Projections and Policies for Volunteer Programs
The Implications of the Serve America Act for Volunteer Diversity and Management

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This article explores the limits of public policy as it affects volunteerism in the United States. Our analysis focuses on the potential of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (2009), the most sweeping volunteer legislation in U.S. history, to raise the level of volunteering and national service in the United States, particularly among young people, older people, and minorities—the primary target populations of the act. The Serve America Act aims to increase service-learning opportunities and national service placements substantially. However, the long-term impact of these changes on the rate of volunteering and the composition and character of the volunteering population remains unclear. Using data from the Current Population Survey’s annual Supplement on Volunteering, we examine a variety of reasonable policy scenarios to see how the Serve America Act might affect future volunteering through the year 2050. The findings suggest that even if the Serve America Act is fully funded and implemented, it is unlikely to have a long-term impact on the overall volunteering rate and, consequently, that altering the national volunteering rate might be an unrealistic public policy goal. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that because of naturally occurring changes in the population, the composition of the volunteer pool is likely to change as we

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move toward 2050—a demographic shift that will present increased challenges for volunteer managers. We discuss these challenges and how managers might deal with them effectively.

**Keywords:** volunteering, volunteering policy, Serve America Act, volunteer management, national service

The encouragement of volunteering has long been public policy in the United States, and the Serve America Act of 2009 presented the most dramatic expansion of the size and scope of policies and institutions supporting national service and volunteering. The goals and results of volunteering policy are normally expressed quantitatively, with respect to increasing the number of volunteers (Brudney 1999; Brudney and Gazley 2006). For example, ServiceNation (2009), a strong supporter of the Serve America Act, hoped and expected that the act would raise the number of volunteers in the United States to 100 million by 2020, up substantially from about 63 million in 2012. In this article we evaluate the potential of this legislation, as claimed by its supporters, to change the landscape of volunteering and service in the United States. To do so, we propose several realistic scenarios regarding the likely effects of the Serve America Act on volunteering and, based on annual survey data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS 2008), project these scenarios through the year 2050. Using these projections, we seek to inform nonprofit organizations and their volunteer resource managers about ways that the Serve America Act may affect them as they move into the future.

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act

The Serve America Act has three main purposes: (1) to expand opportunities for Americans to provide volunteer service, (2) to strengthen the nonprofit sector and support innovation in the sector, and (3) to increase the accountability and cost-effectiveness of programs. Although the Serve America Act is intended to jump-start volunteering for people in all stages of life, the special emphasis of the act is on volunteering and service among young people, minority populations, and older Americans. Serve America Act programs targeted toward youth include the Summer of Service program, where sixth through twelfth graders receive a $500 education award ($750 for disadvantaged students) for participating in 100 hours of approved service; the Semester of Service program, which is geared toward involving high school students in seventy hours of service learning; and Youth Empowerment Zones, which provide grants to eligible partnerships to engage secondary students or out-of-school students in service learning. The act also
includes provisions through Learn and Service America to support the use of service learning in schools.

The feature that grabbed most of the headlines about the Serve America Act, though, is the striking increase planned in national service opportunities. The legislation promised to more than triple the number of participants in the AmeriCorps programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) from 75,000 to 250,000 by 2017. The act provides inducements to serve by increasing the full-time education award for national service to $5,350 for 2010 (up from $4,725) and linking the award to future increases in the Pell Grant scholarship. Priority recruitment of disadvantaged and diverse youth for national service placements is also mandated.

The Serve America Act also includes programs aimed at service given by seniors. It increases the age and income eligibility for senior volunteering programs, including Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions; the minimum age for participation in these programs was reduced from sixty to fifty-five. Also, individuals making up to 200 percent above the poverty line may be eligible for a small hourly stipend (up from 125 percent). The act also provides for a new $1,000 education award for seniors who give more than 350 hours of service, which can be transferred to a child or grandchild.

In addition, the Serve America Act aimed to strengthen the nonprofit sector—where most of these volunteers will serve. The Volunteer Generation Fund (SEC 198P) includes money for grants to nonprofit organizations to recruit and retain volunteers and to strengthen the volunteer management infrastructure. The Nonprofit Capacity Building Program (SEC 198S) authorizes $200,000 grants to intermediary organizations to provide organizational development assistance to increase the capacity of small and medium-sized nonprofits in such areas as best practices, compliance with tax laws, financial planning, and grant writing. The Social Innovation Fund (SEC 198K) provides seed money to fund or expand innovative programs aimed at solving society's most serious problems. In most cases, the funding for these programs is delivered through state-level service commissions.

Finally, the Serve America Act includes some provisions regarding accountability and effectiveness. The act reauthorizes the Corporation for National and Community Service and its programs through 2014 and directs the corporation to conduct a nationwide Call to Service campaign. The act requires that programs that receive funds be evaluated regularly to ensure that they are meeting performance goals. The act authorizes a Civic Health Assessment to collect data about volunteering, voting, charitable giving, and interest in public service in order to assess the civic health of American communities. The act also makes allowances for more simplified, fixed-amount grants and provides the Corporation for National and Community Service with greater flexibility to consolidate application and reporting requirements.
The initial basis for our projections of annual volunteering over time emanate from the annual (September) Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) and the U.S. Census Bureau for the Corporation for National and Community Service. Table 1 shows the volunteer rates, organizations to which people volunteered, and volunteer activities for the general population and the Serve America Act’s target groups in 2008.

In 2008, 26.4 percent of the adult population in the United States volunteered, contributing more than 8 billion hours of volunteer time. Table 1 shows the four most common types of organizations for which people volunteered in 2008: religious organizations (35.3 percent), educational institutions (24.3 percent), community service groups (14.1 percent), and health organizations (8.7 percent). The four most common volunteer activities nationally are fundraising (27.5 percent); collecting, preparing, distributing, or serving food (24.4 percent); general labor (21.6 percent); and tutoring or teaching (19.2 percent).

The BLS surveys allow us to track the volunteering characteristics of the groups targeted by the Serve America Act: younger people, older adults, and minority populations. In 2008, the rate of volunteering for young adults in the sixteen-to-eighteen age group was 27.6 percent. Compared to the general population, youth were less likely to volunteer for religious organizations and more likely to volunteer for educational organizations; they also performed general...
labor more often. Older adults (ages sixty-five and above) volunteered at a rate of 23.5 percent in 2008. The organizations to which they volunteer differ somewhat from those assisted by the overall volunteer population: Nearly half of the older adult volunteers donated time to religious organizations (46.4 percent); this group was more likely to volunteer at social service (17.5 percent) and health organizations (11.0 percent), and much less likely at educational organizations (6.5 percent) than the general population. Older adults favored food service volunteering activities.

In 2008, Hispanics volunteered at a rate of 14.5 percent, typically at religious (39.7 percent) and educational (33.1 percent) organizations. Hispanic volunteers did less fundraising (22.3 percent) and general labor (17.8 percent) than the general population. The volunteering rate for African Americans in 2008 was 18.9 percent. African Americans were more likely to volunteer for religious organizations than the general population (47.3 percent), but less likely to volunteer for educational (21.4 percent) and health organizations (6.3 percent). African Americans did more tutoring activities (21.9 percent) than the general population.

Across the series of annual BLS-CPS volunteer surveys beginning in 2002, the volunteering rate for the general population has ranged from a low of 26.2 percent in 2007 to a high of 28.8 percent in 2004 and 2005; thus, the volunteering rate seems robust, with slightly more than one-quarter of Americans volunteering in any given year (BLS 2008). Nevertheless, with the exception of youth, each of the groups targeted by the Serve America Act has a rate of volunteering significantly less than the volunteering rate for the entire population, and sometimes substantially less.

Data and Methodology

The Volunteer Supplement to the Current Population Survey provides information on the total number of individuals in the United States involved in volunteering, measures of the frequency or intensity with which individuals volunteer, types of organizations for which they volunteer, and activities in which volunteers participate, along with extensive demographic data. Because they yield more precise estimates, we use pooled data from the 2006–08 CPS Volunteer Supplements to estimate the numbers and rates of volunteering over time reported in this article. To derive estimated numbers of volunteers, we multiply the estimated volunteer rates by population projections, created and published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2008). These projections, which are based on the results of the 2000 Census, use estimated birth rates, death rates, and net immigration rates among selected population subgroups to forecast changes in population sizes. Because these projections were developed from the Census 2000 baselines, they become less accurate.
over time. To calculate the projected number of volunteers for a particular year, we multiplied the population projection for that year by the estimated volunteering rate for the population in that year. In the next section, which describes our policy scenarios, we discuss how we arrive at the estimated volunteering rate under several different scenarios.

For our final scenario (please see following), population projections for key subgroups were used to form the estimated shares of the volunteer population (as seen in Figure 1). For each subgroup these shares were calculated from the projected number of people in each population subgroup, multiplied by the average estimated volunteer rate for this subgroup, and divided by the population projection of volunteers for the entire adult (sixteen and over) population.

Policy Scenarios

In this article we propose and examine six realistic policy scenarios that predict the potential impact of the Serve America Act on national volunteering rates. Scenario 1 comprises the status quo estimates of volunteering based on standard Census Bureau population projections. This depiction serves as a baseline scenario, meaning that the volunteering rate remains constant over time, thus suggesting no effect of the act. Scenario 2 represents a one-time increase in the national volunteering rate occurring in the first year of the Serve America Act in 2010, and from that point forward the volunteering rate continues at the same level into the future. This scenario represents a pulse effect, that is, the act generates an immediate public response, perhaps because of the publicity and excitement surrounding its passage, but the response quickly recedes and the volunteering rate does not increase beyond that point. Scenario 3 incorporates a consistent increase in the rate of volunteering for each year of the five funded years of the Serve America Act (2010–14) with the volunteering rate continuing at the 2014 level into the future. This steady increase scenario assumes that the programs that are part of the Serve America Act will have an increasing effect on the volunteering rate every year over the funded life of the act. Scenario 4 represents the same steady increase in volunteering rates as scenario 3, but after 2014 the volunteering rate tapers off by the same amount that it had increased in the previous years until it reaches the same level as predicted by scenario 1. This rise and fall scenario assumes that should funding for the Serve America Act terminate in 2014, the positive effects of the act might also dissipate. In scenario 5, we pose a lagged effect of the Serve America Act, so that the increases in volunteering begin in 2011 (instead of 2010) and continue each year for the five (funded) years of the Serve America Act (2011–15), and then remain at the 2015 levels into the future. This delayed effect scenario corresponds to a situation in which the effects of the Serve America Act might not be felt
immediately; it may take some time (here, assumed at one year) for the programs, messages, and appeals made by administrative agencies to be implemented and lodged in the public mind.

Finally, scenario 6 depicts volunteering increases each year for the five (funded) years of the act, but only for the main target populations of the Serve America Act—minorities, youth, and seniors. This targeted scenario focuses on the specific groups identified by the Serve America Act. Because most of the programs directly addressed in the act are geared toward these populations, it is possible that we will see increases in the volunteering rates solely among these groups.

In each of these six scenarios, we examine low (.5 percent), medium (1.0 percent), and high (1.5 percent) projected annual increases in the volunteering rate resulting from the Serve America Act. Table 2 helps to provide context for these policy scenarios. The table presents the annual volunteering rates and number of volunteers for the population and for major age, race, and ethnic groups from 2002 to 2009. Over this period, the national volunteering rate has changed by as much as 2 percentage points from one year to the next only once (a decline of 2.2 percent from 2005 to 2006). The typical change from one year to the next is much more modest in absolute value, averaging about one-half of 1 percent (0.66) over the series, and the standard deviation of the annual volunteering rates is also small, just over 1 percent (1.14). The volunteering rate seems stable, especially in the period 2003–05, although in other years (2002–03 or 2005–06) the rate might shift by a percentage point or more. Given the longitudinal changes in volunteering rates shown in Table 2, we believe that the projections based on high (1.5 percent), medium (1.0 percent), and low (.5 percent) percentage increases in the volunteering rate are fairly conservative.

Findings: Impact of Policy Scenarios 1–5
Table 3 presents the number of volunteers over time for the first five policy scenarios; it shows how estimates of the number of volunteers between 2010 and 2050 vary with the assumptions made under the different scenarios. Because of projected population growth, the number of adult volunteers is estimated to increase steadily even under scenario 1 (baseline scenario) to nearly 71 million in 2020 and to 92.1 million in 2050. Scenario 2, the pulse scenario, which involves a one-time increase in the volunteer rate in 2010 that persists until 2050, raises these projections slightly. Scenario 2a, which assumes that the volunteer rate rises by 0.5 percent, increases the projected number of volunteers by 1.9 percent, to 93.8 million by 2050. Similarly, the 2050 estimate increases by 3.8 percent, to 95.6 million, under scenario 2b (1.0 percent increase in
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
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<td>27.4</td>
<td>63,791</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>64,542</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>65,357</td>
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<td>16–18</td>
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<td>19–64</td>
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<td>29.2</td>
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<td>60,440</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>60,846</td>
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Table 2. Historical Volunteering Rates and Number of Volunteers by Age, Race, and Ethnicity (in Thousands)
the volunteer rate) and by 5.7 percent, to 97.3 million, under scenario 2c (1.5 percent increase). Although the numbers of volunteers would grow substantially under these scenarios, they would fall short of the target set by ServiceNation of 100 million volunteers by 2020.

In scenario 3, the steady increase scenario, which assumes that the volunteer rate increases each year between 2010 and 2014, the future projections for adult volunteers are much larger. In scenario 3a, which features a half-point increase in the volunteer rate annually from 2010 to 2014, the number of adult volunteers is estimated to surpass 100 million for the first time in 2048 and tops out at 100.8 million in 2050. These projected numbers are even larger

Table 3. Projected Number of Adult Volunteers, Scenarios 1 through 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Scenario 2a</th>
<th>Scenario 2b</th>
<th>Scenario 2c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>64,332,182</td>
<td>65,550,377</td>
<td>66,768,572</td>
<td>67,986,766</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>70,955,161</td>
<td>72,298,769</td>
<td>73,642,376</td>
<td>74,985,984</td>
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<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>78,050,966</td>
<td>79,528,940</td>
<td>81,006,914</td>
<td>82,484,888</td>
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<tr>
<td>2040</td>
<td>85,093,294</td>
<td>86,704,621</td>
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<td>89,927,276</td>
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<tr>
<td>2050</td>
<td>92,102,566</td>
<td>93,846,620</td>
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<th>Scenario 3b</th>
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<td>2020</td>
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<td>84,391,237</td>
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<td>2030</td>
<td>85,440,835</td>
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<td>2040</td>
<td>93,149,930</td>
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<td>2050</td>
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Note: Scenario 1 = baseline; scenario 2 = pulse effect; scenario 3 = steady increase; scenario 4 = rise and fall; and scenario 5 = delayed effect; a = low estimate (.5% increase in rate of volunteering); b = medium estimate (1.0%); c = high estimate (1.5%).
under scenarios 3b (1.0 percent annual increase, 109.5 million volunteers in 2050) and 3c (1.5 percent annual increase, 118.3 million volunteers in 2050). Future projections under scenario 4, or rise and fall scenario, which features a five-year rise in the volunteer rate followed by a fall of equal magnitude, are very similar to the projections of scenario 2 (pulse scenario) for 2020 and beyond, while future projections under scenario 5 (delayed effect scenario, with annual increases in the volunteer rate starting in 2011 rather than 2010) are equal to those under scenario 3.

**Findings: Composition of Volunteer Population, Scenario 6 (Targeted Scenario)**

In addition to analyzing the aggregate trends in volunteering stemming from the possible effects of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (2009), we were also interested in the demographic composition of the volunteer population under different sets of assumptions or scenarios. The Serve America Act is intended to increase volunteer service, particularly among younger people, older people, and ethnic minorities. Using scenario 6, the targeted scenario, we examined the likely effects of the act projected through 2050 under the assumption that the policy effects would be concentrated among these specific groups.

In scenario 6b, we generated a projection based on annual 1 percent increases in volunteering for the three targeted groups for the first five years of the act (2010 through 2014). From 2014 onward the scenarios presume that the volunteer rate would persist until 2050. The composition of volunteers represented by each of these groups varies according to not only the different policy scenarios but also the projected population dynamics (growth, decline, stability) of the groups. Although the aggregate rates of volunteering would not vary much under scenario 6b, because of demographic changes in the population the composition of the volunteer force would change dramatically by 2050.

Figure 1 presents a stacked area graph demonstrating the demographic composition of the volunteer population over time under scenario 6b. This figure breaks down the volunteer population into nine mutually exclusive groups based on age (16–18, 19–64, and 65+), race (white, minority), and ethnicity (Hispanic, non-Hispanic); the Current Population Survey upon which these projections are based separates race and ethnicity. In order to show age, race, and ethnicity in the same figure, we combined white Hispanics and minority Hispanics into one group.

Figure 1 demonstrates that by 2050 the volunteer population will be increasingly composed of Hispanics, especially from the older age groups. Middle-aged whites will become a smaller proportion of
volunteers. Initially, the share of older white volunteers will increase, but as the baby boomers pass away, this share will decrease. Older minorities will become a larger volunteer group in this scenario as well.

**Findings: Reactions of Volunteer Managers**

To determine whether the volunteer pool projections would be seen as useful and relevant to volunteer managers, we shared the primary projections with a group of volunteer managers at the annual conference of the North Carolina Association of Volunteer Administrators (NCAVA) in May 2012 and asked these managers several questions related to their perceptions of the usefulness of the projections. Table 4 shows the results of this brief survey of twenty-two volunteer managers.

As seen in Table 4, 82 percent of these managers reported difficulty recruiting Hispanic volunteers, and 36 percent have challenges recruiting other minority volunteers. Twenty-three percent feel it is challenging to recruit youth volunteers, while only 9 percent feel
that it is challenging to recruit senior volunteers. Retention of Hispanic (50 percent) and minority (41 percent) volunteers was also reported to be challenging, and retaining youth was reported to be even more challenging (59 percent). Seventy-seven percent of the managers regarded the projections as interesting, and fully 91 percent considered them relevant to their work. Eighty-two percent reported that the projections would be helpful to their work, and 86 percent indicated that it would help them to act and think more strategically. Forty-one percent felt that these projections altered their perceptions of the volunteer pool.

This survey was not designed to be representative of the population of volunteer managers but to provide an initial test of how volunteer managers might react to these projections and how they might see these projections in relation to their work. Overall, the responses of the volunteer managers were strongly positive that the projections were interesting, relevant, and helpful for their work. These managers face strong challenges in recruiting Hispanic and minority volunteers and retaining Hispanic, minority, and youth volunteers—factors that increase the relevance of these projections.

**Discussion: Volunteer Policy and Nonprofit Organizations**

The results of our analysis have implications for the design and expectations of public policy concerning volunteering and for the recruitment and management of volunteers in nonprofit organizations.
With respect to policy, the findings show that under a variety of reasonable policy scenarios, the long-term rate of volunteering is unlikely to be greatly affected by the Serve America Act even if it were fully funded and implemented. Although our more optimistic scenarios showed an increase in the rate of volunteering in the short term, these effects dissipated over time, so that the impact was minimal moving into 2050. These results are consistent with other available data. For example, despite differences in volunteer programs, historical circumstances, and presidential leadership, the volunteering rate appears to have remained relatively constant over the past forty years or so (O’Neill 2009, 247–49). Moreover, even when citizens can be recruited into volunteering, studies suggest substantial turnover (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, and Washburn 2009), so that sustaining an increase in the annual rate of volunteering contributes to the challenge. Meeting ServiceNation’s goal of 100 million volunteers in 2020 would require a volunteering rate of 37.2 percent, which is a much higher volunteering rate than currently exists. Under the conservative scenarios in this article, this target seems to be an unlikely goal.

Changing the mix or composition of the volunteer pool, by contrast, may be a more tractable public policy objective and outcome. The empirical results suggest that targeting volunteering policy toward certain groups coupled with natural demographic changes could result over time in larger proportions represented in the volunteer pool. Although volunteering policy tends to focus on numbers, changing the mix of participants may be equally laudable and important. Studies find that volunteering carries benefits for the volunteer (Musick and Wilson 2008) as well as for the host organizations and clients. With respect to public policy, the lessons lie in targeting policy toward certain groups and offering incentives that will entice their members into volunteering (such as education awards). Because demographics change over time (that is, birth, death, and immigration rates), a relatively modest increase in the percentage of individuals volunteering for just a few years can result in rather dramatic changes over the long run.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding to emerge from our analysis of the policy scenarios is the dramatic change that we could expect to take place in the composition of the volunteer population over the next forty years. This change will be primarily caused by demographic shifts in the population rather than increases in the volunteering rates of different groups. Hispanics will likely form a particularly large segment of the volunteer pool as their numbers increase. The proportion of African American volunteers will also increase, and Americans over the age of sixty-five, too, will constitute a more sizeable group of volunteers. These demographic shifts in the composition of the volunteer population will need to be reflected in volunteer management techniques: They suggest the importance of targeting volunteer recruitment messages

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to different segments of the population. Given these trends, managers of volunteers (and other officials) in nonprofit organizations will likely benefit from familiarity with the Spanish language, and volunteer program materials will likely require adaptation for other languages. Volunteer managers should also reach out actively to African American religious institutions to recruit volunteers from that community. They will also need to become oriented to a growing cohort of older volunteers who may bring accomplished professional skills honed over years of experience. As shown earlier in this article, each of these groups gravitates toward slightly different volunteer activities that should be considered when recruiting volunteers.

These trends will accelerate the need for volunteer managers in nonprofit (and public) organizations to have additional training in, and to become more adept at, managing a more diverse pool of volunteers. Volunteers from different racial groups have different motivations (Latting 1990) and interpret the volunteer experience differently, at least among students (Raskoff and Sundeen 2001). In fact, not only does each major racial group have a unique set of demographic predictors of volunteering behavior, these predictors vary between native-born and immigrant populations (Sundeen, Garcia, and Raskoff 2009). Volunteer resource managers need to understand the differences among these groups in order to recruit and retain them more effectively. Different recruitment methods, volunteer assignments, and volunteer work may be appropriate for people from different age groups (see, for instance, Nagchoudhuri, McBride, Thirupathy, Morrow-Howell, and Tang 2007). One resource discusses the importance of modifying recruitment techniques in order to reach a Hispanic population, for example, by building relationships in the Hispanic community, approaching individuals rather than relying on advertisement, becoming familiar with Hispanic culture, and holding recruitment and training meetings in locations that are familiar and inviting to Hispanic people (Hobbs 2000). The analysis in this article highlights the importance of tailoring the volunteer experience to people from different demographic groups in order to capitalize on and accelerate current trends in volunteering, especially among minorities.

One of the obstacles to increasing diversity in volunteer programs is that managers do not routinely know how to recruit volunteers from ethnic or racial minority groups. A major barrier to recruitment of minority volunteers is often communication. Many potential volunteers from minority populations do not volunteer either because they were not aware of available opportunities or because they were not asked to volunteer (Searl, Rodriguez-Corriere, and Panepento 2008; Recruiting Volunteers of Color 2011; Roaf and Tierney 1994; Smith, Ellis, Howlett, and O'Brien n.d.). To surmount this obstacle, volunteer programs can extend their outreach by advertising through ethnic or cultural media (particular media
outlets). One volunteer manager reported that by placing advertise-
ments expressing a need for Hispanic volunteers on television
stations, including some Spanish-language stations, the traffic on the
organization's website increased by 60 percent (Quotah 2008). An
additional way to reach minority populations is to recruit a spokes-
person or advocate who is a role model in the minority community
(Recruiting Volunteers of Color 2011; Quotah 2008).

Another important aspect of communication with minority vol-
unteers is language. Some potential minority volunteers are not
comfortable with English. Minorities who are fluent in English may
still appreciate receiving volunteer information or training in their
native languages. One study reports that Hispanics, even those who
speak English as their primary language, are more likely to remem-
ber an advertisement in Spanish than one in English (Searl,
toward minorities, however, does not mean that simply translating
materials into other languages will solve the problem. In fact, one
manager explains that the “worst thing we could do is just take all
our English-language materials and translate them into Spanish and
think that they'll work” (Quotah 2008). In addition to translating
recruitment materials, volunteer managers must take cultural differ-
ences into account. They may find it advantageous to “network with
each individual volunteer on a personal basis” (Searl et al. 2008).

Volunteer programs must also demonstrate their cultural rele-
ance for minority groups. One way to publicly display cultural rele-
ance is to employ staff members who are members of ethnic or
racial minorities. A survey conducted in 1990 reveals that most Afri-
can Americans, regardless of socioeconomic background, volunteer
primarily for organizations that either serve African Americans or
are run by African Americans (Roaf and Tierney 1994). Another
study indicates that organizations in which minority staff members
worked on recruitment tended to recruit more minority volunteers
(Roaf and Tierney 1994, 16). A minority presence in the organization
may also reduce a potential minority volunteer’s “fear of being
used as a token” (Recruiting Volunteers of Color 2011).

Another way to attract minority volunteers is to recruit at eth-
ic, cultural, racial, or civic events and organizations. One success-
ful director of volunteers suggests that a good source “for ethnic
volunteers has been with other government agencies, police, fire-
fighters and retired teachers” (Searl et al. 2008). A volunteer recruit-
ment guide recommended that organizations “participate in cultural,
fraternal, church related events. Distribute materials at street fairs,
music festivals, block parties, and historical celebrations. Distribute
culturally appropriate materials and pulpit messages to churches and
community centers” (Recruiting Volunteers of Color 2011). Another
volunteer manager explained that she attends and staffs booths at
Latino events where she is likely to meet Latinos interested in con-
tributing to the community (Searl et al. 2008).
Similar difficulties arise in recruiting minority youth. Studies reveal that the volunteer behavior of Black and Hispanic youth responds to different influences, thus suggesting the need for different recruiting strategies to attract young minority volunteers (Schultz 2006). For example, Black youth have responded most enthusiastically to volunteering roles as mentors, where they believe that they can make a difference, while Hispanic youth respond most readily to participation in service learning (Schultz 2006). In any case, managers should work with minority volunteers to identify tasks that motivate them. Instead of assuming that a Hispanic volunteer wants to teach Spanish, for example, the manager should determine whether the volunteer would prefer to work in a different capacity (Quotah 2008).

An inhibiting factor that may diminish minority youth involvement and retention in volunteering is the degree of relevance the activity may hold for their lives and their communities. In addition to societal and socioeconomic differences, cultural differences often discourage minority youth from volunteering. For example, studies show that African American youth often do not express a desire to participate in volunteer activities such as picking up trash. One researcher believes this unwillingness to participate is an expression of the youth’s “realization that the problem is rooted more deeply in his community” (Charles 2005, 16). Because the youth have repeatedly witnessed once cleaned areas quickly filled up with trash again, they understand that this action will not solve the underlying problem. Volunteer managers can avoid this frustration by involving minority youth in other activities such as mentoring younger children. African American youth may thrive in such roles, perhaps because this type of behavior is more frequently observed of African American adults when they are “giving back to the community” (Charles 2005). A complementary strategy is to work closely with minority adults who are already active in the community to role model and encourage younger people to volunteer (Charles 2005).

With respect to older volunteers, an important aspect of recruiting is to allow for flexibility in volunteer activities and the opportunity for impact. Because retirement may free individuals to spend more time volunteering, baby boomers may select activities that they feel make good use of their time. Culp (2009, emphasis in original) writes, “They anticipate doing what they want to do, not what they have to do. Boomers feel comfortable making choices and saying ‘no’ to volunteer roles that don’t make effective use of their interests, skills, resources, or abilities. Volunteer activities should offer flexibility to accommodate their busy lifestyles.” Mark and Waldman (2002) concur that baby boomers want to see that they are making a difference and contributing to something “larger.” Marketing strategies to target boomers should take into account appropriate language to appeal to them, such as “experienced,” “advisors,” “coaches,” and “mentors,” rather than “older people” and “senior
citizens” (Culp 2009; Mark and Waldman 2002; Wilson and Steele 2002). When working to retain older volunteers, too, volunteer managers should offer the appropriate incentives such as companionship, meaning, and opportunities to volunteer as a group (Lindblom 2001). Overall, boomers should “understand the impact of their afternoon spent volunteering rather than receive a reward for the number of hours they’ve served” (Culp 2009).

Conclusion

This article began with an analysis of the Serve America Act (2009) and its implications for volunteering policy and managers. The analysis showed that as expansive as the act might be, it is unlikely to have major effects on the aggregate rate of volunteering in the United States. Thus, our conclusion is that even large changes in volunteering policy will not have much of an impact if the criterion is simply an increase in the rate of volunteering.

This caution seems to be even more pertinent because of the contemporary policy and budget climate surrounding the Serve America Act. Because of the recession of the late 2000s, the programs authorized by the Serve America Act have not been fully funded during the past few fiscal years. Over the past three years, funding for Learn and Serve America, the Nonprofit Capacity Building Program, and the Volunteer Generation Fund has been eliminated. It is possible that these program eliminations and the overall reduced budget for the Serve America Act will negatively affect our short-run projections and further reduce the potential of the Serve America Act to create long-term changes in national volunteering rates.

Nevertheless, our analysis demonstrated that due to demographic changes in the population over the next forty years or so, the composition of the volunteer pool will also undergo transformation. Volunteer managers can expect to welcome an influx of more volunteers representing minority groups. The analysis suggested that government policy can accelerate these changes by offering incentives and programs tailored to particular groups. Whether or not government has the will or the means to do so, however, volunteer resource managers can anticipate the changes. In our view, now would be a good time to prepare for and adapt to them.

Notes

1. For more details about the methodology underlying the Census Bureau’s population projections, see http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/methodstatement.html. At the time of this analysis, the 2010 Census was not yet publicly available, so the analysis in this paper uses the 2000 Census.

2. CPS volunteer statistics are usually published for the adult population. Following established BLS conventions, “adults” are defined as people ages sixteen and over, because sixteen is the age at which people can work for pay without permits in most states.
References


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