

MENTORING FACT SHEET



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Mentoring Resource Center

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Volunteer Motivation and Mentor Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment and retention are constant worries of mentoring programs; no mentoring program can survive without an adequate supply of individuals willing to volunteer time and energy long term to serve as role models and coaches.

Understanding what drives people to seek out and stay with volunteer activities can help you better target your efforts at finding and keeping mentors. This *Fact Sheet* summarizes some of the key research on volunteer motivation and offers tips on how to use this information to build more effective volunteer recruitment and retention programs.

Research on Volunteer Motivations

Each individual has a unique mix of interests, feelings, and circumstances that can drive him or her to join a volunteer program. However, emerging research on volunteers and volunteerism in America does point to a cluster of motivations commonly found among volunteers. These are best captured in the Volunteer Functions Inventory developed by Clary et al., 1998, as shown in the table at right.

Generativity, community concern, and civic pride are additional influences that may encourage people to volunteer. Generativity is the need to pass on wisdom, lessons, and knowledge to future generations, and some scholars (e.g., Snyder and Clary, 2004; Erikson, 1963) see it as the mark of full maturation among adults. Community concern and civic pride may compel an individual to volunteer because he or she sees a concrete need in the community, or is driven by a simple desire to show pride in the community by being a supportive, engaged citizen (Omoto and Snyder, 1995).

Volunteer Functions Inventory

Function	Description	Example
Values	Desire to demonstrate one's humanitarianism and empathy by getting involved.	"I hear so much about the hard lives these kids have and feel I should do what I can to help."
Career	Enhancing career options or exploring a new vocation.	"I'm considering getting into education and want to see how I get along with children."
Understanding	Desire to better understand society and individuals.	"I know I've lived a sheltered life, so I want to know what these kids are dealing with."
Enhancement	Desire to feel better about oneself or feel needed by others.	"I get such a good feeling when I am helping others."
Protective	Using volunteerism to avoid or work through personal issues.	"I want to give a child the role model I never had growing up."
Social	Volunteering to meet the expectations of, or get approval from, others.	"Two of my good friends are mentors and say I'd be good at it."

Think about the mentors in your program. What reasons do new mentors give for wanting to participate? Are there patterns in the reasons given? If you could classify your mentors' motivations into the Volunteer Functions Inventory, which motivations would appear most frequently? What motivated *you* to work for a mentoring program?

Just as motivations to volunteer differ for each individual, motivations also vary among different groups of volunteers. Individuals are motivated to help those who are most like themselves, whose needs are familiar (Stukas and Tanti, 2005), a tendency borne out in studies (e.g., Carson, 1991) showing ethnic and cultural groups primarily volunteering in capacities impacting their own subgroup. Thus, a complete picture of who mentors and why should include demographic information highlighting the subgroups most likely to participate in mentoring.

A 2005 survey of 60,000 U.S. households conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (White, 2006) indicates that in comparison to other volunteers mentors tend to:

- Be equally likely to be male as female (nationally, more females than males volunteer)
- Be found somewhat more frequently among African Americans than other racial/ethnic groups (whites generally tend to volunteer more)
- Be younger, between 16 and 44 years old
- Have some college education
- Have at least one child under the age of 18 in their home.

A poll of 2,000 adults conducted by MENTOR in partnership with the AOL Time Warner Foundation (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2005) found additional demographic and personality traits shared by those who typically serve as mentors or would consider serving. The 2002 poll found that potential mentors tend to:

- Have household incomes of \$50,000 or more
- Have access to the Internet
- Want access to expert help (84 percent) and training (84 percent) before mentoring
- Be willing to mentor a youth online (47 percent)

Think again about the mentors in your program. Do they tend to come from one racial/ethnic or socioeconomic group? What are the average and median ages of your mentors? Do they tend to be employed or retired? Do they have children? What reasons have you heard young professionals give for wanting to mentor, versus the reasons given by middle-aged mentors and seniors? What types of people have responded best to your recruitment outreach, and why do you think that is?

How Your Program Can Use Knowledge of Volunteer Motivations

Knowing your audience—who its members are and what they want—is a fundamental principal of marketing, whether you are selling a cosmetic or the opportunity to change a young person's life. Mentoring programs can improve their volunteer recruitment and retention efforts by identifying potential volunteers' backgrounds, beliefs, and motivations and speaking to these directly in recruitment messages and ongoing support.

The findings described above provide a snapshot of people inclined to mentor and their motivations. You may see some things that apply to your mentors and others that do not. The findings should thus be used as a framework and launching pad for conducting analyses of your own mentors. If you do not already do so, you will want to think explicitly about—and capture data on—who your mentors are and “what's in it for them.” The following tips may be helpful:

- **Include motivation-assessment questions on screening or match questionnaires for new mentors.** Ask prospective mentors questions regarding their motivations for participating in your program. Open-ended questions such as “Why do you want to be a mentor?” or “What do you hope to get out of your mentoring experience?” are a great start. Consider developing a set of multiple-choice questions based on common motivations, interests, and goals.
- **Interview long-serving mentors to understand what keeps them involved in the**

program. Unless your program is relatively new, you'll likely have mentors who have participated in it over several years. Asking them what inspires or compels them to continue serving can reveal information that can be used to refine recruitment pitches and retention plans. Depending on your time and resources, you can conduct interviews about mentor motivation on an informal, one-to-one basis or through focus groups. Mentors are likely to cite the personal relationships they've formed with their mentees as the main reason they "stick around," so develop questions that encourage them to be specific about when and in what context they get the greatest sense of fulfillment in their work with their mentees.

- **Collect and analyze volunteer-motivation data to identify clusters of motivation.** Analyzing motivation information collected from your mentors may reveal common drivers among them. Thess data can also be compared with the demographic information you've already collected on your mentors (i.e., race/ ethnicity, employment status, etc.) to see if there are motivations common to mentors from specific types of backgrounds.
- **Align volunteer motivations with recruitment messages and approaches.** Information you gather on motivations can be used in crafting recruitment messages and retention strategies (i.e., volunteer-recognition offerings). One method for doing this is to create a three-column worksheet listing the motivations you know or think drive your mentors to volunteer (i.e., Volunteer Function Inventory items, generativity, civic pride) in the first column. Title the middle column "How we can take advantage of this motivation," and list ways your recruitment and retention strategies can be better tailored to meet each motivation. Title the third column "Slogans, messages, images, and approaches" and list marketing messages or materials that can be developed to play to each function/ motivation among volunteers. As an example,

the National Network of Youth Ministries uses the slogan "They need what you know" in one of its mentor recruitment campaigns, which speaks to the motivations of enhancement, values, and generativity.

- **Test slogans and approaches on mentors.** Test your recruitment pitches and approaches on your mentors to see if they resonate with their experiences and motivations. The strongest and most promising approaches that emerge can then be used in generating recruitment ad copy and graphics.

When time and recruitment budgets are tight—and with mentoring programs, they usually are—you have to spend resources wisely and generate the most "bang for the buck." Understanding volunteer motivations generally, and among your mentors specifically, can go a long way toward making better-informed, targeted recruitment messages and materials.

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Additional Reading and Resources

Print

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Web

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