religion and professional life have an effect on volunteer motivation, concerns for society’s welfare, community and social ties were included. Personal values, humanistic concerns and enhanced relationships also emerged as motivators.

No effort was found in the research to develop an approach to understand motivational factors specific to community development volunteer leaders in rural areas. Furthermore, there were no specific research found that identified the motivational desires possessed by volunteer community leaders. The following research will help identify the motivational desires of volunteer leaders in the community development field. Once desires are identified, an attempt will be made to discriminate between individuals who are motivated to volunteer by their motivational factors based on their desire to volunteer. From these findings, recruitment and appropriate placement of leader volunteers can be made based on their motivation to volunteer.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive research methodologies were used to summarize the characteristics of the population and used to describe the key incentives and influences that motivate individuals to volunteer in community leadership roles.

The target population for this study was a purposeful sample of community volunteer leaders from the community development field associated with the West Virginia Regional Planning and Development Council and the West Virginia Economic Development Council (N = 577). The individuals in these two councils included mayors, city council members, county commissioners, city managers and

other elected officials. These councils focus on community and economic needs in West Virginia communities.

Demographic questions were included in the survey to determine gender, age, race, paid versus non-paid leader, previous training, needs for future training, educational background and educational level. Dillman's tailored design (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2009) was followed for data collection which included five mailing attempts to gather data from the population. Non-response error was assessed by conducting a comparison of early respondents to late respondents. There were no differences between the two groups.

### **Findings**

A total of 285 instruments were returned for a 49.4 % response rate. The majority of the respondents were male (68.1%). In relation to the general volunteer population, this percentage is inconsistent with Hayghe (1991) who found that there is little difference in the number of men and women volunteers in America. Baby boomers (1946 –1964) were the highest percentage (52.8%) of respondents for this study.

Over 50% of the respondents had earned at least a four-year college degree (55.4%). A cross tabulation of educational level and amount of volunteer hours revealed over half (54.2%) of respondents who were high school graduates or equivalent (GED) had the highest amount of volunteer hours (more than 12 hours per week) as to compared to the other higher education level respondents who had the lower amount of volunteer hours. Community services projects (86.5%) and government associations (78.4%) were the top two activities or groups where the high school graduate or equivalent respondents volunteered their time.

Most of the respondents worked full time (65%) and 77.9% were currently volunteering in a leadership role. When asked to specify their current volunteer leadership role, the largest percentage (26%) indicated they were working with non-profits. The majorities of respondents live and volunteer in rural/non-farm areas (59%) and were trained in developing leadership skills (69%). A high percentage of volunteers did not receive payment for volunteering (88.7%) and volunteered for two - four organizations (63.9%). Findings showed that the majority of respondents volunteer for four or more hours per week with only 32.9% of the individuals volunteering 1-3 hours per week.

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the key incentives that motivate individuals to volunteer in community leadership roles. One-hundred-seventy two individuals (60.1%) indicated flexible meeting schedule was their key incentive and 132 respondents (46.2%) indicated networking. One-hundred five respondents (36.7%) indicated training opportunities while 87 respondents (30.4%) indicated continued training opportunities. Forty-five individuals (15.7%) indicated continued education for credit and 44 respondents (15.4%) indicated recognition. Twenty-nine respondents (10.1%) indicated reimbursement for food and travel and nine individuals (3.1%) indicated paid for volunteer work. Seventy-three individuals (25.5%) indicated something other as key incentives that motivate them to volunteer. Of the 73 individuals, 28 indicated helping others and 17 respondents indicated satisfaction was their key incentive to volunteer. Ten individuals indicated their incentive was due to a need while three indicated more time (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Key Incentives that Motivate Individuals to Volunteer in Community Leadership Roles**

	Incentives	
	N	%
Flexible meeting schedule	172	60.1
Networking	132	46.2
Training opportunities	105	36.7
Continued training opportunities	87	30.4
Continued education for credit	45	15.7
Recognition	44	15.4
Reimbursement for food and travel	29	10.1
Paid for volunteer work	9	3.1
Other	73	25.5

Respondents were asked their opinions on the most significant influences that affected their decision to seek a volunteer leadership role in their community. One-hundred eighty-four respondents (64.3%) indicated friends were their highest influences affecting their decision to volunteer and 160 individuals (55.9%) indicated family. One-hundred forty-two individuals (49.7%) indicated church while 127 respondents (44.4%) indicated civic organizations. One-hundred seventeen individuals (40.9%) indicated other people in the community development profession while 103 respondents (36%) indicated business. Forty-nine individuals (17.2%) indicated mentor and 23 respondents (8%) indicated 4-H involvement. Twenty-three individuals (8%) indicated Boy Scouts while 17

respondents (5.9%) indicated community educational outreach service (CEOS) involvement. Fifteen individuals (5.2%) indicated FFA involvement, 15 respondents (5.2%) indicated university faculty and four individuals (1.4%) indicated Girl Scouts. Thirty-seven respondents (12.9%) indicated something other for their opinions on the most significant influences that affected their decision to volunteer. Of the 37 respondents, 13 individuals indicated their influences were related to filling a need while eight respondents indicated it was due to community improvement. Three individuals felt a duty, another three individuals wanted to be a role model and two indicated they seek volunteer leadership roles in their community for personal enjoyment (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Influences Affecting Decision to Volunteer**

	Influences	
	N	%
Friends	184	64.3
Family	160	55.9
Church	142	49.7
Civic organizations	127	44.4
Other people in the community development profession	117	40.9
Business	103	36.0
Mentor	49	17.2
4-H involvement	23	8.0
Boy Scouts	23	8.0
Community Educational Outreach Service (CEOS) involvement	17	5.9
FFA involvement	15	5.2
University faculty	15	5.2
Girl Scouts	4	1.4
Other	37	12.9

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The research findings revealed a unique disparity to the national statistics regarding educational level and amount of hours volunteered. The literature showed adults with a college degree and employed were more likely to volunteer, whereas, this study revealed over half (54.2%) of respondents that were high school graduates or equivalent (GED) respondents had the highest amount of volunteer hours (more than 12 hours per week) as compared to the

higher educational level respondents who had the lower amount of volunteer hours. Of the high school or equivalent respondents, the top two reported activities or groups where they volunteered their efforts were community service projects (86.5%) and government associations (78.4%). This study suggests that those with a higher education level in West Virginia are not likely to volunteer more hours. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 41.6% are high school graduates with no

additional higher education. Because the West Virginia high school graduate percentage is higher than the national (28.4%), there is a greater opportunity to target this group for increased volunteer involvement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). A targeted strategy will help identify these individuals and their motivational desires that will assist in successful recruitment.

The top two key incentives for volunteering were flexible meeting schedules (60.1%) followed by networking (46.2%). This finding is in line with the research that indicates that baby boomers are looking for volunteer leadership opportunities that will work with their schedules (Culp, 2009; Lindblom, 2001). Trends in motivation suggests movement toward a society in which aspects like social status and sociability with a concentrated network of social relations all have a positive effect on the organization (Clark & Wilson, 1961; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) concluded that a successful community cultivates social capital and is most impactful when embedded in a focused network of social relations, thus; making connections, building networks and focusing on a common goal is important to success.

Friends (64.3%), family (55.9%) and church (49.7%) were at the top of the list of influences that motivate volunteering. These findings uncover the need to develop specific recruitment and placement strategies based on these influences.

Over the years, the volunteer rate has declined in West Virginia (Volunteering in America, 2010) along with increased volunteer leadership turnover and limited resources within city government. The findings of this study reveal new challenges and opportunities in the areas of community leader volunteerism. Community Development volunteers have time requirements and job demands. Flexible meeting schedules and informal networking

opportunities should be encouraged in order to motivate individuals to volunteer that will lead to future volunteer efforts with other groups. Strategies that include volunteer recruitment through friends, family and church will generate new volunteer growth in the community development field. In line with the literature on civic voluntarism by Verba et al (1995), understanding what motivates volunteer leaders and their capacity to take part in political life will increase the volunteer pool. This understanding will help create more effective volunteer placement and retention; ultimately leading to stronger communities and quality of life. Future research may examine why individuals have not volunteered in their community. In addition, future research may investigate the connection between incentives to volunteer and preference for volunteer activities as well as analyzing the demographics and volunteer participation. Furthermore, studies that target demographics of organizations which aggressively seek volunteer support will contribute to the overall understanding of community development volunteer recruitment and retention.

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**Lisa Kelly Nix, Ph.D.** focuses her attention in West Virginia on Community Leadership Development. Specific areas of expertise include working with community groups to develop leadership through training sessions such as board development, visioning, strategic planning, team building, and project planning.