

Empowerment Evaluation As An Alternative Approach to Meeting National Volunteer Organization Outcome Reporting Compliance Expectations: The Massachusetts Senior Corps Experience

Peter J. Gartland

Note:

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of an ‘empowerment’ evaluation methodology for programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service – National Senior Service Corps (NSSC). Like other national volunteer organizations, NSSC utilizes volunteers in meeting identified critical community needs. The empowerment evaluation methodology was designed to accomplish outcome reporting of program impact, to bring NSSC programs into compliance with the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, while also fostering the use of evaluation information to move volunteer organizations to elements of a process of continuous improvement of programming. The evaluation methodology, referred to as a *collaborative development approach*, utilizes and recommends the development and use of *standards of measures* to enable NSSC programs to realize the true scope and magnitude of the impact they have on community issues. The paper suggests that many national volunteer organizations, currently engaged in efforts to evaluate the impact of their sponsored programming, would also realize similar benefits from the implementation of the concepts as presented.

Introduction

In general, it is fair to say that evaluation at the Foundation serves one prime function: to improve, not prove (Millett, R., 1996, W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

In recent years, the nation's nonprofit organizations have come to depend more and more on volunteers to deliver services to people (Points of Light Foundation, 1999). According to the Giving and Volunteering in the United States Biennial Study (Independent Sector, 1999), 56% of adults volunteered a total of 19.9 billion hours in 1998. This documents a 13.7% increase from the 1996 study, and is the highest ever percentage of Americans volunteering their time to the service of others. As part of his national agenda, President Bush has called upon all Americans to dedicate approximately 4,000 hours over the course of their lives in service to others. In his June 1, 2002 radio address, the President noted: *Americans from every walk of life are heeding the call to service. Since my State of the Union address, more than 45,000 Americans have asked for Peace Corps applications. More than 34,000 citizens have signed up for the new Citizen Corps initiative. Applications for AmeriCorps and Senior Corps are also up.*

Americans from every generation and walk of life are offering their services as volunteers. However, this increase in volunteer service comes with the additional task of preparing them to effectively serve the needs of the nation. National volunteer organizations, responding to the changes in the profile of the 'typical' volunteer, have been responding by developing increasingly demanding volunteer roles. Although many volunteers come to their assignments with appropriate training and education for their assigned tasks, many do not. Even among those who come prepared, they continue to demonstrate a motivation to further their education in support of their volunteer activities. According to work by Morris and Caro (1995), people with more education are more likely to participate in adult education as well as in volunteer service.

By employing effective training practices, organizations can assist volunteers in meeting the challenges of their assignment-related roles and responsibilities. However, research by VanderVen (1989) suggests that to enhance the legitimacy of the volunteer, programs must move to develop *competency or objectives-based training* by observing and analyzing what volunteers actually do. By observing and analyzing interactions in the volunteer environment, programs may gain a greater understanding of the needs of the audience being served, as well as the needs of the volunteer.

The following discussion describes the ways in which one program of the Corporation for National and Community Service has utilized an *empowerment* approach to evaluation to result in the identification of program impact, as well as the development of a process of continuous improvement of its programming.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), an agency of the Federal government, was created in 1993 by the Clinton administration. The 'Corporation,' as it has become known, sought to bring to the field of service, Federal program support to communities through innovative public-private partnerships. The Corporation provides grants to community-based not-for-profit organizations, agencies of government, and Indian Tribes, that administer community service programs within a grantee-defined geographic service area. It funds and administers three primary voluntary service streams: AmeriCorps; Learn and Serve, and Senior Corps. Corporation programs are administered directly through Federal field offices, and independent, Gubernatorial-appointed State Commissions.

Senior Corps

The Corporation's Senior Corps is made up of three (3) senior volunteer programs known as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and the Senior Companion Program (SCP). FGP was founded in 1965 as part of the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty. Originally an income-supplement program for low-income elders, the FGP provides part-time (20 hours per week), stipended volunteer opportunities to income-eligible adults over age 60. The stipend is currently paid at the rate of \$2.65 per hour. The primary purpose of FGP is to generate opportunities *for low-income persons aged 60 or over to provide supportive person-to-person services in health, education, welfare or related settings to help alleviate the physical, mental or emotional problems of children having special or*

exceptional needs (CNCS). The terms *exceptional* and *special needs* are broadly defined to include children with physical and learning difficulties, as well as institutionalized children, and children from families demonstrating special needs and circumstances.

Among the stated goals of the FGP program is the following: *To enable low-income persons aged 60 and over to remain physically and mentally active and to enhance their self-esteem through continued participation in needed community services.* (Year 2000 FGP Handbook) Since its inception, FGP has grown from a program with 21 funded sponsors to one where 28,000 Foster Grandparents, nationally, provide service to 230,000 children.

SCP was created in 1973 to mirror the programming of FGP. Like the FGP, SCP also provides volunteer opportunities to low-income eligible elders, age 60 and over. It too focuses on meeting critical community needs, while also providing personal and tangible benefits to income-eligible elder volunteers. While Foster Grandparents provide services to children, Senior Companions offer support and companionship to frail elders. These services generally provide elders in the community with the opportunity to remain living in an independent manner, usually in their own homes. Fourteen thousand Senior Companions, nationwide, currently assist 61,737 elder adults to remain living in an independent manner (CNCS).

RSVP, the successor to a highly successful demonstration program that provided community-based volunteer service opportunities for older adults (ages 55 and over) in New York City, became a Corporation program in 1971. It is an outgrowth of efforts by private groups, gerontologists, and government agencies over the past two decades to address the needs of retired persons in America, while at the same time addressing the growing needs of communities. Nationwide, 485,000 older adults serve through 67,500 community-based organizations in a diverse array of volunteer service positions that include service to children, adolescents, adults, elders, and service to communities such as public safety and environmental programs. Of the three Senior Corps programs, RSVP is the most flexible, in terms of the types of service in which its volunteers may become engaged. Another significant difference of RSVP from both FGP and SCP is that volunteers in this program do not receive any financial stipend.

Glenwood Research

Glenwood Research is a research and consulting firm focused primarily on the provision of assistance to organizations engaged in community service. Consulting activities include the provision of training and technical assistance, program evaluation, focus group facilitation, and grant writing. Client research activities include consumer research, psychosocial research in support of program design, program outcome studies, opinion surveys, and client satisfaction research. The company supports a national client base of community service organizations.

Glenwood initiated its work with Corporation for National and Community Service programs in 1998, providing training and technical assistance to them in meeting their program outcome evaluation and reporting compliance requirements. Glenwood was a sub contractor to the national TTA provider that was under direct contract to the Corporation. Glenwood TTA activities were focused in the New England region. As of this date, the company provides training and technical assistance to over ninety Senior Corps programs located in twenty-one states and in Puerto Rico, as well as to many other volunteer organizations.

GPRAs and the Challenges of Programming for Impact

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) was passed by the U.S. Congress in July, 1993. The Act was considered to be *a pivotal first step toward measuring whether Federal programs (were) meeting their intended objectives* (Gore, 1993). GPRA required all federal agencies, by 1998, to develop 5-year strategic plans with measurable outcomes.

Programming for Impact (PFI) became the Corporation's Senior Corps response to GPRA. Senior Corps established PFI as *a methodology for integrating measurement into project performance, and ensuring that GPRA goals were achieved*, (Senior Corps Program Operations Handbooks). Prior to the advent of PFI, none of the three Senior Corps programs were recognized as being actively engaged in the evaluation of either volunteer or project outcomes at the local level. Instead, evaluation activities were primarily limited to the yearly assessment of project administrative processes and operations, and conducted by local project advisory councils. Although notable evaluations of Senior Corps program impacts were accomplished at the national level, prepared by outside evaluation firms under contract to the Corporation, the evaluation of program activities and the reporting of program outcomes was relatively unknown to local programs.

PFI was also envisioned as a way to raise senior service programming to a *new level of significance* (PFI Toolkit). As the nation's population was aging, and increasing numbers of healthy, and skilled adults were leaving the workforce, the National Senior Service Corps wanted to remain an attractive volunteer option for new retirees. It was concerned that the style and content of senior service programming might not appeal to the retirees of the 1990s as well as it had appealed to retirees in the late 60's, 70's and 80's. The question before the Senior Corps was whether or not RSVP, FGP, and SCP could effectively compete with newly emerging service programs, like the Points of Light Foundation and others, for volunteers from a growing pool of healthy, energetic, and talented retirees.

Challenges faced both National Senior Service Corps staff, located in Washington, D.C. and in Corporation State offices, and Senior Corps local project directors as Programming for Impact was unveiled. Change, at best, is difficult, and the introduction of the scope of the PFI change was often initially met with resistance. Many individuals engaged in Senior Corps programming voiced concern that the new PFI emphasis on community impact would result in a de-emphasis on providing benefits to elder volunteers. Another contributing factor to PFI resistance appeared to be related to the fact that most local Senior Corps project directors, as well as many Corporation staff, had little or no direct experience with outcome-based programming, or with program evaluation.

In response to these challenges, a process was devised to train both project and Corporation staff simultaneously. The Corporation implemented parallel processes of training - one for Corporation staff, and one for local program personnel. NSSC also designed a 5-Element Planning and Reporting Statement format (a logic model) for the use of projects as a planning and reporting tool. The logic model was part of a comprehensive document, known as the *Programming for Impact Toolkit*, developed and published by NSSC and distributed to each local project director across the country, as well as to every Corporation state office. In addition, each State Office was given funding with which to engage the services of the national TTA provider of evaluation consultation, under contract to the Corporation, to assist them in moving local programs into compliance with evaluation expectations. However, final decisions of how PFI resources were to be utilized within each state were left to the determination of the individual state offices.

In addition to preparing and distributing PFI resource materials, the Corporation also published Senior Corps GPRA goals that called for an increasing percentage of volunteers to be included in assignments that reported out on their impact on community needs. The percentage of volunteers engaged in activities covered by impact statements was expected to increase annually until such time as all Senior Corps volunteers were engaged in activities demonstrating a community impact. Programming for Impact provided Senior Corps with a way to demonstrate its progress on meeting the published GPRA goals.

The PFI Model

In the words of the Corporation, Programming for Impact *is an outcome based approach*, and a framework implemented by Senior Corps to allow its projects to effectively demonstrate how they: *deliver benefits and results to the community; focus energies and resources on meeting high priority local needs; gauge and measure how the activities of the volunteers get results in communities; and raise the importance of seniors as valuable community resources [in ways] that justify investment from public and private sectors (CNCS).*

PFI is a structure to result in the assessment of outcomes of Senior Corps activities on the needs of communities. It utilizes a five (5) step logic model, consisting of:

Community Need – the identification of the priority issue or problem to be addressed by Senior Corps activities

Service Activity - the identification and description of activities, to be performed by the Senior Corps volunteers, developed to meet the identified community need.

Inputs – the description of the project resources assigned to the accomplishment of the activities. Inputs are generally defined in terms of volunteer hours, as well as other project resources being applied to the activities.

Accomplishments – these are defined as outputs or products of the service activity.

Accomplishments are usually identified in terms of ‘customer’ or ‘client’ process measures.

Impact - the fifth PFI element is defined as the measurable change in the community, client or agency that occurred as a result of the service activity.

The PFI Implementation Approach

The Corporation's Senior Corps approach to meeting its Programming For Impact (PFI) outcome / impact reporting goals, as recommended by its national office in Washington, DC, has been referred to as a *bottom-up* methodology (Endres, 1998). This approach essentially consists of the provision of training and technical assistance, generally at regional conferences, during which the Corporation's national TTA vendor (consultant) provides audiences with general evaluation terminology, and exposure to evaluation process and outcome measurement methodology. A review of the PFI framework is usually included. Local project personnel are then expected to use this information to develop appropriate evaluation activities and measures, specific to their operations, and designed to bring their projects into compliance with outcome reporting expectations.

Strengths / Weaknesses

The so-called bottom-up approach to PFI has demonstrated both strengths and limitations. From a strengths perspective, the Corporation:

- Established a useful and comprehensive model to assist projects in identifying and measuring their impacts on community issues.
- Appropriated considerable sums of money, allocated to the provision of training and technical assistance, to assist projects in adopting and utilizing the PFI model.
- Developed a comprehensive reference manual and guide for local project directors in support of PFI compliance activities, entitled: *Programming for Impact: National Toolkit*.

From our point of view, the Corporation's approach also demonstrated key limitations, including:

- The parameters, practices, and expectations for PFI, beyond meeting GPRA reporting requirements, were never defined.

Despite being a new initiative, no one, or group of employees from CNCS headquarters was assigned responsibility for developing longer term leadership for the PFI compliance challenge. Instead, a combination of outside national TTA provider contractors, working with state CNCS personnel, interpreted the compliance information needs, delivered training, and developed means, methods and tools by which community impacts were to be measured. As a result, there was a lack of a single vision of how, and in what form PFI compliance should be carried out. Further, despite language in the Toolkit referencing the use of PFI to improve on the quality of Senior Corps programming, training and implementation emphasis remained on *reporting of results* rather than on improving results.

- Corporation personnel at the state office level did not demonstrate a consistent understanding of what constituted compliance with PFI objectives set by the Corporation for local programs.

Although Corporation state office personnel were assigned the responsibility for monitoring PFI compliance progress, no uniform method was ever developed to guide them in determining local project achievement of PFI compliance targets. As a result, each State Office defined PFI compliance differently, and acted accordingly. In the absence of national compliance standards, numerous project personnel from across the country were heard to complain that state CNS staff were not consistent in the application of PFI, resulting in differing, and often contradictory standards of compliance from state-to-state.

- The lack of compliance standards resulted in the absence of compliance models, including examples of acceptable compliance formats, instruments, and measurement tools.

Local Senior Corps project personnel were reporting they had received sufficient volumes of training in general evaluation methods, but what they needed was assistance in transferring this knowledge into functional evaluation tools they could be reasonably assured would be acceptable to the Corporation.

- Despite the fact that the Corporation had identified a number of national initiatives, notably its ‘America Reads Challenge,’ it never developed, nor communicated national outcome measure targets for these activities, nor did it identify other national Senior Corps programming for which it might accumulate national impact data.

The significance of Senior Corps projects performing the same, if not dramatically similar service activities was not recognized. For example, most Foster Grandparent programs across the country provide volunteers acting as in-classroom reading and literacy tutors to grades K through 3 students. Other similarities in service activity have been found to be present in all three Senior Corps programs. Most SCP and RSVP projects are also engaged in similar types of programming as other SCP and RSVP projects. In addition, a number of similar service activities are performed by each of the three Senior Corps programs. RSVP projects, in particular, have been found to be performing many of the same, or similar activities as both FGP and SCP.

- The NSSC prescribed ‘bottom up’ method of developing outcome reporting acted to prevent the accumulation of information to demonstrate the entire scope and magnitude of the impact Senior Corps programs were having on community needs.

Using the bottom up approach, where each project made its own decisions regarding what and how to report on outcomes, reporting lacked consistency from project to project, characterized by the use of a wide variety of measures applied to the same, or similar programming. The lack of outcome / impact reporting standards also led to an array of reporting formats.

Dissimilarities of measurement acts to restrict the Corporation's ability to collect impact data to any level but the local program geographic area of responsibility. It also results in additional negative consequences. For example, a lack of consistency in outcome/impact measures severely limits the Corporation's ability to accumulate impact data across broader geographic regions, thus making it difficult to identify the true, overall value of CNCS programming. This is true for activities within the same program, such as similar interventions delivered by Foster Grandparents from various projects, but is also true for Senior Corps programming that appears in more than one type of program.

An example is literacy tutoring. Both FGP and RSVP volunteers are engaged in literacy tutoring of in-school youth, yet, no standard impact measures have been suggested to these projects. As a result, FGP projects engaged in literacy tutoring tend to report their impact results in varying ways. RSVP projects also report their literacy tutoring impact results in varying ways. The result is inconsistent measures of impact not only within each program (FGP and RSVP), but a lack of consistent measures of impact for the intervention we call *literacy tutoring*. Without an overall intervention focus, the Corporation is unable to demonstrate the impact of the combined efforts of both FGP and RSVP tutor volunteers.

Without the identification of standard language, used to identify the same or similar activities offered by any two or more of the three Senior Corps programs, and without the identification and use of common standards of measure to collect impact information, the Corporation runs the risk of under-reporting the true measure of the impact Senior Corps has on community needs.

- Despite the provision of compliance training and technical assistance, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the first three years of its implementation, PFI compliance progressed at a far slower rate than was projected, and local programs were having difficulty demonstrating impacts of their programming on community issues.

The Massachusetts Approach

In contrast to the national 'bottom up' approach of the Corporation to meet GPRA compliance objectives, the Corporation state office, responsible for Senior Corps programs in Massachusetts, took an alternative approach. This alternative approach was developed because:

- Massachusetts CNCS staff, working directly with local projects, voiced concern that progress toward nationally established compliance objectives was not moving at a satisfactory pace, and that projects would not meet GPRA goals.
- Massachusetts local Senior Corps project directors and staff were voicing frustration with the lack of specificity offered by the bottom-up compliance process.

Recognizing the need to enable projects to engage in outcome-based programming, in order to demonstrate their impact on community issues, Glenwood Research set about to develop a PFI compliance method that would ensure national GPRA goals would be achieved. Glenwood accomplished the development of this alternative methodology with the help of numerous

Massachusetts State and local Senior Corps program personnel. Instead of following the Corporations' 'bottom up' approach, we introduced a *collaborative development* approach to PFI compliance activities. This method is now in use in Massachusetts and a number of other project sites throughout the country.

Collaborative Development Approach

This collaborative method was modeled on the 'empowerment evaluation' principles. Empowerment evaluation is defined as: *the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination* (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman, 1996). Glenwood Research acted as coach and facilitator, assisting Massachusetts Senior Corps program staff in identifying their intended outcomes, and then worked with them to develop tools to identify and quantify the outcomes of their programming on an ongoing basis. Like the approach to evaluation, as described by Ricardo Millett in the Fetterman, et. al. book, Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self Assessment and Accountability, the evaluation process developed for Massachusetts Senior Corps programs focused on *improvement of programming rather than proof of programming*, whereby resulting evaluations were intended to not only report on the impact of programming, but to reflect on program operations to assist with the identification of ways to improve upon them.

In keeping with concepts of continuous improvement, the collaborative approach evaluation process was designed to be cyclical in nature, enabling program personnel to re-assess program efficacy at regular testing intervals, re-design portions of the intervention, implement, re-test, and analyze results.

The method has also worked to engage program staff. It recognizes the contribution staff can bring to the evaluation process through their thorough understanding of the programming, along with their in-depth knowledge of the characteristics and conditions of program clientele. This insight gives staff a unique perspective on the analysis of findings developed from the evaluation activities. In addition, when staff become engaged in the process of evaluation, they tend to assume ownership of the process which, in turn, often supports its cyclical nature.

This collaborative development model of evaluation also:

- Introduced common language identification of like-activities to identify like-interventions.
- Provided common measures of impact to projects to result in comprehensive outcome reporting.
- Provided a capacity for projects to compare and contrast local results, thus fostering best practice and peer exchanges.
- Introduced to local projects, key activities, methodology, tools and supporting documentation in support of ongoing program improvement, similar to those found in the total quality management (TQM) literature.

In Support of Standards of Measure

A fundamental principle of the collaborative approach centers on the use of standard language to identify program activities, and *standards of measure* for assessing the impact of local program interventions. During the process of assisting local programs with PFI compliance, Glenwood recognized a similarity in programming among the various Senior Corps projects. As we worked with individual local program personnel to describe their activities, and develop evaluation tools and methods to assess their impact, other program directors known to be delivering similar programming were consulted, and asked to assist in the development of the tools so that they would also be of use to them. We believe this manner of collaboration, where the consultant engaged local project directors in finalizing tool content and design, resulted in the acceptance of the instruments, and fostered a recognition among directors that the development of standards of measure provided them with opportunities to demonstrate outcomes over broader geographical areas, as well as opportunities to compare and contrast program outcomes among their local programs.

Now, any Massachusetts Senior Corps program that offers the same, or similar intervention has the opportunity to measure and report outcomes for that activity in the same manner, using the same measures of impact as all other programs offering that intervention.

In addition to standard impact measurement tools, Glenwood provided local Senior Corps project personnel with a method of collecting and analyzing data generated by them. This was completed using an Excel spreadsheet with built-in formulas for calculating mean scores and frequency of responses. Provision of this spreadsheet also facilitated our ability to accumulate evaluation data across project and program lines. The use of a standard format in the Excel spreadsheet provides the consultant, and the Massachusetts Corporation office, with the ability to accumulate and combine individual project results. Once accumulated, analysis can then be performed on the data to report out observations of impact at local, regional, and at state levels either by individual program (ie., FGP vs RSVP vs SCP), or combined. Further, the spreadsheet data is compatible with SPSS data requirements, allowing us to import data to software that is capable of more rigorous statistical testing.

At the present time, there are twenty-seven different impact scales available to Senior Corps projects. The scales reflect the wide variety of Senior Corps programming. Scale designs were generally guided by the following objectives:

- Identify what change or impact has been observed
- Identify what contribution the Senior volunteer made to the observed change or impact
- Assess the effectiveness of the volunteer in delivering the activity (intervention)
- Be so designed to accommodate time constraints of both those administering the instrumentation and those completing the instrumentation.

The scales utilize a combination of nominal, ordinal and Likert-type scaling. They support program reflection and continuous improvement through longitudinal testing of program impact. This enables local programs to consider and assess the impact of any introduced changes to intervention design or volunteer preparation on program or volunteer efficacy.

The collaborative evaluation approach introduced in Massachusetts addressed many of the Corporation's PFI *bottom-up* compliance limitations, in that:

- It identified individuals who would be responsible for the PFI compliance challenge at the State level. This task was now identified with the State Corporation Program Specialists, and the consultant.
- It developed a clear vision of how, and in what form PFI compliance would be carried out in Massachusetts.
- It provided Corporation personnel, responsible for determining local program PFI compliance, with a clear understanding of what compliance looked like, allowing them to approach the compliance review process with improved consistency.
- It provided assistance to local Senior Corps project personnel in transferring evaluation knowledge to functional evaluation tools they were assured were acceptable to the Massachusetts Corporation office.
- It identified a number of program activities being delivered by most, if not all of the programs in the State. This led to the recognition that measures of statewide impact could be developed and presented.
- It rapidly moved PFI from a state of general non-compliance, to a level of compliance that exceeded national PFI compliance goals. Local programs that were not in compliance could, by adopting the tools and methods provided through the collaborative process, immediately come into full compliance with the Corporation.
- It resulted in consistent measures of impact for similar programming from project to project. This has enabled the collection of impact data across broader geographic regions, and across program lines, contributing to an improved capacity to identify the true, overall value of Senior Corps programming.

The Response

Response to the collaborative development process, as well as response to the 'empowerment' concept of program evaluation, as developed in Massachusetts, has been very positive at the local project level. Program directors recognized that the use of the provided examples, forms and instruments, was a way to immediately meet State compliance expectations. Secondly, it removed the burden of original development from their shoulders. For many program directors, the task of developing evaluation instrumentation is seen as a very difficult task, and one for which they are not prepared by either schooling or experience.

From the perspective of the Corporation State Office, the development of uniform standards of measurement for the work of Senior Corps projects represented a breakthrough in their ability to manage Programming for Impact. A broad range of user-friendly, program-specific instrumentation was now available for use. The instrumentation allowed for the identification of attribution (causality) to volunteers for aspects of a service activity's success. Further, local project GPRA compliance reporting could be validated by Programming for Impact outcome reporting.

Other observed benefits derived from this approach include:

- For the past two years all Massachusetts RSVP projects that have applied for Corporation competitive funding, through its Programs of National Significance (PNS) initiative, have been successful. One program has quadrupled in size, seven have tripled, and two have doubled as a result of their receipt of new PNS awards. RSVP's success in competing for PNS funding has been linked, by State and local CNCS personnel, to local program director enhanced skills in the areas of outcome-based programming and evaluation.
- Massachusetts projects now successfully 'market' their measured outcomes to other partners and funding sources, using findings generated through their evaluation instrumentation and analyses. Program directors report their ability to attract new funding for their programming has been enhanced by their evaluation activities. Local program directors also report finding their work to be regarded as more credible by both their sponsoring organizations and their community partners when programming and funding discussions focus on the production and measurement of outcomes.
- Local program director attitudes about PFI, and evaluation in general, have changed for the better. Many of the local directors now actively engage in cyclical evaluation, and report increased comfort levels with the process. Further, local projects are beginning to 'institutionalize' evaluation by including its associated costs within their budgets.
- RSVP in Massachusetts has expanded its use of the collaborative evaluation model to associated programming, namely its AmeriCorps*VISTA programming.

Results To-Date

From the work completed in Massachusetts, we have identified a number of different community activities in which Senior Corps programs are engaged. The following lists, organized by each of the three Senior Corps programs, identify the instrumentation developed with the assistance of local program personnel, and in use to assess impact of programming on identified community needs. Those activities highlighted in blue are also found in one, or both of the other two Senior Corps programs.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer Impact In-School Tutors - Literacy In-School Tutors - ESL Assignments In-School Tutors - Pre-School & Head Start Assignments In-School Tutors - Any Grade Independent Living - Client Impact Tutors - Adult Education - GED Preparation Tutor / Mentor - Young Adults Mentors to Adults (pre-release incarcerated) 	RSVP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly Visiting – General Friendly Visiting – Transportation Friendly Visiting – In Hospitals Adult Day Care / Nursing Home Setting - Client Utilization Parent Aides (teen parent mentors) Meals on Wheels Partner Agency – Contribution to Agency Mission SALT – TRIAD Congregate Meal Sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer Impact Independent Living - Client Impact Assisted Living - Client Impact Adult Day Care / Nursing Home Setting Client Utilization 	SCP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respite - (client version) Respite (partner agency version) Mental Health Client - Treatment Utilization Independent Living Assistance to formerly homeless HIV/AIDS Patients
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer Impact In-School Tutors - Any Grade Assignments In-School Tutors - ESL Assignments In Hospital Service to Children's Unit Patients In-School Tutors - Pre-School & Head Start Assignments Young Adult Tutor / Mentor 	FGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-Hospital Service to Children's Unit Patients In-School Tutors - Literacy Parent Aid Advisory Council Program Evaluation In-School Tutors - disabled / developmentally delayed children and youth

Literacy Tutors

Of all the programming found to be in common among the Massachusetts Senior Corps programs, the one most consistently tested has been the provision of in-school tutors to grades K through 3 students in support of literacy skills improvements. The community need associated with this intervention has been described as:

According to the America Reads initiative (a Clinton Administration initiative), as many as *forty percent of all children are now reading below the accepted level on national reading assessments, and are often identified as being 'at-risk' for literacy and reading skills.* The implications for children at-risk for literacy has been identified by the America Reads challenge as: *Children who do not read early and read well are held back at the start of their education-- and for the rest of their lives* (CNCS, 1999).

‘At-risk’ is a term used by educators to identify children who *are differentiated by their difficulty meeting standards for school success* (Sullivan, 1996).

In response to this national need, the Corporation launched its *America Reads* initiative, which is a program design that places elder volunteers into schools and other settings to tutor children in reading and other literacy skills. Many FGP and RSVP programs across the country, working with local school officials, identified the need for literacy skill improvement among students, and in response developed and marketed literacy tutor programming as a method to assist children in gaining literacy proficiency.

The provision of in-school tutors by an elder volunteer program was seen as having potential benefit to students. Research confirms the use of tutors, and demonstrates that despite the fact that students are classified as being at-risk, they can generally learn successfully and continually by the application of curricula *that includes tutoring*, among other key components (Demery, 1995). Of particular note to Senior Corps programming, research is also available to suggest that non-professional tutors from the community can deliver effective literacy interventions (Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne & O’Connor, 1997). Outcome evaluation data on Senior Corps literacy tutoring generated in New England, and *America Reads* national evaluations have confirmed the positive improvements to student literacy skills from the provision of Senior Corps tutors, as well as their effectiveness as tutors.

Once Senior Corps became engaged in literacy tutoring, it was up to local programs to find ways to measure their impact on this identified need. Many programs attempted to use school administered test results, combined with volunteer and teacher observations to track change in student literacy skills improvements. However, due to variations in tests utilized by different school districts, and in some cases, difficulty in obtaining access to student test results, many programs found themselves without a means to assess the impact of their tutors.

Further, in considering the issue of causality, the question arose as to whether student assessments were even appropriate as indications of the impact of the senior volunteers on literacy skill development, as opposed to other initiatives undertaken by schools in addition to providing students with tutors. Such other interventions included an array of activities, such as remedial reading instruction, programs to engage parents in reading to their children, parent literacy programs, summer reading programs, and others. As a result, Senior Corps programs were faced with the challenge of identifying and assessing their contribution to the *America Reads* initiative, as distinct from the impact of the other interventions.

Finally, with their focus on trying to develop ways to demonstrate their impact on students, most Senior Corps programs never considered the need for ways to identify the efficacy of the volunteer tutors themselves.

In keeping with the philosophy of empowerment evaluation, Glenwood recognized the need to measure Senior Corps contributions to student change in a way that would also support continuous improvement of the programming. In response, a scale was developed, using both primary and secondary research on literacy skills development in early elementary grades, to identify testing variables. The scale also included variables to test for tutor skills, identified by teachers as desirable among volunteer tutors.

The scale is administered to teachers one time per year, at year-end. Teachers were selected to complete the scale since, among the mix of teacher, volunteer and student, the teacher is the only one professionally trained to observe and assess academic skill development in the student. In addition, teachers were most likely to observe the student with the volunteer, and were considered most likely to accurately assess the dynamic of the student-volunteer relationship.

Variables selected to assess student change included:

- Trusting in the volunteer
- Bonding with the volunteer
- Increased enjoyment from reading
- Increased self-confidence
- Increased ability to self-express
- Increased participation in reading
- Increased interest in books
- Improved behavior during reading
- Increased amounts of reading
- Improved self-esteem

Variables selected to test on volunteer effectiveness included:

- Relates well to the students
- Works within teacher guidelines
- Demonstrates healthy nurturing skills
- Respects student choices
- Remains non-judgmental
- Remains flexible
- Demonstrates commitment to the assignment
- Provides a positive classroom influence
- Relates well to the teacher and other staff
- Demonstrates reliability
- Maintains a sense of humor
- Demonstrates good listening skills

A recent analysis of Massachusetts results of the administration of the literacy scale included a total of 248 completed surveys on individual Senior Corps volunteers from four (4) RSVP program sites, and five (5) FGP program sites. Surveys were completed in May/June of both 1999 and 2000. Each program administered the identical instrument to teachers to whom volunteer tutors were assigned. Results were tabulated for each program, and then accumulated for all nine programs.

As demonstrated from the following chart, and in addition to calculating results for each of the nine programs, use of standard measures allows for accumulation of the data to the program level to provide for an analysis of impact for both FGP and for RSVP; a comparison of outcomes between the two programs; and a combined assessment of the impact accomplished by the nine Senior Corps programs across the State. Of the accumulated results, fifty-six percent (56%) of the volunteers were RSVP, and forty-four percent (44%) were FGP volunteers.

	FGP	RSVP	RSVP vs FGP	Combined (State- wide Impact)
	(n=110)	(n=138)		(n=248)
	mean	mean		mean
Number of at-risk assigned to volunteer	5.29	2.4	-2.89	3.61
Overall, observed improvement in assigned children	2.79	2.73	-0.06	2.76

Scoring Key - Student Change

1=No Improvement; 2 = Modest Improvement; 3 = Substantial Improvement; 4 = Now at grade level

Volunteer Contribution to Improvements	FGP	RSVP	RSVP vs FGP	Combined
Trust in Volunteer	4.43	4.52	0.09	4.48
Bonding with Volunteer	4.42	4.45	0.03	4.44
Increased self-confidence	4.03	3.98	-0.05	4.00
Improved self-esteem	4.08	3.91	-0.17	3.99
Increased enjoyment from reading	3.92	4.03	0.11	3.98
Increased amounts of reading	3.89	3.79	-0.10	3.83
Increased participation in reading	3.87	3.80	-0.07	3.83
Increased interest in books	3.86	3.78	-0.08	3.82
Increased ability to self-express	3.77	3.81	0.04	3.80
Improved behavior during reading	3.75	3.74	-0.01	3.74
Overall Volunteer contribution to improved skills	4.01	3.49	-0.52	3.56

Scoring Key - Volunteer Contribution to Student Change

1 = No contribution; 2 = Modest contribution; 3 = Meaningful contribution; 4 = Substantial contribution; 5 = Totally responsible

Another example of the benefit of using standards of measure is our current work around assessing volunteer effectiveness. The volunteer effectiveness variables, as contained in the following list entitled: *Satisfaction with Volunteer*, is used on every instrument that was designed for any type of tutoring program. In addition to literacy tutoring, Senior Corps volunteers are also engaged in English as a Second Language (ESL), pre school and Head Start, general academic, and GED tutoring. Each of these activities has its own evaluation instrument. Although the variables included to measure change in the client are different on each of the instruments, the variables we use to test for customer satisfaction of the tutor volunteer are identical.

	FGP	RSVP	RSVP vs	Combined
Satisfaction With Volunteer	mean	mean	FGP	mean
Demonstrate commitment to the assignment	4.45	4.37	-0.08	4.41
Demonstrate reliability	4.36	4.39	0.03	4.38
Relate to you and other staff	4.41	4.28	-0.13	4.34
Provide a positive classroom influence	4.30	4.29	-0.01	4.29
Maintain a sense of humor	4.34	4.24	-0.10	4.28
Remain flexible	4.23	4.31	0.08	4.27
Demonstrate good listening skills	4.23	4.20	-0.03	4.21
Demonstrate healthy nurturing skills	4.14	4.27	0.13	4.21
Work within your guidelines	4.23	4.17	-0.06	4.20
Relate to the children	4.09	4.23	0.14	4.17
Remain non-judgmental	4.07	4.15	0.08	4.12
Respect children's choices	4.05	4.17	0.12	4.12
Overall satisfaction with Volunteer	4.28	4.16	-0.12	4.18

Scoring Key – Teacher Satisfaction With Volunteer

1 = Dissatisfied; 2 = Somewhat satisfied; 3 = Satisfied; 4 = Very Satisfied; 5 = Exceeded Expectations

Moving Forward

The use of standard measures provides us with the ability to compare results from project to project, program to program, intervention to intervention, state to state, and year to year. Our approach to evaluation also allows us to identify where improvements can be made in programming to result in improved impact scores. By reviewing the scores achieved for each variable, we can identify where we might want to attempt to improve upon the recorded scores.

For example, we might select the three lowest recorded scores and target them for improvement. At the present time, we have accumulated three years worth of test results in two different New England states for these tutor effectiveness variables. We have results from over 800 tests. The results of our longitudinal testing provide us with a comprehensive picture of volunteer performance, and also points to areas where improvements might be attempted.

Test results demonstrate that for student improvement, our consistently lowest scoring variables are our contribution to demonstrated student improvements in: *interest in books*, *self-expression*, and *behavior during reading*. For volunteer effectiveness, consistently, the lowest scoring variables are for: *relating to the students*; *respecting student choices*; and *remaining non-judgmental*.

Scores for the three lowest scoring student impact variables consistently range from 3.7 to 3.8 on a 5 point scale where 1 = the volunteer made *No Contribution* to any observed positive change, and 5 = the volunteer was *Totally Responsible* for the observed change. Scores for the three lowest scoring teacher satisfaction variables consistently range from 4.16 to 4.20 on the 5 point scale, where 1 = Dissatisfied, and 5 = Exceeded Expectations. Despite these consistently high scores, we have concluded that Senior Corps tutors can improve on these issues, resulting in an improved overall impact on their assignments.

Whether our analysis of results is conducted and addressed at the local project level, the program level, or statewide, we now have data available to point us to areas of needed improvement. In keeping with the empowerment evaluation philosophy, we have begun to consider the development of changes to volunteer preparation, and ongoing in-service education to target both student and volunteer outcomes we want to improve upon. The State CNS office, and each of the local Senior Corps projects now have baseline scores against which to compare future test results. Further, if we should introduce training, or other volunteer preparation changes to the programming, we now have the ability to see, by comparing subsequent scores to previous scores, whether the changes make a quantifiable difference to program outcomes.

Relevance to Other Organizations

Through the implementation of evaluation activities focused on improvement of programming, we can provide organizations with the tools to identify volunteer training needs. Also, when delivered, this same evaluation approach can identify the training that was effective versus that which was not. As a result, an empowerment approach to program evaluation can support opportunities for community service organizations to improve their capabilities to effectively contribute to solutions to the challenges facing the nation.

In addition, a number of national volunteer organizations have also begun to identify broader program themes. The Points of Light Foundation has begun to identify a number of national initiatives, and generally requires its programs to conduct outcome evaluation activities. Volunteers of America, and Catholic Charities, among other faith-based organizations are playing an increasing role in the provision of volunteer community service, and will also be required by Federal funding sources to meet GPRA requirements. Some United Way agencies are also beginning to identify and initiate regional initiatives in response to regional need issues. All of these organizations are currently engaged in efforts to introduce concepts of evaluation for the purpose of being able to report on program outcomes.

Regardless of how they get to them, the identification of community needs implies the subsequent development of targeted impacts. Once community needs are identified, organizations can develop ‘standards of measures’. Once the standards of measures are identified, local programs can use them to demonstrate their contribution to the sponsoring organizational community need impact objectives. This process will result in the development of impact data across service regions that can then be used to demonstrate agency-wide impact on the identified needs.

Unfortunately, similar to the history of the Corporations' Senior Corps, these other national volunteer organizations appear to have narrowly interpreted evaluation as a means to develop outcome or impact reporting, and have not recognized the value of this information as evidentiary documentation for the development of program improvements. However, as projects within these organizations begin to assess the outcomes of their community activities, the opportunity to identify areas needing improvement will become more apparent. This will perhaps lead to an evolution toward empowerment evaluation where organizations begin to focus on continuous improvement.

Conclusions

It is interesting to note that the same instrumentation developed in Massachusetts has demonstrated utility to other Senior Corps programs outside of New England. Through both marketing efforts by Glenwood Research, and by word of mouth among local program directors, a number of the same twenty-seven instruments developed in Massachusetts are now in use in over ninety (90) Senior Corps programs, in fourteen states and in Puerto Rico. As a result, Corporation opportunities for comparing and contrasting program impacts, and volunteer effectiveness, and for developing training and other changes to result in outcome improvements are expanding.

Based on the demonstrated adaptability of the Senior Corps instrumentation, opportunity exists within the Corporation to expand use of the collaborative, empowerment evaluation approach to Senior Corps programs across the country, as well as to its other two 'streams' of service: Learn and Serve, and AmeriCorps. Each of these service programs, like Senior Corps, demonstrates similarities in their programming. Neither program has adopted an evaluation framework like PFI, but both are expected to report on outcomes. By developing standards of measure, and introducing empowerment evaluation methodology to them, the Corporation could realize significant strides in its ability to demonstrate regional and national impacts on community needs being addressed by all three of its national programs.

Volunteers of America, Points of Light, United Way agencies, and others, each currently working to develop ways to demonstrate the impact of their programming, are also candidates for the collaborative, empowerment approach to evaluation. Their development of standards of measures, and their use of an evaluation methodology focused on improvement, could result in more effective use of volunteers in meeting the growing and increasingly complex challenges facing our communities.

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