

Volunteering in Under-Resourced Rural Communities
Final Report



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The Points of Light Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to engaging more people and resources more effectively in volunteer service to help solve serious social problems. The organization collaborates and partners with community leaders to better recruit, manage, and encourage volunteers to effect real change. Through its programs, initiatives, and hundreds of Volunteer Centers around the country, the Points of Light Foundation supports activities focused on engaging the general public and specific volunteer segments - including workplace, family, youth, seniors, and faith-based communities, among others. Learn more at www.PointsofLight.org.

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Final Report

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In Their Own Voices

“It is important to engage those we serve, but often we do an adequate job of ministering to the poor, but not with the poor.”

“I used to make \$300/month and felt guilty taking the time to volunteer when I knew that I could be using that time to make money, or be with my children.”

- *Clarksville, IN*

“The way information gets around my neighborhood, is like this, “did you hear this...” It’s by word of mouth. If they don’t see positive people coming in trying to make a difference, trying to help them, it’s not going to change. It’s time for a change.”

“People get tired of other people coming in to help. This new group wants to come in and do whatever, but that’s not what we think needs to be done, so why would we help.”

- *Gettysburg, PA*

“Neighbors will drop by to visit, help with tasks around the house, and if needed, bring groceries from town.”

“Native Americans say they don’t have time to volunteer because they are taking wood to the elderly or fish to people who need it.”

- *Humboldt County, CA*

"I think the biggest volunteering need in this community is leadership and organizers. There seems to be many willing to volunteer, but few who are willing to take a leadership role."

“We look at the community as a whole. We find it inappropriate to single out someone based on income.”

“There is less anonymity in rural areas...everyone knows who is doing what, but either excuses it or ignores it, and there is less charitable, organized help.”

- *Sumner County, KS*

“Meal routes may be longer. There is no public transportation system here so if a person does not drive or own a car, they can't volunteer.”

“Being in a small town, everyone knows everyone, and sometimes that helps...the regular community in stepping up.”

- *Randolph County, NC*

“Policy and regulations are barriers – such as school volunteers, parents. We can’t provide them with lunch – children can eat, but we can’t feed volunteer moms who might also be hungry.”

- *Edcouch, TX*

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Executive Summary

Volunteering is an important way through which people connect with one another. It is also an important method of providing services and meeting the critical needs of communities that are not met by other means. But how does the concept of “volunteering” translate across socio-economic boundaries? What role does volunteering play in meeting the specific needs of low-income families and transforming distressed communities into family-supportive places? How are low-income people themselves engaged in volunteering in their community? With support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Points of Light Foundation, for a number of years, has been engaged in exploring these questions and sharing the learnings with the field. Points of Light’s seminal publication, *A Matter of Survival: Volunteer By, In, and With Low-Income Communities*, documents specific learnings from low-income urban communities and provides insight to practitioners and those interested in the well-being of low-income families and children about mobilizing volunteers and developing effective volunteer partnerships with tough communities.

Building on this work, in 2003, the Foundation began a study to explore the nature and practice of volunteering in low-income rural communities. *Volunteering in Under-Resourced Rural Communities* is a result of that effort. How do the learnings from the urban communities translate to rural areas? Do the unique conditions of rural communities necessitate unique and vastly different strategies for effective volunteer engagement? Led by questions such as these, the overall goals of the study were to:

- Deepen understanding of volunteer engagement in rural communities;
- Examine the applicability of the neighboring model to rural communities; and
- Identify practices that document and support volunteering / neighboring by, in and with under-resourced rural communities.

Methodology

The study was undertaken in two phases. The time-sequenced activities occurred over a period of 15 months, between September 2003 and December 2004. The first phase included a literature survey of pertinent publications and research on rural issues, especially rural volunteering; key informant interviews with 10 rural volunteer management practitioners; and three focus groups. The focus groups were held in Clarksville, IN, Edcouch, TX, and Gettysburg PA and engaged a diverse cross-section of rural stakeholders including community members, grassroots leaders, volunteer managers, and local faith and nonprofit staff. In the initial phase, the study sought to identify key ideas and themes that were then further explored in the second phase.

For the second phase of the study, the Foundation partnered with three Volunteer Centers to delve deeper into the topic through a focused study of volunteer practices in rural communities. This practitioner-focused method sought to understand the nature of volunteering in rural areas and explore the rural applicability of the findings from our urban work.

Key Findings

Findings from our rural study underscored the need for a greater focus on mobilizing low-income volunteers as equal partners in addressing the intractable social and economic challenges faced by rural families and communities today. The study brought to light the uniquely rural conditions that affect volunteer engagement and highlighted the need for a strategic and intentional approach to volunteer engagement. Our explorations also helped identify critical challenges that prevent participation and uncover effective strategies in engaging and empowering rural residents.

- Rural America is immensely diverse and this diversity negates a uniform understanding of what constitutes “rural.” Geography, location, demography, history, and local culture are all variables that impact conditions and thwart hopes for a generalized blue print approach to finding solutions to address needs and engage rural residents.
- Despite this diversity, there are, however, common issues that persist across regions, especially the struggles faced by low-income rural families. Disconnection and isolation, and issues such as transportation, affordable and reliable child care, healthcare, and living wage jobs not only affect the well-being of rural families, but also impact the ability of rural residents to engage in community activities.
- Inconsistent infrastructure across rural communities and local capacity are critical areas for consideration when seeking to foster volunteering in rural under-resourced areas. Lack of resources, collaboration, professionalism, and investment of rural volunteer organizations limit growth and effective volunteer solutions.
- Neighboring and informal volunteering in rural communities, like in their urban counterpart, are very much a part of life and community. Rural residents rely on neighbors, family members, and friends to meet many critical needs. The culture of independence and self-sufficiency speak to the inherent strength and resilience of rural areas and celebrates community. Yet, these very characteristics also inhibit growth and limit the effectiveness of formal volunteer efforts.
- Formal volunteering in rural areas differs from its urban areas in the limited pool of volunteers correlated to the relative smaller population of rural areas. However, in most other respects, formal rural efforts mirror mainstream urban volunteering, most notably the perception and limited targeted engagement of low-income residents.
- Most differences in urban and rural volunteering are found to be not so much a matter of the uniqueness of the barriers to engagement. Rather the differences emerge in the degree of obstruction posed by a common challenge (such as, transportation) as determined by unique local conditions (vast distances in rural areas), and the resulting need for place-based solutions – solutions rooted in the unique local reality of the community in question, its geography, history, culture, economy, etc.

Recommendations and Strategies

Our rural study affirms much of what we learned about volunteering in low-income urban communities and validates the applicability of the neighboring model in rural contexts. However, throughout the study, we also found overwhelming evidence that supports the critical need to find place-based solutions to overcome challenges in engaging rural residents, especially marginalized low-income populations. Volunteer organizations and supporters of volunteer efforts in rural areas must:

- Address the particular conditions of each community when designing volunteer programs, taking an intentional place-based approach to volunteer engagement that pays heed to the unique needs of low-income rural volunteers
- Celebrate and encourage innovation to overcome barriers and bridge the gaps of resources, infrastructure, and other logistical challenges that prevent participation
- Focus investment to build and strengthen the support, infrastructure, and capacity (organizational and community-wide) necessary for effective volunteer engagement
- Strengthen relationships, collaborate, and partner with local leaders, organizations, and community stakeholders to leverage resources, influence, and local networks
- Build on the strengths and assets of ongoing local efforts and neighboring activities, to foster ownership of local issues ; bridge cultural, social, and economic divides; and enhance formal efforts to effectively meet needs and boost community cohesion

Conclusion

Despite the great diversity of rural America, one resource that spans its multiple and varied realities is the human potential that can be raised through volunteer programs to meet local needs. However, an overwhelming proportion of rural citizens, many of whom are economically disadvantaged, remain largely untapped. The mobilization and participation of low-income rural residents has potential far beyond simply helping deliver existing services through a larger the pool of prospective volunteers. Low-income residents and leaders can help organizations develop locally relevant, volunteer driven solutions that address critical needs. Volunteering can be a strategy to build community cohesion and resilience, and an effective strategy in helping low-income rural residents connect to the essential resources, skills, and services needed to thrive.

1. Introduction and Background

The Points of Light Foundation began exploring the nature and practice of volunteering in America's low-income communities in 1996 at the invitation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Our initial work focused on the nation's urban low-income communities. Characterized by declining investments, rising unemployment, lack of social, economic and service infrastructures, issues of violence, segregation, and isolation among others, the conditions in these communities often make them "tough" places for families to raise healthy children. To understand volunteering and the role it plays in strengthening families and building family supportive communities, we set out to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of volunteering as it happens within low-income communities, performed by local people?
- What are some of the challenges faced by traditional volunteer organizations that try to "go into" low-income communities for volunteer initiatives?
- What are the key strategies through which traditional volunteer organizations can partner with low-income communities and help mobilize residents to solve community problems and strengthen families?

In an effort to address these questions, the Points of Light Foundation engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, including Volunteer Centers, other local and national volunteer organizations, businesses, and local grassroots leaders from low-income communities. The group engaged in dialogue sessions, focus groups, and pilot projects in eight communities. From this work, we learned that "volunteering," as it is practiced and conceived in the American mainstream, is still largely a middle class phenomenon. Traditional volunteer organizations often view low-income communities and their residents merely as recipients of services. As a result, the greatest assets of low-income communities, the people, go untapped by formal volunteer efforts.

However, we also learned that volunteering, though not always called so and often taking place through informal networks of friends, family, and faith, is very much a part of the social fabric of low-income neighborhoods and is critical to the success and well being of low-income families. These discoveries gave rise to the concept of volunteering as "neighboring"—the connections among residents that support positive individual and community behavior based on mutual respect, responsibility, and ownership—and the conclusion that organizations that seek to improve conditions in low-income communities must mirror the "neighboring" practices found in these communities.

The Neighboring Model

The Points of Light Foundation's "Neighboring Model" is built on the learnings from our work on volunteering in urban low-income communities and the understanding that facilitating sustainable social change in tough neighborhoods requires partnering with residents, neighborhood leaders, and informal groups, rather than just institutions. Modeling the culture of self-help and mutual assistance present in these communities, the neighboring model calls for

promoting asset building in the community, especially its people, and mobilizing all of a community's resources to build family supportive communities.

At the core of this model is a set of seven key concepts. These concepts were identified as critical success factors in promoting volunteering by, in, and with low-income communities to build and sustain effective partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and local low-income volunteers. The seven neighboring concepts are as follows:

1. Understand the nature of volunteering in low-income communities
2. Overcome barriers to community involvement
3. Empower the communities to help themselves
4. Cultivate community members skills and talents
5. Strengthen existing community leadership
6. Acknowledge that neighboring is an exchange
7. Ensure community readiness

More information on volunteering by, in, and with low-income communities and incorporating the concepts regarding neighboring can be found in *A Matter of Survival: Volunteering By, In and With Low Income Communities*.

Volunteering in Under-Resourced Rural Communities

With the goals of continuing the explorations and expanding our learnings about volunteering and its role in strengthening families and building family supportive communities in the context of rural low-income communities, in the Fall of 2003 the Points of Light Foundation began a two-phased study to:

- Deepen understanding around volunteer engagement in rural areas;
- Examine the applicability of the neighboring model to under-resourced rural communities; and
- Identify practices that document and support neighboring/volunteering by, in and with under-resourced rural communities.

This final report is a result of the study and details its design and methodology, shares the findings, and provides insight and recommendations to direct expanded rural application of the model.

2. Methodology

The study was designed to take place in two-phases. The first phase utilized a three-pronged strategy to learn from practitioners, community members and volunteers, as well as existing research and publications related to the topic. The second phase built on the preliminary study and took a deeper look at the issues through field study in local communities.

First Phase: Preliminary Investigation

The key objectives of the first phase were to:

- Explore the unique challenges that rural communities across America face today, especially issues that affect low-income families in these communities;
- Understand the scope of volunteer-based services and programming that nonprofits, Volunteer Centers, and other community based organizations are engaged in to address these needs;
- Identify the unique challenges that organizations face in engaging volunteers in rural communities, especially those from under resourced communities; and
- Document effective volunteer strategies that organizations and communities have employed to engage volunteers, especially residents of low-income rural communities.

The preliminary investigation, conducted over the course of several months in late 2003 and early 2004, employed a three-pronged method, which included:

1. Literature Review consisting of a review of research and publications focused on rural issues, specifically volunteering in rural communities. This literature review was conducted to provide a background to frame the findings from the other two methods.
2. Key Informant Interviews engaged 10 volunteer management practitioners from diverse rural communities across the country. These interviews were designed to explore the key research questions from the experience and perspective of individuals and organizations focused on addressing key social issues through volunteer engagement. The participants included paid and volunteer staff from Volunteer Centers, local nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies.
3. Focus Groups in three communities. Participants included local volunteer practitioners from nonprofit, government, faith- and community-based organizations, community leaders, and local volunteers. By engaging a diverse cross-section of local communities, the focus groups sought to explore the questions through dialogue and shared learning among participants.

Second Phase: Case Studies

Building on the learnings of the first phase, the specific goal of the second phase was to explore and document the applicability of neighboring model to rural communities (that lack similar support and resources of tough urban communities) through practitioner focused field research. The Points of Light Foundation collaborated with three Volunteer Centers as learning partners in this effort. The primary objectives of the case studies were to:

- Investigate the nature of volunteering in under-resourced rural communities performed by local citizens
- Identify the unique challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural communities
- Detect new or emerging effective strategies that are unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities
- Document the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities
- Document how volunteering strengthens families and transforms neighborhoods

Through the combined learning of both phases, the study sought to arrive at a collective body of evidence that helped address the overall goals of the study.

3. Summary of Findings

I. Literature Review

A literature review of existing publications and past research was undertaken to arrive at a deeper understanding of issues faced by rural communities. It specifically focused on volunteer engagement and family strengthening efforts. We found that while much has been written about rural communities, rural empowerment and rural development programs, most research lacks specific descriptors on volunteering. However, the review was helpful in identifying key issues and ideas critical to the study. Following is a summary of findings. Please refer to Appendix I for the complete literature review.

Defining Rural

The U.S. Census Bureau defines “rural” and “urban” as follows:

...rural areas comprise open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents. Urban areas comprise larger places and densely settled areas around them. Urban areas do not necessarily follow municipal boundaries. They are essentially densely settled territory as it might appear from the air. Most counties, whether metropolitan or non-metro, contain a combination of urban and rural populations. (USDA, n.d., *What is Rural*)

In 2000, the Census Bureau changed classifications of what is urban and rural from the old dualistic categories to “urbanized areas, urban clusters, and rural.” Both population size and density are considered in these definitions. In addition, the recognition that metropolitan and non-metro counties can contain a combination of urban and rural population indicates an expanding understanding of rurality. The recognition of the diverse realities of communities that share both rural and urban traits is a precursor to creating responsive place-based (rooted in the unique local reality of the community in question, its geography, history, culture, economy, etc) policies and practices that support the specific conditions of the communities in question. However, among most practitioners and researchers, “rural” America still specifically refers to conditions in non-metropolitan (non-metro) areas —(counties outside the boundaries of metro areas).

Rural Trends and Local Solutions

Progress and Partnerships in a Dynamic Rural America, released February 2004 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), describes three driving forces impacting rural America’s dynamic future:

- Changing demographics: Realized in the shifting migration patterns that can cause both positive and negative impacts.
- Industrial restructuring: In response to the decline in farming and mining jobs, rural America must restructure the economy to encourage population growth and stabilization.

- Increasing educational attainment: The number of rural Americans attaining higher levels of education is increasing. In 2000, for example, “one out of six rural adults age 25 and older had graduated from a four-year college, more than double the rate in 1970.” (Whitener et al., 2004).

All three trends call for rural communities to respond to meet new needs and address changes in the communities. However, there is also a growing recognition that there are no blueprint solutions to these trends. An overwhelming majority of the literature recommends approaches that take into account the diverse cultures of rural areas for any policy or program intervention. ERS recognizes that the “diverse needs of rural America require a diverse approach” and that “strategies to improve the economic well-being of rural residents will be most successful when tailored to individual and community needs”(Whitener et al., 2004, p.4).

A majority of readings also suggest using a community empowerment approach to strengthen the community from the inside out. For example, the Southern Development Center focuses on strengthening the quality of human capital by making community investments in the young people of rural areas. These “investments” include providing young people supportive, community-funded activities, as well as giving them a voice in community decision-making to foster civically responsible convictions.

A 2002 issue brief published by the Center for Community Action Research echoes this sentiment: “the unique challenges found in rural America can only be addressed by local grassroots initiatives”(Alwin, 2002, p.1). Aligning with this view, Community Action Agencies create a tri-partite board, “composed of one third private sector, one third elected officials and one third low-income representation,”(p.1) to determine service provided in each unique community.

Rural Poverty

Recent studies confirm that compared to their urban counterparts, rural families and communities fare worse when it comes to poverty and other economic indicators. The ERS publication *Rural America at a Glance* reviews a series of indicators based on federal data issued between 1999 and 2003. The figures highlight the differences between urban metro and non-metro employment, poverty and hunger rates. The report identifies many recent improvements in rural economic health; however, these slight shifts do not suggest a complete recovery. While these rural improvements have been in contrast to a decrease in urban economic well being, the urban economy still fares better overall. For instance, in 2001, 14.2 percent of non-metro residents were poor compared to 11.1 percent of metro residents.

According to the 2002 Save the Children report, *America’s Forgotten Children: Child Poverty in Rural America*, child poverty is greater in rural America than in urban areas; increasingly, rural child poverty mirrors urban poverty. Affecting a higher percentage of children of color and children of single parents, poor rural children face severe challenges. Without adequate local infrastructure and support systems, breaking the cycle of poverty is especially difficult for the poor rural families.

The Brookings Institution's report "*State of Low-Wage Workers: How the EITC Benefits Urban and Rural Communities in the 50 States*" points to a striking similarity between working-poor families in the most urban and most rural areas. Using the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as a "lens which to view the working poor" (Berube & Tiffany, 2004, p.2), the authors find that "large cities and rural areas contain nearly half (47 percent) of the nation's working poor families." (p.4). EITC data, when broken out region, indicate, "the most remote rural areas closely resemble large cities in their incidence of working poverty, while rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas look more like small metro areas"(p.5).

Challenges for Rural Organizations

Rural organizations, whether relying on paid staff or unpaid volunteer staff, face many challenges in serving and engaging low-income rural communities and residents. The Points of Light Foundation 2000 publication, *Volunteer Centers: Meeting the Challenges of Rural Non-Profit Management*, documents six unique challenges faced by nonprofits working in rural communities to address local needs:

- Cultural tradition of informal volunteering
- Identification of critical community needs
- Small and less diverse economies when compared to suburban and urban areas
- Lack of affordable, accessible training opportunities
- Difficult cultural transition
- Inconsistent infrastructure in rural communities

In *Meeting the Challenge of Social Service Delivery in Rural Areas*, Pamela Friedman raises similar themes. Discussing the challenges faced in delivery of social services to low-income families in rural areas, in addition to issues of transportation and reliable child care, Friedman also points to the lack of basic infrastructure, the greater costs per client faced by nonprofits combined with fewer human and fiscal resources needed for public administration (Welfare Information Network, March 2003). All these challenges call for innovation, partnerships, sharing of resources, planning and careful administration in both effective volunteer mobilization and service delivery.

Civic Engagement and Community Well-being

The Center for Economic Studies 2001 paper, "*Civic Community in Small Town America*," examines the impact of civic engagement and local capitalism on civic community. The study, focusing on 4,553 small towns (places with 2,500-20,000 people) categorized into metro and non-metro areas, evaluates the role of civic community in producing beneficial local outcomes (Tolbert et al. 2001, p.9). Variables utilized to specify civic engagement included third places (service and retail gathering places), associations (Chambers of Commerce, fraternal organizations, labor unions, etc) and civic denominations (places of worship). Though volunteering was not one of the variables used to define "civic engagement," the authors recognize the clear links between voluntary associations and civic engagement.

The study suggests that non-metro small towns are more likely than metro small towns to have above-average concentrations of "adherents to civic denomination" and "contain more third places and more associations than metro small towns" (p.16). The authors conclude that the

existence of third places (local businesses), faith-based organizations and membership communities is “associated with civic welfare”(p.20), also defined as beneficial local outcomes, and thus impacts “communitiy cohesion” and social and economic well-being.

Innovations in Civic Participation’s report, *The Impact of National Service on Critical Social Issues: Getting Things Done*, sheds light on the unique and critical role national and community service can play in addressing challenges faced by rural communities. Based on a forum held in May 2003, the report highlights innovative rural national service programs that have effectively addressed intractable rural challenges, such as shortage of job prospects, environmental issues, and lack of youth development opportunities. The report documents the critical role national and community service programs, in the form of Youth Corps, AmeriCorps and VISTA initiatives, can play as important catalysts and facilitators of positive social change by leveraging additional resources and partners to address local needs and engaging the community in its efforts (ICP, 2003). The report recommends targeting service programs to ensure the engagement and success of rural youth and the need to provide a living allowance and benefits to enable more members of the community to participate in service efforts.

Rural Volunteering

The Pew Partnership’s *Voices of Rural America: National Survey Results* is perhaps the most pertinent and comprehensive study available regarding volunteering in rural communities. The survey of 1,830 adults, conducted in October 2000, touches upon the differences between rural and urban residents, as well as the striking similarities between these two groups. The survey reveals that both rural and urban residents share similar percentages of voting, volunteering, and charitable contributions. However, over “50% of rural residents reported volunteering in the past year and rural volunteers are more likely than urban or suburban residents to commit to volunteering on a regular basis.”

The Pew report discusses the concept of “simple neighborly acts,” embodied in the Points of Light Foundation concept of *neighboring*, in which over 80 percent of rural residents report helping a neighbor, the highest percentage out of all three groups (rural, urban, and suburban). According to the survey, rural residents report two main “impediments to getting more involved,” which are lack of free time and knowledge about who to contact to get information about volunteering. Rural and urban volunteer trends are similar in the number of hours spent volunteering and the types of organizations residents utilize as “entry points” into the volunteer sector. In both groups, churches and schools were the most common types of organizations where residents volunteer.

Survey respondents ranked living-wage jobs as the most severe community challenge faced by rural communities, while illegal drugs were reported to be a serious problem in both urban and rural areas. Access to affordable healthcare was more challenging for rural residents than for urban and suburban residents. Pew also notes that teen pregnancies and unsupervised children and youth are also of concern to rural residents. When identifying key problem solvers, urban communities rank local religious organizations and police departments high on the problem-solver scale. For rural residents, however, the highest rank (above both religious organizations and police) was awarded to friends and family serving as problem solvers, again echoing the concept of neighboring.

The Pew Partnership study reinforces the notion that “rural and urban communities are more alike than different in terms of how they see their community, choose to get involved, perceive problems and identify problem solvers.” However, Pew also notes an “inspiring finding” in the “overwhelming number of rural respondents that rank their quality of life as excellent,” concluding with the suggestion that “there are enough positives in their community to make them want to stay”. The Pew report counteracts the common thinking that rural populations may have a tendency to “feel isolated.” In fact, the report states “rural residents were *more* likely to feel connected to their communities than urban residents and equally optimistic about their community's prospects for the future. Eighty percent of rural residents indicated that they “feel that their community's best years might be ahead, not behind.”

Conclusion

The literature review helped identify some critical issues related to rural communities in general, the challenges faced by organizations working in rural areas, as well as volunteering in rural communities. The Pew Partnership’s survey remains the main source of completely relevant information, yet it too does not completely correspond to the specific goals of this research. The report parallels two critical learnings of the Points of Light Foundation. The first is how the informal “neighborly” acts are reported by rural residents, which reinforces the importance of volunteering in these communities. The second is the need for volunteer organizations to acknowledge local leadership and build capacity.

II. Key Informant Interviews

As part of the study's first phase, staff from the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment of Indiana University–Purdue University conducted 10 key informant interviews on behalf of the Points of Light Foundation. The Points of Light Foundation identified 10 volunteer management practitioners, including paid and volunteer staff from Volunteer Centers, local nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies, living in and/or working to address key issues facing rural families and communities through volunteer engagement in the following states: California, Michigan, Utah, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Missouri.

Interview questions are included in Appendix III; a detailed summary of the phone interviews is included in Appendix IV.

A. Interview Findings

Diversity of Rural Areas

When asked about the differences between rural and urban areas in terms of volunteering, respondents indicated that, in their perception, most urban areas are similar in volunteer needs, recruitment methods and retention strategies, while rural areas can differ greatly. Rural areas close to urban areas and those that are hours away from a city have different issues. The differences found between a border town in Texas, a farming community in Missouri and a northern California rural area illustrate the diversity of rural areas, which impacts their needs and volunteer methods.

Formal vs. Informal Volunteering

When asked about forms of volunteering, a majority of respondents from different rural communities report a healthy mix of formal and informal volunteering. However, findings indicate that the more rural the community, the more informal the volunteer methods. Formal volunteering is often a more attractive option for people who move into a community and might feel disconnected. Formal volunteering provides new residents a bridge into the community, especially in smaller towns where they are seen as an outsider.

Critical Issues

Challenging issues identified by key informants are: a lack of personal and public transportation; issues related to single parent families, family support, and dysfunctional households; too many isolated youth, not enough youth leadership activities, and a transportation problem for youth in very rural areas; the high dropout rate in school and a lack of family support for education.

The top issues that attract volunteers are those initiatives benefiting youth and schools, community-driven issues, and issues that are relevant to people's basic needs (e.g. health or dental fairs). Key informants reported that often rural people are locally focused and will volunteer for meeting immediate needs, crisis situations, community focused projects, and for

social interaction. It is difficult to get people to assist in projects or fundraising that will leave the immediate community.

Community Mobilization

Respondents noted that the key community mobilizers are churches, Volunteer Center-type agencies, and nonprofit organizations. In rural farming areas, respondents indicated that it is easier to reach potential volunteers through school sites and churches. People find out about volunteer opportunities through: the media (newspaper, radio and television– in that order); nonprofits and agency fairs; and through word of mouth and personal relationships.

For people in isolated rural areas, it is important to find out about opportunities from a trusted word of mouth. Media is important to this particular group of rural residents because they may not interact with other people on a daily basis. Radio was noted twice as much television, especially for Spanish speaking populations.

People need to be matched up correctly for volunteer opportunities. For example, adults with a sixth grade education need to be given a volunteer opportunity with which they will feel comfortable. This will help ensure a positive experience for volunteers, encouraging them to volunteer in the future.

Urban vs. Rural Volunteers

Respondents noted some of the differences between rural and urban volunteers. Town and city schools recruit volunteers through local businesses; however, in rural areas, where businesses are scarce, recruiting volunteers and resources is more challenging. People from rural, low-income areas may want to volunteer but cannot due to tight financial obligations or lack of transportation. In rural areas much volunteering is done through church partnerships and schools.

B. Ideas for Overcoming Barriers

Main Barriers: Transportation and Communication

The main barriers to encouraging rural residents as volunteers are transportation and insufficient communication about opportunities. Respondents noted communication about a rural volunteer project is vital to its success, and using reliable word of mouth to help spread information is beneficial to the project. In one area the community center and church staff received training from the Volunteer Center through a community meeting. In turn, the staff effectively spread the word in their rural area.

The problem of transportation was reported as the number one issue in under-resourced rural areas. Respondents suggested engaging non-profits to coordinate the community's transportation needs. One nonprofit is trying to get more vehicles to transport projects to rural area that are not currently engaged. One food pantry on wheels provides people with news, information and volunteer opportunities. Some nonprofits take projects to volunteers in their homes and then pick up the projects after an allotted amount of time.

Innovative Volunteering Techniques

Key informants noted that issues are addressed successfully in their communities when they use innovative volunteering techniques. Offering volunteer opportunities for first, second, and third shifts helps people who might otherwise have work commitments to get involved. A successful strategy for many rural practitioners has been to not just focus on how volunteer efforts benefit the community, but to show people that they learn skills that may help in the job market. These types of projects help to bring in volunteers and retain them for future projects, creating a circle of givers. One common example can be seen in computer training that successfully retains volunteers because they are building technology skills in return. To be part of this computer program, volunteers must provide 20 hours of service to nonprofit organizations in the community.

Another idea reported by volunteer practitioners was to support new projects that break from the traditional model, especially for youth. A unique example shared was a Boy Scout that put together a project to install lights by home addresses in very poor rural areas so the ambulances are able to find the person's home in an emergency.

Overcoming Wariness

One barrier that was reported several times was of the reluctance of rural adults to seek information or guidance on various services in the community. To overcome this barrier, youth can be trained to provide knowledge to adults in a non-threatening manner. In one community, youth organized a community resource fair. The parents and others came to support the youth. Businesses and the community college were present to offer jobs, request skills and offer assistance on further education. It was a non-threatening environment for adults.

Volunteer Recruitment

To overcome the barrier of recruiting new volunteers, organizations have to be willing to seek "new" types of volunteers, outside of their regular volunteer base. In one mill town, the parents were too busy working to eat lunch at school with their children on special days. To address this issue, the school extended the invitation to grandparents. The school had a huge turnout, which in turn created an active volunteer base for future initiatives. Organizations should be willing to tap into the "untapped."

III. Focus Groups

The three focus groups were held in Clarksville, IN, Gettysburg, PA, and Edcouch, TX. These focus groups engaged rural community stakeholders including local volunteer practitioners from nonprofit, government, faith- and community-based organizations, as well as community leaders and local volunteers. The Clarksville focus group included participants from several rural Appalachian communities in Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia. The Gettysburg focus group included participants from across Adam County, PA. In Edcouch, participants came from two Rio Grande Valley counties, Hidalgo and Cameron.

The focus group questions are included in Appendix V; detailed notes from each focus group can be found in Appendix VI, VII, and VIII.

A. **Critical Issues Facing Rural Communities and Low-Income Rural Families**

Participants identified a broad range of issues facing their individual communities. Issues identified by participants in Clarksville reflected the unique realities of the Appalachian communities many participants represented. Issues of land and homeownership due to mining, access to adequate and affordable health care, decreasing population size and out-migration due to changes in the local economy and lack of jobs were some critical challenges facing the communities in the region.

In Gettysburg, participants pointed to affordable homeownership and absentee landlordism as two issues facing residents of Adam County. Both are issues relevant to the area being a bedroom community for several neighboring metro areas like Washington DC, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. In addition, participants identified a lack of services for a growing Latino population that has come to the area in support of the local orchards.

In Edcouch, participants shed light on challenges unique to Southern Texas and the rural Rio Grande Valley. Border communities must address the needs of a growing immigrant population with limited local and state resources. A critical issue is a gap in employment supply and local skills base. In addition, for many low-income families living in *colonias* (unincorporated settlements) challenges include access even to basic amenities like running water, electricity, health care, and education.

However, participants of all three focus groups identified the following challenges facing rural communities, particularly low-income families:

- Participants identified **transportation** as a major issue. Lack of transportation—availability of a public transit system and for low-income individuals and families, access to reliable personal vehicles—translates to isolation and inability to access available services. Transportation is even more critical for geographically spread out, isolated communities.

- Lack of **living wage jobs** and jobs with growth potential, as well as availability of adequate technical and vocational training opportunities were identified as key issues in all three focus groups. Changes in local economy, including agricultural practices and industry, were also reported as affecting local job prospects.
- The **low level of literacy** among rural residents, especially among low-income individuals and families, is a challenge identified in all communities that bespeaks not only the academic performance of low-income students, but also the significant divide in language and experience across socioeconomic boundaries. Literacy is an even more significant issue for new immigrant populations without the language skills of the host community.
- Participants identified **homelessness** as a critical and complicated issue facing rural families. Homelessness in rural communities can be harder to identify because of extended family/multi-family occupancy situations and living conditions, which, though substandard, might not qualify as a formal “homeless” designation. Both of these can affect a family’s ability to access services that it might otherwise qualify for.
- Increasing **availability of drugs** was identified as a key challenge facing rural families and communities. The availability of drugs and its effect on young people is further aggravated by **lack of adequate recreational and developmental opportunities** and community activities for rural youth.
- **Immigration** was a key issue identified by participants. In many communities, participants shared that the arrival of the newcomers precipitates changes within host communities that often manifest as a clash of languages and cultures. Though they bring many assets, immigrants are often perceived as being a drain for local communities in terms of jobs and services. In addition, an increase in need for services is not necessarily supported by corresponding increase in resource investment. With a high percentage of undocumented immigration, the growth is often not taken into account when resources are allocated to address local needs.
- **Communication** is a key challenge that affects rural residents’ education about available services and about community and volunteering opportunities.
- The difficulty in effectively creating regional and local **collaboration** between organizations and local entities was identified as a challenge in effectively addressing local needs. Without a common voice and unified community vision, rural communities suffer.

B. State of Volunteering in Rural Communities

Formal and Informal Volunteering

Participants shared that rural communities have strong traditions of neighbor helping neighbor. The **informal** volunteering that takes place in rural communities is often a byproduct of tight-knit communities that rely on their neighbors to maintain local self-sufficiency. However, this sort of informal volunteering is *not* recognized as volunteering by volunteer management practitioners or the participants themselves.

In terms of **formal** volunteering, rural residents are engaged in a wide range of activities and in various capacities within their communities. Like their urban counterparts, rural nonprofits,

faith- and community-based organizations, and local government agencies depend on volunteers to fulfill a variety of roles in their organizations and programs. From raising funds; serving as a board member; tutoring in after school and ESL programs; to providing direct services in health clinics, food banks and crisis response programs, volunteers play an important role in meeting community needs.

However, participants shared that most volunteers engaged by organizations in formal volunteer opportunities are middle-income and identified many challenges in engaging low-income rural residents. A significant challenge identified by participants is that low-income residents are not seen by organizations as potential volunteers. This is reflected in a quote from a participant in Clarksville: “It is important to engage those we serve, but often we do an adequate job of ministering *to* the poor, but not *with* the poor.”

Challenges in Engaging Low-Income Rural Residents

Participants identified the following challenges in engaging rural low-income volunteers:

- Transportation: Lack of reliable public and personal transportation
- Lack of time: Low-income individuals and families struggle to meet basic needs (e.g. caretaker responsibilities, parenting, earning income), thus lack time to be engaged in formal volunteer opportunities that require a time commitment
- Lack of self-confidence
- Negative perception about volunteering: Some low-income people are inhibited by fear of ridicule because sometimes people make fun of those who volunteer
- Negative perceptions about low-income people: Low-income people are not traditional candidates for volunteering
- Lack of reliable and affordable child care keeps people from becoming involved
- Language and culture differences are barriers, especially in communities with new immigrants
- Wariness of outsiders and a sense of local self-reliance
- Communication barriers: Lack of appropriate modes of communication and use of creating effective messages on how people can be involved, especially in remote areas

C. Strategies that Work

When asked about engaging low-income rural volunteers, focus group participants identified the following successful strategies:

- Invite people to get involved: Go out and knock on doors, go where people are
- Speak the language: Be culturally and linguistically appropriate (e.g. creating messages in Spanish or using appropriate literacy level in messages)
- Establish taskforces for particular issues to bring residents together on common issues of concern
- Recruit college and high school students and court-ordered workers
- Provide incentives to volunteers, such as food and giveaways

- Give opportunities for ownership by creating opportunities for involvement around issues that matter and areas people are comfortable with
- Make it fun and show appreciation for what people do
- Go through kids to get to their parents
- Host specific events: Episodic volunteers easier to recruit and retain
- Communicate the need: People have to understand the issue and see it as relevant to their lives
- Build the trust and credibility of leaders and organizations
- Stay cognizant that people have had lot of bad experiences and might be intimidated
- Offer training to make people feel comfortable in their duties
- Spread information that creates awareness about resources and accessing services
- Provide child care or create family-friendly projects

When asked specifically about how organizations can honor and respect grassroots efforts to promote volunteering, participants shared additional strategies:

- Collaborate and share resources, including applying together for grants
- Hire staff that represents the community to bridge gaps such as differences in language and culture
- Advocate for and build off of grassroots efforts
- Mobilize community volunteers to get the word out and advocate for community needs
- Use culturally relevant and appropriate language, messages and images
- Tap into what is already happening
- Recognize activities to build self-esteem
- Garner recognition from politicians, elected officials and city leaders to celebrate the efforts of communities and grassroots leaders
- Remain cognizant of community members literacy levels when developing communication tools and materials

Participants identified the following players as the most important potential partners in developing, supporting, and sustaining rural volunteer initiatives that engage low-income community members: churches, the media, colleges and schools, parent associations, state and local government, current clients, businesses, hospitals, law enforcement, and the local United Way.

IV. Summary of Case Study Findings

Building on the first phase of the study, in 2004, the Points of Light Foundation partnered with three Volunteer Centers to delve deeper into the nature and practice of rural volunteering through focused case studies of three rural communities. The case studies sought to explore and document the applicability of the neighboring model in rural communities that lack similar support and resources of tough urban communities.

Following were the key questions the case study sought to address:

- What does volunteering in under-resourced rural communities performed by local citizens look like?
- What are uniquely “rural” challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural communities?
- Are there new or emerging effective strategies that are unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities?
- What are the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities?
- How does volunteering strengthen families and transform neighborhoods?

In support of the case studies, participating Volunteer Centers engaged in activities designed to apply neighboring concepts around three focus areas: capacity building, targeted outreach, and partnership development. The primary means of collecting data were documentation of activities, meetings, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and direct observation. See Appendix IX for the Case Study protocol. In addition, a survey was administered in all three case study communities. See Appendix X for the survey report.

A. Case Study Site Descriptions

The Volunteer Centers and the case study communities were identified and selected based several criteria, including geography and location (geographic isolation, remoteness, proximity to metro center); demography and population size; as well as existing programs and the capacity of local partners. Before summarizing the key findings, following is a summary description of each case study site. Please refer to Appendix VI through XIII for detailed case studies of each site.

I. Sumner County, Kansas - United Way of the Plains, Sumner County Office

Sumner County, Kansas, located in south central Kansas just north of the Oklahoma border is primarily a rural county (62.4 %). The area produces vast quantities of winter wheat. Wheat fuels the local economy, in addition to railroads, petroleum and manufacturing (especially aircraft parts). Much of the population resides in Sumner County but commutes to neighboring Sedgwick County, home to Boeing, Bombardier, Cessna and Raytheon aircraft manufacturers. Issues facing low-income families include housing, employment, and healthcare.

The Points of Light Foundation partnered with the United Way of the Plains (UWP) to explore conditions in Sumner County. Through outreach based in UWP's newly opened Sumner County office, the case study sought to specifically focus on two rural communities, Wellington and Conway Springs.

Participating in the case study was an opportunity for UWP, which had only opened its office in Sumner a year ago, to pilot activities of discovery and inquiry to learn about rural volunteering and to begin to develop a protocol for involvement that might be replicated in other small towns in south central Kansas. Building on its ongoing work in the county, UWP initiated a multi-tiered approach to networking beyond Wellington to other county residents in and near Conway Springs.

	Kansas	Sumner County	Wellington	Conway Springs
Population	2,688,418	25,946	10,046	2,358
Median Age	35.2 yrs	37.6 yrs	37.4 yrs	32.8 yrs
Percent of Population:				
At least 62 years old	15.4%	17.9%	18.9%	15.2%
Caucasian racial/ethnic background	86.1%	94.6%	92.9%	97.3%
Hispanic ethnicity	7.0%	3.6%	6.5%	1.5%
Households (in 1999)	1,038,940	9,920	3,938	800
Median Household Income	\$40,624	\$39,415	\$36,448	\$42,021
Median HH Income Below \$25,000	28.7%	30.4%	31.8%	27.0%
Families below poverty level (in 1999)	6.7%	7.2%	8.5%	2.5%

Wellington, with a population of 10,046, is the county seat and home to nearly two-fifths (38.7 percent) of the county's residents. It contains the health department, mental health facility, courthouse and regional hospital for Sumner County, as well as many churches, public schools and three parochial schools. Wellington has local service clubs such as Kiwanis and Knights of Columbus as well as 4-H groups and other youth organizations (e.g. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts). With a population of 2,358, Conway Springs is about one-fifth the size of Wellington and is approximately 23 miles away.

Sumner County brought several unique attributes to the case study, including its geographic location (Midwest); relative economic advantage, proximity to a metro center (Wichita, KS); a largely homogenous population (Caucasian); as well as an established traditionally agricultural and industry-based economy. In addition, the multi-tiered approach to outreach in Wellington and Conway provided an opportunity to take a comparative look at the volunteer issues in these two different rural communities.

II. Randolph County, NC - Volunteer Center of Greensboro and Randolph County

Located in the Piedmont Triad Region of North Carolina, Randolph County was the second case study site. Although part of the largest metropolitan area located entirely within North Carolina, Randolph is still largely a rural county. The Points of Light Foundation partnered with the Volunteer Center of Greensboro and Randolph County to learn about volunteering in this rural under-resourced area. Focusing on two small communities of Franklinville and

Liberty, the effort in Randolph was specifically targeted at exploring the nature and practice of volunteering among the growing Latino/Hispanic population.

In 2000, the Volunteer Center of Greensboro opened its Randolph County satellite office in Asheboro. Since then, it has established a variety of successful programs. Participation in the case study provided the Volunteer Center an opportunity to expand outreach to areas outside of Asheboro.

	North Carolina	Randolph County	Franklinville	Liberty
Population	8,049,313	130,454	2,661	1,258
Median Age	35.3 yrs	36.2 yrs	34.7 yrs	27.5 yrs
Percent of Population:				
At least 62 years old	12%	14.5%	16.4%	9.5%
Caucasian racial/ethnic background	70.2%	84.2%	65.7%	78.2%
Hispanic ethnicity	4.7%	6.6%	14.2%	16.5%
Households (in 1999)				
Median Household Income	\$39,184	\$38,348	\$35,052	\$29,390
Median HH Income Below \$25,000	30.7%	29.7%	33.9%	38.3%
Families below poverty level (in 1999)	9%	6.8%	15.8%	9.9%

During the 1990s, North Carolina had the fastest growing immigrant population (274% increase in foreign born), and also the fastest growing Latino population (394% increase) in the nation. About half (45%) of the state's new Latino population settled in rural counties.¹ With a 1077.9percent increase in its Latino population between 1990 and 2000, Randolph County is second only to three other counties in the entire state in the rate of growth of Latinos. Latinos represent only 6.6 percent of the county, compared to the national rate of 12.5%; however, it is the county's largest minority segment.² With 14.2 percent and 16.5 percent respectively, Liberty and Franklinville, however, have significantly higher Latino/Hispanic populations than the rest of the county.

Half of those living in poverty in North Carolina are white, but poverty rates are much higher for minorities, with poverty rate for Hispanics in living in rural areas at the very end of the spectrum at 28.3 percent.³ Both Franklinville and Liberty have a higher percentage of families below poverty level than Randolph County or North Carolina. Twenty-four percent of Liberty and 18 percent of Franklinville residents lack a high school diploma or equivalent.

The area's economic base is built on production, transportation, and material moving industries, which includes poultry processing plants, textile manufacturing, and farming. Many Latino families moved to Randolph County in the 1990s when jobs were numerous. With the decline in tobacco farming, textile industry, and a general downturn in the economy, Randolph County has lost a substantial number of jobs, and unemployment is higher in small towns.

¹ http://www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/trendpage_Population.asp

² <http://demog.state.nc.us/demog/hisp9000.html>

³ http://www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/trendpage_Poverty.asp

Randolph county and the Volunteer Center of Greensboro and Randolph County brought several unique attributes to the case study. Specifically, the rapid growth in population has implications for the area both in terms of providing services as well as engaging the newcomers in meaningful ways—the case study sought to learn from this phenomenon. In addition, as one of eight Centers that participated in the low-income urban volunteering initiative, the Volunteer Center brought special experience and insight to the project.

III. Humboldt County, California - Volunteer Center of Redwoods

Located in the northwest corner of California, Humboldt County, an area rich in natural resources, comprises 3,572 square miles along the Pacific Coast. The average population density of the county is slightly over 35 persons per square mile. For the purposes of the case study, the Foundation partnered with the Volunteer Center of the Redwoods and efforts were focused on small communities in an area referred to locally as “Southern Humboldt.”

Based in Eureka, the county seat in the north, the Volunteer Center currently refers volunteers to more than 300 nonprofit organizations, schools, and governmental agencies in the two county areas of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties. Due to reasons of capacity and resources, the Volunteer Center has not been able to retain a staff position in Southern Humboldt since the mid-1990s; however, it has dedicated one day a month of staff time to maintain connections with the community. The case study provided an opportunity for the Volunteer Center to leverage and build on existing work in the area to gain a better understanding of how individuals volunteer in remote, rural communities and the unique challenges organizations serving these communities face in mobilizing volunteers.

	California	Humboldt County	Eureka CCD ⁴	Garberville CCD ⁵
Population	35,484,453	126,518	46,447	12,194
Median Age	33.3 yrs	36.3 yrs	37.8 yrs	38.4 yrs
Percent of Population:				
Over 65 years old	10.6%	12.5%	13.9%	11.0%
Caucasian racial/ethnic background	59.5%	84.7%	85.0%	89.0%
Hispanic ethnicity	32.4%	6.5%	6.7%	6.5%
Households (in 1999)				
Median Household Income	\$47,493	\$31,226	\$30,995	\$30,424
Median HH Income Below \$25,000	11.5%	17.2%	18.1%	19.1%
Families below poverty level (in 1999)	10.6%	12.9%	13.4%	15.7%

Encompassing approximately a quarter of the county, Southern Humboldt is a sparsely populated area with an average of approximately 7 persons per square mile. Garberville, with a core population of 2000, is 85 miles south of County seat of Eureka and provides services to surrounding smaller communities of Southern Humboldt. Some area residents

⁴ Eureka CCD includes unincorporated areas immediately surrounding Eureka City limits.

⁵ Garberville CCD includes the area from the southern Humboldt County line north to the community of Rio Dell, population 3,174. Rio Dell is approximately 45 minutes north of Garberville. For the purpose of this case study, Rio Dell was not considered part of Southern Humboldt.

travel an hour or more to access services in Garberville. There is no local public transportation in the area with the exception of a weekly senior bus service to Eureka and the senior dining center in Southern Humboldt.

Historically dependent on timber, fishing, tourism and cottage industries, communities across the county are responding to a diminished economic base as timber and fishing resources decline. Multiple-year impacts of state budget reductions, the rising costs of Worker's Compensation, and across-the-board 20 percent reductions to all Humboldt County programs are trickling down to local nonprofit and government supported agencies, affecting budget and delivery of services. Rising health care, insurance and gasoline costs further impact the budgets and capabilities of both local agencies and area residents.

Southern Humboldt brought many unique attributes to the case study. Besides being a remote, isolated, spread out, and sparsely populated area, Southern Humboldt is also home to a large informal underground economy, which provided an interesting backdrop to the issue of volunteer engagement and community building. The area is also subject to large-scale seasonal forest fires, which impacts local agencies and residents. The Volunteer Center brought with it, its long history in the region (through the parent Area 1 Agency of Aging and the RSVP program) and its leadership and partnerships in many of the area's local coalitions and efforts as important assets to the project.

B. Key Case Study Findings

Originally planned for a nine-month period, the revised timeframe allowed for six months of work in the community for the case studies. All partner sites cited that this timeframe limited the depth and breadth of the case study. However, the findings affirm the applicability of “neighboring” in rural communities and reinforce the findings from the first phase of the study. The case studies also unearthed additional unique findings, all which are summarized below. Please refer to Appendix VI through for XIII for detailed reports on learnings from each site.

I. Characteristics of Rural Communities

The case studies reaffirmed some common characteristics of rural communities, namely their **independence, strong traditions of self-reliance and self-help, and a keen sense of place and community**. Communities, such as Southern Humboldt, can be characterized as “fiercely independent,” which often translates into a distrust of outsiders and formal institutions.

Yet, **community is also found to be not a monolith in rural areas**. Often, invisible community borders are drawn according to allegiances based on culture, language, politics, and income. Social or economic issues can contribute to significant polarizations within rural communities and can impact the ability of the community to act as a cohesive unit. For example, in Randolph County, the integration of the growing immigrant Latino population into the areas community life is affected by language and culture, as well as issues of trust

and prejudice between the newcomers and the long-term residents. In Southern Humboldt, residents are often divided by their participation in the informal underground economy. The fear of censure or exposure may deter individuals from being involved in community activities.

Findings point to a corollary relationship between **the level of community ownership of issues and a community or population's relative isolation**. Varying degrees of a community's rurality (relative to a community's size and local infrastructure) and the relative isolation of a population from the mainstream (whether demographically or geographically), affect this phenomenon, in reference to remote, smaller, and isolated communities. These communities exhibit a greater focus on self-reliance and place-based solutions. In the absence of a strong well-established service infrastructure, or in the case of populations marginalized from the mainstream (whether by income or culture and language, such as the Latinos population in Randolph County), rural residents rely on neighbors, family members and friends to meet many critical needs.

In all three case study communities, rural residents were reported to be **less likely to seek assistance** from formal services than in urban communities. Closely related to the independence, self-reliance, and tightly knit nature of rural communities, was a **lack of anonymity**, which combined with the former characteristic, pose a significant barrier in residents seeking assistance.

In addition, **rural residents are often spread out** over vast distances and unlike in urban areas, low-income families are not necessarily concentrated in specific "neighborhoods" or specific geographic locations. This frequently emerges as a significant challenge for area agencies, both in identifying and targeting low-income residents for service provision or engagement.

II. Volunteering in Rural Communities

Volunteering in under-resourced rural communities is found to parallel community engagement in America's urban communities on many fronts. Similar to urban communities, the case studies revealed that volunteering is very much a part of life in rural low-income areas and plays a critical role in the lives of residents. For instance, in Sumner County, area residents frequently come together "spontaneously" to help friends and family after natural disasters or meet the needs of a neighbor.

Like its urban counterpart, much of **rural volunteering is informal and is not recognized as "volunteering."** For example, in Humboldt County, Native American community members reported that they did not have time to volunteer because they are taking wood to the elderly or delivering fish to people who needed them. Similarly, in Randolph County, existing family and community obligations, including schools and church, meant that many Latino community members and leaders were unable to give of their time in other formal volunteer efforts in the community.

All three communities reported an established practice of engaging community residents in formal volunteer efforts. **Formal rural volunteer efforts are found to be similar to those in urban areas.** In a survey conducted in all three sites of staff and volunteers representing the areas' nonprofit and community based organizations an average of 93 percent of respondents reported that their agency engaged volunteers in their programs.

	Overall Response	Randolph	Humboldt	Sumner
% respondents engaging volunteers	93	96	87	95
% specifically recruiting low-income volunteers	37	65	24	22
% stating there are unique challenges to engaging low-income volunteers	68	86	69	50

Similar to urban communities, **volunteering helps meet the needs to strengthen bonds between community residents in rural areas.** A successful local pre-kindergarten program in Randolph County that addresses school readiness of area children, especially those from low-income families, is an example of how informal and formal volunteering strengthens families and communities. Another example is from Sumner County, where residents report neighbors rallying their efforts to repair and improve homes of a local family.

In terms of formal volunteer efforts, the reported types of assistance that rural volunteers provide do not have exhibit uniquely rural characteristics, except in the particular local needs they address. Volunteers in rural organizations perform similar types of work urban and suburban agencies request of their volunteers, including indirect and direct service responsibilities on a wide range of issue areas (e.g. healthcare and hospices, employment preparation, fire and police departments, education and youth services and services to women and low-income families).

Community residents are **more likely to volunteer in a formal setting when there is greater ownership of issues and when the issue personally affects the quality of life.** In Randolph County, Latino parents are frequent volunteers in the schools and programs in which their children participate. This involvement builds their confidence as well as tangible and marketable skills.

III.Challenges in Engaging Rural Low-income Volunteers

Challenges in engaging low-income rural residents in formal volunteer efforts included many of the same challenges reported in urban efforts. However, one critical difference is the smaller populations of rural communities. Regardless of volunteers' income or relative economic/social well-being, rural areas have a **smaller volunteer recruiting pool.**

Only 37 percent of the rural survey respondents reported specifically recruiting low-income. In the case of Randolph County, where 68 percent of survey respondents indicated specifically recruiting low-income and Latino volunteers, there was also a greater recognition

(86% versus the 68% aggregate for all three sites) of the unique challenges in engaging these volunteers.

Evidence from the survey, as well as from other methods employed by Volunteer Center partners, point to several key reasons why most formal volunteer efforts do not routinely seek out low-income and marginalized populations. Similar to urban communities, low-income rural residents are often recipients of services, whom are not viewed by the agencies as potential volunteers. **Negative perceptions of low-income populations, recognition, or lack thereof, of the barriers faced by low-income volunteers, and issues of rural organizations' limited capacity and organizational resources** are significant barriers in engaging low-income rural volunteers.

Issues related to professionalism within the field, including recognition of special skill sets and competencies required for effective volunteer management, and availability of resources necessary to invest in overcoming the unique challenges in engaging low-income residents were reported as barriers in optimizing rural volunteer mobilization.

Local organization perceptions of low-income residents, including their capacity and reliability as volunteers, is often a barrier to effective mobilization. In Sumner County, agency representatives questioned the **reliability** of low-income volunteers, stating, "Responsibility is a concern. They don't always show up when scheduled." Additional concerns included "Some are unable to follow routines"; "They are not familiar with our organization"; and "They do not understand how to relate to students and their needs."

An interesting finding is the **resistance of many rural agencies to target low-income volunteers**. At odds with the reported lack of anonymity of rural communities, targeted outreach to low-income residents was seen as counter productive. Volunteer managers reported that such targeting to be opposed to the egalitarian spirit of service and even inappropriate, as it would mean singling out residents based on income and thus stigmatizing.

In severely depressed urban and rural areas, survival issues often preclude formal volunteering for many low-income rural families that struggle to make ends meet. **The difference in the critical challenges in engaging rural low-income volunteers versus urban volunteers is not necessarily a matter of the uniqueness of the barriers, as much as the degree of obstruction posed and the appropriate solution needed to address it.** For example, the geographic vastness and remoteness of many rural communities make transportation and communication (both also noted as barriers in urban areas) even greater barriers for volunteer engagement in rural communities.

However, whether isolated geographically or by virtue of language and culture, **trust is a significant barrier for rural residents to getting involved in volunteer activities.** Organizations often have to contend with overcoming the trust issue. In the case of some Latino residents in Randolph County, lack of documentation was a barrier in people getting involved in community activities. However, on the other hand, corresponding with the earlier findings related to negative perception of low-income people, newcomers or those from

outside the mainstream may invoke fear, distrust, and insecurity among those who have lived there for generations, especially when the new people are of different ethnic origins.

Another barrier identified through the case studies, related to the need to **find local leadership and organizers who are able and willing to commit the time and effort necessary to lead local efforts**. Identifying leaders who can bridge differences; and unify and mobilize residents is difficult. Having a smaller pool of prospective volunteers, in communities where local leaders are often overstretched by multiple commitments, also hinders effective leadership.

IV. Strategies to Overcome Barriers

The close-knit structure and community nuances often invisible to outsiders necessitate a greater need for organizations to really understand the community and be responsive to its unique local conditions, needs, and assets. **Building relationships** within the community and its leaders is a mandatory precursor to mobilizing volunteers, critical for organizations working to engage rural residents. Here the concept of “key log,” a term rooted in Humboldt County’s logging culture and denoting the one log that when moved will unstick a logjam, is particularly useful. In the context of communities, “key logs” are individuals who others turn to for information. Having the acceptance or even approval of the “key log” can help smooth entry into the community for an individual or organization. As evidenced by the experience of all three sites, however, developing trusting relationships requires investment of time and continued presence in the community.

New players in small rural communities are often seen as competitors for scarce resources. Therefore, **establishing a clear role from the onset is critical** in breaking barriers of distrust. **Working in partnership with existing organizations and institutions**, such as churches and local coalitions, can expedite entry into the community and increase credibility. In the absence of an abundance of resources, collaborative efforts also help garner additional support through **resource sharing**.

Many of the strategies identified in urban areas and captured in the neighboring model are found to be applicable to volunteer engagement in rural areas. Addressing specific barriers, such as by providing child care, skills building and meaningful incentives to volunteers and developing allies among key leaders to reach new volunteers are some strategies that are found to work well in rural communities.

Recruiting from area agency client bases and creating opportunities that match the population’s skill, language, and ability sets also help address unique challenges to engagement. However, the unique condition of each rural community calls for specific **place-based strategies** that can only be developed by understanding the community in question.

The fundamental precondition to overcoming barriers to volunteer engagement in under-resourced rural communities is the **recognition of the critical need to engage low-income**

people in community activities and in addressing local challenges. Low-income community member involvement not only means that the community and organizations benefit from a previously largely untapped volunteer resource, but the perspective and insight these community members bring can be instrumental in developing effective and accessible programs and services.

4. Learnings

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Points of Light Foundation has explored the nature and practice of volunteering in America's low-income communities since 1996. Focusing initially on tough urban communities, the Points of Light Foundation used its findings from dialogue sessions across the country and several community-based pilot projects to develop the “neighboring” model—an empowerment and asset-based approach to volunteering that mirrors the culture of self-help and mutual assistance present in these tough urban communities. The neighboring model encompasses seven critical success factors to promote volunteering by, in and with low-income communities:

1. Understand the nature of volunteering in low-income communities
2. Overcome barriers to community involvement
3. Empower the communities to help themselves
4. Cultivate community member skills and talents
5. Strengthen existing community leadership
6. Acknowledge that neighboring is an exchange
7. Ensure community readiness

Complementing this work in urban areas, in the fall of 2003 the Points of Light Foundation began a two-phased study to study the volunteering phenomenon in rural communities. The Points of Light Foundation's study, *Volunteering in Under-Resourced Rural Communities*, includes a literature review, key informant interviews and focus groups paired with practitioner-focused research that explored the applicability of the neighboring model in rural areas.

This time sequenced methodology, which occurred over 15 months, provided a system for researchers to refine objectives. In the initial phase, a general understanding of rural America and particularly its third sector was sought. In the next phase, researchers focused in more clearly on the nature and practice of volunteering in rural areas.

This section of the report synthesizes the collective findings uncovered in the study. The data gathered through our work are robust, regardless of the method or respondent location. Our findings echo the current state of knowledge on conditions in rural America, while also unearthing new learnings of non-metro volunteer engagement issues. These learnings, supported by evidence from our research, are detailed in the following sections.

A. Echoing the Current State of Knowledge

Our study echoes the current state of knowledge about conditions and social change efforts in rural America. The Economic Research Service RS reports that the “diverse needs of rural America require a diverse approach,” (USDA) and the results of this study reaffirm this message: **successful strategies in rural communities capitalize on community resources to grow programs.** Community resources depend on a variety of economic, social and political factors.

Yet one common resource spans rural America’s diverse communities: the potential human power that can be raised in volunteer-engaging programs.

Rural America’s diversity—from the colonias of the Rio Grande Valley to the mining towns of Appalachia—negates a uniform definition for “what is rural.” In fact, geography, history, culture, size, demography, proximity to urban centers and economy are just a few of the factors that vary greatly from one rural area to the next and directly influence the conditions and needs of rural communities. Throughout this study, we find evidence that **solutions need to be place-based**, in terms of designing volunteer programs and strategies to engage rural residents, especially marginalized low-income populations.

Despite rural America’s diversity **many social issues are prevalent throughout rural regions**, forming a cohesive picture of these differentiated and fragmented areas. Such issues include:

- **Changing demographics:** Realized in shifting migration patterns, including an influx of immigrants and exodus of longtime residents, these shifts have been shown to “contribute to the revitalization of small towns” but in other areas, can “strain community resources, as local areas strive to provide essential services, programs and infrastructure” to native and new residents (Whitener et al, 2004, para.8).
- **Industrial restructuring:** In reaction to the decline in farming and mining jobs, rural American areas are forced to restructure industry to spur job growth.
- **Increasing educational attainment:** Although the number of rural Americans attaining higher levels of education is increasing and the benefit of receiving an education in rural America is great, it is still less valuable than the same degree in an urban area: “Rural college graduates earn twice as much as rural high school dropouts...however, college graduates in urban areas...earned 12 percent more than non-metro college graduates in 2002”(para.13).
- **High Poverty Rates:** Rural poverty parallels urban poverty rates, yet is more acute; for instance, ERS states that in 2001, 14.2 percent of the non-metro population was poor (7.2 million) in contrast to 11.1 percent for metro areas. Because rural poor often live in remote areas, they often become invisible to social service networks—this problem intensifies in isolated pockets and in areas with undocumented immigrants where families exist undetected by service providers.

In the midst of these challenges, however, the Pew Charitable Trust notes an “inspiring finding” in the “overwhelming number of rural respondents that rank their quality of life as excellent,” concluding with the suggestion that “**there are enough positives in [rural communities] to make [residents] want to stay**” (para.10). We believe not only do these positives “make [rural residents] want to stay,” but they also encourage informal and formal volunteer traditions to improve the quality of life, enhance the interconnectedness of residents and increase self-sufficiency in rural communities.

B. Discovering Issues Related to Rural Volunteer Engagement

The recurring themes throughout this study provided a framework in which to analyze our findings. Categorized into three areas, each affects volunteer engagement in low-income rural communities. As the reader will discover, each theme area is integrally connected to the other themes.

Community Issues	This area covers the general nature and characteristics of rural communities uncovered in our research, as well as the common community issues that affect rural residents, especially low-income residents and their families. Both impact program design and delivery as well as volunteer mobilization. This category relates to the first, most general, goal of the study: <i>To deepen our understanding around volunteer engagement in rural areas.</i>
Volunteering Issues	This area encompassed issues related to the nature and practice of volunteering, formal and informal, in rural areas, including the unique barriers to volunteer engagement, particularly of rural low-income residents. This category corresponds to the study's second goal: <i>To examine the applicability of the neighboring model to under-resourced rural communities.</i>
Organizational Issues	Organizational issues relate to the unique logistical challenges and concerns faced by rural volunteer organizations in mobilizing rural residents to meet local needs. This category addresses the third goal: <i>To identify practices that document and support neighboring and volunteering by, in and with under-resourced rural communities.</i>

The remainder of the analysis utilizes these issue areas to discuss our findings around volunteer engagement in rural areas including the applicability of the neighboring model to transform neighborhoods and strengthen families.

I. Community Issues

Rural America is distinguished by its geographical, cultural and social diversity; yet its common denominator, persistent poverty, overshadows these differences. Study respondents noted several poverty-related challenges rural residents face (under-employment, low-paying jobs and lack of affordable housing and healthcare) which are exacerbated by the public sector's inability to effectively meet community needs. Rural areas, for the most part, do not have a public transportation infrastructure making job acquisition and retention, accessing services, as well as getting involved in community activities difficult for rural residents in remote areas. Moreover, findings also suggest that rural communities often lack the communication infrastructure and systems that hinders effective sharing of information on available social services and volunteer opportunities.

Our findings suggest that child care is critical for rural families. Lack of affordable and reliable child care affects the ability of parents to volunteer their time while employed. This is also intimately connected to the lack of positive out-of-school activities for youth, which may contribute to the significant rates of teen pregnancy and drug abuse in rural areas. Our observations resonate with Pew Partnership's *Voices of Rural America: National Survey Results*. Pew found living-wage jobs as the most severe community challenge faced by rural communities. Additionally, access to affordable healthcare is more challenging for rural residents than for urban and suburban residents. Teen pregnancies and unsupervised children/youth are of great concern for rural residents.

Poverty in rural areas closely mirrors urban areas; however, poverty in rural areas is more acute and, generally, **rural Americans fare worse than their urban counterparts** on numerous socioeconomic indicators. Recent studies illustrate rural America's struggle with poverty in comparison with metro areas. For instance, the National Council on Family Relations describes more such disparities between metro and non-metro areas: rural workers are two times more likely to earn minimum wage than urban workers; rural families more likely have poor health; death and teen birth rates are higher in rural counties; and rural 8th graders are more likely to abuse drugs than youth in large metro areas ("Health and Economic Well-Being," 2003, p.1-2). According to the 2002 Save the Children report, *America's Forgotten Children: Child Poverty in Rural America*, child poverty is greater in rural America than in urban areas: "Of the nation's more than 200 persistently poor counties, 195 are rural. And in these counties, child poverty rates often exceeds 35 percent" (Save the Children, 2002, p.12).

Yet, striking similarities between working-poor families in the most urban and the most rural areas exist. This fact was emphasized when Brookings Institution researchers used the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) as a "lens through which to view the working poor" (Berube & Tiffany, 2004, p.2) and found the nearly half of the nation's working poor families reside in either large city or rural areas (p.4). EITC data, when broken by region, indicate, "the most remote rural areas closely resemble large cities in their incidence of working poverty, while rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas look more like small metro areas"(p.5). In other words, **the most rural and most urban areas are more closely related in terms of the working poor than are remote rural and rural near metropolitan areas.**

While most community issues are common in both non-metro and metro areas—especially in low-income communities—it is important to note rural communities also exhibit some very distinct qualities that both celebrate community yet inhibit growth. Specifically, **rural community residents are independent and self-sufficient.** These traits speak to the survival strength of rural communities, even in tough times; however they also touch on the challenge faced by many agencies because of this very characteristic: the "strong cultural tradition of independence" and self-sufficiency in rural communicates makes it difficult for people to ask for help, accept assistance, and also less likely to access available agency services.

To overcome this community barrier, one Volunteer Center reported creating an exchange system “where community members offer what skills they possess in return for some essential help,” which removes the stigma of obtaining free services because residents are able to offer a service in return. Here **speaking to the self-sufficiency of the individual is critical**. Echoing the learning from our urban study, findings suggest the importance of addressing how volunteers benefit from the activity (e.g. gaining new job skills). In addition, employing trusted community members to recruit volunteers, serve as board members, or staff also helps to remove barriers and allows the agency to bridge the credibility gap.

A lack of anonymity and confidentiality due to the interconnectedness of these areas intensifies rural residents’ reluctance to obtain assistance from community programs. Service providers may know clients from everyday life, diminishing client’s confidence that their privacy will be upheld. Not only does this concern speak to the need to uphold professional standards of confidentiality, it also touches on the fact that organizations should invest time and resources into preparing a confidentiality protocol, train employees on this protocol and communicate the agency’s dedication to its credo.

Changing demographics, specifically influx of newcomers and immigrants into the community, often reveal tensions inherent in the tight knit nature of most rural communities and the resulting suspicion of outsiders. As evidenced from the findings in North Carolina, as well as focus group findings in Texas and Pennsylvania, newcomers, especially new immigrants of a different ethnicity, may invoke fear, distrust, and insecurity among those who have lived there for generations. For example, one rural North Carolina practitioner discussed the reluctance of long-time town residents to accept Latino immigrants, making it difficult for the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking communities to volunteer together. Such inter-group tensions often spur the perception that newcomers are a threat to residents, vying for the already scarce local resources, such as jobs and services. These issues affect not only the immediate integration of newcomers into the community, but the long-term community cohesion.

The resident-newcomer dichotomy also fosters a need for those of similar backgrounds to cultivate their own community, creating an interdependent environment in which neighbor relies on neighbor. This reliance on neighbors, however, is grounded in group loyalties. –This loyalty is demonstrated through neighbors helping neighbors from *within* their own community. To be effective, volunteer organizations can build off of inter-group neighboring by providing resources for these distinct groups to neighbor *within* their cultural boundaries more efficiently while also *bridging the gap* through formal volunteer programs.

Our findings affirm those of other research studies that indicate the **uniqueness of individual rural communities**. The distinctive characteristics of each community may not often be apparent to outsiders immediately, such as social norms and prejudices or political and economic circumstances (e.g. the tensions between new immigrants and longtime residents or the participation in the underground economy). However, such realities impact community mobilization, effectively polarizing groups and impacting the ability of the community to act as a cohesive unit.

Rural communities' uniqueness calls for organizations to invest resources to understand the comprehensive community (e.g. research the area's history and culture) and build trust with its residents (e.g. work with well respected community leaders and key logs). The example of local Community Action Agencies (CCA) is a useful model in addressing this challenge. CAAs form local tri-partite boards with representatives from local stakeholders as a way to build ownership and buy-in. As a focus group participant suggested, it is critical to **“give opportunities for ownership and centers opportunities for involvement around issues that matter.”**

II. Volunteering Issues

Formal Volunteering

Rural residents tend to **support issues that are locally focused and relate to people's basic needs** (e.g. health and family needs). Respondents discussed numerous examples of residents serving youth organizations, schools, and faith-based institutions. In a similar vein, Pew reports churches and schools with the highest percentage of rural volunteers. **Volunteers in rural organizations perform similar types of work urban and suburban agencies request of their volunteers**, including indirect and direct service responsibilities on a wide range of issue areas such as healthcare and hospices, employment preparation, fire and police departments, education and youth services and services to women and low-income families. The type of work rural volunteer programs offer do not have any distinct attributes that differentiate them from other non-rural programs. However, they are determined by the unique local needs the efforts are geared to address.

In terms of engaging community members from low-income households in formal volunteer efforts, participants affirmed what a participant from the Clarksville, IN focus group expressed: “We do an adequate job of ministering *to* the poor, but not *with* the poor.” **The findings illustrate that most rural agencies do not specifically focus recruitment efforts on low-income populations.** In fact, a survey of rural practitioners illustrates that, on average, only 37 percent of respondents report specifically recruiting lower-income and under-resourced volunteers. The reasons behind not specifically engaging this population vary. In some instances, **it is logistically impossible to focus solely on low-income volunteers.** Respondents noted that:

- Volunteer recruitment is not a function of income and any person who answers the call to serve will be engaged; and,
- The community itself largely comprises low-income residents, thus the entire target is primarily under-resourced.

In other cases, **lower-income residents are not recruited to volunteer because of perception and more complicated, but intangible issues:**

- Volunteers are typically middle class, increasing the social apprehension barrier for low-income populations to both receive and provide services;

- Agencies simply overlook this population because of prejudice surrounding low-income people (e.g. they are unskilled or unreliable); and
- Recruiting specific populations might stigmatize low-income volunteers.

Similar to Foundation findings in urban areas, evidence suggests that there are **many barriers that prevent residents from participating in formal volunteer activities**. These include a lack of child care at and transportation to volunteer sites; lack of time (many rural residents are working to survive and have little time to spare); negative perceptions of volunteering (some people feel they will be stereotyped by agency staff, be unqualified or unappreciated); and language, literacy and cultural barriers (residents might not understand recruitment efforts, feel they will not be helpful or are fearful of the unknown). These findings are tangent with Pew’s qualitative survey in which rural residents report two main “impediments to getting more involved” including not enough free time (nearly two-thirds) and lack of knowledge about who to contact to get information about volunteering (40 percent). With so many deterrents to volunteer plaguing an already sparse population, the recruiting pool becomes even further diminished.

Informal Volunteering and Neighboring

Residents in under-resourced urban communities help the community because it is the “right thing to do,” rather than “volunteer.” When populations are marginalized from the mainstream (be this because of cultural, language or economic reasons), they rely on neighbors, family members and friends to meet many critical needs. Our findings suggest rural communities, lacking a well-established service infrastructure, also have a long-standing tradition of informal volunteering. The neighboring phenomenon is illustrated in statements such as “there are different types of volunteering, for example, preparing meals for people who are poor or needy or for each other, but this is not necessarily viewed as volunteering.” This supports Pew’s discussion of “simple neighborly acts,” in which over 80 percent of rural residents report helping a neighbor, the highest percentage out of any group (rural, urban and suburban).

Two characteristics largely distinguish rural informal Volunteeringvolunteering: local relevance and immediacy of needs. For instance, informal volunteer activities included providing food, transportation and home repair to neighbors. Residents might mow an elderly neighbor’s lawn, help farmers with field work or just “call to make sure everything is OK.” Communities come together “spontaneously” to help when there is an emergency (e.g. home fires or collecting funeral funds); volunteers feel “close to the cause” when helping friends with sick children and coworkers recover from a car accident. Barriers similar to those that inhibit formal volunteering, including transportation issues and changing economic and social climates, ultimately limit the extent and ability of community members’ informal neighboring activities. Such **barriers to neighboring suggest that agency involvement is essential in building the capacity of neighbors to serve neighbors.**

Supporting formal and informal volunteering will require some short-run investments that can enhance long-term programming. For example, a food pantry, staffed by volunteers, might also provide extra supplies to a family that prepares meals for elderly neighbors, and a community development agency may loan tools to residents that weatherproof others’ homes.

While the benefits of such services are difficult to track, and **an inherent trust is placed in the informal volunteer** receiving extra supplies, such resources will effectively build the capacity of people to keep helping one another, lessening the organizational resources required to provide these same services in often very remote areas.

To strengthen formal volunteer programs, it is essential that **organizations use creative approaches, stretching organizational resources to meet the goal of the volunteer program and community needs**. The most successful strategies that respondents cite are also those that expend staff and financial resources: door-to-door recruitment; creating many different types of volunteer opportunities (e.g. episodic, ongoing, project-based, team-based, various time shifts) for every type of person taking into account language and literacy barriers; offering transportation and child care (or family-friendly projects) for volunteers; and creating “mobile” projects that can be transported and completed in convenient places for volunteers including homes, schools, local diners and places of worship.

Finally, the recurring premise that rural America is characterized by diversity, negating the possibility of a standardized solution, reinforces the need to **understand community nuances and foster a sense of community ownership in third sector services**, including volunteer projects. For instance, in the Foundation’s assessment of neighboring in urban, and now rural areas, we find it is essential that, in order to bring about change, **residents need to “own” both the issues and the solution**. To accomplish this, outside organizations must recognize community assets and build upon them, “rather than trying to develop a program for which there is little interest or buy-in from the community”(Cihlar & Shrestha, DATE, p.11). This includes **strengthening existing leadership and utilizing the power of community voice in issue identification, program development and implementation**. Creating partnerships with “key logs” or gatekeepers is essential to reach new populations to include in this process. These are the individuals that can provide insight to the local culture and ease acceptance into the community as well as give their time to help mobilize and inspire their neighbors.

III. Organizational Issues

Many of the challenges rural organizations face parallel those affecting the broad third sector: volunteer recruitment and retention, training, partnership development and fundraising. Yet working in rural America requires organizations, especially newer ones, to surmount an additional barrier—they must **invest time and resources to develop trusting relationships with tight-knit societies**. To truly understand the community and its nuances, respondents suggested organizations employ a trusted community source to advocate on the organization’s behalf (e.g. minister, teacher); encourage staff to attend community meetings to become familiar with potential clients, volunteers and the issues most important to them; and conduct extensive research of the community including historical, social and cultural audits.

Organizations should proactively pioneer relationships with existing agencies to increase credibility. An additional entrée into the community, these collaborative

relationships develop “economies of scale” when approaching funders—instead of individual entities applying for grants, *the partnership* can speak to funders, thus minimizing competition for scarce monies. This strategy also counters, what respondents noted to be a historical lack of collaboration in rural areas between communities and practitioners that **limits growth and leads to piece-meal, competing operations**. Establishing clear roles for agency partners limits, or at least raises awareness of, duplication of services and maximizes resource sharing. For example, respondents cited a **lack of professionalism** in the rural volunteer management arena. Brought about because of inadequate resources at the individual agency level, organizations are prevented from **attaining their maximum volunteer potential**. Ongoing collaboration and communication between agencies would facilitate resource pooling such as regional training sessions in which each partner might have to incur a small fee and exchange systems for sharing organizational development materials.

When identifying potential partners in rural communities, participants named churches and faith-based groups; local government, the media; schools and colleges and elected leaders. In addition, employment and welfare offices, local food pantries and churches were noted. Although respondents noted that rural areas do not have the ability to rely on businesses as sources for volunteers or funding, the literature review does suggest using “third-places” as potential sites to promote community engagement. Coupling the remote nature of these areas with the lack of established businesses, it is **important to leverage the existence of third-places** (faith-based institutions, schools, diners, grocery stores and other public places) **to the public sector advantage**. This includes using these sites for mobile projects, recruitment fairs, drop-offs for goods drives and other activities which build the capacity of the nonprofit to serve and recruit community members.

Rural geography also plays a large role in cost-per-volunteer analyses, where associated costs may outweigh benefits. **Not only are geographical distances large (a cost to volunteers), but the population from which to draw volunteers from is scattered and small (a cost to agencies)**. One strategy to overcome this logistical barrier is to host episodic volunteer events and community fairs that have the capacity to bring residents to a centralized location without making an ongoing commitment. These opportunities, if created with the intention of building a critical mass of supporters, can act as a natural recruitment tool to engage volunteers from ongoing, distinct populations (e.g. youth groups, retirees, faith groups) and mobile volunteers (those groups of people that would be willing to take on a mobile project if transported to them).

Outreach in rural areas poses distinct challenges, especially when targeting materials to serve or request volunteer services from low-income residents. Again, due to the vastness of these areas, organizations cannot target just the low-income population because **“pockets” of low-income residents are generally nonexistent; residents are intermingled throughout the region**. This problem intensifies in regions with increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants where families exist undetected by service providers, a group certainly suspect of government or agency officials. The intermingled nature of rural communities forces organizations to outreach to the entire community, negating potential for a targeted audience

message. This additional recruitment challenge, oftentimes coupled with preexisting biases against low-income residents, deters administrators from recruiting low-income volunteers.

Low-income rural residents remain a largely untapped resource in the effort to revive the economic and social health of rural communities. To successfully nurture rural low-income volunteering, agencies should not limit volunteer opportunities to traditional, formal volunteering; **it is critical to promote and support a mix of both informal and formal volunteering.** With this in mind, respondents note it is essential that organizations remain cognizant of the high rate of illiteracy (one respondent stated that many rural adults are educated at a 6th grade level), various colloquialisms of the community and the diversity of languages understood due to fluctuating immigrant populations. Others cite that to capture community members' attention, organizations must communicate a **localized need, making the need relevant to people's lives while also allowing opportunity for community ownership of the issue and solution.**

5. Conclusion

Volunteering—the tradition of neighbor helping neighbor—is well and alive in rural America. The culture of independence and service forms the backbone of rural communities, providing residents with the support and strength necessary to survive and thrive under many economic and social challenges. Through our study, we have learned that similar to our findings in urban areas, rural volunteering, both formal and informal, plays a critical role in strengthening families and building family-supportive places. However, rural communities, with the historical legacy of poverty and new social economic pressures that especially impact the lives of low-income families, are in need of more and more effective volunteering that leverages the breadth and diversity of a community’s assets.

Findings from our study underscore the critical need for volunteer organizations to take a place-based approach to volunteer engagement, especially among low-income and other marginalized populations, that bolsters and builds on ongoing local efforts. If low-income rural residents continue to remain a largely untapped resource, rural communities will continue to miss out on this immense potential. Volunteer organizations and those working to strengthen rural communities and families will benefit greatly by carefully considering how best they can leverage this resource by:

- Addressing the particular conditions of each community when designing volunteer programs
- Celebrating and encouraging innovation to overcome barriers and bridge gaps
- Focusing investment to build and strengthen the support, infrastructure, and capacity
- Strengthening relationships, collaborating, and partnering with local community stakeholders
- Building on assets to foster ownership and bridge cultural, social, and economic divides

Effective volunteer efforts in rural areas must link volunteer engagement to the specific needs of residents, not only in removing barriers to participation, but, most importantly, in targeting efforts to reflect local priorities. Engaging residents makes for locally relevant, targeted programs that address the unique needs of individual communities by tapping into local grassroots efforts. In addition, volunteering can be an effective strategy to build community connectivity, cohesion, and resilience and a method of connecting low-income rural residents to the essential resources, skills, and services needed to thrive.

We urge volunteer organizations, practitioners, policymakers, and others committed to affecting sustainable positive change in rural areas to take the learnings afforded by our research to heart. The vision of rural communities as the cultural keystone of a strong thriving America is achieved when rural communities are healthy, family-supportive places for all rural residents. Volunteering is the catalyst in building a resilient and empowered citizenry, and the volunteer sector has a key role to play.

Appendix

- XIV. Literature Review
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Literature Review

Introduction

The Points of Light Foundation conducted a Literature Review to synthesize publications that offer a deeper understanding around volunteer engagement and family strengthening in rural communities. The Foundation finds that there is a lack of published research regarding rural volunteering and neighboring, especially when juxtaposed against volunteering and neighboring in urban areas. Notably, Europe and Canada appear to have conducted studies regarding this phenomenon. For the purposes of this project, international studies were not included. There is much information regarding rural community empowerment and development programs; but often, these lack descriptors about volunteering and concentrate on civic participation in the form of government engagement, entrepreneurial development and expanding the leadership base.

To compare rural and urban America and clarify ambiguous terms, the U.S. Census Bureau's definition, as described by the Economic Research Services (ERS), follows:

According to official U.S. Census Bureau definitions, rural areas comprise open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents. Urban areas comprise larger places and densely settled areas around them. Urban areas do not necessarily follow municipal boundaries. They are essentially densely settled territory as it might appear from the air. Most counties, whether metropolitan or non-metropolitan, contain a combination of urban and rural populations. (USDA, n.d., *What is Rural*)

It is critical to note that the concept of "rurality" is a dynamic one. In 2000, Census changed classifications of what is urban and rural from the old dualistic categories to "urbanized areas, urban clusters, and rural." This change indicates an expanding understanding of rurality and recognition of the diverse realities of communities that share both rural and urban traits. Most often "rural" America refers to conditions in non-metropolitan areas—(counties outside the boundaries of metro areas).

- Office of Management and Budget defines **metro areas** as (1) central counties with one or more urbanized areas, and (2) outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties as measured by work commuting.
- **Urbanized areas** (containing at least 50,000 people) and **urban clusters** (2,500-49,999 people) are areas with places with core census blocks with population density of 1000 people per square mile and surrounding with 500 people per square mile. Urban areas do not follow municipal borders.
- **Metropolitan** (metro) and **non-metropolitan** (non-metro) areas are defined on the basis of counties, which are also frequently used as basic building blocks for areas of economic and social integration. (United States Census Bureau, n.d., *Metropolitan*)

Engaging Volunteers From Under-Resourced Communities

In partnership, the Points of Light Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation developed an initiative, based on Casey's mission to strengthen low-income families and Points of Light's mission to mobilize volunteers, to answer three main questions regarding volunteering in under-resourced communities. These are:

- What is the nature of volunteering as it happens within low-income communities, performed by local people?
- What are some of the challenges faced by traditional volunteer organizations that try to “go into” low-income communities for volunteer initiatives?
- What are the key strategies through which volunteer organizations can partner with low-income communities and help mobilize residents to solve community problems and strengthen families?

While research shows lower-income people typically volunteer less than higher income groups (42 percent of households reported volunteering with income under \$20,000 versus 68 percent of households with income between \$40,000 and \$49,999), this work suggests that informal volunteering in under-resourced communities is prevalent and often undocumented.

Using eight Volunteer Centers in urban communities as pilot sites, the Points of Light Foundation framed work around the concept of neighboring, informal volunteering or helping of the community, “to encourage stronger ties between those inside and outside the communities in a way that respects and builds upon the strengths those living in the communities”(Cihlar & Shrestha, p.6). Pilot sites utilizing low-income residents as volunteers included:

- The Youth Volunteer Corps (Denver, CO)—The Piton Foundation's Colorado Youth Corps Association and the Denver Volunteer Center expanded programs to include a community service component in which participants develop service projects in their communities while gaining employment experience and earning GEDs.
- Shelter Services (Greensboro, NC)—The local Volunteer Center and Community Foundation offered technical assistance and partnership building to strengthen and expand a long-standing community tradition to provide shelter to neighbors seeking relief from domestic abuse. Not only did more residents offer their homes to abuse victims, the coalition also raised enough funds to allow for the purchase of supplies and food, and validated the existence of this informal network and built its assets.
- After-School and Summer Programs (Providence, RI)—Together, the Providence Volunteer Center and Housing Authority aimed to strengthen the family unit by creating an after-school and summer program that focuses on youth and parents serving the community together.

As a result of this work, the Points of Light Foundations identified several critical factors that must be addressed to implement effective volunteer programs and create positive change in under-resourced communities. For example, it is essential that volunteer organizations understand the nature of volunteering in these communities including volunteer participation in informal organization and altruistic behaviors exhibited by helping out fellow community members. Again, this neighbor-to-neighbor activity is called neighboring, and like formal volunteer institutions, provides established infrastructure which volunteer organizations should

employ and offer tools to build capacity. Secondly, volunteer organizations must provide avenues to overcome traditional barriers including lack of time, financial resources, child care and transportation. Pilot projects considered these barriers and provided child-friendly projects, recognition through monetary rewards (gift certificates to local establishments) and bus tokens. In addition, projects were also aware of “less traditional” barriers such as low self-esteem and negative perceptions of volunteering and external organizations. To ameliorate these issues, pilot project staff were sure to include esteem building practices including “true” community voice and equitable representation in all stages of project development as well as “presenting resources in such a way that they were viewed as a helpful partner rather than an overbearing outsider that wanted to dictate how the program was run and money spent”(p.11).

The requirement for strong community voice resonates in the fourth component, that, in order to bring about change, residents need to “own” both the issues and the solution. To accomplish this, outside organizations must recognize community assets and build upon them “rather than trying to develop a program for which there is little interest or buy in from the community”(p.11). This includes strengthening existing leadership and utilizing the power of community voice in issue identification, program development and implementation. Lastly, the Foundations close with a reminder to volunteer organizations that this process takes time: “While infrastructure and interested parties are common, the approach is unique...outside organization oftentimes must overcome negative stereotypes left to them by predecessor organizations...that did not engage communities members as partners”(p.11-12). The Annie E. Casey and Points of Light Foundations recognize this work as important to build strong communities and families and have expanded the urban focus to include rural communities.

Volunteer Centers: Meeting the Challenges of Rural Non-Profit Management

The Points of Light Foundation developed *Meeting the Challenges of Rural Non-Profit Management* for use as a source of technical assistance to Volunteer Centers in rural communities. Through a series of on-site and telephone interviews with 12 Volunteer Centers that serve rural communities with populations ranging from 15,000 to 50,000 residents, the Foundation discovered five unique Volunteer Center-led “creative solutions” to the critical challenges faced in these diverse communities. Specifically, the Foundation describes:

- The *cultural tradition of informal volunteering* as a stumbling block to nonprofit managers because its formal counterpart is unknown to community members. Volunteer Centers have overcome this barrier by partnering with a trusted nonprofit that has been a community institution for many years, thus building the Volunteer Center’s own credibility; hosting a festival or special event that encourages community participation to make the Volunteer Center and its staff more recognizable; and adapting volunteer recruitment collateral to the rural culture to create a more familiar message (e.g. changing “will you volunteer” to “will you help?”).
- The identification of *critical community needs is a distinct challenge* in a rural area because poverty is often hidden in the sheer remoteness of the community while the “strong cultural tradition of independence”(p5) and self-sufficiency of its residents make it difficult for people to ask for help or accept assistance. Volunteer Centers achieve the goal to help solve serious social problems by identifying local leaders to provide key insight into the community, for instance a local minister serving on the board to allow access to the strong religious population in the county; using in-place food delivery

program volunteers to assess the needs of isolated and often bedridden elderly clients; and, finally, creating an exchange system “where community members offer what skills they possess in return for some essential help”(p6), which removes the stigma of obtaining free services because residents are able to offer a service in return.

- Rural communities often have *small and less diverse economies* than suburban and urban areas; yet, this “distinct characteristic of rural economies are rarely addressed formally in terms of non-profit activities”(p7). Volunteer Center strategies to involve and integrate the rural business community into their work include forming a speakers bureau to inform employers about volunteer activities, creating a joint Business and Volunteer Expo to promote local businesses and nonprofits, and building relationships with organizations that have “long-standing traditions of supporting farmers and their families”(p7).
- The *lack of affordable, accessible training opportunities* in rural areas inhibits the professional development of the non-profit sector. To meet this challenge, Volunteer Centers have created training opportunities including forming a mentor relationship with a larger Volunteer Center to build off their ongoing knowledge, support and assistance; using local resources, such as accountants for financial planning and lawyers for legal council, to build their capacity and receive localized training; and building a local chapter of Directors of Volunteer in Agencies (DOVIA) to offer trainings and technical assistance to the area’s nonprofits.
- The difficult *cultural transition* that many rural communities are experiencing leads to a growing socioeconomic gap and fosters resentment between original and new community members. To ease the tension of the cultural transition, Volunteer Centers have collaborated with realtors to give out Volunteer Center directories with each new resident’s welcome package to inform them of critical community services as well as volunteer opportunities and have created episodic volunteer events to bring the community together in service, a unifying activity that transcends cultural differences.
- Finally, the lack of infrastructure in rural communities creates a unique challenge regarding *reliable, sustainable funding* when compared to more suburban and urban areas. To counter this lack of funding, Volunteer Centers have applied for national and community service grants; implemented fundraising events and drives specific to the locale; and capitalized on in-kind donations from local educational institutions and businesses to bring about new funding streams and capital.

Acknowledging that these six issues cannot be considered characteristic of all rural communities nor can the management challenges apply to all Volunteer Centers or nonprofits. The Foundation maintains, “despite differences...these issues did become themes that were interwoven into conversations with many of the Volunteer Centers”(p1).

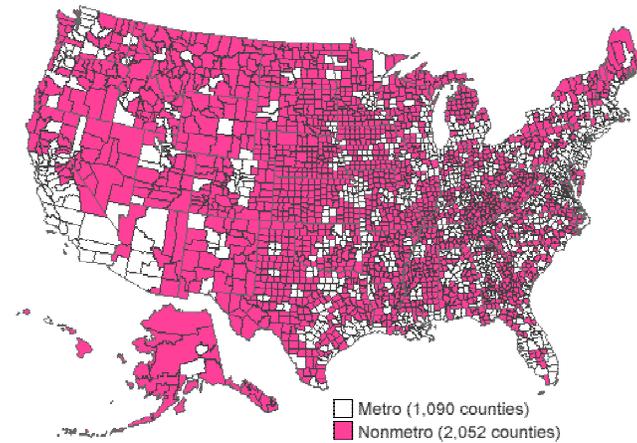
Rural America

ERS reports “the U.S. rural population was 59 million (21 %) in 2000” compared to a 2003 estimate of 49 million (17 %) in 2003 (Whitener et al, 2004, para.2), depicting a decline in the rural population.

Progress and Partnerships in a Dynamic Rural America, released February 2004 by ERS, describes three driving forces impacting rural America's dynamic future:

- Changing demographics—Realized in the shifting migration patterns that can cause both positive and negative impacts, these patterns have been shown to “contribute to the revitalization of small towns” but in other areas, have the capacity to “strain community resources, as local areas strive to provide essential services, programs and infrastructure to both native populations and are residents”(Whitener et al, 2004, para.8).

Nonmetropolitan and metropolitan counties, 2003



Source: Prepared by ERS using data from the Census Bureau.

- Industrial restructuring— In reaction to the decline in farming and mining jobs, rural America must restructure the industry to encourage population growth and industry stabilization. To accomplish this, ERS recommends looking to an area's “natural amenities, promoting farm-related businesses and generating farming input products”(para.10).
- Increasing educational attainment—The number of rural Americans attaining higher levels of education is increasing. In 2000, for example, “one out of six rural adults age 25 and older had graduated from a four-year college, more than double the rate in 1970”(Whitener et al, 2004, para.12). The benefit of receiving an education in rural America is great, although still less valuable than the same degree in an urban area: “Rural college graduates earn twice as much as rural high school dropouts...however, college gradates in urban areas...earned 12 percent more than non-metro college graduates in 2002”(para.13).

The Southern Development Center's report, *Creating Vibrant Communities and Economies in Rural America*, speaks to specific populations in rural areas, Hispanic and African-American, including educational attainment rates where 8.4 percent of Blacks had a college education in 1999 and in 2000, the rate dropped to 8 percent. The author describes America's “Latino population as entrenched in the lowest rungs of the educational attainment ladder where more than 45 percent of non-metro Hispanics have less than a high school education in 2000”(Beaulieu, 2002, p.4). Juxtaposing education and employment-tiers, the authors contends, “if rural areas are to effectively participate in a more complex and technology sophisticated global economy, an educated and skilled pool of workers will be an absolute requirement”(p.5).

Rural & Urban America—Differences, Similarities

Differences—The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the ERS publication *Rural America at a Glance* reviews a series of indicators based on federal data issued between 1999 and 2003. The numbers highlight the dichotomy between urban metro and non-metro employment, poverty and hunger rates.

The report identifies many recent improvements in rural economic health; however, these slight shifts do not foster a complete recovery and, while these rural improvements have been in contrast to a decrease in urban economic well-being, the urban economy still fares better overall. For instance, in 2002, the “non-metro unemployment rates (5.6 %) reversed trend of recent years and fell below metro rates (5.8 percent)...in the first half of 2003, the non-metro rate stayed about 5.7 percent, while the metro rate increased to 6.1 percent”(p.2). Along those lines, “non-metro employment increased by...less than 0.1 percent”(p.2) but metro employment fell by 0.3 percent, and non-metro wages per week increased 1.4 percent whereas metro wages experienced a weaker improvement of 0.9 percent.

As mentioned, metro areas suffered a more severe rise in unemployment rates and slighter increase in weekly wages earned than non-metro areas; however, urban areas still experience, on average, higher wages and median incomes and less poverty rates than rural areas. Specifically, in 2001, 14.2 percent of non-metro residents were poor compared to 11.1 percent of metro residents and non-metro average median household incomes (\$33,601) were 75 percent that of the metro average at \$45,219.

According to the 2002 Save the Children report, *America’s Forgotten Children: Child Poverty in Rural America*, child poverty is greater in rural America than in urban areas and increasingly, rural child poverty mirrors urban poverty. “Of the nation’s more than 200 persistently poor counties, 195 are rural. And in these counties, child poverty rates often exceeds 35 percent” (Save the Children, 2002, p.12). Affecting a higher percentage of children of color and children of single parents, poor rural children face severe challenges. Without adequate local infrastructure and support systems, breaking the cycle of poverty is especially difficult for the rural poor families.

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) succinctly describes the disparities between metro and non-metro areas in an April 2003 fact sheet entitled *Health and the Economic Well-Being of Rural Families*. Some contrasting points include:

- “Rural workers are often underemployed and more than twice as likely to earn minimum wage as urban workers;
- Rural more than urban families are likely to experience poor health;
- Death rates are higher in rural counties for children and adults;
- Rural 8th graders are more likely to abuse drugs than youth in large metro areas; and
- Teenagers in rural areas are at particularly high risk for negative effects of teenage childbearing with higher teen birthrates than in metropolitan areas” (“Health and Economic Well-Being,” 2003, p.1-2).

In *Rates of Food Insecurity and Hunger Unchanged in Rural Households*, Mark Nord discusses the prevalence of household food insecurity, when households are not “consistently and dependably able to get enough food for an active and healthy life” (Nord, 2002, p.42), impacting 2.4 million households in non-metro areas in 2000. Furthermore, 3.4 percent of these food insecure households reported “one or more household member were hungry...because they could not afford enough food”(p.42). In minority, ethnic and households with children, the food insecurity is more severe. For instance, Nord reports that food insecurity was “three times more prevalent among non-metro Blacks” than non-metro Whites and “for non-metro Hispanics, the rate was over twice that of non-metro Whites” (p.43). Nord also states “one out of five non-metro children”(p.44) lived in households that experienced food insecurity, and that “children’s hunger was more than twice as prevalent in single-parent families as in two-parent families”(p.46).

Similarities—In the Brookings Institution’s Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy’s *The State of Low-Wage Workers: How the EITC Benefits Urban and Rural Communities in the 50 State*, the author uses the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a tax credit available to working families whose incomes fall below 200 percent of the poverty line, “as a lens through which to view the working poor” (Berube & Tiffany, 2004, p.2). Using this “EITC lens,” the data describe similarities between the metro and non-metro working poor in contrast to small metros and large suburbs (as opposed to metro versus non-metro alone). For example, the study finds large cities (metro areas) have the highest percentage of filers receiving the EITC (20.4 percent) followed closely by rural areas at 18.2 percent, when compared to small metros and large suburbs. The report further notes, “large cities and rural areas contain nearly half (47 percent) of the nation’s working poor families,”(p.4) and the “number living in rural areas (4.2 million) is quite similar to the number living in large cities (4.6 million) nationwide”(p.4). The author concludes, “in this sense, EITC is as much of a program for rural areas as it is for cities” (p.4), as the need witnessed in economic strife and sheer numbers of eligible filers in quite similar in these areas.

The study further breaks EITC receipt (used as proxy variable for levels of working poor) into regional patterns including the “amount of urban influence” on a rural area. Data indicate “the most remote rural areas closely resemble large cities in their incidence of working poverty, while rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas look more like small metro areas.” In other words, the most rural and most urban are more closely related in terms of the working poor than are remote rural and rural near metropolitan areas. Overall, the South has the highest prevalence of working poor compared with every other part of the nation. The author attributes this to the region’s “lower prevailing wages and high number of economically isolated communities,” which results in “many more working poor families than other regions of the county”(p.5).

Voices of Rural America: National Survey Results

The Pew Partnership’s online report *Voices of Rural America: National Survey Results* is perhaps the most pertinent and comprehensive study available regarding volunteering and civic participation in rural communities. The survey of 1,830 adults, conducted in October 2000, touches upon the differences between rural and urban residents, as well as the striking similarities between these two groups— similarities which are reinforced by economic data discussed later in this review.

The Pew Partnership's findings counteract the common thinking that rural populations may have a tendency to "feel isolated." In fact, Pew states "rural residents were *more* likely to feel connected to their communities than urban residents and equally optimistic about their community's prospects for the future. Eighty percent of rural residents indicated that they feel that their community's best years might be ahead, not behind" (Pew Partnership, n.d., para.2).

In terms of civic participation, rural and urban residents share similar percentages of voting, volunteering and charitable contributions. Of much interest to this particular literature survey, Pew found that:

- "Over 50% of rural residents reported volunteering in the past year and,
- Rural volunteers are more likely than urban or suburban residents to commit to volunteering on a regular basis"(para.3).

Pew also discusses the concept of "simple neighborly acts," embodied in the Points of Light Foundation and Casey Foundation's definition of *neighboring*, in which over 80 percent of rural residents report helping a neighbor, the highest percentage out of all three groups (rural, urban and suburban).

For the following information, Pew did not report related data on other cohorts to compare across group lines, however, the information is still interesting regarding the civic participation of rural residents. For instance, rural volunteers report participating in a club or community group (37 %), attending a neighborhood or community meeting (33 %) and regularly attending a house of worship (40 %)"(para.4). According to the Survey, rural residents report two main "impediments to getting more involved" including not enough free time (nearly two-thirds) and lack of knowledge about who to contact to get information about volunteering (40 %).

Rural and urban volunteer trends are similar in the number of hours spent volunteering and the types of organizations residents utilize as "entry points" into the volunteer sector. When responding to "what organizations did you get involved to help with," churches and schools covered the highest percentages in both groups, nearly two-thirds reporting involvement in these types of organizations. For all other organizations, involvement rates decreased similarly across group lines: charitable organizations scored an average of 14 percent, "other organizations" about 11.5 percent and local civic groups and boy and girl scouts each scored at or below 6 percent.

The Survey requested that respondents rank the most severe community challenges and the top organizations that deal with such challenges most effectively. Results indicated that the most serious rural issue was living-wage jobs, that "illegal drugs rate equally serious in both urban and rural areas" and access to affordable healthcare "was the most challenging for rural residents when compared to urban and suburban communities"(para.7). Pew also notes that teen pregnancies and unsupervised children and youth are also of much concern for rural residents in particular.

When identifying key problem solvers, rural and urban communities rank local religious organizations and police departments highest on the problem solver scale. For rural residents, however, falling in first place (above both religious organizations and police) were friends and family serving as problem solvers, supporting the “neighboring” concept presented by the Annie E. Casey and Points of Light Foundations. For rural residents, “falling close behind were parent-teacher associations, civic/service groups and local nonprofit organizations. Farthest down the problem-solvers scale were the federal government, labor unions and the media”(para.8). Notably, business leaders were “no more likely to be seen as problem solvers [in rural areas] than those in an urban environment”(para.9) which Pew discusses as a contrast to the “connectedness” one may expect rural areas exhibit.

The Pew Partnership reinforces the notion that “rural and urban communities are more alike than different in terms for how they see their community, choose to get involved, perceive problems and identify problem solvers”(para.10). However, Pew also notes an “inspiring finding” in the “overwhelming number of rural respondents that rank their quality of life as excellent, ” concluding with the suggestion that “there are enough positives in their community to make them want to stay”(para.10).

Analysis—The Pew Partnership’s online report is the most pertinent to the work of Casey and Points of Light Foundations in rural and urban areas. The data are not only relevant, but also relatively recent (published in October 2000). The data paints a positive picture of the initiative and commitment rural residents exhibit towards their communities and gives insight into the type of organizations of which they tend to volunteer and a synopsis of the community issues rural residents feel are the most important.

The negative aspects include the terseness of the survey; there is no information on where these communities were located, how the survey was conducted and if the sample was representative of urban, suburban and rural populations. While these negative features might be published in a complete version of the survey, they are not accessible online or made available for ordering.

The Casey and Points of Light Foundations may find this data helpful, yet inadequate due to the lack of information regarding 1) families and family volunteering in rural and urban communities and 2) nonprofit, faith-based and civic organizations views on the issues regarding volunteering in rural areas. Overall, however, the numbers indicate a move to strengthen programs involving rural volunteers will have a positive reception if created in partnership with local organizations such as places of worship and schools.

The Impact of National Service on Critical Social Issues

Innovations in Civic Participation’s report, *The Impact of National Service on Critical Social Issues: Getting Things Done*, contains a chapter that specifically focuses on “Service as a Strategy to Promote Rural Development” which sheds light on the unique and critical role national and community service can play in addressing challenges faced by rural communities. Based on a forum held in May 2003, the report highlights innovative rural national service programs that have effectively addressed intractable rural challenges, such as shortage of empowered leaders, professionals and generally under developed human capital, and history of

environmental exploitation, and lack of youth development opportunities. National and community service, in the form of Youth Corp, AmeriCorps and VISTA programs can serve as important catalysts and facilitator of positive social change, leveraging additional resources and partners, and engaging the community in its efforts. Among the report recommendations, most relevant are the ones that recommend targeting service programs to ensure the engagement and success of rural youth. The report emphasizes the need to provide a living allowance and benefits to enable more members of the community to participate in service efforts.

Civic Community in Small Town America

The Center for Economic Studies published a paper in 2001 regarding the impact of civic engagement and local capitalism on civic community. The authors state, “the civic community perspective maintains that locally oriented capitalism and civic engagement are the foundations of civic institutions that nurture trust and cooperation among citizens...this contributes to a vital capacity to solve problems and resolve local issues” (Tolbert et al, 2001, p.2). The paper discusses the notion of third places— businesses, pubs, restaurants and other establishments serving as “venues for civic interaction” (p.7)— along with traditional settings like faith-based organizations and associations (e.g. VFW, Kiwanis). These venues, the authors offer, provide additional opportunities for community members to interact.

The authors identified 4,553 small towns (places with 2,500-20,000 people) and categorized them into metro and non-metro areas in order to “evaluate the role of civic community in producing beneficial local outcomes”(p.9). Variables utilized to specify civic engagement included third places (service and retail gathering places), associations (Chambers of Commerce, fraternal organizations, labor unions, etc) and civic denominations (places of worship).

The results found that “non-metro small towns are more likely than metro small towns to have above-average concentrations of adherents to civic denomination” (faiths) and “non-metro small towns contain more third places and more associations than metro small towns” (p.16). The median income of small-towns is positively related to the amount of civic engagement measures, and the existence of third places is an important factor in this positive relationship for non-metro areas. In non-metro small towns, “location in a county with an above-average percentage of civic denomination adherents is associated with higher median income”(p.18). According to these results, the authors conclude that the existence of third places (local businesses), faith-based organizations and membership communities is “associated with civic welfare”(p.20), also defined as beneficial local outcomes, and thus impacts “community cohesion” and social and economic well-being.

Analysis— Though volunteering was not one of the variable used to define “civic engagement,” the authors recognize the clear links between voluntary associations and civic engagement, and as such the study provides some valuable insight and also raises relevant questions for this study.

The authors exclude places with fewer than 2,500 people and explain this exclusion by referring to a 1991 study stating “very small communities do not possess complete institutional structures”(p.9) thus attempting to include places large enough that “have social infrastructures and built environments sufficiently well developed to service local population”(p.9).

Interestingly enough, the concepts forming the founding argument of this study—“owners and managers of small firms are active participants in the community’s civic affairs”(p.3)—belies the finding in the Pew Partnership’s online report stating, from the perspective of residents, that business leaders were “no more likely to be seen as problem solvers [in rural areas] than those in an urban environment”(Pew Partnership, para.9). In essence, this contrast might be due to the apparent lack of developed institutions, as the authors suggest, in places with fewer than 2,500 residents.

The “third places” notion, while there may be smaller numbers in rural areas compared to places with more than 2,500 residents, may present additional avenues to engage residents not typically involved in community activities. For instance, if rural residents do not find business leaders supportive in solving social issues, the hosting of a volunteer-led weekly preschool reading group in a local diner, for instance, offers a way to involve third places as non-traditional volunteer settings.

The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service and 4H

Out of its offices, the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) hosts the national Leadership and Volunteer Development Base Program. Its mission is to enhance the capacity of diverse people to take action to improve the well-being of self, families, and communities and includes eight program components: Youth Leadership and Development, Community Leadership, Local Officials Training, Statewide Leadership Development, Family Leadership and Resource Management, Master Volunteer and Volunteer Development Programs. Perhaps the most well known of CSREES-supported programs is the National 4H Council.

Two brief studies feature 4H youth and adults as respondents to surveys regarding volunteering in rural areas. The first, *Urban and Rural 4H Adult Volunteer Leader’s Preferred Forms of Recognition and Motivation*, looks at adult leaders in rural and urban volunteer programs to analyze if current recruitment and recognition programs (based on a rural population) aligns with the needs of an increasing urban leader population.

The data indicate that “rural and urban volunteer profiles in this study were more alike than they were different”(Fritz et al, 2003, para.6) such as most had children eligible for participation in 4H programs, more than 92 percent were married and 70 percent were former 4H volunteers. A significant difference was found between the numbers of other volunteer programs these groups participated in, specifically, rural volunteers were found to participate in more volunteer organizations in addition to 4H than urban volunteers. The study notes, “rural and urban volunteers committed a comparable annual amount of service (65 hours urban/53 hours rural)”(para.7) and forms of desired recognition were quite comparable for both groups (phone calls and letters were ranked highest).

The authors’ conclusions speak more to the recognition 4H experiences in communities, than to the generalized sense of volunteering that encompasses the Casey and Points of Light Foundations’ focus. For instance, the study finds “although they still ranked them as above average, rural volunteers were less positive about their state and county 4H programs than were urban volunteers. Perhaps rural volunteers viewed the 4H program as critical component to

community viability”(para.16), which resonates in the greater numbers of rural youth participating in 4H programs than urban youth.

Analysis—Overall, this study indicates a homogenous group of adult leaders participating in 4H programs in both rural and urban areas and the respected position that 4H holds in many rural communities. A time-tested program, 4H may serve as a model for recruiting both rural youth and adult volunteers, however, an adherence to creating a diverse volunteer base (which reflects the increasing diverse populations of rural America) should be considered when looking into its recruitment methods.

The second 4H study, *Public Opinion Survey on Community Service and Dialogue Between Youth and Adults*, is a nationwide telephone survey of 1,000 adults and 400 12- to 17-year olds. While not specifically focused on rural and urban volunteering, the data imply interesting results. For example,

- “27 percent of rural teenagers cited ‘building respect/tolerance for others’ as the most needed element in terms of improving their communities;
- Urban youth believe that helping someone who is physically or mentally handicapped is most needed in terms of improving their community (22 %vs. 14 % of youth overall); and
- Mentoring/tutoring children/teens is the volunteer activity of most interest to youth (25% overall and 36% of rural youth”(4-H Centennial, 2001, p.1-3).

Analysis—Offering a glimpse into the interests of youth volunteers in rural and urban areas, this brief survey appears to be one of the only sources comparing volunteer issue area by urban or rural resident. As evidenced in the diverse communities and community empowerment program models, needs assessment requires a localized approach (done in the community, by the community) although expanded data of this type would be helpful in the initial steps of program creation or expansion. It should be noted that the Pew Partnership’s online report discusses community problem areas, however does not position these issues in relation to volunteer opportunities (e.g. in the 4H case, the question is posed “what volunteer activity interests you most” whereas the Pew Partnership asked respondents to “rank a list of 18 possible community challenges”).

Welfare/TANF in Rural Nebraska

In November 2002, Mathematica, a policy research firm, studied Nebraska’s welfare program in attempts to fill “research gaps” regarding challenges in urban and rural areas for TANF program recipients to attain employment and case managers in service delivery (Mathematica, 2002, p.1).

It appears that rural clients exhibit some stronger tendencies than their urban counterparts in the case management and employment process. For instance, rural clients were more likely to report facing “personal obstacles” such as substance abuse problems (22% versus 14%) and history of domestic violence (55 %versus 40%). Rural clients are more likely to “talk frequently with program staff and receive services to address personal obstacles” (p.2) than urban clients including “4 in 10 rural clients, compared with 3 in 10 urban ones, talking with their case manager at least every two weeks.” Mathematica also reports “similar percentages reported talking with an employment services staff member regularly” (p.2).

Finally, rural clients have a better success rate at exiting welfare to enter the workforce (45 %of rural clients exited the welfare program within a year compared to 31 %urban). However, “perhaps because the economic base is weaker in rural communities and jobs are more difficult to access, rural clients were considerably less likely to find good paying jobs with benefits” (p.3). Rural clients, on average, earned 85 percent the wage of urban clients (\$6.75 compared to \$7.85) and were also less likely to receive benefits on the job (4 out of 10 in rural areas receiving fringe benefits compared to 6 in 10 urban clients).

Analysis—This study was included to highlight potential differences in service delivery in rural and urban areas. While this is a sector-specific example, its implications are applicable to other programs. For instance volunteer-led job training workshops might focus on high-level skills, technology development and career counseling. When recruiting volunteers or program participants that are low-income, staff must remain cognizant of social needs by providing child care (or creating family-friendly projects or programs) and hosting projects near public transportation, in easily accessible areas or at multiple service sites.

Urban Versus Rural Experiences of Nurse Volunteers

A 1999 study, *A Comparison of Urban Versus Rural Experiences of Nurses Volunteering to Promote Health in Churches*, delves into a very specific type of volunteering (parish nursing) along with the motivations that these volunteers have in urban and rural communities. According to the authors, parish nursing is utilized to “promote health within the context of faith communities, building on the health-promoting strengths of congregations and providing services not readily available in the traditional health care system”(Chase-Ziolek & Striepe, 1999, p.270).

A literature review depicts that rural and urban communities experience differences in “health status, disease and accessibility to health care services”(p.271) in addition to cultural variations. Specifically, the authors cite McConnell and Zetzman (1993) to illustrate that rural residents have “poorer health, increased chronic disease, lower incomes and access to health services is impeded by transportation issues”(p.271) than urban populations. In contrast, urban residents have greater access to health services yet decreased support networks and “greater social isolation, an increased concern about violence and greater numbers of immigrant groups and persons who are homeless”(p.271). The authors also juxtapose urban and rural environments in cultural contexts. For instance, rural areas are considered to exhibit high cultural contexts or “where people share many aspects of their lives with frequent and sustained contact” as opposed to the low context culture of urban residents, “where people are more isolated, have greater mobility and relationships change often”(p.271).

The research indicates both “similarities and differences in the experiences and motivations of [volunteer] nurses in the urban and rural programs”(p.276). For example, both rural and urban parish nurses cite great value in the opportunity to integrate faith with professional expertise (p.276) and the training, education and support provided by the sponsoring organization. Urban and rural discrepancies include the “nature of services provided”(p.276), which the authors hypothesize may be due to the “characteristics of the communities, program focus or the length of time the program has been in operation”(p.276). Rural nurses also tend to rate congregational

support higher, possibly caused, the authors report, because of smaller congregations in rural areas (over 50 percent had less than 500 members as opposed to over 50 percent of urban memberships at 1,000 or greater).

Another highlighted difference in urban and rural parish nurses is overall motivation to volunteer. The authors propose, for instance, that motivation to volunteer transitions from the need *to strengthen one's relationship with the congregation* to an overall aim *to help others* as length of time involved in a program increases. Rural nurses volunteered an average of 4.1 years more than urban nurses, and ranked “parish nursing gives me the opportunity to help others” highest. Urban nurses, on the other hand, ranked “parish nursing strengthens my relationship with my congregation”(p.273) highest. Such findings indicate that a volunteer's initial motivation to get involved may be based on a need to strengthen one's own personal sense of community, and, as participation increases, evolves into the larger purpose of strengthening the community as a whole.

Parish nursing, growing out of the belief in the public health arena that “churches are solid community organizations that can provide access to underserved population”(p.270), involves “functioning as a health educator, personal health counselor, coordinator of volunteers, community liaison and role model of interrelationship between faith and health”(p.271). Supported by formal programs, for example the Parish Nurse Programs and the Volunteer Congregational Health Program, the sample of parish nurses working in rural areas “perceived higher support from the clergy than the coordinator, a relationship that is inverse in the urban program”(p.277). The authors reflect that geographical barriers might cause this weak coordinator/rural nurse relationship of which the clergy, easily accessible and familiar, can resolve by offering support.

Analysis—This particular study was included to highlight a program example as well as resonate the necessity of plugging into established community infrastructure such as third-places and, as in this case, faith-based communities. For example, the authors' proposal, motivation to volunteer transitions from a desire to “strengthens one's relationship with my congregation” to “help others” as length of time involved in a program increases, suggests that building upon established community institutions allows for unaffiliated volunteers to meet the basic need of “strengthening relationships with their personal community” while introducing them to the larger purpose of “helping others.”

To ameliorate coordination and logistical issues, as witnessed more often in rural programs, the Casey and Points of Light Foundations may need to operate multiple program sites or provide a traveling coordinator able to meet with volunteers on an ongoing basis as well as providing the lead volunteer, in this case a member of the clergy, with adequate training and resources to support volunteers between coordinator visits.

Recommendations

The overwhelming majority of the literature recommends approaches that *take into account the diverse cultures of rural areas* for any policy or program intervention. ERS recognizes that the “diverse needs of rural America require a diverse approach” and that “strategies to improve the

economic well-being of rural residents will be most successful when tailored to individual and community needs”(Whitener et al, 2004, p.4).

The majority also suggested using a community *empowerment approach to strengthen the community from the inside out*. For example, the Southern Development Center focuses on strengthening the quality of human capital by making community investments in the young people of rural areas. These “investments” include equipping parents/guardians with tools to create a home environment that reinforces education; forming a community-responsive school structure in which teacher/parent and teacher/student relationships are central to learning; and providing young people supportive, community-funded activities as well as giving them a voice in community decision-making to foster civically responsible convictions.

The Development Center also describes the requirement for community leaders *to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit of residents*. Instead of waiting for opportunities to coax large corporations or manufacturing plants into an area, the author writes, “rural communities should fully examine the nature of their imports and try to figure out ways in which these products and services can be successfully produced locally”(Bealieu, 2002, p.7).

Finally, the Development Center describes the need to create a “corps of civically minded citizens”(p.9). Citing research by Tolbert, the author reports “locally oriented businesses in non-metro areas have a positive influence on the development of civic communities, communities that have an active involvement in local churches, that expand the presence of local associations and that provide gathering places for people to interact on local matters of importance” (p.10).

The Center for Community Action Research published a 2002 issue brief stating, “the unique challenges found in rural America can only be addressed by local grassroots initiatives”(Alwin, 2002, p.1). Aligning with this view, Community Action Agencies create a tri-partite board, “composed of one third private sector, one third elected officials and on third low-income representation,”(p.1) to determine serviced provided in each unique community.

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) makes policy recommendations encompassing “strengthening families and promoting economic stability” including encouraging development by ensuring funding, creating nonprofit and public agency branches that are accessible to low-income community members and promoting “safe communities by developing partnerships between residents and police” (2003, p.4).

The Center for Economic Studies’ research report “Civic Community in Small Town America” concludes that policies to promote and strengthen “regional trade associations, local industrial districts, producer cooperatives and other forms of locally based entrepreneurship”(Tolbert et al, 2001, p.21) should be the foundation for community-based development initiatives.

Conclusion

The lack of published knowledge regarding rural volunteering limited the capacity of the Literature Review. The Pew Partnership’s online report remains the sole source of completely relevant information yet does not respond to the concept “rural volunteering as it affects the public sector and the family structure.” The report does, however, positively reinforce the Annie

E. Casey and Points of Light Foundations' initiative to expand volunteer and neighboring programs in rural areas. In implementing programs, for example, Volunteer Centers and volunteer organizations must acknowledge local leadership and community structure, but can strengthen and build the capacity of the currently informal "neighborly" acts of kindness that so many rural residents report (80 percent).

The Center for Economic Studies report establishes strong linkages between residents belonging to clubs, associations and places of worship and the amount of civic welfare a community exhibits. This thinking can be applied to the utilization of current social structures in developing volunteer programs. Volunteer Centers, for instance, should approach places of faith, civic groups and other social institutions to build upon existing structure and member commitment to their community.

The authors also report strong positive associations between the number of third places and civic welfare, when third places double as informal venues for civic interaction. Again, Volunteer Centers should exploit in-place infrastructure for program (volunteer orientation, volunteer open house) and volunteer activities – not only are these places accessible and frequented by a cross section of a community, they are establishments of which residents are familiar and thus removes the "alien" barrier one often feels when entering a new situation, like volunteering.

The two 4H studies reiterate the theme found in much of the literature: urban and rural volunteers share much of the same tendencies. The negative aspect of the 4H Adult Leader study, though, is that these groups exhibit *too much* of the same characteristics and are not representative of a diverse cross section of the populace. The second 4H piece, *Public Opinion Survey on Community Service and Dialogue Between Youth and Adults*, provides a brief look into rural and urban volunteer interest areas for young people; yet since it is so little information, the value greatly diminishes.

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Key Informant Interview Questions

I. Background

1. Do people in your community do more of their volunteering formally or informally? (ask for examples)

CLARIFICATION –

Formally – institutions, volunteer organizations

Informally – neighbors

Do low income people differ?

2. Have you found that people in your community prefer to volunteer for one time opportunities or to commit to volunteering on a regular basis? Do low-income people differ?
3. What are the main issues that face children and low-income families in your community?
4. How are they addressed? Which organizations seem to be the most effective problem-solvers and mobilizers in the community?

II. Recruitment

Communication

5. What are some of the ways that people find out about volunteer opportunities in your community? Do low-income people differ?

PROBES -

if they say church and school- Outside of churches/schools what have been other ways to recruit and mobilize rural volunteers?

if they say Volunteer center, what are ways to reach those not reached by traditional methods?

Motivation

6. What types of organizations/programs/issues find it easier to attract volunteer assistance? Why?
7. What are the barriers to getting people to engage with projects in your community?

8. How do you deal with these barriers?

PROBE-

If there are transportation issues - is there a way people are dealing with it?

III. Retention

9. What have been successful ways to get volunteers to return and volunteer again in your community? Do low-income people differ?

Key Informant Interview Summary Themes

I. Do people in your community do more volunteering formally or informally?

- In a majority of the communities, there is a healthy mix of formal and informal volunteering.
- The more rural the community, the more informal the volunteering tends to be.
- There was some importance given to the growth in formal volunteering for people who move into a community, do not have a support system, and are disconnected from the community. Formal volunteering provides them a bridge into the community, especially in towns.

II. Have you found that people in your community prefer to volunteer on a regular basis or for one-time events?

- Over half of the respondents said that people prefer to volunteer on an on-going basis, yet some of these organizations were speaking on behalf of their organization that only offers committed opportunities, i.e. Habitat for Humanity. A few respondents from this group also clarified that regular volunteering for low-income people was not as prevalent due to prohibitive barriers and a propensity for engaging in informal volunteering.
- One-time volunteer opportunities are said to be growing and are more and more popular each year as people learn more about them.
- Regular volunteer opportunities, such as RSVP, are very important for many seniors. Seniors receive a mileage reimbursement, which is vital to them.

III. What are the main issues that face children and low-income families in your community?

The top areas that were noted as issues facing low-income families or as gaps in service are:

- 60percent indicated that transportation is an issue. There is no public transportation and the transportation that is available, such as taxis, do not go out of the county.
- 50percent identified lack of family structure, dysfunctional households, or single-parent households as main issues. There is not enough care for youth, coupled with not enough involvement from fathers in separated or divorced families or families of incarcerated individuals.
- 40percent indicated that there are too many isolated youth and not enough youth leadership activities or transportation for youth in very rural areas. Consequently, these youth cannot participate in after-school activities since there is only one after-school bus and many parents are working second shift or do not have transportation.
- 40percent indicated that the high drop out rate is an issue. Many families in poverty lack education themselves and do not support education for their children
- 30percent indicated that health care expenses are too high

- 30percent identified the problem of cyclical generational poverty of families
- 30percent identified the issue of adult illiteracy and adults fears that prevent them from seeking out programs
- 20percent indicated a lack of homeless shelters
- 20percent identified budget cuts effecting local school drastically
- 20percent identified the high pregnancy rate
- 20percent identified the lack of affordable housing
- 20percent identified drug problems.
- 20percent identified the high unemployment rate
- 10percent identified addressing the needs of the Latino community
- 10percent identified lack of a soup kitchen
- 10percent identified the problem of hunger
- 10percent indicated that ambulances cannot see rural addresses in emergencies
- 10percent indicated that people lack motivation
- 10percent identified increasing poverty
- 10percent identified employment instability (based on tourist season).
- 10percent indicated the lack of job skills and peoples' unfamiliarity with accessing resources.
- 10percent indicated that people are unable to obtaining propane and pay utility bills
- 10percent identified youth not obtaining a decent education while in school
- 10percent indicated a lack of available child care

IV. How are the main issues in your community addressed?

- Half of respondents stated that the main issues are addressed by inter-agency meetings and collaborations with various organizations:
 - a. "Close the Gap" is a summit on the status of the community and formulates the plan of action for each year. The summit is highly attended and helps form collaborations within a diverse network of organizations, businesses, and individuals
 - b. Job taskforces.
 - c. Statewide literacy campaign supported heavily with newspaper media for ten days.
- One-third of respondents stated that issues in their communities are addressed by focusing programs and development on youth. Communities try to create new types of home environments, impacting priorities for young people. This idea is that by targeting youth volunteering, other family members will be encouraged to participate in future volunteer opportunities
 - a. When youth put together a community resource fair, parents and others in the community come to show their support, and are not as intimidated. Additionally, businesses and the community college are there to offer jobs, request skills and offer assistance on further education. It is a non-threatening environment.
- Another way of addressing these issues is by having staff visit needy clients, instead of having clients come to them. This eliminated feelings of fear or isolation.

- a. Staff visits homes of parents that are afraid to allow their children to attend Head Start. Staff tries to educate parents on the importance of this early education program. Many times parents will not allow their children to participate. The children of these families are given special in-house Head Start. These home-based families meet twice a week where their kids get to interact with other kids, women volunteers teach moms how to cook, and male volunteers teach dads how to cut hedges, etc.
- Using innovative volunteering techniques is another way of addressing these issues, such as:
 - a. Offering volunteer opportunities for people who work first, second and third shifts.
 - b. NCCS visits the community at home, bringing volunteer projects that can be done at home, then returned.
 - c. This spring, the local welfare department is mandating a certain number of volunteer hours for people receiving funds and are not working or in school. This creates a new group of people for the Volunteer Centers to work with. In the past, many of these volunteers were placed by the government into work crews and did not have to go to the nonprofit community.
- By supporting new and innovative youth projects, issues are further addressed. Examples of these youth centered projects are:
 - a. A local boy scout put together a project that would help ambulances locate rural addresses in emergencies by installing lights outside their homes . . . Even though only a few people in this rural community allowed the installation, it was an original solution to a pressing problem.
 - b. Conducting investment club contests through the state Boys & Girls Clubs.

V. Which organizations seem to be the most effective problem solvers and mobilizers in the community?

- 100percent of respondents stated churches
- 60percent of respondents stated Volunteer Center or United Way type organizations
- 60percent of respondents noted a particular non-profit organization such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools, Habitat for Humanity, Love Inc., McDowell Mission Ministries)
- 40percent of respondents stated Rotary Clubs and other civic organizations
- 40percent of respondents stated the school system
- 20percent of respondents noted the Volunteer Clearinghouse
- 20percent noted their local library
- 20percent of respondents stated county and local governments
- 10 percent of respondents stated local sport teams
- 10percent noted the local community center
- 10percent noted the local newspaper
- 10percent noted the local community foundation

VI. What are some of the ways that people find out about volunteer opportunities in your community?

- 80percent of respondents noted Media
 - a. Newspapers 80percent
 - b. Radio 40percent
 - c. TV 20percent
- 60percent noted area nonprofits and/or agency fairs
- 40percent stated by personal relationships
- 30percent noted school newsletters or service-learning programs
- 30percent stated church bulletins
- 20percent stated by community outreach by organizations that go into the community and speak to groups
- 20percent noted mail or flyers
- 10percent noted the phone book
- 10percent stated the Volunteer Clearinghouse
- 10percent stated the Chamber of Commerce
- 10percent stated at United Way campaign time
- 10percent noted a volunteer booth at festivals
- 10percent noted websites
- 10percent noted the Volunteer Center through their news releases and toll-free number

VII. Are there varying methods of how very rural people find out about volunteer opportunities?

- 50percent stated that it is even more important that it comes from a very trusted person
 - a. Community Center and church staff receive training from Texas Volunteer staff through a community-setting meeting. This training is then used to educate others in the community.
- Media is even more important because they may not see many people
 - a. Radio is noted twice as much, especially for Latinos who may listen to local Spanish radio talk-show programs while at home
- Because of a large population of farmers, it is easier to reach potential volunteers through school sites and churches.
- Church bulletins
- Innovative methods
 - a. A food pantry on wheels that also delivers news, information, and volunteer opportunities.
 - b. The Dream Center, which is located on the outskirts of the town, near a large rural, poverty area.

II. Which type of organizations, programs, and/or issues find it easier to attract volunteer assistance?

- **Organizations**
 - a. 20percent stated hospitals
 - b. 10percent stated Red Cross, hospices, or churches
- **Programs**
 - a. Golf scrambles are VERY effective for all types of organizations
 - b. Buying supplies for back to school drives, as well as soliciting others to purchase and contribute by passing out supply list and having people buy items and donate them when they exit stores.
- **Issues**
 - a. 50percent stated issues surrounding youth or schools
 - 20percent stated that it is difficult to find volunteers for middle, high school, and needy youth
 - b. 40percent stated issues that are local in focus
 - c. 20percent stated issues that are relevant to people's basic needs such as health and dental fair
 - d. The environment
 - e. Animals
 - f. High Teen pregnancy rates
 - g. Issues that are relevant to people

III. What are the barriers to getting people engaged in community projects?

- 50percent noted that people are too busy due to prior commitments or working
- 40percent noted the lack of community education and/or communication about events not coming from trusted sources
- 50percent noted not having access to transportation or being physically isolated and having to travel too far for an event
- Those that do volunteer are over-involved and spread too thin.
- Invisible boundaries between people and neighborhoods formed by religion, income, and housing that people are not aware exist.
- During heavy summer tourism, it is hard to find volunteers since many are working
- Organizations are afraid to collaborate with each other
- Organizational staff that have been around for a while are resistant to change

IV. Are these challenges different from engaging members of under-resourced areas?

- 40percent noted greater lack of and access to transportation
- There is an enhanced issue of noncommunication
- Definitely, town and city schools have a wealth of volunteers through local businesses that are VERY effective. However, in rural areas where there are minimal to no

businesses, they have a hard time finding volunteers and resources. Additionally, more of their volunteering is done through church partnerships.

XI. How do you deal with these barriers?

- Different methods to deal with the transportation issue:
 - a. The Council on Aging has a transportation van, however, a 24-hour notice is required prior to use and the van cannot leave the parish grounds.
 - b. If neighbors have access to cars, there is a lot of ride sharing.
 - c. NCCS is trying to get more mobile vehicles to bring projects to rural areas not currently engaged.
- The Volunteer Connection is trying to create a community forum of various religions, community leaders and businesses to come together and look at issues and resources.
- To help with the distance problem of county-projects, the county is broken down into 23 smaller communities and projects are focused within those 23 communities. It is more successful to focus events at the local neighborhoods, especially in rural areas.
- Texas Volunteer is trying to take the lead in helping form collaborations, serving as “middleman”.
- Create shorter, yet committed volunteer opportunities that range from 6-8 weeks, giving options to people who want more than a one-time opportunity, but do not have time for a yearly commitment.

XII. What strategies have you used that have successful in engaging volunteers?

- **Engaging**
 - a. Moving some civic organization access into areas that are more rural or by starting new chapters. A Rotary Club just started in a very rural area, that is growing quickly and is effective.
 - b. In one mill town, when parents were found to be too busy working to attend special lunch events at school with their children, grandparents were encouraged to attend. turnout was great, and created a new huge and active volunteer base.
 - c. Through an excellent broadcast e-mail system that is effective for volunteer placement of community needs.
 - d. Press releases are effective.
 - e. Local industry and business are very community-minded, building volunteer groups within their industry to help the community.
 - f. Recruit all ages of people. Ask everyone!
 - g. The most importantly aspect to recruit people is encouraging local service and recruits seeing their impact on the community.
 - h. Habitat for Humanity has a speakers group that goes out into the community, speaks to groups, and recruits volunteers.
 - i. A successful strategy has been not focusing on volunteering as doing something good for the community, but in showing people that they learn valuable skills that will help with future jobs. These types of projects help bring in volunteers and help to retain them for future projects.

For example, computer training engages volunteers and retains them because they are getting something back. In order to be part of this program, volunteers must volunteer for twenty hours in various nonprofit organizations in the community. Each nonprofit helps in retaining these volunteer. It is a circle of givers.

- j. Since there is not much to do in rural areas, socialization is a key factor to bringing in volunteers. Service projects help break through the isolation that many deal with on a regular basis.
- k. In terms of recruitment, there is a steady influx of immigrants including families that grow and changing in size. A great deal of recruitment takes place within families.

- **Retaining**

- a. The successful nonprofits have spent time to build an effective volunteer infrastructure.
- b. Organizations, media, government, etc., have different types of recognition for volunteers including awards and honors
- c. Special volunteer banquets that can be attended by the community
- d. Corporation for National Service and RSVP provides good training for recruitment and retention. They have their best luck when they apply such concepts as requiring that all volunteers sign registration forms, track and plan work hours. After volunteer events are completed, organizations can show their results to the community through radio talk shows, newspaper articles, as well as distribution to area nonprofits and statewide associations.
- e. Within school, youth write thank you letters to volunteers. There is also yearly recognition for volunteers.
- f. Periodic training and volunteer time to talk and debrief.
- g. Make sure volunteers have permanent nametags when on campus so that they feel like a part of the staff.
- h. The most important thing needed to retaining people is good relationships with the supervisor.
- i. Small nonprofits attract a wealth of talent, such as the environmental educational nonprofits, where the focus from staff is on teaching volunteers how to manage programs. When there is additional money available, these small nonprofits will hire a volunteer as a staff person.

XIII. Biggest differences between recruiting & retaining urban vs. rural volunteers?

- 30percent noted that people from rural, low-income areas might want to help but cannot due to tight financial obligations or lack of transportation.
- 30percent noted that rural areas could be very cliquish, not welcoming people from outsider of the community.
- 20percent noted that rural volunteering is more informal and focused on an individual's neighborhood.

- 20percent noted that there is a focus on the process of building trust and recruiting in rural areas, which is time intensive. Since (immigrant) families are always moving there is high turnover as many come and go.
- There are not as many people to draw from in rural areas; they need a larger percentage of people to respond to volunteer opportunities.
- In a small community, there is a stigma associated with asking for help because everyone knows each other. Volunteers need to be constantly reminded of confidentiality.
- Each county bonds together and sees the other county as their rival.
- In rural areas, more adults are educated around the 6th grade level. When they do volunteer, they need to be matched up with the right volunteer opportunity so they feel comfortable, are not intimidated, and want to return.
- Rural people are more cautious about volunteering. They are more guarded because they are used to living a more isolated life, and are not educated about volunteer opportunities as easily.
- The rural volunteer that lives closer to town will participate more often in volunteer opportunities compared to the rural volunteer that lives farther away.
- In urban areas, there is no time for people to get to know one another.
- With urban volunteers, an organization probably does not need to get as personal and engaged as when trying to recruit rural volunteers.
- In urban areas, there are more people to solicit as volunteers and it is harder to get urban volunteers to go out into rural areas.

Focus Group Questions

As part of the study into volunteering in under-resourced rural communities, at least two focus groups will be held to gain insight and input from rural volunteer practitioners. These focus groups will include nonprofit, government, faith-based groups, community-based organizations, as well as community leaders, current volunteers, and interest representatives from the community.

Following are the questions that will be asked of focus group participants during the session.

1. What are the main challenges and issues facing your community today?
 - a. Are there some unique problems facing low-income children and families that has not been mentioned so far?
2. How are volunteers or community members engaged in addressing these issues? (Who volunteers, when, where, how much, how often, why do they do it, and, what do they do)?
3. What are some of the challenges in engaging people in volunteering?
 - a. Are these challenges different from mobilizing volunteers from under-resourced communities?
 - b. How are low-income community members engaged in community activities?
4. What strategies have you used that have been successful in engaging volunteers (getting people involved in community activities), especially low-income volunteers?
5. When we work in low-income communities, how can we honor and respect local grassroots initiatives?
6. If you were going to work in low-income communities, whom would you look to as a potential partner?

**Clarksville, IN: Appalachian States
October 2, 2003**

1. What are the main challenges you are facing in your community?

- Transportation – people cannot get to services that are being offered.
- Poverty – pockets of industry have gone away and there is no new economy
- Illiteracy and poverty –we have the 5th highest illiteracy rate in the country.
- Drugs – Metamphetamin use is especially high, and on the rise in rural communities.
- Areas – It is hard to attract industry, even though there is a strong and capable workforce.
- A “framework of poverty” exists that affects how children see and understand the world. Examples given were of tests containing questions about hotels that children in rural communities could not understand because of their limited experiences.
- Children could not identify road signs or understand restaurant menus. There is a significant divide in language and experience.
- Dental care, health care, housing, home ownership, and lack of adequate housing.
- “Homeless” classifications by the Census are inaccurate. People who live in unlivable conditions are not classified as homeless but should be.
- Collaboration between local organizations and sectors (business, nonprofit, and, government agencies), as well as the isolation from other communities and practitioners, is a challenge.

2. How are volunteers and/or community members engaged in addressing these issues?

- At Kettering, they hold forums; “Hispanic Action Forum” for example. it’s important to remember to engage the people you’re trying to help. The Hispanic Action Forum, for example, needed to engage more Hispanics.
- You have to meet the people where they are – your appearance and approach have a significant impact in how you are perceived. Should knock on doors, go out into the community and make every effort to reach the people where they are.
- A homeless person became involved, as did other homeless people. It’s important to acknowledge that homeless people are able to help themselves and others.
- It is important to engage those we serve but often we do an adequate job of ministering *to* the poor, but not *with* the poor.”
- It is usually the people of privilege who gather to meet needs, but we need to better engage those who are receiving the services we offer.
- It is vital that the people who receive our services are on our boards.
- We can’t rely on email, or even phone calls to reach the people who we’re serving. We have to really reach the people where they are – this may mean going to people’s homes,

or congregations. Suggested that we (rural organizations) are more community minded than urban organizations.

- Generally, volunteers are middle class people. Low-income families are busy just trying to survive.
- People in the lower class are just trying to survive.
- There are different types of volunteering. Example is preparing meals for people – people in the community may prepare meals for the poor or needy, or for each other but this is not necessarily viewed or termed as “volunteering.”

3. What are some of the challenges in engaging people in volunteering efforts?

- Time is a challenge. I used to make \$300/month and felt guilty taking the time to volunteer when I knew that I could be using that time to make money, or be with my children. People from all over the country and sometimes abroad come to our center and community to serve and give time. In awe of that commitment and being able to do that.
- Real ministry is about getting your feet wet and your hands dirty. We deal with guilt by trying to do something for people who are poor rather than with them. There is still an underlying feeling by many that if you are poor you have placed yourself in that position.
- A lot of times, people who have “made it” (out of poverty) don’t want to “get dirty again.”
- It’s a lot easier to read someone a story about feet washing than to go to someone’s house and wash their feet.
- There is a misconception that people who are poor placed themselves in that position.
- A big part of getting involved is educating people that they are an important part of their community and that they have a voice. Relocation into the community you’re serving is beneficial.
- Crisis relief; a bit of everything (in terms of meeting the needs of their communities)

4. What strategies have been successful in engaging volunteers?

- We have to get outside of our comfort zones. The most important thing is to keep people engaged.
- There needs to be a clear “job” description for the volunteering that is needed.
- Clearly identified needs are also very important.
- Watch people and recruit them from the community to volunteer (essentially target people who have special talents and skills, and call them into volunteering)
- Establish credibility and longevity in the community
- We should incentivize volunteering.

5. When we work in low-income community, how can we honor and respect local grassroots initiatives?

- We should share resources and apply to grants for our communities.
- We should stop doing needs assessments and start doing resource assessments.

- We should work together and pull in different people to meet the needs people are facing in our communities.

6. Who are potential partners in low-income communities?

- Churches – there are inherent challenges here because most churches have their own projects and are hesitant to add “one more message” or project to their work
 - Media
 - Colleges
 - State and Local Government – Have the mayor and county judge “on your side”
 - Clients – We should identify the strengths of our clients and ask “what can they do?”
-

Key Ideas:

- Poverty, illiteracy, joblessness, lack of transportation, and drug use – these were major issues facing the rural communities represented in the focus group. Most of the services offered seemed to be comprehensive. There was a desire to do a better job of collaborating with other non-profits, and a strong desire to engage community members, especially those served by organizations in greater acts of service.
- The participants saw the value in engaging people in their communities in service, but many low-income individuals, so consumed with their own survival are not able to commit to volunteering on a regular basis.
- It is important to “meet the people where they are” – in order to be most effective, those who are serving cannot appear, more important than those receiving the assistance.
- There are different ideas and conceptions about what it means to volunteer. Although volunteering is not always termed as such, people in the community assist their neighbors as best they can. It is a more informal kind of community service.

**Gettysburg, PA: Adam County, PA
Nov 10, 2003**

1. Challenges in the community

- Money for human services
- Community health needs assessments - access to services
- Lack of affordable housing
- Latino families - trying to find resources to help them develop the language skills, basic language and basic education necessary to be able to interact with the rest of the community
- Lack of positive activities for the youth in the community
- I work in the Migrant education program where there is a growing Latino community; 10percent of the population of Adams County is from Mexico. There are challenges in the areas of health and education. Challenges in communication and people without health insurance is characteristic of the population
- Jobs - jobs with growth opportunities
- A recidivism study in Pennsylvania has revealed that there is a 47percent recidivism of incarceration in the state. According to an informal study conducted of the county jail system, we have documented that there is 53percen recidivism in the county.

Specific problems unique to low-income rural families

- Jobs
- Transportation - no public transport and things are far apart.
- Academic failure for kids living under poverty level compared to
- Lack of Legal defense representation for the Latino community. There is no agency for the farm worker community.
- Generation Diez in partnership with St. Francis Saviors Catholic Church has been working for a long time to open a Hispanic center where all people can get information, get opportunity to find interpretation for Drs appointment. One thing we are fighting, we don't like parents using their children as interpreters when they have doctors appointment. Sometimes they even take them out of school. There are only three four of us available and able to go with them. We have been trying to start the Hispanic center, but have not yet been able to find the resources to start it. All counties have such a center, but we don't.
- The center should be an interracial center and not just focus on Hispanics.
- There are huge amount of medical practitioners, but even with certain insurance, it takes a really long time to get appointments. Dentists. No one will take medical access cards. They are not getting served. For youth, no recreational services, there are recreational facilities but not with adequate adult supervision.
- People go out of county to work, speaks volume for a major problem for the county. Others left are left in agricultural and service type industries and small businesses.

- Lack of job training. Technical and vocational educational opportunities, the closest vocational center is in York. We used to have a culinary art center, but pretty much people have to leave the area.
- People moving here from larger urban areas are more affluent. Poor getting poorer.
- People live here but work elsewhere. Only 37% homeownership in the borough. The ownership, especially in the Borough, of building. They rent. There is no sense of pride and ownership. They don't live here. They have no idea of who their tenants are or who their neighborhoods. So its not only an issue of affordable housing but, also. If there lived here.
- Section 8 housing - paper work is difficult and there are government regulations keep landlords from participating. They are also afraid of people destroying the houses.

2. How are volunteers engaged?

- There are task forces - transportation, medical.
- We are all at the same kind of meetings all the time. There are a whole lot of people who live in the community who are not involved at all. There would be a great deal of difference if they got involved in even one of those issues.
- Lack of funding.
- Same people who volunteer are board members, involved in human service organizations.
- County task forces
- Episodic volunteering is easier - short term commitment, easy for people to get involved. Then it starts getting tougher if you start looking at the commitments, Toughest is working on task forces as those require long terms commitments.
- Example of our partnerships - we do periodic community health needs assessments. To identify major health and human service issues facing the community. We look around to see if there are already community groups working to address the issues and if there are fine, if not we put the word out to get volunteers to task forces and committees. Most volunteers come from same stakeholder groups, large reps from human service agencies, or much less from business sector which is major problems. We get a lot of volunteers, but not from all the constituencies that can actually look at prevention of prevention. We have yet to crack the business people. There are a handful of larger employers.
- We rely heavily on students from Gettysburg College. Center for Public service they provide all kinds of volunteers. Some in agencies. For events, some on daily weekly activities. Formalization of service learning.
- Vista positions - to strengthen service learning. That was great.
- Court ordered volunteers
- High school students for whom service is required for graduation.
- One of my frustrations in trying to work within a group to maintain interest. College students are great for mentors, but to really transform the community you need community ownership, long term community investment and we need to be able to get folks in the neighborhood to come out. Maybe even on a project, but really solving a specific problem.

- Washington street corridor community coalition - is a good example. Trying to engage parents - some of us come out and volunteer.
- Good things going on in town - such as the literacy council for ESL classes to teach parents. After school programs we depend on students. Can't run without them. There are sources, but we really need to look for other sources, no professional people with background in legal issues. For Education College kids do well. But other professional lacking. We have a big soccer league - 500 players. Need access to fields, have to look at liability issues. Explore other areas, who can look at other areas.
- We have many doctors and lawyers in the community, but we need doctors without boarders in Adams County.
- Lack of information in low-income community.
- Mentoring 65 and older. But difficult, but they spend two three months a year in Florida. So that sort of long-term commitments are hard.
- Substance abuse in my community - police mistreated people. But since then the streets are quiet. Sheila goes out there are asks people to get involved. Let's go do this - outreach. But they don't care, they are content. There are a lot of mental problems there. Not only do we black positive people, but we needs all kinds of positive people. People can say what they want to say about the neighborhood, but until they get up and say, get out and volunteer, even I need to get beat down by her to go out there and volunteer. When I get out there and sell chicken I sell chicken. This is what its going to take. They need information. We need information. We need to know what is available. The way information gets around my neighborhood, is like this, did you hear this.. its by words of mouth. If they don't see positive people coming in trying to make a difference. Trying to help them, its not going to change. It's time for a change.
- There are some white children in Generation Diez. Now leap is not there. There are tons of kids in summer time, nothing for kids to do.
- We have been working on some churches on summer program. it is tough to operate when the college kids are gone. Trying to train teenagers to run summer camps for younger kids. Train older kids give them training and tools to be able to run programs. Kids don't have summer jobs. Lots of kids could not get jobs, why did no jobs.. did training program. Summer jobs. Transportation is a problem, even if they get jobs if they can't get there, then that's problems.
- Correctional workers - they have to volunteer. Street cleaning, lot of other jobs.

3. Challenges in engaging people in volunteering?

- We have lot of volunteers from college. We have no way of transporting them there. So there are no volunteers for the Center. There is another center in B. If they have transportation, they will get there, but not always have transportation. The centers here in Gettysburg get a lot of volunteers, so we have been trying to get parent involved in volunteering in the afterschool program. But its not easy for the parents. The afterschool is for the community in general, so we have some white parents volunteering. Some parents are not able to help them. We try to get parents to feel comfortable to get them to school. Sometimes we do open houses to get parents involved. But it's difficult. They have small children and are working. Lack of self-confidence.

- Programs in prison - fear of the jail. There is a lot of stereotyping. Like homeless children. People are even afraid of volunteering for homeless kids, while parents are in a program. Once they start they get to know the children then its fine, and people love it.
- Getting them out and they feel they can do it.
- Some people in community are negative about volunteering.
- Lack of knowledge.
- If there is nothing in it for you. People don't volunteer.
- Lack of self-confidence. People have no idea of what they will do in the head start room.
- People need to be asked.
- Once they are exposed and they have something meaningful to do, they are engaged.
- People make fun of those who volunteers. Those who do help, others say, why are you doing that anyway, its not going to make a difference. It makes it harder for them to volunteer when their friends are saying that. Sometimes it is difficult to figure out what you can do for somebody else. You don't know you have something word giving to someone else. This is true both for low-income people as well as others. There is a lack of knowledge about what needs to be done in the community.
- Adams county Presbyterian Church - there is a good afterschool program, Parents come in and help, cook.
- Lack of management support - even if someone wanted to volunteer there is no support. Capacity of agencies.
- Even getting a vista volunteer would be helpful. Lack of resources necessary to recruit, retain and coordinate.
- Applying for AmeriCorps was such a headache and paper work was so hard. Philadelphia was so hard to work with that they decided it was not worth it. Our community needed it and still needs it.

4. Strategies that have worked in engaging volunteers.

- Takes a lot o time. Knocking on doors.
- They need to have clearances - takes time and money. We try to facilitate obtaining the clearances, easier. Sometimes we have no money to pay the fee, so we try to get the money, make paperwork less painful. Also, we need programs for kids, empower the parents to put the programs together would be ideal. But the parent need to work otherwise cannot pay for rent. They are not eligible for food stamp of other state assistance for food and shelter. They have specific things they need to solve first.
- Working with kids can be most gratifying, but that requires clearances, for child abuse, criminal history, they need to have money order. They have to go to two places for money order,. For instance BBBS have a waiver, we there is a legitimate way for organization to pay for it, then that's great.
- Criminal records are not easily accessible, cost money and are not reliable and accurate.
- Food
- Giveaway
- Asking them to volunteer
- I have been working with the Latino families trying to interact them with the general population in the community and also get them involved with their children because they

are working many many hours and they are not comfortable to come and help after school because of academic issue, so we put together a Parents association. We gave them ownership of that association and just helped to bring up ideas as to what to do with the community and their children. So one of their ideas was to celebrate a Mexican holiday, children's day. It was their own idea, and they would celebrate with their children. It was a day when all parents would come with their children. All parents came with their children and we had great participation from many agencies here and we used the recreation park. Many agencies donated presents for the day. Their parents cooked and brought food. And was open to the whole community. And then we had Moms cooking and we were thinking of ways to get parents involved - fathers. Because it is so hard to get fathers involved. So we came up with the idea of organizing a soccer tournament since Dads are big on soccer. So they won't come to help with homework, they come to help with anything, but if you say, "can you help to put together a soccer tournament?" they were all there, so we have had many parents involved and especially fathers involved in putting together the soccer tournament. So I think we need to be looking for something that parents feel good about and they are comfortable to do it. The Latino population is growing and they need to be part of everything, volunteering not only for their children, but also for the rest of the community too. So that was our first step in getting parents involved.

- Some parents like to cook chicken
- It should be fun. Fun for me and it was fun for other parents. Find something that they are interested in and good at and that's one way to get involved.
- People need to feel good about it. Something about it needs to be good. I give blood.
- It has to be fun, at some level. They gotta feel appreciated. The more that people feel like they are doing something really good, parents association is a really good idea, since its something that's driven by them. Its something that they feel is important. Its of their neighborhood. People get tired of other people coming in to help. This new group wants to come in and do whatever, but that's not what we think needs to done, so why would be help. So somehow involving the people in the community and getting them connected. If we could put something with every possibly opportunity for volunteers in the kids section, all the adult the elderly all the farming. There is definitely something for everybody. You don't know unless you have time to call around like people have done. We see it but, there needs to be something in every neighborhood.
- How would you get information?.
- Put flyers.
- Get the whole community involved.

5. When we work in low-income community, how can we honor and respect local grassroots initiatives?

- Money
- The agencies need to have staff that represents the community, for example, in ...county we have people from Vietnam and Russia. It is necessary because of language and culture. Grassroots culture, so its important to have people who represent the community.
- Be an advocate for the efforts. Get information about what is happened so that we can help out.

- Be representative so the efforts.
- There are ways through youth resources, trying to get people involved, get volunteers.
- Get volunteers to get the words out. Get Tanya out there get Missey out there saying, "Hey, this is what I am doing and its great." They are your best resources. People will glaze over the papers, they will pause and have the article in front of you and they will get the information, but still its interesting as to what a news paper will or will not do. Also who gets the paper.
- Language - Spanish
- They would need to know what is covered (outside doctors coming in need to know) and what people need, prescriptions are also in English. Figuring out ahead of time, what the basic things are needed in the community. Lot of times people end up using emergency rooms for simple things.
- We need advocacy
- It is really important that they understand the dynamics of poverty itself (Framework for understanding poverty).

6. Potential partners

- The community,
- University
- Hospitals
- YWCA
- Faith
- Churches
- Financial resources
- Businesses
- Agencies that have money that could use the PR (Tobacco companies) But there are also restrictions about who you get money from.
- Colleges and schools
- Cooperative extensions
- Parent Associations
- United Way
- Local county government. Local governing body.
- Tell people exactly what you need them to do, be clear and specific. People won't come back if they don't
- This sounds like an asset management process - if there could be information about asset management and how to do it realistically.

**Edcouch, TX: Rio Grande Valley
Dec 15, 2003**

1. Challenges in the community

- Conflict due to immigration. This is a border area, lot of the issues arise due to lack of planning. Immigration from Mexico and other places; newcomers seeking services; abuse suffered through law enforcement; people need information *before* they come here, they don't have the money, the information they need before they come.
- Funding does not take into account the variables this area affected by. Funding doesn't take into account unemployment rate, degree on incoming immigrants, or increase in caseloads – this is often not taken into account, and thus community is shortchanged. This happens consistently in agencies.
- Growth in population is an issue. Rest of the national doesn't see border issues as a larger national problem. If we do not take care of the needs of the people at our doorstep it's a big problem. It is seen primarily as a local issue. However, it affects nation, e.g. Health care, education, investment, school system, non-documented immigrants, hinders education system, parents are often not educated. Federal and state rules makes it difficult to serve the population and agencies are trying to fill the gap.
- Issue of employment, specifically, the gap in local skills base and what jobs are available. Need for training to fill the gap. People who enter the country often don't have skills. This creates a problem for long-term self-sufficiency and independence.
- Homelessness. Housing substandard. Identifying homeless and defining what "homelessness" is an issue. Lot of extended type family relationships, where people who are homeless are living with relatives and that creates a problem for them to qualify for access funding, housing or services. The basic definition of larger national definition of housing/homelessness does not fit what happens in this area and thus the funding are cut and underutilized, not available to us, even though the problems exists, but it does not fit the historical definition of the variable.
- They give an address, even though the address might be substandard, or it might be a family member allowing them to live there or use the address. But once they write that address in that form, they are not eligible to many services.
- This ties in with the environment. Many who come here are not educated about the environment, having difference between burning trash or dispose of trash by leaving it here or there. We need funding to provide education and connects back to lack of funding and ties back to that people who come here might be used to different standards of living conditions.
- Though "Rio Grande" is recognized as a region there is no real regional identity. Not functioning as a "region"- divided, isolated and no unity between counties. We don't see as ourselves as a region. We don't apply as a collective. Cameron County or Hidalgo. We are losing out. There is not a level of trust.

- The availability of drugs, In terms of youth, influences, sub groups.
- Because we have people using others' address. Documented 40percent of population are in the school district. Many are undocumented. They have an id number. But when you go to a house, they are not counted for in the over all population, because they don't live there. Reliable data about population – especially number of kids in households an issue. People might use an address, to get services for instance, but live elsewhere.
- Lack of transportation means lack of access to services, especially in colonias which are isolated. The ability to move around is severely limited.
- Communication - People don't know about where the services. Getting information out is especially in colonias difficult.
- Low level of literacy is an issue. Many can't read.
- Define rural often means lack of basic services and utilities, medical services.
- People often have to travel sometimes over 50-100 miles to get basic services.
- Huge area – space. There are 71 border counties, but not all are right on the border or are entry points for newcomers. State funding goes to all thus; resources are spread out among all.

2. How are volunteers engaged?

- ESL - church service volunteers
- Pomodores –outreach workers, health clinics a
- County extension services – mano amano
- Church group – provide health care, food
- School – honor societies
- Lack of coordination
- Pomodores – health clinics – started as VISTA now a generic term for out reach workers
- Coalition of valley families
- No structure - low-income community volunteer first
- If asked community comes out to volunteer just for the day
- Trying to engage neighborhood associations – low-income leaders to serve as gateway to help themselves, 21 of them so far
- You have to pay to dispose of things (Keep America beautiful) – but \$10 is a lot of money for people without money
- Need to educate people about clean ups
- Community leaders in Cameron County
- Public speakers – get funding for agencies
- Winter Texan population – retired, like to volunteer in schools, food panty and churches

3. Challenges in engaging people in volunteering?

- Important to let them know they have something to offer
- Mothers bringing mothers as a strategy work
- Child care is an issue

- Time
- Workforce has changes – both parents work
- Shifting expectations – fewer hours to volunteer
- Indigent – unemployed or caring for others – people are not free
- Transportation is an issue
- Matching people with jobs
- Need of volunteers themselves
- Absence of committed network - that communicates between community
- People’s mentality that they pay taxes and don’t have to do anything else
- People are looking at what you are going to get out of it
- Providing incentives to volunteer is an issue
- Policy and regulations are barriers – such as school volunteers, parents. We can’t provide them with lunch – children can eat, but we can’t feed volunteer moms who might also be hungry.
- RSVP Mileage reimbursement provision meant an incentive for volunteers, but budget down
- Possible incentive could be to give insurance – what medicate does not cover
- Language – many from and educated in Mexico
- Traditional role in families
- Transportation – legality – insurance

4. Strategies that have worked in engaging volunteers.

- Training – knowledge
- Awareness about resources and accessing services
- Grants to agencies
- Creating a sense of urgency – use data to let people know what is needed
- Someone spearheads the initiative – trust and credibility of leaders goes a long way
- Getting people to believe in cause and mission
- Structure and routine is important
- People have had lot of bad experiences – be cognizant of that
- Make sure the work pertains to them- their lives and conditions
- Be able to change
- Provide a specific job
- Be cognizant of who is out there and who is doing what
- People are intimidated, there are many barriers
- Language barrier – go to where the people are
- “We want you to help us and your own community and yourself”
- Recognize people have skills
- People need to have input in what volunteer activity is necessary
- Unique – how am I helping someone else – a neighbor
- The Culture is there – people come as one if need is felt by the community

5. When we work in low-income community, how can we honor and respect local grassroots initiatives?

- Culturally relevant – images and bilingual
- Translator available – have professional interpreters at events.
- Tap into what is already happening
- Recognition of activities – builds self-esteem.
- Respect from politicians (such as Congressman Hinsoja)
- Give certificates
- Leaders from county government be present at events
- Grassroots recognized
- Literacy level are considered

6. Potential partners

- Churches
- Commissioner – judge
- Schools
- Youth teens
- People residing in public housing
- Law enforcement – especially in rural areas as a partner, at risk youth
- University – they have data on civic engagement
- Military and veterans
- United Way
- Civic orgs
- Juvenile court
- Legislated volunteers – TANF/Food Stamps, welfare, residents of public housing – under served families.

Other

- People from Mexico not utilized– immigrants are an untapped resource.

Case Study Protocol

Since 1996, the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network has been engaged in exploring and promoting volunteering in tough communities. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, initial research was conducted in predominately urban communities. Under a new three-year grant from the Casey Foundation, we seek to expand the research to volunteering in under-resourced rural communities.

In 2003, a preliminary investigation was undertaken to explore and identify key issues to volunteer engagement in under-resourced rural communities. In 2004, we will build on this investigation through case studies to explore the applicability of the “Neighboring Model” in rural communities that lack similar support and resources of tough urban communities.

1. An overview of the case study project

The case studies will build upon the findings of the preliminary investigation conducted in 2003. Through the examples and experiences of three rural communities, these case studies will document and expand our understanding of the rural applicability of the neighboring model. The case studies will be illustrative/descriptive in nature. We do not seek to make definitive conclusions from these case studies. However, combining the findings from the investigation and the learning from the case studies as a collective group of evidence, we will make some generalizations about the applicability of the model and recommendations to direct any future initiative or research.

Goal: The overall goal of the case study is to explore and document the applicability of neighboring concepts to rural communities that lack similar support and resources of tough urban communities.

Primary Objectives: The primary objectives are as follows:

- Investigate the nature of volunteering in under-resourced rural communities performed by local citizens
- Identify the unique challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural communities
- Identify new or emerging effective strategies that are unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities
- Document the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities
- Document how volunteering strengthens families and transforms neighborhoods

The Foundation will collaborate with three local rural Volunteer Centers as learning partners in conducting these case studies. The selected Volunteer Centers will conduct limited activities and/or expand ongoing programming that engage low-income communities. The activities will be designed to apply neighboring concepts around three focus areas and to engage and partner

with volunteers in under-resourced rural communities. The primary means of collecting data will be documentation of activities through reports/meetings, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and limited direct observation.

Presentation of Issues: The Neighboring Model is an empowerment and asset-based approach to volunteer engagement in under-resourced communities as an effective means of strengthening families and transforming neighborhoods. At the core of this model is a set of seven key concepts. Based on the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network's work and research in urban low-income communities, these concepts were identified as critical success factors in building and sustaining volunteering by, in, and with low-income communities through effective partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and local volunteers. The seven neighboring concepts are as follows:

- Understand the nature of volunteering in low-income communities
- Overcome barriers to community involvement
- Empower the communities to help themselves
- Cultivate community members skills and talents
- Strengthen existing community leadership
- Acknowledge that neighboring is an exchange
- Ensure community readiness

The case study seeks to examine the applicability of these concepts in rural communities and document the unique challenges and strategies that work in engaging and partnering with volunteers in under-resourced rural communities.

2. Field procedures

- Collect information about the local community and partner
- Convene stakeholders: document discussions and outcomes from convenings
- Conduct activities and apply neighboring principles
- Document outcomes as well as reflective learning on the effectiveness of strategies
- Surveys: a small sampling of community stakeholders will complete two surveys
- Site Visit: Staff will visit communities for observation and dialog among key stakeholders
- Partner meetings: Partner Volunteer Centers will meet twice in-person for planning, dialog and training purposes. In addition, there will be periodic teleconferences for technical assistance and to stay abreast of developments.

3. Case study questions

- What does volunteering in under-resourced rural communities performed by local citizens look like?
- What are uniquely rural challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural communities?

- Are there new or emerging effective strategies that are unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities?
- What are the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities?
- How does volunteering strengthen families and transforms neighborhoods?

4. A guide for the report

- Executive Summary
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings (including individual community profile)
- Analysis and implications
- Recommendations and Conclusion

5. Activities and timeframe:

1. March
 - Orientation meeting (March 25)
 - Individual calls with Partners - *Focus Area and Activities*
 - Partnership letter of Agreement (activities, roles and responsibilities, reporting schedule/protocol)
 - Strategy Meeting (Neighboring Concepts)
2. April
 - Activities (Local stakeholders meeting and initial community outreach)
 - *Case History/Baseline*
 - Conference Calls
 - Distribute survey I
3. May
 - Collect survey I
 - Activities
 - Conference Calls (*Documentation*)
4. June
 - Survey I results
 - National Conference (June 6-8, 2004)
 - Activities
5. July
 - Conference Calls
 - POLF site visit (Focus Group/Observation)
 - Activities
 - Report of Activities
6. August
 - Conference Calls

- POLF Site visit (Focus Group/Observation)
- Activities
- 7. September
 - Conference Calls (*Documentation*)
 - Activities
- 8. October
 - Distribute and collect survey I
 - Conference Calls
 - Partner meeting (Oct 20-23, 2004 -Tentative)
 - Activities
- 9. November
 - Survey II results
 - Conference Calls
 - Final Report

Case Study

Rural Community Survey Findings

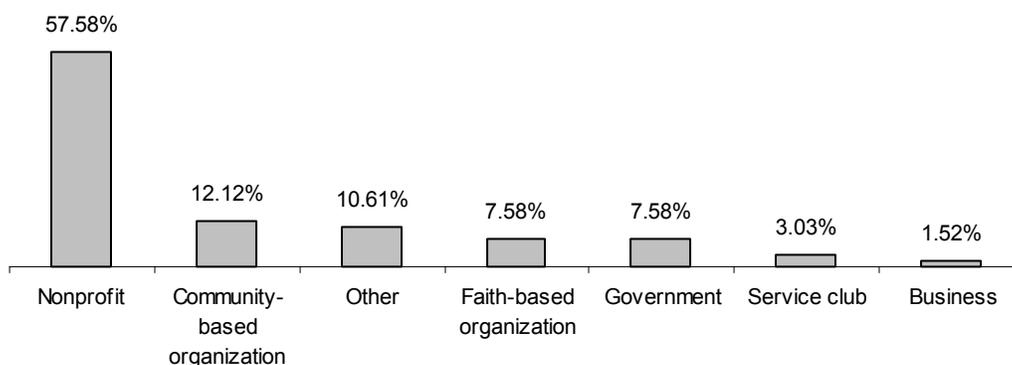
Introduction

To better understand the challenges posed and strategies used to mobilize lower-income community members living in smaller, isolated and mainly rural areas, the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network administered surveys to three rural partner sites. The paper surveys were delivered to 121 people comprising nonprofit, local government and education representatives in Randolph County, North Carolina, Redwood County, California and Sumner County, Kansas. Sixty-six surveys were returned for a 54.55percent rate of response.

This report begins with a look at the findings aggregated across the three participating counties and then moves into a separate analysis for each county beginning with Randolph and ending with Redwood.

Three Counties—An Aggregate Look

The majority of respondents across the three counties represented nonprofit organizations and covered a wide range of issue areas including healthcare and hospices, employment preparation, fire and police departments, education and youth services and services to women and victims.



An average of **93 percent** of respondents report that their agency currently engages volunteers. However, the reported types of assistance that these volunteers provide does not have any distinctly rural characteristics—the type of work volunteers in rural agencies perform closely resembles the types of work urban and suburban agencies request of their volunteers, including indirect and direct service responsibilities.

On average, **37 percent** of respondents specifically recruit lower-income and under-resourced volunteers and cite mixed levels of effectiveness when it came to methods currently used. Some of the more frequently reported effective recruitment methods include providing child care for volunteers, recruiting from the agency's client base and creating opportunities that match the population's skill, language and ability sets.

Out of the three counties, Redwoods and Sumner were asked to detail why they do not engage such populations. A few themes, sometimes contrasting, resonated throughout these responses:

- Recruitment is not a function of income — Agencies do not create recruitment campaigns targeted to under-resourced individuals, will engage any type of volunteer that answers the call to serve and do not qualify volunteers by income level;
- The population does not exist in their area — “To my knowledge our area does not have lower-income or under-represented groups;” and, contrasting,
- The community itself is comprised of largely under-resourced members, thus their entire target is primarily lower-income.

An average of **68 percent** of respondents believe that engaging low-income community members presents unique challenges to the agency. Some of the more frequently reported challenges are:

- Transportation and child care issues
- A small recruiting pool
- Cultural issues — differences in languages spoken, discrimination against newcomers and variance in education and abilities;
- Issues based on perceptions — Overall sense of apathy; lack of time, interest and/or motivation; substance abuse problems and mental health issues; residents may feel “unwelcome” or not “good enough;” reluctance to participate; reliability issues; and feelings of inadequacy; and
- Limited resources — Creating volunteer positions specifically for under-resourced populations is thought to expend more resources than typical positions.

In addition, respondents were prompted to discuss the differences between challenges to engaging urban low-income volunteers versus rural low-income volunteers. Again, commonalities are distinct throughout responses across the three counties:

- Fewer resources and smaller recruiting pool
- Community norms are different, adding positive and negative aspects — There is less anonymity in rural areas... everyone knows who is doing what but either exercises it or ignores it, and there is less charitable, organized help;” and “rural residents are less likely to ask for assistance than others;”
- Greater transportation issues — remoteness “makes it hard and expensive for volunteers to meet and communicate;”
- A persistent lack of professionalism in the field, especially trained volunteer coordinators;
- A “tendency to be less advocated and less computer literate;” be struggling through a severely depressed local economy that may “force survival issues that preclude volunteering;” be “apathetic and distrustful;”
- A greater need to really “understand” the community because of its close-knit structure; and
- There is no difference — “The biggest volunteering need is leadership and organizers; the need for people are the same in both communities;” “I believe all communities need help, and people need to serve others;” and “they are similar in competing against all other personal commitments for time.”

Randolph County, North Carolina

Twenty-three Randolph County residents completed a “Volunteering in Under-Resourced Community Survey.” The survey consisted of 10 indicators — five open-ended, four close-ended and one for obtaining contact information.

Randolph County—At a Glance

Respondents’ Organization Types	%
Nonprofit	61
Government	4
Business	-
Community-based organization	13
Faith-based organization	9
Service club	-
Fraternal	-
Other	13
Respondents’ Top Four Organizational Focuses	
Education	57
Family & Youth Services	43
Services to Youth	22
Human Service	71
Percent currently engaging volunteers	96
Percent recruiting lower-income & under-represented volunteers	65
Percent reporting that unique challenges exist to engage low-income community members	86

Randolph County — Detailed Analysis

Out of the respondents, **96 percent** reported engaging volunteers in their programs. Some ways that such volunteers assist programs include (n=24):

- Working in food service and meal programs
- Providing administrative support, assisting special events and fundraising
- Organizing goods and donations
- Aiding classrooms, schools and youth organizations

Respondents also reported that volunteers help at their agencies by offering support to clinical and non-clinical areas in hospitals, assisting the Spanish speaking community by providing resources and maintaining parks.

Sixty-five percent of respondents reported specifically recruiting lower-income and other under-represented groups in their volunteer efforts (n=23). When prompted to comment on the effectiveness of these recruitment efforts, respondents reported a variety of methods with mixed levels of effectiveness:

- Effective accounts — “We have recruited from the Latino population, which has proven to be highly effective. These volunteers are able to be empowered and pass that along to others;” “we recruit low-income, Hispanic and at-home mothers...it is great to hear their

thoughts and get their input;” “my effort was very effective because I serve the children of these [under-represented] families and they were glad to do it;” we recruit for “community-specific volunteer activities...volunteers serve on community planning teams and help with projects. We provide child care and a meal;” “we feel that we have been very effective...we have the highest percentage of minority volunteers of any program in the state;” and effective strategies are “trust, word of mouth...thanks to our commitment towards the Latino community, we have become” recognized, “as a result there is a sense of trust.”

- Marginally Effective or Ineffective Accounts — “We have actively worked on recruiting volunteers from the Hispanic/Latino community, utilizing volunteers and using volunteers from our local housing authority. However, there has been very little return on our efforts and the housing volunteers have proved to be unreliable” and “our effort was not extremely successful. Volunteers from this demographic have thus far been short-term.”

Of those who reported specifically recruiting from these groups, respondents were requested to describe the major challenges they face in engaging under-resourced volunteers. While respondents naturally detailed challenges specific to their own community, some common themes that resonate through these specifics:

- *Transportation issues* — a lack of public transportation and the price of gas
- *A small recruiting pool* — one respondent identifies this issue by stating, “we are competing for the same volunteers with every other nonprofit”
- *Inclusion issues* — differences in languages spoken, discrimination against newcomers and variance in education and abilities all serve as barriers to participate
- *Issues specific to residents* — one respondent noted an overall sense of apathy as a challenge; a few other respondents stated one or a combination of the following as issues: lack of time, interest and/or motivation
- *Issues specific to agencies* — respondents cited a lack of information and resources including meeting space and marketing funds to increase agency name recognition; an absence of understanding the needs of the community; and recruiting volunteers to work with low-income and under-represented groups, their target clients.

Eighty-six percent of respondents (n=21) stated there are unique challenges to engage low-income community members. Frequently reported challenges are lack of transportation, education, hard and soft skills, time, and child care on the part of the volunteer; differences in languages spoken between agency staff and volunteers; volunteers not being motivated because of altruistic reasons, yet are searching for future employment; overriding negative connotations people might associate with the volunteer experience including prejudices; and creating opportunities that allow people to fully utilize their skills.

When asked, “how are the volunteering needs and conditions of your community similar to or different from those of an urban community,” respondents cited:

- *Transportation issues* — For instance, one respondent stated, “In a rural community the volunteers are more spread out so it takes more time and effort to volunteer. Meal routes may be longer. There is no public transportation system here so if a person does not drive or own a car, they can't volunteer;”

- *Fewer resources and smaller recruiting pool* — One respondent stated, “I worked in both [areas], and urban seems to have a larger pool of people who want to volunteer and are more financially stable; the rural areas aren't as focused on “giving back” to their community in a longer term volunteer commitment” and another noted, “there are more available resources in an urban community than in a rural one;”and
- *Community norms are different, adding positive and negative aspects* — “Being in a small town, everyone knows everyone, and sometimes that helps...the regular community in stepping up. In a larger area, they blend in...whereas in a smaller area, everyone knows them” and another person noted, “Much more personal (one-on-one or small group) contact is required.”

Redwood County, California

Twenty-three Redwood County residents completed a survey. The survey consisted of 10 indicators — five open-ended, four close-ended and one for obtaining contact information.

Redwood County—At a Glance

Respondents’ Organization Types	%
Nonprofit	61
Government	13
Business	-
Community-based organization	9
Faith-based organization	4
Service club	-
Fraternal	-
Other	13
Respondents’ Top Four Organizational Focuses	
Other (e.g. employment preparation, health and hospice, fire services, case management)	35
Environment and Health (tie)	26
Information & Referral and Services to Youth (tie)	17
Percent currently engaging volunteers	87
Percent recruiting lower-income & under-represented volunteers	24
Percent reporting that unique challenges exist to engage low-income community members	69

Redwood County — Detailed Analysis

Eighty-seven percent of respondents’ organizations are currently engaging volunteers (n=23) in activities such as administrative assistance, maintenance and construction work, research and evaluation, leading programs and special events, fundraising, community outreach and providing transportation. Agencies that do not engage volunteers (13%) were prompted to explain the lack of a volunteer program, however, most did not respond; those that did (three) cited reasons such as not being open enough hours to effectively run a volunteer program; wanting to engage volunteers in the future; and the longstanding need to develop a volunteer program.

The major challenges Redwood County respondents faced in engaging community volunteers were varied. Some include:

- Distance is prohibitive in rural areas, especially when face-to-face meetings are necessary;
- Competition among nonprofits for volunteers due to a small community base;
- The difficulty of creating tasks for “drop in” volunteers and unskilled volunteers;
- The nationwide trend of declining AIDS activism;
- The requirement that volunteers must meet the same standards as employees;
- Confidentiality of client interests and records;
- Finding dependable, responsible people;
- Acquiring and affording insurance that covers volunteers;
- Setting up systems that volunteers can be easily “plug into”; and
- Lack of designated volunteer coordinator.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents (n=16) suggest that there are unique challenges to engaging low-income community members. These challenges include:

- Recruiting lists may be comprised of donors, which can exclude low-income members;
- Creating such positions and guiding such volunteers expend more resources than typical positions;
- Lack of child care and transportation;
- Substance abuse problems and mental health issues; and
- Such residents may feel “unwelcome” or not “good enough” to volunteer.

Just **24 percent** of respondents (n=21) have attempted to specifically target lower-income and other under-represented group in volunteer recruitment efforts. For those who have done so, they described methods used and the effectiveness of these efforts:

- A few respondents cited engaging past clients in volunteer service. For instance, “we recruited volunteers from our client base, which is mostly poor and under-represented,” “we have had past residents...do service” and “families came in for services and we would try to engage them in volunteering as a way to build self-esteem;” and
- Another respondent identified community service workers as a natural and effective fit: “They call us!”

The majority of respondents do not specifically engage under-resourced populations. When questioned why they do not, many people implied they do not create targeted recruitment campaigns — agencies engage any type of volunteer that will answer the call to service and do not qualify volunteers by income level. Specific responses follow this trend: one respondent stated that volunteer interest levels are not a function of income, indicating that recruitment should be geared for any population; another said that most people in the community are low-income, thus their entire target is under-resourced.

For the most part, respondents believe that volunteering needs and conditions in a rural community are different than those in an urban community including:

- Greater transportation issues — remoteness “makes it hard and expensive for volunteers to meet and communicate;”

- A smaller recruitment pool — “small, widely dispersed population makes recruitment a challenge” and also poses confidentiality issues;
- A persistent lack of professionalism in the field, especially trained volunteer coordinators;
- A tendency to be “less advocated and less computer literate,” struggling through a severely depressed economy that may “force survival issues that preclude volunteering,” and “apathetic and distrustful;”
- A greater need to really “understand” the community because of its close-knit structure; and
- Fewer nonprofits and agencies than urban counterparts.

One respondent noted some positive aspects stating, “small rural community affords more satisfaction — you can better “see the results” and our media is available and responsive;”another did not “think there is a difference in volunteering needs in our community compared to an urban community.”

Sumner County, Kansas

Twenty Sumner County residents completed a survey. The survey consisted of 10 indicators — five open-ended, four close-ended and one for obtaining contact information.

Sumner County—At a Glance

Respondents’ Organization Types	%
Nonprofit	50
Government	5
Business	5
Community-based organization	15
Faith-based organization	10
Service club	10
Fraternal	-
Other	5
Respondents’ Top Four Organizational Focuses	
Other (Victim services, women and youth, police unit)	25
Education, Recreation, Religion and Service to Youth (tie)	10
Percent currently engaging volunteers	95
Percent recruiting lower-income & under-represented volunteers	22
Percent reporting that unique challenges exist to engage low-income community members	50

Sumner County — Detailed Analysis

All but one respondent currently engages volunteers at their agency (95%, n=20). Examples of services performed by volunteers in rural agencies are:

- Direct service activities such as working in educational settings, answering hotlines, delivering/preparing meals and providing transportation/child care; and

- Indirect service opportunities consisting of events coordination, administrative duties and advocacy work for subordinate populations.

When prompted to describe the major challenges to engaging volunteers, a few respondents actually stated the opposite: they do not encounter problems when recruiting. For those that did identify challenges, some are:

- Changing the mindset of residents
- Time limitations
- Obtaining competent, quality volunteers, not necessarily those people required to perform community service because of a court or school mandate
- Lack of space to host volunteers
- Competition with other agencies need for volunteers
- Retaining volunteers

Half of respondents (n=20) cited their belief that there are unique challenges to engaging low-income members of the community. Respondents reported these unique challenges to be:

- Cost of membership dues
- Reluctance on the part of the volunteer
- Reliability issues specific to this population
- People may feel inadequate and may not understand how they can relate to young people.

Twenty-two percent of respondents, or four out of 18, reported targeting lower-income and under-represented groups as part of their volunteer recruitment efforts. Out of those who did, when asked to describe the types and effectiveness of these efforts, respondents indicated a range of outcomes, such as:

- Effective — “We specifically target the parents of the children we serve and a large percentage of them are lower-income”; in other words, agencies recruit from the client base;
- Ineffective — One respondent stated advertising has not had much of a return, and another stated their efforts have “not been fruitful because of community corporate memory and low expectations.”

The remaining seventy-eight percent of respondents (14 out of 18) did not recruit this specific population. Two main themes spanned respondents’ replies:

- The population does not exist in their area — “To my knowledge our area does not have lower-income or under-represented groups;” and
- Income does not play a role in recruitment — “We look at the community as a whole, find it inappropriate to single out someone based on income,” “ We look at volunteers as people...we don't distinguish by income,” “Our membership is open to all, rather than any specific group,” and “We target anyone who will volunteer.”

When prompted to describe the differences in the volunteering needs and conditions between urban and rural communities, respondents suggested:

- There is no difference — “The biggest volunteering need is leadership and organizers...the need for people are the same in” urban and rural communities, “I believe all communities need help, and people need to serve others” and “they are similar in competing against all other personal commitments for time;”

- Rural areas have fewer resources — “[There is] very little difference with needs...we just have fewer resources — people and dollars to work with,” and “urban areas have a lot more resources to pull from than the rural areas, and we don't have the programs, funds or volunteers in the rural areas to meet all the needs that we have;”
- Rural areas have fewer volunteer opportunities and a smaller pool from which to recruit; and
- Differences in culture — “There is less anonymity in rural areas...everyone knows who is doing what but either excuses it or ignores it, and there is less charitable, organized help” and “rural residents are less likely to ask for assistance than others.”

Conclusion

The majority of respondents were representatives of nonprofit agencies that currently engage volunteers; however, only 37 percent of these volunteer-engaging institutions attempt to recruit under-resourced and lower-income volunteers. This discrepancy might be related to the fact that many public organizations operate in a volunteer deficit, constantly recruiting to fill open volunteer positions. Volunteer-engaging agencies, then, expend resources to recruit the most willing individuals and groups, not those that fall into a specific socioeconomic category.

Of those respondents that do recruit lower-income and under-represented groups, some of the most frequently cited effective methods are those that require additional agency investment than traditional volunteer positions. These methods might serve as a deterrent to agencies that look to recruit these populations but lack the extra resources to create such distinct opportunities. For example, providing transportation, meals and/or child care and creating language, skill and ability-specific positions for each volunteer. On the other hand, multiple respondents mentioned utilizing what appears to be a natural extension of their services — engaging former clients and the parents of clients. Because a sense of trust and familiarity is already present, recruiting from the client base might provide a cost-efficient and effective method for human service agencies.

Case Study Sumner County, Kansas

Part I. Background

United Way of the Plains is located in Wichita, Kansas and funds over 100 programs that serve the members of the south central Kansas communities in Sedgwick County and the surrounding counties (Sumner, Butler, Cowley, Harper, Harvey, Kingman and Reno). The mission of United Way of the Plains is to mobilize the community to identify and impact critical human needs. In addition to serving the needs of urban Wichita and the communities that surround it, United Way continually monitors and plans ways to serve the residents of rural Kansas.

United Way convenes and/or participates in numerous coalitions, community planning groups and local initiatives, often providing a neutral, impartial community table where local leaders can meet and discuss issues. In addition, United Way maintains a confidential information and referral service, InfoLine. In 2003, InfoLine received 10,367 phone calls from south central Kansans; two-thirds (67%) of these calls addressed basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. InfoLine is positioned to evolve into the statewide 2-1-1 service provider for Kansas within the next year or so. United Way of the Plains also staffs a Volunteer Center, providing information to volunteers via telephone, the Internet and publication of print pieces matching them with appropriate volunteer opportunities. Over 700 volunteer opportunities are available through the more than 200 agencies United Way serves.

In 2003, the Sumner County (Kansas) Commissioners and the Community Partnership invited United Way of the Plains to open an office in Wellington, Kansas, the county seat. The office was established to provide information and referral to put area residents in touch with services available in their community to meet health and human service needs. The engagement of volunteers was recognized as a way to mobilize and enhance the community, and volunteer activities were recognized as tools essential to strengthen families. United Way opened its Sumner County office, engaging area residents by holding a volunteer fair and by initiating a community recycling project.

The Communities

Sumner County, Kansas, is located in south central Kansas, just north of the Oklahoma border. The area produces vast quantities of winter wheat, and wheat is still the driving force behind the local economy, as well as railroads, petroleum and manufacturing, especially aircraft parts. Much of the population resides in Sumner County but commutes to neighboring Sedgwick County, home to Boeing, Bombardier, Cessna and Raytheon aircraft manufacturers. As in other geographic areas, the issues facing low-income families include housing, employment, healthcare and insurance.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Sumner County population is 25,946, with a median age of 37.6 years. Although largely Caucasian (94.6%), 3.6 percent identify Hispanic ethnicity. Nearly one in six (17.9%) residents is at least 62 years old.

There are 9,920 households in Sumner County; the median household income is \$39,415. Nearly a third (30.4%) of the households had annual 1999 household income below \$25,000. Sumner County is primarily rural (62.4%).

United Way viewed involvement in the case study as an opportunity to pilot activities of discovery and inquiry to learn about rural volunteering and to begin to develop a protocol for involvement that might be replicated in other small towns in south central Kansas. United Way presence in Sumner County is definitely a work in progress, building on the strengths of rural America and fortifying family and community. For the purposes of this case study, United Way decided to focus on two towns in Sumner County, Wellington and Conway Springs.

Wellington (ZIP Code 67152) is the county seat. With a population of 10,046, Wellington is home to nearly two-fifths (38.7%) of the county's residents. It contains the health department, mental health facility, courthouse and regional hospital for Sumner County, as well as many churches, public schools and three parochial schools. Wellington has local service clubs such as Kiwanis and Knights of Columbus as well as 4-H groups and other youth organizations (i.e., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts).

With a population of 2,358, Conway Springs (ZIP Code 67031) is about one-fifth the size of Wellington and is approximately 23 miles away. United Way of the Plains initiated a multi-tiered approach to networking beyond Wellington to other county residents in and near Conway Springs.

	State of Kansas	Sumner County	Wellington (ZIP 67152)	Conway Springs (ZIP 67031)
Population*	2,688,418	25,946	10,046	2,358
Median Age*	35.2 years	37.6 years	37.4 years	32.8 years
Percent of Population:*				
At least 62 years old	15.4%	17.9%	18.9%	15.2%
Caucasian racial/ethnic background	86.1%	94.6%	92.9%	97.3%
Hispanic ethnicity	7.0%	3.6%	6.5%	1.5%
Households (in 1999)**				
Median Household Income	\$40,624	\$39,415	\$36,448	\$42,021
Median HH Income Below \$25,000	28.7%	30.4%	31.8%	27.0%
Families**				
Families below poverty level (in 1999)	706,786	7,128	2,743	591
Count	47,299	516	232	15
Percent	6.7%	7.2%	8.5%	2.5%

*Source: 2000 U.S. Census, *Table DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000*, www.census.gov

**Source: 2000 U.S. Census, *Table DP-3: Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000*, www.census.gov

The Kansas Statistical Abstract (2003, 38th edition, *Population of Kansas Cities, 1990 and 2000*) reports that in the decade from 1990 to 2000, the core population of the town of Wellington increased by 130 residents, from 8,517 to 8,647. During that same decade, the core population of the town of Conway Springs decreased by 62 residents, from 1,384 to 1,322. U.S. Census figures cited in the table reflect the entire ZIP code area surrounding each Wellington and Conway Springs.

Part II. Goals and Questions

Case Study Objectives

United Way of the Plains wanted to learn about volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, setting out with the goal of developing a framework for action in the community (which we are defining as Sumner County). We looked to expand our relatively new work in the county seat of Wellington. We had worked hard to be seen as a team player, non-threatening to the community's formal nonprofit and community leaders.

In 2004, United Way of the Plains extended its presence and its activities throughout the county, partnering with the Points of Light Foundation to examine volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities. The case study set out with five primary objectives:

- To investigate the nature of volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities performed by local citizens.
- To identify the unique challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural and under-resourced communities.
- To identify new or emerging effective strategies that are unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities.
- To document the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities.
- To document how volunteering strengthens families and transforms neighborhoods.

Our "Community Experts"

In an effort to determine what volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities looked like and how United Way of the Plains could help foster volunteer engagement, we sought input from various sources, including:

- Formal community leaders
- Agency representatives and staff that work with volunteers

- Organizations (police departments; public and religious-based schools)
- Local residents of the Wellington and Conway Springs communities as a whole including:
 - Informal community leaders
 - Persons active in the community
 - Current volunteers
 - Potential volunteers with a particular focus on under-represented potential volunteers
 - Residents not currently represented by a church, service club, employer, etc.

The Questions We Asked

Our goal was to learn more about volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, and that was addressed by directing the following questions to our community experts.

We asked *formal leaders, agency representatives and volunteer coordinators*:

- What means of acquiring volunteers are present in your community?
- What types of volunteer recruitment have you used?
- What has/hasn't worked?
- What problems do you experience with your volunteers?
- How active are community members when it comes to volunteering?
- How can United Way of the Plains assist you in reaching potential volunteers?
- Are there any unique challenges in recruiting volunteers in a rural community?
- What are the differences, if any, between rural and urban volunteering?

We asked *under-represented potential volunteers and the community as a whole*:

- Why, when, were, for whom and how often do you formally/informally volunteer?
- If you volunteer, why do you?
- Have you volunteered in the past?
- What barriers to volunteering are present?
- What prevents you from volunteering, or volunteering more often?
- How did you become aware of the volunteer opportunity?
- Would receiving something in exchange for volunteer hours be beneficial? If so, what?
- What would make it easier for you to spend time volunteering?

Our Data Collection Method

To answer these questions, United Way of the Plains began with a literature review, drawing upon resources that were already available. In addition, we utilized data from the 2000 U.S. Census (www.census.gov) and the 2003 Kansas Statistical Abstract, 38th Edition, (www.ukans.edu/pri/ksdata/ksah/) to profile the characteristics of the Wellington and Conway Springs communities, as well as Sumner County and the State of Kansas.

We collected community input using a variety of methods, including:

- Personal interviews and phone interviews/conversations with formal community leaders
- Personal interviews with agency staff that work with volunteers
- Personal interviews with community residents
- Personal interviews with under-represented potential volunteers
- Observation of community dynamics at meetings, discussions and presentations
- Mail survey of formal leaders/organizations on behalf of the Points of Light Foundation
- Mail survey directed to a random sample of Conway Springs residents
- Follow-up contact with Conway Springs informal leaders identified as a result of mail survey
- Brief paper surveys directed to selected Wellington residents, delivered by agency representatives, targeting under-represented potential volunteers

Our learnings from each of these methodologies assisted us to better answer the questions of what volunteering looks like in rural and under-resourced communities and how United Way of the Plains can help foster volunteer engagement, allowing us to work towards our overall goal of increasing volunteering.

In smaller communities, privacy is extremely important. People contacted through agency information included parents of children receiving agency services; these parents tended to be lower income. One reason for choosing a survey methodology was to assure respondent anonymity, if desired.

Beyond the benefit of personal contact, one-on-one interviewing — whether in person or over the telephone — allowed follow-up to responses to assure understanding of the meaning of the answers. Questions could be adjusted as needed, based on responses given. In some cases, this method was preferable over surveys, but was not always possible due to cost, distance and time constraints.

By United Way's actions of discussing and questioning and learning more about volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, we increased awareness of volunteering in these communities. Our conducting the surveys — whether by mail, in person or by telephone — increased respondent awareness of volunteering and volunteer activities as well as United Way's interaction in and with the Wellington and Conway Springs communities. The increased awareness enabled us to expand our questions to a wider circle of individuals and groups and use the information they provided to reach and impact even more community members.

Observation of the dynamics which occurred at meetings, discussions and presentations allowed United Way of the Plains staff to identify formal and informal community leaders as well as to identify proponents and opponents for various community initiatives. In addition, United Way could convene and facilitate follow-up meetings, accomplish follow-up actions such as researching Conway Springs' proposed Neighborhood Watch initiative and offer input concerning "next steps" to be taken.

Part III. Plan and Activities

Our Plan of Action

As a partner in the *Volunteer Engagement in Under-Resourced Rural Communities: Case Study on the Neighboring Model* being conducted by the Points of Light Foundation with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, our plan of action was to conduct activities specifically to test the applicability of the model and its concepts through actions in the community. Our efforts focused on three areas: capacity building, targeted outreach and partnership development.

Capacity Building: Build the capacity of grassroots volunteer leaders to mobilize others.

In the capacity building part of the case study activities, we planned to work primarily in Wellington. We would continue to engage in empowerment and capacity building activities with the Sumner County Community Partnership and begin such activities with the Interagency Coordinating Council (IC). The goals were to discover the loci of informal community leaders with influence among under-represented segments of the community and to raise awareness of increased volunteering as a resource to strengthen community initiatives.

Targeted Outreach: Recruit and mobilize low-income volunteers for an ongoing or new initiative.

As we began our targeted outreach in Conway Springs, United Way staff set up talks and meetings with service and business/professional associations at the suggestion of the County Commissioners. Through these and other contacts, we planned to learn about the nature of volunteering in this town and how we might successfully include all segments of the community, including those under-represented segments. Our intention was to foster awareness of the ways United Way could bring resources and assistance to help further their objectives and help plan future activities.

Partnership Development: Develop partnership with low-income community to initiate a volunteer project/program.

Initially in Wellington, our work was to be three-pronged: to continue working with the Sumner County Community Partnership; to engage and work the Interagency Coordinating Council; and to develop new partnerships to reach the under-represented segments of the community of Wellington. Further conversations revealed that the Interagency Coordinating Council was extremely similar to the Community Partnership, but met only quarterly. Because of the relatively short time period of this case study, United Way staff focused its energy in Wellington on collaborating with the Community Partnership and with social service agencies.

In Conway Springs, our plan was to allow the focus of the outreach to be dictated by the community's hopes, wishes and available resources. Our goal was to work to develop liaisons and partnerships with identified leaders, whether formal or informal.

Core Strategies

In seeking to address the main questions of the case study and in designing our activities, we sought to model the seven "neighboring" core strategies identified by the Points of Light Foundation. We wished to test the applicability of these core strategies in partnering with residents in under-resourced communities:

1. Understand the nature of volunteering in the community
2. Overcome barriers to community involvement
3. Empower the community
4. Cultivate community members' skills and talents
5. Strengthen existing community leadership
6. Acknowledge that volunteering is an exchange
7. Ensure community readiness.

Our Activities in Sumner County

In working with two distinct communities, we selected and pursued different activities to suit the needs of each community, as well as the level of involvement United Way of the Plains had established at the outset of the case study. The time frame of the case study did not allow us to fully develop all of our volunteer efforts — such as building the capacity of grassroots leaders. Our priority had to be in information gathering and in networking. The following is a summary of each community' activities:

Our Activities in Wellington

In the Wellington community, our plan was to expand the existing capacity of grassroots volunteer leaders to mobilize others, through engaging in empowerment and capacity building activities with the Sumner County Community Partnership. United Way already had an office and a presence established in Wellington, and we worked to expand upon that presence. We worked to identify both formal and informal leaders and to raise awareness of the value of volunteer activities to strengthen community initiatives.

In order to develop partnerships, our plan included working with the Interagency Coordinating Council. Further conversations revealed that the Interagency Coordinating Council was extremely similar to the Community Partnership, but met only quarterly. Because of the relatively short time period of this case study, United Way staff focused its energy in this community on collaborating with the Community Partnership and with social service agencies. We accomplished this through collaboration on a countywide resource directory as well as a variety of other volunteer projects in which our Wellington office played a significant role.

Sumner County Resource Directory

In Wellington, United Way of the Plains agreed to assist the Sumner County Community Partnership in developing a countywide resource directory. As a means to further empower the community, United Way helped identify informal partnerships to find resources that could be used for this specific project. This directory was viewed as a way to raise the awareness of community residents as to services available in the area. After extensive data collection, compilation and proofreading, the directories were printed in July 2004.

The directories were hand-delivered throughout the county in July and August by a teenager needing community service hours, two adult volunteers and United Way of the Plains staff. While Community Partnership members were interested in seeing the directory project accomplished, efforts to recruit their assistance in delivering the directories met with limited success, although the director for the Sumner Board of Senior Services and three Futures Unlimited, Inc. employees did assist.

Notices placed in the volunteer opportunity sections of two county newspapers in an effort to recruit community volunteers to assist with directory delivery increased awareness of the project, but yielded no volunteers. United Way of the Plains received inquiries both in the office and on the street concerning how to acquire copies of the directory.

Other Wellington Activities

In order to explore overcoming barriers to community involvement, we reflected on the past year's experiences with existing community partners. We examined how volunteering was enhanced or changed for agencies and individuals due to United Way presence. We identified barriers to community involvement for low-income residents by asking community leaders, arranging discussions with members of professional and service clubs and by speaking with or surveying lower-income residents.

The Sumner County Community Partnership provides a **forum** for working with professional service providers. United Way of the Plains plans to help coordinate different programs and projects as well as assist with a second **volunteer fair** in the Wellington community. Several members of the partnership engage volunteers, and United Way can focus on activities and issues important to them. United Way of the Plains staff and the volunteer coordinator for Futures Unlimited, Inc. has discussed **volunteer recruitment** methods and volunteer needs extensively. We look forward to continuing to develop this relationship. Futures Unlimited, Inc. recently opened a Family Resource Center, which is fully staffed by volunteers and is open to the public. We believe the volunteer coordinator will prove to be a valuable asset in helping to plan for a second volunteer fair.

The Sumner County Community Partnership, the Wellington Chamber of Commerce, and United Way of the Plains are collaborating to produce, assemble and deliver a monthly **city events calendar**. United Way of the Plains' participation includes recruiting volunteers to assemble and deliver these monthly calendars.

The Soroptimist Club began a **recycling program** in 2003, and partnership with United Way of the Plains has provided an arena for interacting with local citizens to increase the capacity and effectiveness of their fledgling recycling project. United Way's Volunteer Center supported this initiative through utilizing its software package, VolunteerWorks, to track individuals and their time spent volunteering. At present, the recycling project lacks a location to house it and is not operating. United Way has researched for a suitable location, but has not taken an active role in encouraging community interest.

To strengthen existing community leadership, we strengthened the roles of staff that work with volunteers and other key personnel at social services agencies, schools and health organizations by working with them to publicize volunteer needs throughout the community. We dialogued to learn about their brands of volunteering and barriers to other kinds of volunteering. One formal leader noted, "I think the biggest volunteering need in this community is leadership and organizers. There seems to be many willing to volunteer, but few who are willing to take a leadership role."

In order to ensure community readiness, those involved must buy in to the efforts for action to take place successfully. United Way staff engaged in the project modeled this behavior and language. Due to the time constraints of this case study, we were able to accomplish only initial steps toward ensuing community readiness. Decisions as to the readiness of the community were based on their coalitions and the organizations, their priority issues, their unity and the commitment of their leaders. United Way of the Plains did not attempt to drive the process, but served primarily as observers or facilitators.

Our Activities in Conway Springs

In the Conway Springs community, our plan was to target outreach efforts through setting up talks and meetings with service and business/professional associations at the suggestion of the County Commissioners. Through these and other contacts, we began to learn about the nature of volunteering in this town and how we might successfully include all segments of the community. Few resources were identified to serve under-resourced residents locally. Those unable or unwilling to seek services in the county seat (Wellington) or in the larger metropolitan area to the north, Wichita, tended to rely on area churches as their source of assistance.

Unlike in the Wellington community, United Way of the Plains had no office in Conway Springs and did not have a Sumner County presence established there. United Way served as a resource available to help identify and further community objectives and to help plan future activities. Many of our activities in this community focused on gathering information and networking. In addition, we worked with a newly formed coalition to attempt to bring a training session to the community, and with the police department to examine interest in a Neighborhood Watch program.

Information Gathering and Networking

In order to understand the nature of volunteering in this community, we listened to the residents and observed their thinking and their attitudes through interviews, group discussions and

meetings with existing groups. We were interested in learning the language they used to describe volunteering (e.g., "helping out," "basic neighbor-helping-neighbor") and how the communities approached issues that needed to be addressed, that is, their culture. In our discussions, we emphasized the importance of both formal and informal volunteering as a way of strengthening the family as well as increasing the connection to the community of both volunteers and those who are served.

Since United Way of the Plains did not have a prior presence in Conway Springs, much of our activity focused on information gathering, building relationships and assessing community needs. We conducted a mail survey of a random sample of Conway Springs residents and utilized the findings to identify formal and informal community leaders as well as to better describe and characterize volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities. The survey we conducted yielded the names of 14 informal leaders that community residents believed we should contact to learn more about volunteering in Conway Springs. We listened to the residents and observed their thinking and their attitudes through interviews, group discussions and meetings with existing groups.

Also, on behalf of the Points of Light Foundation, we conducted a mail survey of individuals at organizations who were involved in coordinating volunteer activities. This survey examined organizations' current use of volunteers, challenges faced in engaging volunteers, special approaches needed to engage and retain volunteers from lower-income and under-represented groups, and similarities and differences of rural versus urban volunteering.

As we experienced in Wellington, as interaction with community leaders and residents increased, efforts to engage the community were viewed more positively, and our relation building continues on a positive track. By our very actions of discussing and questioning and learning more about volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, we increased awareness of volunteering in these communities. The increased awareness enabled us to expand our questions to a wider circle of individuals and groups and use the information they provided to reach and impact even more community members.

The Community Coalition and Baseline Training

In Conway Springs, we attended meetings and listened carefully to the various constituencies, to evaluate and better understand the town's priorities. A newly established community coalition identified issues they wished to address (teen vandalism, pregnancy, drug use), and examined and discussed available options and decided upon a course of action (schedule a baseline training program). A meeting of concerned citizens was the initial step in forming the coalition and developing its plan of action.

After discussion, the community coalition determined that the first step it wished to take was to schedule a baseline training program to identify and recognize signs of child and adolescent drug usage. The 12-hour program (representing a commitment of a day and a half for training) offered through the Regional Prevention Center was available to anyone in the community, but was viewed as especially relevant to school personnel, youth leaders, and local law enforcement. The

coalition experienced some difficulty in follow-through, scheduling the training twice, then canceling due to signing up fewer than the required number of participants (12).

There are many reasons that individuals or groups don't follow through on a commitment such as the baseline training, including lack of interest (including apathy, time restraints, scheduling conflicts, limited buy-in on the need or the importance) or lack of leadership. In addition, the date selected for the training coincided with the beginning of the school year, a busy time for parents, school staff and others who focus on youth activities. The community coalition has discussed revisiting the topic area, to explore other solutions that might garner more community support.

As might be expected in a small town, Conway Springs has a relatively small base of active community members. Many residents were already engaged with several facets of community life and indicated their schedules were too full to take on additional projects. We continue to encourage the Conway Springs community coalition to meet, to network, and to brainstorm solutions to community issues. United Way of the Plains has offered assistance in convening a meeting to brainstorm other ways to address the community's concerns.

The Police Department and Neighborhood Watch

Early in this project, United Way of the Plains spoke at the Conway Springs Lions Club on the topic of United Way's presence and role in Sumner County. After the presentation, the police chief expressed interest in developing a neighborhood watch program for their town. United Way researched the history and requirements of the program and met with the police chief. His hope was to get the program off the ground by having the newly formed community coalition assume responsibility for it, as one of its projects. His belief was that the program would enjoy more success if the push to initiate it were external to the police department. The community coalition was mildly interested, but did not choose to go in that direction.

At a National Night Out event held in Conway Springs in August, four adults signed up indicating interest in the program. The police department did not see this as a sufficient number for immediate action. In communication with the police after National Night Out, convening an open community meeting to present information on the program was seen as a good idea. Prior to scheduling such a meeting, the community coalition would again be approached to see if they would be willing to undertake it as their next project.

Part IV. Critical Learnings

Throughout our work on the case study, we identified seven themes we believe represented areas of critical learning:

- Developing trust and community leadership are critical;
- Similarities and differences exist between rural and urban volunteering;
- Volunteering in rural communities is informal, “Neighboring;”
- “Ownership” of community projects is important to their success;

- In rural communities, groups do not target messages based on volunteers' income levels;
- Barriers keep potential volunteers from stepping forward; and
- Volunteer recruitment methods need to be tailored for rural communities.

Developing Trust and Community Leadership are Critical.

In smaller rural and under-resourced communities, success of a program or a project hinges on developing networks and building trust. In both Wellington and Conway Springs, we found formal leaders and other parties to be helpful and willing to discuss their community. Developing trust takes time. As was previously noted, one formal leader identified the community's need for developing more informal leadership, "I think the biggest volunteering need in this community is leadership and organizers. There seems to be many willing to volunteer, but few who are willing to take a leadership role." Again, the time frame of the case study required that we prioritize our efforts into information gathering and networking; however, we believe we began making inroads into identifying and working with both formal and informal leaders.

From the project outset, United Way of the Plains wished to examine volunteer recruitment methods of area agencies, with the goal of strengthening our working partnerships with them. This interest extended beyond "how" they recruit volunteers, to ways in which United Way could assist them in that process. Meetings with local volunteer recruiters led to brainstorming different approaches in their volunteer recruitment.

Although the Sumner County Commissioners and the Community Partnership approached United Way of the Plains and invited us to open an office in Wellington, Kansas, we experienced some initial aloofness from those farther removed from that original decision. Even though agency staff who work with volunteers acknowledged that they were experiencing difficulties finding enough volunteers to fill their positions, initial visits with them uncovered little interest in United Way and whatever capability it might have to assist them. When assistance was first offered, the community had a cautious, "wait and see" response, asking what was expected from them. Perhaps this was due to a preconception that United Way was moving in on their area to "fix things" in a "different, better way." As interaction with community residents increased, efforts to engage the community were viewed more positively.

Developing trust takes time. Through frequent communication with these agencies, the relation building continues on a positive track. The agencies have warmed somewhat to the idea of having some assistance and now offer helpful information about their programs and services. In Conway Springs, the community coalition appeared to need someone to assume responsibility for scheduling and decision-making, whether an organization or an individual. The community expressed interest in the issues, but lacked someone to get the ball rolling.

In Conway Springs in particular, United Way of the Plains encountered an unexpected challenge regarding time and urgency. We experienced a slower work pace than

expected, particularly noticeable because of timeframes established by the case study. Meetings occurred too far apart time-wise to be of much help for tasks we wished to complete for this case study. On occasion, even agreeing upon a time for the next meeting required weeks. Part of this may be due to the limited number of committed community volunteers; when one event is being planned and executed, other activities or events necessarily tend to be put on hold. In planning for future work in a rural or under-resourced setting, the slower pace needs to be taken into consideration.

Similarities and Differences Exist between Rural and Urban Volunteering.

While several similarities were identified between rural and urban volunteering in under-resourced communities, several differences also became apparent. Residents of Wellington and Conway Springs believed rural communities and urban communities faced **similarities** in their needs and problems. They noted, "Drug/alcohol problems have permeated rural communities, too," and said there was "very little difference in needs," adding, "We just have fewer resources, people and dollars to work with." Another similarity between volunteering in urban and rural communities was that everyone had to compete against all other personal commitments for the volunteers' time. One agency representative believed the time crunch was even more prevalent in rural communities than in urban ones, saying, "We have fewer people in the community with the luxury of extra time to give. Many families have two working parents, and many adult children seek paying jobs instead of volunteer work."

However, residents also identified important **differences** between volunteering in urban and rural settings, saying:

"Less anonymity in rural areas. Everyone knows who is doing what, but either excuses it or ignores it."

"Fewer volunteer opportunities to choose from in a rural setting."

"Residents of our community are much less likely to ask for assistance than those in larger communities."

"Culture needs are different in a rural area."

"Urban areas have a lot more resources to pull from than the rural areas. We don't have the programs, funds or volunteers in the rural areas to meet all the needs that we have."

"Smaller populations equal fewer volunteers."

Agency representatives in rural, under-resourced communities characterized volunteers in urban communities as more homogeneous, stating: "My view of urban areas is that social groups stick together."

It is important to note that many Wellington or Conway Springs residents may never have lived in a larger urban area. They may be basing their opinions on perceptions shaped by television broadcasts, newspaper headlines or hearsay, as may urban dwellers that have never lived in a smaller rural community.

Volunteering in Rural Communities is Informal, "Neighboring."

Survey findings from Conway Springs residents indicated that the majority had volunteered or "helped out" their community during the past year. Nearly four in five (79%) had helped out their friends or their church or other faith-based organization. Nearly three in five (58%) had helped out nonprofit organizations or family members outside their immediate family, and over half (53%) had volunteered at a school. In a typical month, Conway Springs residents spent 6.9 hours in formal volunteer activities and 3.8 hours in informal volunteer activities, on average.

In both Wellington and Conway Springs, volunteers, leaders and agency representatives viewed volunteering as less structured and less formal. Most often, volunteer activities were not associated with a formal organization or activity. They were something one did because it was "neighborly" or "the right thing to do." This "informal" volunteering included food, transportation, home repair and upkeep and community connectedness. Residents might mow an elderly neighbor's lawn, help farmers with field work, shovel snow, provide transportation, visit nursing home residents, or just "call to make sure everything is OK."

In Conway Springs, residents who responded to the mail survey provided examples of informal volunteering locally, that is, "neighbors helping out neighbors" in their community as:

"When there's a funeral at our church, I will donate food."

"Clean up the yards of elderly people."

"Picking up mail. Shoveling snow."

"Providing transportation to the grocery store or hair appointment."

"Shoveling snow, helping with fallen tree limbs and basic neighbor-helping-neighbor with their families."

During the course of this case study, these Sumner County communities rallied their efforts around various projects including cleanup from recent tornado damage; home repair and improvement completed for a needy local family; and a volunteer-planned fundraiser for a child with cancer. The communities came together "spontaneously," to help. Interviews with low-income residents indicated they frequently pitched in to help their family and friends. Informal volunteering drew increased participation from low-income, under-represented residents. Volunteers reported "closeness with the cause," citing the destruction of their family's house, their neighbor's sick child or a fellow employee's car accident.

In terms of receiving something in exchange for volunteering, the **Heartland Shares** program provides a "share" of food at a reduced price in exchange for community volunteer service. The program is based on the belief that all people have something valuable to contribute to their communities. It is a self-sustaining food program that emphasizes "people helping people." Nationwide, the program began in San Diego, California, in February 1983. It established a presence in Kansas in November 2001. It is

regional in scope, with its main warehouse located in Topeka, Kansas. A professional purchasing staff buys from growers, manufacturers and producers. The food is trucked from the Topeka warehouse to a network of 375 community host sites across the states of Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Missouri. Because of the bulk buying power and the volunteer distribution network, savings of up to 50 percent are passed on to participants. Heartland Shares does not have any income requirements, and there is no government involvement or funding. At present, Heartland Shares has a site in Conway Springs and two in Wellington; generally, it distributes food one Saturday a month.

Aside from Heartland Shares, no agencies currently provided a tangible benefit in exchange for volunteer service. For some, volunteering itself served as an “exchange” in terms of fulfilling school, honor society or mandatory community service requirements. However, for the most part, volunteers, leaders and agency representatives in these rural and under-resourced communities viewed volunteering something one did because it was “neighborly” or “the right thing to do.” Some volunteers indicated they received as much benefit from their volunteer service as the individuals or agencies they served. Within the low income, under-represented population segment, potential volunteers reported that receiving something tangible in exchange for volunteering -- such as a voucher, gift certificate or discount —might serve as an incentive to encourage them to volunteer.

On the other hand, most people enjoyed being acknowledged or recognized for volunteer work they did to better their communities. Some agencies accomplished this recognition through a volunteer “thank you” meal or other ceremony, with an award, or with an article or picture in a newspaper or agency newsletter.

"Ownership" of Community Projects is Important to Their Success.

Not surprisingly, people liked receiving recognition for their efforts, and the importance of acknowledging volunteer efforts became evident. In Wellington, Community Partnership members liked that the directories were identified as a project of the partnership; the directories devoted a full page to identifying this relationship. However, no one received recognition for any individual effort such as time spent proofreading or delivering directories. Perhaps this provides a partial explanation as to why there was little interest in helping with directory distribution.

Residents showed interest in new issues and projects; however, securing firm commitments to help presented a challenge. In completing projects utilizing or relying on volunteer efforts, assigning responsibility and accountability to group members for specific tasks became essential. When an open meeting was held in Conway Springs to discuss that community's issues, only 11 participants attended, four of whom were the meeting's organizers. The newly formed community coalition determined that the first step it wished to take was to schedule a baseline training program to identify and recognize signs of child and adolescent drug usage. Although the chairperson requested assistance at coalition meetings, no one came forward or showed an interest in helping. Again, the importance of assigning responsibility to group members for the completion of specific tasks is essential.

In general, small-town residents enjoyed talking about their town and the many projects going on. We found this particularly evident in Conway Springs, which spent little time bemoaning what might be wrong in their community and instead began looking for solutions. Conway Spring residents expressed their civic pride in tangible ways, perhaps more so than in a larger community. The community is served by a volunteer fire department. The community's leaders and volunteers took an active interest in the appearance of their community. Volunteers complete park and city beautification projects, year round. Area service groups collaborated to purchase trees for the new high school, and the Girl Scouts were working to purchase new playground equipment for the city park. The community sponsors an ongoing recycling project run by volunteers. A daylong citywide fall festival in Conway Springs brings out informal volunteers; festival participants come from all segments of the population. In an annual Spring Clean-Up event, Conway Springs provides dumpsters and volunteers help others in the community during the clean up. Area businesses provide funding for recreational sport team uniforms.

In Rural Communities, Groups Do Not Target Messages Based on Volunteers' Income Levels.

Agency representatives resisted the concept of categorizing volunteers as low income, describing such a distinction as “inappropriate” and reporting, “We look at volunteers as people. We don't distinguish by income” and “All volunteers are welcome and needed,” regardless of where they came from or how much they earned. At the outset of the case study, no activities were identified in either Wellington or Conway Springs that had the recruitment of low income or under-represented volunteers as their specific purpose.

More so than is evident in larger urban areas, Wellington and Conway Springs represented “mixed communities,” where neighbors lived side by side, regardless of income levels. A larger, well maintained home might appear next to a smaller, almost ramshackle dwelling. Particularly in Conway Springs, there was no “bad part of town.”

Most messages attempting to recruit volunteers in Wellington and Conway Springs focused on the population as a whole. In particular, messages focused on those already active in the community. For example, agencies seeking volunteers delivered their presentations to service clubs, other non-profit organizations or school personnel, where many of the members already perform volunteer service. Often low-income residents were recipients of services (such as from the food bank, Big Brothers Big Sisters or Head Start) and had not been viewed by the agencies as potential volunteers.

As part of the case study, we reached out to potential volunteers considered under-represented or lower income. Two area agencies (Big Brothers Big Sisters and Futures Unlimited, Inc., home of the local Head Start program) helped United Way locate several low income, under-represented potential volunteers through the children they serve. This agency assistance provided a direct path to people we otherwise might not have been able to reach, and we were able to survey these individuals concerning volunteering. Perhaps

agency involvement also lessened any stigma that might have accompanied being singled out based on income.

Looking toward the future, United Way of the Plains hopes to facilitate a joint brainstorming meeting with volunteer coordinators to discuss future recruitment efforts. We expect to examine strategies focusing on under-represented potential volunteers not being reached by current recruitment methods but acknowledged as having great resource potential. While we expect some strategies to be specific to the Wellington or Conway Springs areas, the hope is that some of the learnings will apply to agencies and organizations in other settings. Through this case study, we have learned how to better connect individuals and cultures that might not otherwise have interacted. We hope that this will in turn lead individuals and families to make better-informed choices.

Barriers Keep Potential Volunteers from Stepping Forward.

From the project outset, United Way of the Plains wished to examine volunteer recruitment methods of area agencies, with the goal of strengthening our working partnerships with them. This interest extended beyond "how" they recruit volunteers, to ways in which United Way could assist them in that process. One focus included identifying and removing or lowering barriers to volunteer participation and community involvement.

In interviews, volunteers, potential volunteers, and volunteer coordinators cited **day care, time and family commitments** as barriers to volunteer service. In addition, **lack of awareness** of volunteer opportunities available presented a barrier to service. Often low income people did not subscribe to the newspaper or belong to civic or service clubs, two of the most commonly used methods of publicizing volunteer opportunities.

Many volunteers preferred **one-time volunteer opportunities** to long-term ones. Comparatively little difficulty was experienced acquiring volunteers to run a concession stand for an evening or to spend a few hours at the recycling center one morning. However, agencies which relied on a long-term commitment (i.e., Big Brothers Big Sisters or CASA) or which required lengthy training reported a constant shortage of volunteers. In the Conway Springs baseline training example, the 12-hour time commitment required for training might have been a factor in the community's lack of participation.

Some agencies and organizations reported no difficulty in obtaining volunteers, noting, "We've had real good luck in getting volunteers. Usually no shortages" and "Once we find them, they tend to volunteer frequently." Other agencies reported a continuous shortage of long-term, committed volunteers, in particular for positions that required training. Agency representatives expressed difficulty **getting volunteers to commit** to completing all training. Part of this might be attributable to an agency's relying on the same recruitment method, year after year.

In examining barriers to community involvement which need to be overcome, some formal leaders and agency representatives identified major challenges their organization faced in engaging volunteers in their community as **finding, recruiting, training and retaining** a sufficient number of qualified volunteers who are **interested and willing to volunteer** according to when the organization or agency needs them. They said there was “too much demand for volunteers from other agencies” and that “folks are too busy with other activities that they say have a priority.”

Since our work indicated that volunteers in rural, under-resourced communities seemed to prefer one-time volunteer opportunities, we need to learn more about what programs or activities each community supports successfully. We need to examine what galvanized the community to support those particular programs or activities, and we need to identify those causes each community really gathers around.

As in larger communities, **time** was a factor in residents' decisions whether to volunteer. A core group of citizens already had "many irons in the fire," that is, multiple commitments to the community. Potential volunteers cited lack of time as a barrier to volunteering. For example, in Conway Springs, volunteers were unable or unwilling to commit to the day and a half training required for baseline training. In addition, Conway Springs is a farming community, with activities scheduled around planting season, harvest and so on.

Reaching low-income and under-represented potential volunteers posed unique challenges, including how to reach, talk with and recruit them, how to "get them involved." Agency staff believed the low-income population felt their **skill level inadequate** to allow them to volunteer on a formal level, and several low-income interviewees concurred that their qualifications were limited. In addition, agency representatives questioned the **reliability** of low-income volunteers, stating, “Responsibility is a concern. They don't always show up when scheduled.” Additional concerns included “Some are unable to follow routines,” “They are not familiar with our organization,” and “not understanding how to relate to students and their needs.”

Volunteer Recruitment Methods Need to be Tailored for Rural Communities.

Agencies and organizations in Wellington and Conway Springs employed a limited number of methods to recruit actively new volunteers, relying on what they had always done. Many believed that word-of-mouth volunteer recruitment worked the best. Agencies with limited budgets lacked the means to invest a lot of time and money into volunteer recruitment and relied heavily on word-of-mouth information. Volunteers appreciated the personal touch, being approached in person and asked to volunteer. This assured them that they were valued and wanted and allowed them the opportunity to ask questions before committing.

Churches represented not only a place to get connected with resources, but also a potential source of volunteers. Agencies agreed that churches represented a fertile field for potential volunteers, saying, "I advertise in the church bulletin when I have a need for

volunteers." Both the Senior Center and a care home reported success in advertising for and recruiting volunteers through churches. Other agencies expressed guarded interest in examining other methods of volunteer recruitment.

A new recruitment strategy to reach out to potential volunteers being tested by one agency is to invite a few people to a short presentation over their lunch hour. These people are asked to bring one friend, neighbor or co-worker. The agency provides a light lunch and a brief presentation (approximately 15 minutes in length), explaining their organization and their volunteer needs. This method reaches an assortment of people, many who were not being reached using previous methods. A day or two after the presentation, the agency follows up with attendees by phone to ask for feedback and to see if they are interested in volunteering.

Often Wellington's formal volunteers were members of an organization, and many volunteers acted on behalf of civic or service clubs, churches and so on. Typically volunteers were members of the organization sponsoring a particular project or event. Often those who volunteered in the community were well known and active in other issues in the community as well.

Conway Springs residents were asked where they would turn if they or someone in their household needed help or information on matters involving children, seniors, families, health, independence or basic needs such as food shelter or healthcare. Area residents would turn to their church (58%), then to family and friends (42%) or nonprofit organizations (42%) or some area of the government (32%). (Multiple responses were possible, because respondents could indicate more than one information source. Percentages sum to more than 100 percent.)

Participation in this case study has increased our understanding of how we can be more effective both in a town that is the population center of a rural Kansas county and in Kansas towns with smaller populations. In similar endeavors in the future, United Way of the Plains staff would expect to play a more proactive role, perhaps serving in a "staff" capacity by following up with community members to determine what the "next steps" should be and scheduling, hosting or facilitating meetings. While United Way still would not drive or direct the goals of the group, steps could be taken to help move the group successfully along its chosen path and keep the process going.

United Way of the Plains is part of the Kansas network of social service providers, and we anticipate sharing our learnings in appropriate forums such as the Wichita Association of Volunteer Administrators, United Way of the Plains' Community Impact Councils and *The Coordinator*, United Way of the Plains Volunteer Center's newsletter for professional volunteer administrators.

Part V. Applicability to Neighboring

If we consider "neighboring" as the connection among residents that supports positive individual and community behavior based on mutual respect, responsibility and ownership, then both formal and informal volunteering have important roles to play. As a result of our work in these two Kansas communities, we would characterize both Wellington and Conway Springs as possessing inherent internal assets and strength in the people and families who live there.

Earlier in this report, we cited the core strategies identified by the Points of Light Foundation in building effective partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and under-resourced communities to engage and empower resident volunteers and for partnering with residents in low-income communities. In seeking to model the neighboring principals evident in these core strategies, we found each to be applicable for under-resourced rural communities as well as urban ones.

In seeking to **understand the nature of volunteering in the community**, we learned that formal approaches or "best practices" applicable in a large, urban setting or with a national organization might not be applicable to or necessary in a rural, under-resourced community. To residents in these communities, what they were doing was "neighboring" or "helping the community," rather than "volunteering." The cohesiveness of a smaller population led them to view offering assistance as the right thing to do. In large part, their service or their donations helped people they knew. As the size of the community increases, we would expect a disconnect in that service to occur. In a larger community, volunteering becomes more formal, more structured and more distant. Often the person served is a stranger, unknown to the volunteer personally.

In each of these communities, we needed to **overcome barriers to community involvement**. For example, limited formal volunteering opportunities were identified. Though agencies and programs existed that engaged volunteers, the majority of volunteering was accomplished on an informal level. Wellington residents clean their church, mow an elderly neighbor's lawn, visit nursing home residents, or bake cookies for a local blood drive. Farmers pitch in to help with field work for other farmers that were ill or otherwise unable to do for their own. A group of senior citizens spend their days in the elementary schools as foster grandparents. People meet at the local cemetery every Memorial Day to raise flags for the Avenue of Flags. Very few of these people classify themselves as volunteers. They don't "sign up" to participate; they just show up.

Other barriers to community involvement that needed to be overcome included projects that had volunteers available but lacked leadership; lack of awareness of volunteer opportunities available; and all of the factors that keep potential volunteers from stepping forward, such as time, family commitments, lack of interest, and lack of skill.

Volunteering was seen as a means to **empower the community**. It helped provide the support and connections that individuals and families needed to do well. One resident reported, "My neighbor called me to take her to the beauty shop when she couldn't get her car started, and I took her mail to her when her son was gone for several days." Another helped out by "shoveling snow of older persons."

In thinking about their volunteering during a typical month, Conway Springs residents were asked — other than their paid employment — how many hours per month they estimated that they, themselves, had “helped out” in their community, both in formal and informal ways. The amount of time spent in formal volunteer activities ranged from none to 50 hours per month and averaged 6.9 hours per month. Time spent in informal volunteer activities ranged from none to 10 hours per month and averaged 3.8 hours per month.

Whether serving their immediate or extended family, their neighbors, their church, their child's school or in other, more structured settings, volunteering served as a means to **cultivate community members' skills and talents**. Residents identified volunteering as central to creating feelings of connectedness (i.e., “Our community is well known for coming together during a crisis — bringing in food, helping with farming, taking people to the doctor, etc.” and “calling to make sure everything is OK”) and safety (i.e., “volunteer fire department” and “donating blood”). In **acknowledging that volunteering is an exchange**, sometimes volunteers identified tangible benefits; sometimes, intangible ones. Tangible benefits included programs such as Heartland Share, where two hours of volunteer service per month entitled the volunteer to purchase food from a cooperative at a reduced price. Other, less tangible benefits included the benefits of positive social networks in their community, coming together as a community to accomplish “taking up money collections for families in need” and “yearly food drive at the holidays.”

Whether it occurs in larger urban areas or in rural America, volunteering can **strengthen existing community leadership**. It can be characterized as an opportunity to “give back” to the community, to share what one has and to show support and concern for other community members and the future of the community.

This volunteering serves to strengthen communities and families in numerous ways. Those who volunteer to work or socialize one-on-one with a child from a single parent household can serve as a positive role model, alleviate household stress, and provide a few hours of parental respite as well as expand the child's dreams and horizons. Those who volunteer in school settings can tutor students who might otherwise fall behind in their classes, instill a lifelong love of learning or provide social interaction during one-on-one time that might be the most important part of that child's day. Those who volunteer at a food bank or in a clothing donation and distribution activity can help struggling families meet their basic needs while holding on to their independence and dignity.

Whether in urban or rural under resourced areas, both formal and informal volunteer efforts are essential to the task of **ensuring community readiness**. As might be expected, problems facing urban and rural America differ in scope and intensity. Where a large metropolitan area might have several agencies providing programs to serve the needs of teen drug addiction and treatment, rural areas might still be examining whether such a problem exists in their community and, if so, how to identify it.

Where urban population centers might be able to draw from a larger pool of community, church and agency volunteers, smaller population centers might have to rely on one or more individuals

passionate about a cause, who would be willing to spearhead an issue and involve the community in supporting it.

United Way of the Plains would like to thank the residents of Wellington and Conway Springs who so generously volunteered their time and their knowledge to make this project a success, and the Points of Light Foundation, for making this outreach into these communities possible.

Case Study Randolph County, North Carolina

1. Background

The Volunteer Center of Greensboro is located in Greensboro, North Carolina, and operates a satellite center 20 miles away in Asheboro, the county seat of neighboring Randolph County. Both are located in the Piedmont, a six-county area centrally located in the state.

The Volunteer Center began in 1963 as the Greensboro Volunteer Bureau, a department of the Greensboro Community Council, which later became the United Way of Greater Greensboro. The mission of the Volunteer Center is to strengthen the community by creating meaningful volunteer connections. The Center connects people with volunteer opportunities, promotes volunteering by recognizing outstanding volunteers in the community, supports other nonprofits by offering training and consultation, and builds partnerships with local businesses and agencies.

At the North Carolina Governor's Summit on Volunteerism in 1998, then-Governor Jim Hunt challenged every county in the state to provide volunteer center services, and the delegation from Randolph County asked the Volunteer Center of Greensboro to establish a satellite office in Asheboro.

Since then, the Volunteer Center of Randolph County has established a variety of successful programs. A strong Corporate Volunteer Council, a group of area businesses with employee volunteer programs, has been (or was) established and participates each year in Days of Caring projects. In 2000, its inaugural year, Days of Caring attracted 2,000 employees from local businesses.

The Center held its first Human Race community-wide fundraising event in 2002. In 2004, the event raised more than \$35,000. An annual Holiday Tour of Homes is an important fundraiser for the Center's countywide programs. Most recently, the Center received a grant to prepare a list of emergency supplies families should have on hand in case of a local or national disaster.

In 2004, the Volunteer Centers of Greensboro and Randolph County joined in the Volunteer Engagement in Under-Resourced Rural Communities: Case Study on the Neighboring Model plan being conducted by the Points of Light Foundation with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The idea was to study the model in the under-resourced Randolph County communities of Franklinville and Liberty.

The Volunteer Center of Greensboro had a particular interest in this case study because it participated in 1999 in a low-income urban volunteering initiative funded by the Community Foundation of Greensboro in partnership with the Points of Light Foundation. This "Safe Houses" project, which involved two low-income neighborhoods in Greensboro, introduced the

“neighboring” concept — a term coined by the spouse of Molly Keeney, then-Executive Director of the Volunteer Center of Greensboro — and produced many of the findings that led to the development of the rural initiative.

The Communities

Like the rest of North Carolina, Randolph County has seen a significant increase in its Hispanic and Latino population so that it is now its largest minority segment. In the past 10 years, it has increased 1077 percent.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, of Randolph County’s total population of 130,454, 84 percent (116,370) is Caucasian, 6.6 percent (8,646) is Hispanic or Latino, and 5.6 percent (7,342) is black. In the northwest section of the county, the rural, isolated communities of Liberty and Franklinville have significantly higher Latino and Hispanic populations. Of Liberty’s population of 2,661, 14.2 percent is Hispanic or Latino, while Franklinville’s population of 1,258 is 16.5 percent Hispanic or Latino.

These rural, isolated communities also have significant numbers of people of all races living in poverty. Twenty-four percent of Liberty’s 727 families and 33 percent of Franklinville’s 316 families have annual incomes of under \$25,000. Twenty-four percent of Liberty and 18 percent of Franklinville residents lack a high school diploma or equivalent.

Geographically, both communities are connected to Asheboro by two-lane country roads. Each community has an elementary school, library, and fire department. Religion plays an important role in the people’s lives. Liberty has five churches, while Franklinville has four. However, residents must drive nearly half an hour to reach medical and social services, the health department, and grocery and discount department stores.

Thirty-seven percent of adults in Liberty and 55 percent in the smaller community of Franklinville are employed in the production, transportation, and material moving industry, which includes poultry processing plants, textile manufacturing, and farming. Eleven percent of adults in Liberty and 14 percent in Franklinville work in the construction, extraction, and maintenance industries. Many have work outside their immediate communities because of the decline in the state’s tobacco and textile manufacturing businesses.

Profile of Selected Geographic & Economic Characteristics				
U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000				
	Randolph Co	Franklinville (ZIP 27248)	Liberty (ZIP 27298)	North Carolina
Population*	130,454	2,661	1,258	8,049,313
Median Age*	36.2	34.7	27.5	35.3
% of Population				
At least 62 years	14.5%	16.4%	9.5%	12%
Caucasian	84.2%	65.7%	78.2%	70.2%
Hispanic/Latino	6.6%	14.2%	16.5%	4.7%
Households (in 1999) **				
Median income	\$38,348	\$35,052	\$29,390	\$39,184
Median household income below \$25,000	29.7%	33.9%	38.3%	30.7%
Education (for adults 25 years+) ***				
Less than 9 th grade	10.8%	12%	20.4%	7.8%
Less than 12 th grade (no diploma)	19.2%	18.1%	24.2%	21.8%
Poverty (in 1999) **				
Families: Number	2,555	50	73	196,423
Families: %	6.8%	15.8%	9.9%	9%
Individuals: Number	11,802	247	333	958,667
Individuals: %	9.1%	19.8%	12.2%	12.3%
* Source: 2000 US Census, Table DP-1: Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, www.census.gov				
**Source: 2000 US Census, Table DP-3: Profile of General Demographic Characteristics				
*** Source: 2000 US Census, Table DP-2: Profile of General Demographic Characteristics				

II. Goals and Questions

Case Study Objectives

The Volunteer Centers of Greensboro and Randolph County wanted to learn about volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, engaging the growing Hispanic and Latino populations and increasing volunteer opportunities for people in Liberty and Franklinville.

The study sought to create awareness of service opportunities and volunteer partnerships between the Latino community and the rest of the population. Another goal of the study was to create new methodologies for working in rural under-resourced communities, especially within the Latino population.

The case study had five primary objectives:

- To investigate the nature of volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities
- To identify the unique challenges in engaging low-income volunteers in rural and under-resourced communities
- To identify new or emerging effective strategies unique to mobilizing low-income volunteers in rural communities
- To document the differences between volunteering in rural and urban under-resourced communities
- To document how volunteering strengthens families and transforms neighborhoods

Our “Community Experts”

To determine the current status of volunteering in rural and under-resourced communities, and to learn how the Volunteer Center of Randolph County could increase interest and participation in volunteer work, input was sought from various resources including:

- Formal community leaders
- Agency representatives and staff who work with volunteers
- Organizations (schools, churches, and the Latino Coalition)
- Local Franklinville and Liberty residents including:
 - * Informal community leaders
 - * People active in the community
 - * Current volunteers
 - * Potential volunteers, with a particular focus on under-resourced potential volunteers

Of the 30 surveys sent to individuals representing organizations and advisory boards currently working with the Latino population, 22 were returned from among the following groups: Randolph County Senior Adults; Randolph County Partnership for Children; Smart Start in both Franklinville and Liberty; Small Business Center of Randolph Community College; Girl Scouts of the Tarheel Triad Council for both Franklinville and Liberty; Guardian Ad Litem; Randolph Health Improvement Partnership; United Way and the Volunteer Center of Randolph County.

Other participating community organizations included Eastern Randolph High School and the Cultural Diversity Committee of the Randolph County Chamber of Commerce, the Spanish United Methodist Church, the Franklinville Methodist Church, and the Association of Churches in Liberty.

English and Spanish-speaking volunteers were recruited to help with the study and communicate with the population.

Questions Asked

Several questions were asked to identify the parameters of the study:

- Where are the smaller, rural towns in Randolph County?
- What do census figures reveal about levels of income?
- What do we know about volunteering efforts in the community as a whole?
- Are there large groups that are under-represented in the community as a whole?
- If so, where do they reside and how can they be reached?

Community leaders, agency representatives, and volunteer coordinators were asked:

- Do you currently have volunteers working in your organization?
- Do you have Latino community members volunteering in your organization?
- If so, what types of volunteer work do they do?
- If they are not volunteering, do you know why?
- What recruiting methods have you used to encourage volunteering?

Latino and Hispanic community members were asked:

- Do you volunteer at a community agency or group?
- Is there a reason why you do or do not help?
- Do you help your neighbors?
- If so, what kinds of help do you give each other?

Data Collection Methods

Community input was collected using a variety of methods, including:

- Personal interviews and phone interviews/conversations with community leaders
- Personal interviews with agency staff who work with volunteers
- Personal interviews with community residents
- Personal interviews with under-represented potential volunteers
- Observation of community dynamics at meetings, discussions, and community events
- Written survey of formal leaders/organizations on behalf of Points of Light Foundation
- Newspaper articles on the Latino community
- Research conducted by Randolph Community College

III. Plan and Activities

Plan of Action

The Volunteer Center's plan was to conduct activities specifically to test how applicable the neighboring model is to rural communities. Efforts focused on three areas: targeted outreach, partnership development, and capacity building.

Targeted Outreach: Recruit and mobilize low-income volunteers for an ongoing or new initiative

We met with community leaders in Asheboro, Franklinville, and Liberty to determine the extent of volunteering within these communities and conducted telephone interviews with school officials, church pastors, and organizational leaders. Through these and other contacts, we hoped to learn about the nature of volunteering specifically in Franklinville and Liberty with a focus on the Latino and Hispanic population.

We also convened a focus group of Latino community members to discuss possible volunteering opportunities within their community, thus expanding the awareness of the Volunteer Center satellite office in Randolph County. In addition, this group helped document the types of volunteering already occurring in the Latino community and the barriers to community involvement.

Partnership Development: Develop a partnership with a low-income community to initiate a volunteer project/program

We met with leaders of existing Latino initiatives and community leaders who were in the process of mobilizing the Latino population for specific programs. This enhanced our understanding of the nature of volunteering within the under-resourced rural community.

Capacity Building: Build the capacity of grassroots volunteer leaders to mobilize others

We planned to train a core committee of Latinos in Liberty to organize a Mexican food booth at the annual town-wide Celebration of Liberty's Children. This volunteer activity would help to strengthen existing community leadership and empower the Latino community to help themselves.

Because of the relatively short time period of this case study, it took all of our time to establish trust among the Latino community and learn about their methods and leadership potential. It is difficult for an outsider of the community who does not speak the language to be able to organize, plan, and work out a project in a short period of time. It also takes time to blend planned activities into existing programs and empower Latino volunteers to accept positions of leadership. By the conclusion of this case study, the goal of establishing a Mexican food booth was not achieved, however, with continued work, we believe it might be possible within two years.

Core Strategies

In addressing the main questions of the case study and designing the activities, we followed the seven "neighboring" core strategies identified by the Points of Light Foundation with the goal of discovering how applicable the strategies are in working with residents in under-resourced communities.

1. Understand the nature of volunteering in the community
2. Overcome barriers to community involvement
3. Empower the community
4. Cultivate community members' skills and talents
5. Strengthen existing community leadership
6. Acknowledge that volunteering is an exchange
7. Ensure community readiness

Activities in Randolph County

In working with two distinct communities, we selected different activities to suit the needs of each community. The time frame of the case study did not allow for the full development of volunteer efforts such as building the capacity of grassroots leaders. Our priority was to gather information and build trust among the Latino community. Since the Volunteer Centers of Greensboro and Randolph County had not specifically worked with the Latino population in Randolph County before, we had substantial groundwork to cover.

In order to understand the nature of volunteering in the two communities, we listened to the residents and observed their thinking and attitudes through interviews, group discussions, and meetings. We were interested in learning the language they used to describe volunteer work (e.g., “helping out”, “basic neighbor-helping-neighbor”).

Activities in Franklinville

We met with Smart Start Program Director, Amanda Sutliff, Pastor Dowling, thrift store director, and a number of other people working with Franklinville agencies. We discovered that people do volunteer in Franklinville and that Latinos volunteer for activities that focus on their population. We also met with the volunteer Smart Start advisory board and learned that they are in the process of recruiting Latinos for the board. We helped Ms. Sutliff plan a recruitment and informational meeting for potential board members, with special emphasis on Latino volunteers. Three Latino families attended the meeting, as well as two members of the current board and a town commissioner. After the meeting, two of the women attending expressed interest in becoming volunteers.

Activities in Liberty

We met with Marissa Benton-Brown, director of both the pre-kindergarten program and the volunteer organization, Celebrate Liberty's Children, and the Rev. Bill Bingham, of the Liberty Association of Churches, who also helps run the thrift store.

We observed and recorded the discussion during a meeting of the Celebrate Liberty's Children volunteer board of directors. They are dedicated to improving advantages for Latino children, especially in the public schools.

Activities in Asheboro

We met with a member of the Latino Coalition in Asheboro to learn about their activities and how they might affect Franklinville and Liberty. Only two years old, the coalition currently focuses only on Asheboro, but the group plans to extend activities to both Franklinville and Liberty in the near future. The coalition has already produced a resource list for members of the Latino communities, which is available to residents of Franklinville and Liberty.

We met with the pastor of the Spanish Methodist Church in Asheboro, and discovered that the church provides worship for Franklinville residents. Church members volunteer when they are needed.

IV. Critical Findings

Our research on volunteering among the under-resourced rural communities of Franklinville and Liberty in Randolph County, particularly within the Latino population, revealed these important findings:

- Rural, under-resourced communities recognize the needs of their minority populations.
- Volunteering takes place mostly *within* the Latino communities in rural, under-resourced communities.
- Latinos living in rural, under-resourced communities do participate in formal volunteering in those areas that personally affect the quality of their lives.
- Latinos volunteer in rural, under-resourced communities in spite of numerous challenges.
- When collecting data in rural, under-resourced communities, it is important for the practitioner to build relationships, particularly if he or she is of a different ethnic origin. These relationships are critical to successful research and program development.

Critical Finding: Rural, under-resourced communities recognize the needs of the population as demonstrated through their volunteer efforts.

Four years ago, the Liberty community discovered that 40 percent of its children were not ready to begin kindergarten. Approximately half of those children were Latino. Volunteers from businesses, organizations, churches, and the Chamber of Commerce formed a committee called Celebrate Liberty's Children to address the problem.

The committee began a pre-kindergarten program through an existing Randolph County program called Partnership for Children. Now, two classes, each with a five-star rating from the state reach these children. Forty percent of the children in the classes are Latino. An educational program for parents reinforces the children's training. A large percentage of Latino parents take part in reading programs and activities for their children.

At the same time, the smaller community of Franklinville became aware that a large percentage of its children were also unprepared for school. An advisory board made up of concerned citizens formed an advisory committee to address the issue. Two years ago, they funded a local Smart Start Program, under the auspices of the Randolph County Partnership for Children.

The town has reduced the number of children who enter kindergarten “with delays” (meaning that they are unable to identify colors, use scissors, recite the alphabet, and perform other basic skills). A high percentage of these children are from Latino families.

Area churches have also responded to the needs of the Latino population. Strong faith connects Latinos to their churches. In Liberty, through a tremendous volunteer effort, the First Baptist Church sponsored a Latino church. They rented a building and helped find a minister, Fortina Ocampo. The United Methodist Church of the High Point District of North Carolina has also formed the Adonai Mission Church in Asheboro, the county seat. This church is relatively close for the Franklinville Latinos and also meets the needs of Asheboro Latinos. Both of these churches are empowering the Latinos to help themselves by providing places of worship that they want and need.

Other churches are also building relationships with the Latino population. The Adonai Mission Church is reaching out to other churches for help in setting up a center for the Latinos to learn English, practice sewing skills, and provide a meeting place for youth after school. The Archdale United Methodist Church Women are gathering sewing materials to help Latino women with the project. Through these efforts, the communities are helping the Latino population cultivate their skills, talents, and eventually strengthen their own community leadership.

Critical Finding: Volunteering takes place mostly *within* the Latino communities in rural, under-resourced communities.

Amanda Ratliff, director of Smart Start in Franklinville, summed volunteering in Latino communities up when she commented, “Over the past two years of working with the Latino families, I have discovered that they are interdependent, while in contrast, American families are independent.”

She explained that Latinos help each other in many ways. They share cars so they can get to work, the Social Services office, to medical appointments, to shop. One of the most important volunteer efforts occurs among the bi-lingual Latinos who serve as interpreters in schools, medical situations, stores, and county offices.

One volunteer, Carmen, said, “Latinos have a greater community sense.” In fact, they know each other so well that they share in caring for each others’ children, providing help when someone is ill and sharing their food. When someone dies, they share scarce dollars to help send the deceased home (quite often to Mexico) for burial. They also help their families back in their home countries by sending them part of their wages each month. This is “neighboring” or volunteering in its purest form.

Critical Finding: Latinos in rural, under-resourced communities do volunteer in areas that personally affect the quality of their lives.

Latino parents, particularly mothers, volunteer at the schools their children attend. At Liberty Elementary School a group of six Latino mothers volunteered to cook and serve authentic Mexican dishes for the pre-K and kindergarten celebration of Cinco de Mayo. Approximately one-third of the children in those classes are Latino.

In both Liberty and Franklinville, at least one bi-lingual Latino mother volunteers on a continuing basis with the Smart Start and pre-K programs.

One of the most important critical findings is Latinos become more comfortable volunteering once they begin and they encourage others to volunteer by setting an example. Often, Latinos are intimidated because of their lack of English skills and their own formal education. Some Latinos are undocumented and their lack of citizenship erodes their self-confidence.

Adriana, who volunteered for one year at Liberty Elementary School, is now a paid teacher's assistant at the school. Her duties include translating documents, serving as an interpreter for speech therapy sessions and at parent/teacher conferences, helping with issues in the principal's office, and encouraging more parents to volunteer at the school. She and other Latino parents are building their skills while becoming more involved in their children's lives. Adriana explained, "I help people who can help others."

Carmen, another Latino volunteer living in Franklinville, began volunteering at Smart Start when her children entered the program. She's now responsible for the Latino mothers' group that meets every Wednesday and has been given part-time employment, even though she continues to volunteer full-time.

The Latino mothers' group participates in the Parents as Teachers program. Mothers and fathers learn how to act as "teachers" at home with their children. Children under five also attend the program but are involved in a separate learning program to prepare them for kindergarten. Participation in the program is voluntary. Each week, Latino volunteers help with the children while the parents attend sessions.

Latino church members also volunteer in their churches. They clean, make repairs as needed, and prepare and serve meals for church events.

Both Liberty and Franklinville have thrift stores, but only the Franklinville store has regular Latino volunteers. Further research is necessary to determine why the Liberty store does not attract Latino volunteers who also patronize the store.

Critical Finding: Latinos volunteer in rural, under-resourced communities in spite of numerous challenges.

The challenges Latinos face center on five issues: language, education, transportation, poverty, and integration/trust.

Language:

Since the Latino population in rural Randolph County is one of the fastest growing populations in the nation, it is important for the general public to understand the need to overcome the language barrier. More volunteers are needed in small, rural under-resourced areas where language is a barrier. Further research is needed to discern how this issue might be overcome.

For many, Spanish is spoken in the workplace as well as in the home, so there is little opportunity to learn English. Therefore, it is often difficult for Latinos to communicate at stores, at medical and emergency providers, at government offices, and other places where English is the common language.

Volunteering within the community is difficult for Latinos because of the language barrier and the stigma this carries in the wider community. Rev. Bill Bingham, Vice President of the Association of Liberty Churches, said, “The average American citizen in Randolph County thinks that Latinos who come to work here *should* learn the English language.”

Members of organizations recruiting volunteers also do not believe that they should make any concessions for language differences. When volunteers cannot understand directions because they do not know the language, they are unable to participate. If the organization does not have anyone who can interpret, it has lost a potential volunteer.

Deborah Massey, an active member of the Latino Coalition in Asheboro, voices another concern. “It is good for them <Latinos> to learn English so they can assimilate into our culture, but it is also good for us to learn Spanish so we can help them and ourselves.”

Children are also affected since they are expected to speak English at school and Spanish at home. Carmen said, “The little ones speak Spanglish,” which she explains as a mixture of both languages, making it difficult for everyone to understand. Of the 36 families participating in the Franklinville Smart Start program, 47.2 percent speak a language other than English, presumably Spanish.

Education:

Organizations usually look for volunteers who can read and write English. Volunteers often need to be literate in English in order to read directions or stories to children, drive a car, or file forms. Low education levels in the pool of potential volunteers hampers the efforts of the organization.

Statistics shared at the Smart Start advisory committee meeting indicate that of the 36 families served during the 2002-2003 school year, 69.4 percent of families had low educational attainment levels. Most had a 6th grade level education. Smart Start works with all under-resourced families in the community, so this problem extends beyond the Latino community.

Since half of the 36 families served by the program are Latino, it can be assumed a large number of Latino families face this problem.

Generally, a lack of education is intimidating to volunteers, making it difficult to enter into any situation where they are unable to understand what is needed or expected of them.

Transportation:

Transportation is difficult for many Latinos. The two rural communities are geographically isolated by the 25-minute drive on narrow country roads that is required to reach stores, medical providers, the health department, Social Services, and other government agencies.

Many Latino families cannot afford cars, licenses, insurance, or gasoline. In addition, license tests are given in English, which again reflects the challenges associated with the language issue.

While many volunteer opportunities are located centrally in the county, these are not the places where Latinos usually live. Without transportation, potential volunteers cannot reach those sites. In addition, evening volunteer work conflicts with traditional Latino family gatherings for meals and caring for children.

Poverty:

Poverty often precludes formal volunteering. Of the 36 families served by the Franklinville Smart Start program in 2002-2003, 88.9 percent were at the poverty level. Approximately half of these families are Latino. Fathers often work two jobs to provide for their families, while mothers stay home to care for the family. They simply cannot afford the expense of child care.

Rev. Bill Bingham explained that male Latino leaders in these communities are unable to volunteer because they work so many hours. They also put their families ahead of community service. Although they do not become involved in formal volunteering, many help at school and church and assist their neighbors.

Many Latino families moved to Randolph County in the early 1990s when jobs were numerous. With the decline in tobacco farming, the textile industry, and a general downturn in the economy, Randolph County has lost a substantial number of jobs, and unemployment is higher in small towns, where most Latinos live. The percentage of households with income below \$25,000 is 33.9 percent in Liberty and 38.3 percent in Franklinville, according to the US 2000 Census Report.

Latinos have a strong work ethic. Pastor Ana Morrison of the Adonai Mission United Methodist Church says, "The best workers are Latino. Latinos will do jobs that no one else will!"

Integration/Trust:

Integrating outsiders into the community is a barrier to encouraging Latinos to volunteer. When Latino Pastor Ana Morrison, who was not in clerical attire, ate at an Asheboro fast-food restaurant recently, a man approached her table and said, "Why don't you go back where you belong?" Although she has lived in the United States most of her life, she says that these kinds of encounters are not uncommon.

Individuals who move into a community may invoke fear, distrust, and insecurity to those who have lived there for generations, especially when the new people are of different ethnic origin.

Marissa Benton-Brown, director of the Liberty pre-K program, explained the reluctance of long-time town residents in accepting Latinos. The issue of prejudice makes it difficult for the Spanish and English-speaking communities to work together as volunteers. The efforts of the schools and the Celebrate Liberty's Children initiative may reduce some of this prejudice in time.

Franklinville Smart Start Director Amanda Sutliff has had to separate English and Spanish-speaking mothers in the parent training program. She discovered that a single group was uncomfortable for both groups, which might reflect either a language or integration barrier.

The lack of trust, combined with the accompanying issue of integration, makes it difficult for both cultures to volunteer together in the school, church, or community.

Critical Learning: When collecting data in rural, under-resourced communities, it is important for the practitioner to build relationships, particularly if he or she is of a different ethnic origin. These relationships are critical to successful research and program development.

Community leaders have the best understanding of what kinds of volunteer work is already being done in the area. To reach the Latino community, it is important to find the individual who has the respect and trust of the population. Fortunately, Amanda Sutliff, director of the Liberty Smart Start program, has the Latino community's trust and has made an important contact with Carmen, one of the well-liked Latinos, enabling additional research.

Latinos are often suspicious of people who represent a government agency. Since some Latinos are in this country illegally, they are extremely wary of outsiders. So the only way to gain their trust is for the researcher to work with individuals that Latinos already trust.

Building trust within a different culture takes time, especially when the researcher does not speak the language. The Director of the Liberty pre-K program, Marissa Benton-Brown, made it easy to research the Liberty community because she has lived there a number of years and knows the community leaders well.

Before going into any community, it is important for researchers to learn about the community, including looking at census data, newspapers, reports from community organizations, economic statistics, United Way reports, and Chamber of Commerce flyers and reports. A visit to the local library is also helpful. Volunteers open up much more quickly if they discover researchers have tried to learn as much as possible about them and what they are doing.

To better understand how volunteering works in a community, researchers should attend a number of community events, which gives them the opportunity to meet community leaders and

better understand their motivation and commitment. These events might include church activities, town meetings, school sessions, library meetings, and town celebrations.

If language is an issue, researchers should seek out a bilingual interpreter as quickly as possible to give them the opportunity to meet with the target audience sooner and be more effective in gaining information. Carmen in Franklinville and Adrianna in Liberty are both bilingual and were key to reaching the Latino populations in those towns.

When interviewing volunteers, researchers should encourage them to share information on their current projects including their motivation, how they became involved, how long they have been volunteering, and what else volunteers might contribute to the community. When closing the interview, researchers should always ask the question of who might be able to provide further information. Volunteers are happy to comply because the question shows a trust in their judgment.

Particularly in rural communities, volunteers will be more apt to provide information if researchers wear appropriate clothing to minimize any dichotomy. Professional clothing is inappropriate. Simple clothing, flat shoes, and minimal make-up are best for female researchers. Briefcases and expensive notebooks often set researchers apart from the local population and reduce trust. To Latinos, a briefcase may be a sign that a researcher represents the government, an institution many do not trust.

Working with another culture requires more of an understanding of the entire culture than just the language. For example, the Latino population is an action-oriented culture not interested in lectures. Instead, they prefer hands-on learning opportunities. Many people trying to teach Latinos through talks and lectures lose their interest quickly. After a committee meeting of the Smart Start board, Carmen, a Latino volunteer, commented, “All your talking makes my head ache.” Even if researchers do not speak the language, knowledge of and respect for the people’s culture will benefit everyone.

Understanding a culture’s values will also help understand why people do or do not volunteer. In the Latino culture, caring for family is most important, so women stay home and raise children, volunteering during the day when the children can accompany them. Volunteer opportunities need to be presented so that Latinos see the work as helping their children and their families. When this happens, more people will volunteer.

V. Applicability to Neighboring

Accepting that “neighboring” is a strong connection among the Latino population that supports positive individual and community behavior based on mutual respect, responsibility, and ownership, both formal and informal volunteering have important roles in rural communities. Both Franklinville and Liberty possess inherent internal assets and strengths in their Latino residents.

Earlier in this report, the core strategies identified by Points of Light Foundation were cited for building effective partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and under-resourced Communities, and for engaging and empowering local residents. In seeking to model the neighboring principles evident in these core strategies, we discovered that each strategy is applicable for either rural or urban communities.

In seeking to understand the nature of volunteering in the community, we quickly learned that considerable volunteer work already occurs in Latino communities. Instead of being called “volunteering,” however, the work is seen as helping family, friends, and fellow church members. As the population increases, as it has steadily done in Asheboro, more formal, structured organizations such as the Latino Coalition are created.

In both Franklinville and Liberty, work must be done to break down barriers to community involvement. There are few formal volunteer opportunities for the Latino community, which volunteers primarily in groups or for activities in which they have a personal stake. Latinos will come to the schools for Parents as Teachers activities; they will volunteer at the thrift store when they patronize the store themselves; they will work with their children in a school-sponsored reading program; and they will serve on Smart Start boards that help their children receive a good education.

The barriers of transportation, literacy, and language must also be overcome. A lack of public transportation means that many under-resourced families must share cars and rides. Literacy is a barrier because of the intimidation people feel when they cannot read or understand directions. In particular, language, both for the English and Spanish speakers, provides barriers to community involvement.

Whether serving immediate or extended family members, neighbors, their church, their child’s school, or in other, more structured settings, volunteering is a means to cultivate community members’ skills and talents. Two individuals in both Franklinville and Liberty who originally volunteered to work with Smart Start are excellent examples of enhancing skills and talents. As a result of their volunteer work, each was offered a paid position within the school system. Their duties vary, but their most important role is to serve as a resource to the Latino community. They encourage others to volunteer, serve as interpreters, work as assistants in various school settings, and, in general, are excellent role models.

Volunteering is an exchange, and the volunteer work people do provides tangible and intangible benefits. Tangible benefits include caring for children in time of illness, collecting money to return a deceased resident to Mexico for burial, sharing food with others who have less, and providing transportation to medical and other appointments. Intangible benefits include seeing the smiles on children’s faces when they are learning and watching as someone who is ill becomes well again.

Whether it occurs in larger urban areas or in rural Randolph County, volunteering strengthens existing community leadership. One impassioned volunteer saw that Franklinville children needed a better educational start before entering kindergarten. She brought together others who shared that concern, and they organized a local Smart Start program.

Formal and informal volunteer efforts are essential to ensuring community readiness, whether in the urban or the rural setting. When Franklinville and Liberty studied the low level of school readiness of its three to five-year-olds (about 50% from the Latino community), community leaders began a local Smart Start program. When the Methodist and Baptist churches recognized the need for their Latino church members to have their own churches, they helped sponsor the creation of these churches.

Rural communities have fewer people to call upon, yet concerned volunteers come forward to do whatever the community needs, whether it is in education, the church, or establishing a thrift store.

Special Thanks:

The Volunteer Center of Greensboro and Randolph County would like to thank the residents of Franklinville and Liberty who so generously volunteered their time and knowledge to make this project a success. The Points of Light Foundation receives thanks as well for providing this opportunity to study volunteering within the Latino communities and provide a base for further volunteer efforts.

Case Study Humboldt County, California

I. Background

The Volunteer Center of the Redwoods is a program of the Area 1 Agency on Aging and is located in Eureka, California. The Volunteer Center's mission is to provide the leadership and resources that support volunteers as they make positive changes in their communities. The Volunteer Center provides referral services to individuals wanting to volunteer and volunteer management support and training to organizations.

The Volunteer Center includes the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), which began in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties more than 30 years ago. In 1994, with community support, the Volunteer Center of the Redwoods was created to expand the services of RSVP to people of all ages. Currently, the Volunteer Center refers volunteers to more than 300 nonprofit organizations, schools, and governmental agencies in the two county area.

Since its inception, the Volunteer Center has been the convener of the North Coast Regional Network for Service & Volunteerism (NCRN). This coalition of service organizations envisions Humboldt and Del Norte counties as places where people of all ages and abilities are invited to engage in service that unites individuals in addressing crucial community needs. Thirty-two organizations have participated in NCRN and a core group, designated as the leadership team, provides the vision and direction. Through NCRN, the Volunteer Center coordinates service events on national and local days of service and provides a forum for information sharing and collaborative project and grant proposal creation.

The Volunteer Center is an active member of Humboldt County's Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster/Citizen Corps Council of Humboldt (VOAD/CCCH). The Volunteer Center works with VOAD/CCCH organizations to assist them in preparing systems to more effectively manage volunteers before, during and after a disaster.

Community

Humboldt County encompasses 3,572 square miles and is located in the northwest corner of California along the Pacific Coast. Steep, forest-covered mountains ranging in elevation from 2,000 to 7,000 feet dominate the landscape of the County. The majority of the population lives along the coastal plain and inland river valleys, while the mountain areas are sparsely populated. Land use is 74 percent forests, 10 percent agriculture, six percent public use, four percent residential, three percent water resources, two percent industrial and one percent commercial (30% public lands and 70% privately held).

Primary industries in the region have historically been dependent on timber, fishing, tourism and cottage industries. As timber and fishing resources have declined, many communities in the area

struggle to respond to a diminished economic base. Multiple-year impacts of state budget reductions, the rising costs of Worker’s Compensation, and across-the-board 20 percent reductions to all Humboldt County programs are impacting local nonprofit and government supported agencies, affecting budget and delivery of services. Rising health care, insurance and gasoline costs further impact the budgets and capabilities of both local agencies and clients.

The *Volunteer Engagement in Under-Resourced Rural Communities Case Study on the Neighboring Model* provided an excellent opportunity for the Volunteer Center to gain a better understanding of how to better support volunteering in remote, rural areas. For the purpose of the case study, the Volunteer Center focused on the small communities in an area referred to locally as “Southern Humboldt,” which approximately encompasses the southern most quarter of Humboldt County. Garberville, population 2000, is 85 miles south of Eureka, the County seat, and provides services for the smaller communities of Southern Humboldt. Some residents in Southern Humboldt must travel an hour or more to access services in Garberville. There is no public transportation available in Southern Humboldt with the exception of a senior bus service that provides transportation to Eureka once a week and to the senior dining center in Southern Humboldt.

The following chart provides a comparative look at demographics for the focus area (Garberville CCD), Eureka (Eureka CCD), Humboldt County, and California. Statistics are from the 2000 U.S. Census.

	State of California	Humboldt County	Eureka CCD*	Garberville CCD**
Population	35,484,453	126,518	46,447	12,194
Land Area (square miles)	155,959	3,572	141	851
Persons per square mile	217.2	35.4	327.2	7.1
Median Age	33.3	36.3	37.8	38.4
Population over 65 (percent)	10.6	12.5	13.9	11.0
Households	11,512,020	51,238	18,967	4,916
Median Household Income	\$47,493	\$31,226	\$30,995	\$30,424
Household income below \$25,000 (percent)	11.5	17.2	18.1	19.1
Families living below poverty level, (percent)	10.6	12.9	13.4	15.7
Population (percent):				
White	59.5	84.7	85.0	89.0
Hispanic or Latino	32.4	6.5	6.7	6.5
American Indian & Alaska native	1.0	5.7	3.8	3.0
African American	6.7	0.9	1.2	0.8

* Eureka CCD includes unincorporated areas immediately surrounding Eureka City limits.

* *Garberville CCD includes the area from the southern Humboldt County line north to the community of Rio Dell, population 3,174. Rio Dell is approximately 45 minutes north of Garberville. For the purpose of this case study, Rio Dell was not considered part of Southern Humboldt.*

II. Goals and Objectives

Although the Volunteer Center recognized the importance of local staff in Southern Humboldt, they have not had the capacity to maintain a staff position since the mid-1990. Volunteer Center staff dedicates one day a month to travel to Southern Humboldt to connect with the community. Partnering with the Points of Light Foundation in the *Engaging Volunteers in Under-Resourced Rural Communities: Case Study on the Neighboring Model* provided an excellent opportunity to learn how individuals volunteer in remote, rural communities and the unique challenges organizations serving these communities face in mobilizing volunteers. With the learnings from the case study, the Volunteer Center will be able to better support volunteers and organizations in remote, rural communities of Southern Humboldt and throughout Humboldt and Del Norte Counties.

The Volunteer Center's goals for the case study, in addition to how to apply the seven neighboring concepts, were to:

- Create new and strengthen existing relationships with organizations and communities in Southern Humboldt
- Gain a better understanding of under-resourced, remote, rural communities needs and challenges to engage community members into volunteering
- Develop strategies to more effectively use Volunteer Center resources to increase the abilities of organizations in remote, rural communities to mobilize and support volunteers to address crucial needs in their communities
- Enhance outreach to remote, rural communities to establish Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). CERT provides training in emergency preparedness and in basic disaster response techniques so that volunteers can take a more active role in the safety of the people in their neighborhood, workplace, or school in a time of crisis.

The Volunteer Center identified two networks that would help provide information about and access to communities in Southern Humboldt. These networks are:

Southern Humboldt Emergency Preparedness Committee (SHEPC) – Members of the Committee include representatives from four volunteer fire departments, Amateur Radio Association, California Department of Forestry, California State Parks, Children and Families Commission, Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services, American Red Cross Humboldt Chapter, and Volunteer Center of the Redwoods.

The Volunteer Center has been involved with SHEPC on a monthly basis for the past year and intermittently over the past three years. It was anticipated that SHEPC would provide access to individuals in the more remote communities of Southern Humboldt. SHEPC members are

predominately volunteers and would be a valuable resource to gaining insights into the nature of volunteering in rural, under-resourced communities.

Southern Humboldt Family Partnership Council (SHFPC) – Members of SHFPC include the Children and Families Commission, Southern Humboldt Community Health District, Southern Humboldt School District, Healy Senior Center, and Humboldt County Public Health. SHFPC was chosen as a primary contact because the Garberville area has the highest percent (46%) of children (0-5 years) and the second highest level (19%) of elders (75+) living in poverty in the county. SHFPC meets monthly to share information, coordinate social services, and leverage resources from outside local communities.

III. Plan and Activities

In April, the Volunteer Center developed a plan of action to assess the applicability of the Neighboring Model and its concepts to mobilize volunteers. The Volunteer Center focused on three areas: capacity building, targeted recruitment, and partnership development

Capacity Building

- Facilitate discussions (formal and informal) with volunteers and organizations to gain a better understanding of what volunteers are currently doing and challenges to mobilize more volunteers. *Actual Activity:* In June, the Volunteer Center convened a meeting of Southern Humboldt to discuss results from the Points of Light Foundation’s survey to better understand existing challenges and strategies used to mobilize lower income community members in rural areas. By consensus, the meeting participants identified three priority areas to increase promotion of volunteer opportunities and enhance communication between organizations:
 - 1) *Establish a community calendar* – Organizations felt if they could better coordinate special events in the community, it would help increase their ability to recruit volunteers and attendance at the events. Currently, organizations often schedule multiple events on the same weekend. The Garberville-Redway Chamber of Commerce is hosting the community calendar on their website. The Volunteer Center assists in promoting the community calendar through its newsletter, radio talk show, and ongoing contact with Southern Humboldt organizations.
 - 2) *Centralized location for volunteer resources* – Organizations emphasized that Southern Humboldt residents are not likely to call Eureka to find out what volunteer opportunities are available in their communities. Having a central location in Southern Humboldt where volunteers could access information about service opportunities would be beneficial. As mentioned above, the Internet is not always a viable option.

The Volunteer Center compiled two volunteer binders that included information about current volunteer opportunities, benefits of RSVP, and how to request volunteers. The binders are located at the Garberville Chamber of Commerce and the Mary Bendle Health Resource Center in Garberville. Staff at the Resource Center often assists residents in connecting with volunteer opportunities in the community.

- 3) *Establish a volunteer festival to promote opportunities to serve* – Ideas were discussed to plan a volunteer fair in conjunction with an existing event such as the local Farmer’s Market. The Volunteer Center indicated it would help support and coordinate a volunteer fair; however, the group deferred the discussion to the fall indicating their preference for a community calendar and establishing volunteer binders.

An informal focus group was planned in Southern Humboldt during a site visit by a Points of Light Foundation consultant. Due to communication issues, the event was neither well advertised nor attended. However, the few people that did attend provided an informative look of their community. A radio talk show later the same day was well received and numerous people called in to share how they help in the community or the challenges that kept them from volunteering.

- Provide consultation or trainings focusing on Neighboring concepts. *Actual Activity:* At the June meeting, organizations expressed interest and identified a convenient time for staff to attend trainings is in January or later in the winter. Conversations with organization staff and community members provided venues to informally discuss Neighboring concepts and volunteer management issues.
- Explore ways to coordinate the publicizing of volunteer opportunities. *Actual Activity:* Organizations emphasized the reluctance of Southern Humboldt residents to call a Eureka telephone number to find out information about their community. Websites were discussed as a possibility; however, there are many areas where telephone and Internet service is not available or cost prohibitive. Establishing a location in Garberville to provide information about volunteer opportunities would increase outreach.

The Volunteer Center currently sends regular information to the Humboldt County paper about volunteer opportunities. Southern Humboldt organizations agreed to send information to the Volunteer Center to be published in the newspaper and incorporated into the Volunteer Binders. To date, response has been minimal from Southern Humboldt organizations.

Targeted Recruitment

- In coordination with SHEPC, identify communities to plan CERT trainings. *Actual Activity:* The Volunteer Center partnered with the American Red Cross Humboldt Chapter to conduct outreach to establish CERT Teams. Working with SHEPC, the Volunteer Center identified communities interested in CERT trainings and organizations

or individuals available to coordinate CERT volunteers. Shelter Cove and Beginnings were two communities heavily impacted by last year's wildfires and had existing infrastructure in place to support CERTs. The Volunteer Center is doing on-going outreach through SHEPC and other community venues.

- Assist communities to integrate CERT volunteers into existing activities. *Actual Activities:* Shelter Cove, a small coastal community located 45 minutes west of Garberville, hosted the only CERT training in Southern Humboldt during the timeframe of the case study. Volunteer Center staff attended the final CERT training class and discussed with volunteers ideas of how to use their newly gained skills in non-disaster times. Several of the CERT volunteers expressed a desire to volunteer more in their community. Their interests and skills were noted and made available to organizations matching their interests.

The Shelter Cove CERT expressed that they will continue to fine-tune their community's disaster plan using lessons learned last year. The Volunteer Center offered to assist as needed to develop effective volunteer plans. To date, the Shelter Cove CERT has not requested assistance of the Volunteer Center.

- Assist with coordination of an annual Safety Fair to provide volunteer opportunities for individuals and families. *Actual Activity:* The SHEPC deferred the planning of this event and the actual event to an undetermined future date.

Partnership Development

- Participate in monthly meetings of SHFPC and SHEPC. *Actual Activity:* Volunteer Center staff attended monthly meetings for both networks. The meetings provided insight into activities in the community and offered a venue to remind organizations of the resources the Volunteer Center has to offer.
- Develop a system to increase accessibility to volunteer opportunities. *Actual Activity:* The Volunteer Binders system was implemented in August. Staff at the Mary Bendle Resource Center stated the binder has been helpful when receiving calls from people wanting to volunteer.
- Educate organizations on how to utilize the new volunteer opportunities system. *Actual Activity:* The Volunteer Center continues outreach to organizations to encourage them to include information in the binder. With input from organizations, the Volunteer Center is refining the format of information to make it easier to read and easier for organizations to provide the needed information.

Neighboring Concepts

The Points of Light Foundation has identified seven core strategies in building effective partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and low-income communities to engage

and empower low-income resident volunteers. The Volunteer Center applied these strategies in Southern Humboldt.

1. Understand the nature of volunteering in the community.

Informal discussions with volunteers and organization staff, completed surveys, and focus groups (including radio talk show) gave insight to how people of Southern Humboldt were helping in their communities, formally and informally. Specifically, the Volunteer Center hoped to learn how Southern Humboldt residents described “informal” (for example “helping out” or “taking care of”) volunteering activities and the language they used to identify informal volunteering.

Most of the individuals interviewed spoke of helping out neighbors as just part of living in a rural community. There is an expectation that you will help. When questioned about how he knew whom and how to help, one interviewee responded, “You just know and you do it!”

2. Overcome barriers to community involvement.

Survey responses and conversations with organizations established common barriers to engaging individuals in rural, under-resourced communities into service. Recruiting volunteers is a crucial ongoing task for most organizations in Southern Humboldt. Dependability and volunteer management issues, including supervision and recruitment, were identified as main barriers.

Volunteers and organizations also identified the need to locally publicize volunteer opportunities. Southern Humboldt residents are reluctant to call a Eureka telephone number to get information about their community.

3. Empower the community.

At SHEPC and SHFPC meetings, the Volunteer Center presented itself as a resource for the networks and the community. Due to significant wildfires last summer, SHEPC has been working to establish Fire Safety Councils and increase awareness in communities of how to be fire safe. The Volunteer Center discussed with SHEPC ways in which CERT training provided by the Red Cross could enhance their work with Fire Safety Councils.

At a community meeting facilitated by the Volunteer Center, organizations identified a desire for a community calendar to help coordinate community events. The Chamber of Commerce offered to maintain the calendar on their website. The Volunteer Center assisted in publicizing the new community calendar and gather information about events.

4. Cultivate community members’ skills and talents.

The Volunteer Center encourages both organizations and individuals to focus on strengthening and expanding resources and skills that already exist in the community. The Volunteer Center helps identify resources outside the community that can be leveraged to augment local resources.

5. Strengthen existing community leadership.

The Volunteer Center approaches and acknowledges Southern Humboldt residents and organizations as experts in their own communities. They are the ones who will create systems and solutions to issues in their communities. The Volunteer Center's role is to help coordinate their efforts and assist in leveraging outside resources.

6. Acknowledge that volunteering is an exchange.

Many organizations in Southern Humboldt acknowledged that one way to get volunteers to attend events was to offer food. The Volunteer Center acknowledged to organizations that this was a valid, and effective, example of offering something in exchange for a person's volunteer time. Most of the organizations in Southern Humboldt are small with limited resources. The Volunteer Center helped organizations brainstorm what might be within their capacity to offer volunteers, such as training to build job skills, child care, and free services offered by the organization.

7. Ensure community readiness.

For action to happen and be sustained, the community must have stewardship in the idea. As an outside agency, the Volunteer Center is perceived as neutral and can have a role as facilitator to bring communities together to identify and prioritize their needs.

IV. Critical Learnings

The critical learnings the Volunteer Center has validated or discovered about working with rural, under-resourced communities are:

- It is essential to build trust and develop relationships in rural communities.
- Identifying and acknowledging the role of *key logs* may increase approachability to the community.
- Neighboring is a way of life in remote communities.
- Isolation is both a benefit and a challenge for remote, rural communities.

Trust and Relationships

Learning the culture of a community is essential to being able to offer assistance. In Southern Humboldt there is a suspicion of "outside" agencies offering to bring services to the community. It is often felt that Southern Humboldt is used to make a grant proposal look good, but then Humboldt doesn't necessarily receive any benefit if the grant is awarded.

The time it takes to establish relationships in remote, rural communities can be a barrier to outside agencies that also have limited resources. However, for programs to have a chance to succeed in these communities, the commitment must be made.

During the past few years, the Volunteer Center experienced several staff changes. Each time a new staff person was assigned the Southern Humboldt area, it would take approximately one year before the staff felt that they were really beginning to connect with the community.

One local commented that since the Volunteer Center staff person had been showing up for the monthly meetings for over a year, they figured that staff person is here for the long haul and can be counted on to show up. This continuity and trust has been reflected in the openness of individuals to talk about their community and its challenges

Key Logs

Key log is a logging term for the one log that when moved will unstick a logjam. In rural communities, the key logs are the individuals in the community that everyone knows to turn to for information. Having the acceptance or even approval of the key log can help smooth entry into the community for an individual or organization.

As new people move to a location, volunteering is often a way for them to integrate into the community. In a small community like Garberville, population 2000, the key log is usually a person who is a longtime resident and knows what is going on in the community. In larger communities, such as Eureka (population 46,000), organizations, like the Volunteer Center, service as the key logs for the community.

An interview with a returning resident to a tiny community in Southern Humboldt acknowledged difficulty integrating into the community. Although the resident had identified the key log and was volunteering, it still took several months before she felt “accepted” by the community.

Neighboring

Other interviews provided insight into how people help each other. The editor for a local paper told of how he and his neighbors look out for three widows that live in their neighborhood. Neighbors will drop by to visit, help with tasks around the house, and if needed, bring groceries from town. A staff person with social services agency mentioned a concept of a “social capital savings account.” Generally, people will help each other, as it is needed. She mentioned an older man who was hard to get along with and he had bankrupted his “social capital” among neighbors. The man now needed to depend on social service agencies to provide for his needs instead of help from neighbors.

In September, a consultant for the Points of Light Foundation conducted a site visit to Humboldt County. As part of the visit, the consultant conducted telephone interviews with residents who have volunteer experiences. Volunteering in Humboldt County is strong, but much of it is conducted informally. For example, Native Americans say they don’t have time to volunteer because they are taking wood to the elderly or fish to people who need it.

Isolation

Our greatest strength is also our weakness. This is true of the isolation experienced in remote, rural communities of Southern Humboldt. Many people are attracted to Southern Humboldt for

its beauty and sparse population. Through informal conversations, a sense of the diversity and polarization within communities in Southern Humboldt has emerged. One business owner spoke of how the influx of hippies from the San Francisco Bay area 20-25 years ago impacted small communities in Southern Humboldt. Most of the small communities were originally built around timber operations (mills and housing for workers). The large influx of “aging hippies,” generally environmentalists and counter culturist, conflicted with the more “traditional” residents. In addition to an influx of people who highly value living off the grid and outside the “system,” an underground economy began to blossom.

One person expressed a concern that young people are not engaged in their communities because they grew up in a culture where they were self contained and lived isolated to be able to invest in an underground economy. Another resident told how hard it is to instill her values of hard work and living within the law when her daughter is exposed to the quick rewards of jobs related to the informal economy.

Another person attributed the lack of volunteering to a wide variety of nonwestern or nontraditional religions that do not promote the active participation of volunteering or helping a neighbor. Several people cited time constraints as a reason why people didn’t volunteer. A staff member of the Family Resource Center expressed that some individuals with low-incomes may not volunteer because it would make them more visible in the community and a target for censure.

Other interviews provided insight into how people help each other. The editor for a local paper told of how he and his neighbors look out for three widows that live in their neighborhood. Neighbors will drop by to visit, help with tasks around the house, and if needed, bring groceries from town. A staff person with social services agency mentioned a concept of a “social capital savings account.” Generally, people will help each other, as it is needed. She mentioned an older man who was hard to get along with and he had bankrupted his “social capital” among neighbors. The man now needed to depend on social service agencies to provide for his needs instead of help from neighbors.

Last summer, wild fires threatened shelter Cove, a small coastal community 45 minutes west of Garberville. On three occasions, the town came within minutes of being evacuated. When the wildfire began to initially threaten the community, a civic group began organizing an evacuation plan and notifying all the people in the immediate area. Several frail elders lived in the community and did not have transportation. The civic group assigned community members to be responsible for the elders. The civic group also coordinated town meetings and community bulletin boards to keep everyone informed about the status of the wildfire.

After the crisis, the civic group continues to organize their community around the issue of disaster preparedness. They have organized a CERT training and are continuing to fine-tune their disaster plan using lessons learned from last year’s fires.

V. Applicability of Neighboring

The Neighboring Model paralleled the approach the Volunteer Center applies in every day activities. The Volunteer Center focuses on the strengths of the individual volunteer or organization and acknowledges what they contribute to their community. Volunteering is an essential element in building a healthy community and has a positive impact on those who volunteer. Participation in the case study provided an opportunity to consciously articulate the Volunteer Center's approach. The Neighboring Model was used as a framework to approach organizations and volunteers in Southern Humboldt.

In Southern Humboldt, the Volunteer Center involved the communities as partners to help document best practices and explore solutions to ongoing issues relating to mobilizing volunteers from under-resourced communities. By involving the organizations in determining services were needed to engage more volunteers, the community received what it needed and had a sense of stewardship in the services. The Volunteer Center encouraged organizations to leverage volunteering as ways to gain job skills, for families to interact together, and to help overcome social and economic barriers.

Participation in the case study validated much of what the Volunteer Center knew about working with remote, rural communities. It also provided new learnings that will help the Volunteer Center more effectively support volunteering in Southern Humboldt and other remote, rural communities in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties.

Validated Learnings

- Length of time commitment to build trust and relationships in remote, rural communities. Establishing a local presence increases an “outside” organizations effectiveness in the community.
- Learning about the local culture is necessary – what are the important issues in the community, how do they address them, what are the protocols?
- Lack of anonymity – Everybody knows everyone and what they do or need.
- Neighboring is essential in remote, rural communities where services are few or nonexistent. Residents rely on each other first, before seeking help from organizations or from the “system.”
- Rural communities face similar issues as more urban areas; however, the solutions are often very different due availability of resources.

New Learnings

- Identifying and acknowledging the important role of key logs or gatekeepers. These are the individuals that can provide insight to local culture and ease acceptance in the community. Rural residents are more likely to trust “one of their own” to recommend services or to vouch for an outsider.
- Low-income populations are harder to identify as they are interspersed in the community. There are no low-income housing units or tracts.
- Social or economic issues cause polarization that impacts the ability of the community to act as a cohesive unit. Fear of censure or exposure may deter individuals for being involved in their community.



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