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Civic Engagement and the Disadvantaged: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

Well-designed volunteer and service opportunities, such as those that The Corporation for National and Community Service supports, offer at least two sets of benefits. One set accrues to the individuals and communities served by these programs through the provision of valued and needed services and supports at no- or reduced- cost. The second set accrues to the individuals who volunteer and provide the service. That experience can play an important role in their personal development. Proponents of service programs suggest that these benefits to individuals may include such things as increases in social capital, social networks, civic literacy and civic competence, self-esteem and personal efficacy.[1]

A new study released by the Corporation for National and Community Service offers specific insights. The study examined the long-term impacts that a single year of service in AmeriCorps has on the people (members) who participated in either the AmeriCorps State and National or the AmeriCorps NCCC program between 1999 and 2000. It tracked whether levels of volunteering, educational attainment, voting and other behaviors and attitudes, of these members changed over time. The members were surveyed at four distinct periods in time: 1) before they served in AmeriCorps; 2) one year post service; 3) three-four years post service; and 4) eight years post service. The evaluation compared these AmeriCorps members with a comparison group that was also tracked. The following were key findings:

- *AmeriCorps generates civic leaders.* One year of service in AmeriCorps created long-term positive impacts on the civic outcomes of AmeriCorps alums eight years after they joined AmeriCorps
- *AmeriCorps is a pipeline to public service.* AmeriCorps made people more likely to enter into public service careers in the government and nonprofit sector – 60% of AmeriCorps alumni worked to build better communities by serving in government or for nonprofit organizations.
- *AmeriCorps exposed members to new career opportunities:* 80% of members reported that their service exposed them to new career options and over two-thirds reported that their service was an advantage to them in the job market.

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[1] For a broad overview of benefits, see John Wilson, "Volunteering," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, (2000), pp. 231-3. Social capital is often defined so as to include indicators of joining and volunteering, in which case the connection to voluntary service is definitional. Social capital, in turn, is found to have economic, political and health benefits: see Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Democracy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 296-350. A dramatic example is the finding that higher participation rates in membership groups in Chicago neighborhoods are associated with lower death rates, especially for Black men. See Kimberly A. Lochner, Ichiro Kawachia, Robert T. Brennan and Stephen L. Bukac, Social capital and neighborhood mortality rates in Chicago, Social Science & Medicine, vol. 56, issue 8 (April 2003), pp. 1797-1805. For the positive impact of youth service-learning on civic knowledge and participation, see Shelley Billig, Sue Root, and Dan Jesse, "The Impact of Participation in Service-Learning on High School Students' Civic Engagement," CIRCLE Working Paper 33 (2005). For the benefits on political and civic participation: see Daniel Hart and Ben Kirschner, "Promoting Civic Participation and Development among Urban Adolescents," forthcoming in a volume edited by Peter Levine and James Youniss.

So the study provides strong evidence about the ways in which these volunteer and service programs actually contribute to the development of communities and individuals. But in addition to these more general findings, the new research clearly demonstrates that there are extensive and specific benefits that accrue to members of disadvantaged minority groups when compared to their comparison group counterparts. For example, the study shows that:

- *AmeriCorps has an even greater impact on the career choices of minority members and individuals from disadvantaged circumstances.*[2] Minority AmeriCorps members were significantly more likely than the comparison group to choose careers in public service (44% compared to 26%). AmeriCorps members from disadvantaged circumstances are 20 percentage points more likely to be employed in a public service field (46% compared to 26%).
- *AmeriCorps service produces significant impacts for racial and ethnic minorities as well as members from disadvantaged circumstances.*
    - Hispanic AmeriCorps members: are significantly more likely (56 percent to 35 percent) than their comparison group counterparts to report the importance of neighborhood participation.
    - African-American AmeriCorps members were 10 percentage points more likely than their comparison group counterparts to have an understanding of how to meet the community's needs (77% compared to 67%) and 79 percent of indicated they have the ability to make a difference in their communities, compared to 71 percent of the comparison group.
    - AmeriCorps members from disadvantaged circumstances were significantly more likely to have contacted a government official in the past 12 months to express an opinion on a local or national issue.

Still other research has documented the value of volunteering and service programs to the positive and healthy development of young people. Research on adolescents has shown, for example, that youth who are required to volunteer as part of their school work are substantially more likely to complete high school and college, compared to similar teenagers who are not required to serve.[3] We have also learned that such service can be a powerful tool for reducing pregnancy, violence, and other threats to teenagers' well-being.[4]

Findings like this are what support the movement for "positive youth development," a strategy for producing "healthy, happy, self-sufficient adults" that depends upon giving

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[2] "Disadvantaged circumstances" is defined as study participants who reported that during their youth and in the year prior to joining AmeriCorps, they received public assistance, such as welfare, food stamps, or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance; lived in public housing or projects; or received other housing assistance such as Section 8 or housing vouchers.

[3] Alberto Dávila and Marie T. Mora, "Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress: An Analysis Using NELS Data," CIRCLE Working Paper 52 (2007). All CIRCLE publications are available via www.civicyouth.org.

[4] Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, eds., *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, a report of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (National Academies Press, 2002).

adolescents "the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and get involved."[5] A major tenet of Positive Youth Development is that youth "flourish" or "thrive" when they are given serious opportunities to contribute to their communities.[6] (Here we emphasize the literature on youth, but other age groups, such as retirees, may also benefit personally from service.[7])

Given these benefits to the individuals, it is important that any large service program, especially one that is supported by the government, reach all of America's diverse populations, particularly those that are relatively disadvantaged. This is both a matter of equality of opportunity as well as of program efficiency in that the biggest gains will probably be experienced by volunteers who are at greatest risk of dropping out of school or committing crimes.[8] Indeed, increasing volunteering and service participation among disadvantaged populations can be a powerful tool for improving the life chances of poor and minority populations.

THIS REPORT

This paper was developed in the interest of extending the reach and benefits of national and community service programs to larger numbers of persons from disadvantaged populations – populations that data suggest may currently be underrepresented or underserved. In particular, this paper is intended to increase our understanding of and appreciation for the challenges and opportunities that may attend efforts to increase the participation by disadvantage groups.

In approaching our charge, we provide a broad context, showing that levels of volunteering, community service, and civic engagement vary by subgroup in the US population.   Our explorations suggest that, among many variables tested in research, educational background is the clearest and most dramatic factor affecting participation: persons with more years of schooling tend to be much more involved in volunteer and service programs.[9] Thus special attention and outreach to persons without college experience (about half of the young adult population[10]) may be a fruitful and powerful direction for increasing participation in the Corporation's programs. Race and

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[5] United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Fact Sheet: Positive Youth Development" (n.d., http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/positiveyouth/factsheet.htm).

[6] Richard M. Lerner, *Liberty: Thriving and Civic Engagement Among* America's *Youth* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), pp. 85-107 and passim.

[7] For instance, volunteering late in life seems to reduce depression, raise self-reported health, and increase social integration. See Nancy Morrow-Howell, Jim Hinterlong, Philip A. Rozario, and Fengyan Tang, "Effects of Volunteering on the Well-Being of Older Adults," Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, vol. 58B, no 3 (2003), pp. s137-s145.

[8] For example, an evaluation of the Teen Outreach Program, using control groups, found positive developmental effects from service. The greatest effects were found among youth who had the most initital risk factors. See Joseph P. Allen and Susan Philliber, "Who Benefits Most from a Broadly Targeted Prevention Program? Differential Efficacy Across Populations in the Teen Outreach Program," *Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 29, Issue 6, Pages 637 – 655, available via NIH Public Access (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov.

[9] Cf. Wilson (2000), p. 218 "Level of education is the most consistent predictor of volunteering."

[10] Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, "Youth Demographics," CIRCLE Fact Sheet (November 2006), using the Current Population Survey from the US Census.

Hyman and Levine

gender are also relevant and need to be considered, although their relationships to service and civic engagement are subtler and more complex.

This paper explores the research on these issues; generates hypotheses about what that research suggests by way of strategies for increasing participation; and finally, offers concrete proposals for strategies that might enhance the diversity and equity of participation in Corporation-supported programs.

UNDERSTANDING CURRENT VOLUNTEERING DIFFERENTIALS

One challenge to understanding who volunteers and who does not is our language. Conventional survey questions use the word "volunteering" without much elaboration. For example, the Current Population Supplement traditionally asks, "Since [date], have you done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?" Data obtained using this kind of question show differences by education and by race/ethnicity:

Volunteering rates from the 2005 Census Current Population Supplement
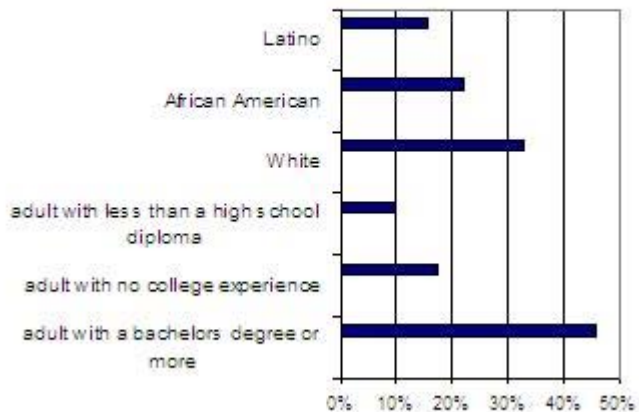
As the graph above shows, such survey questions generate results indicating that volunteer rates are positively correlated with education and that whites volunteer at rates roughly 50% higher than blacks and about twice as high as Latinos. But the survey item on which this graph is based may be misleading. To many Americans, "volunteering" means providing uncompensated service to strangers, often after school or after work. That is a form of service that fits best in middle-class lifestyles. If, for example, an adult is employed full-time and chooses to help other people's children at the local school, we call that activity "volunteering." If, on the other hand, an unemployed parent in a high-crime neighborhood spends (typically) her time carefully monitoring the community's children all day, she is unlikely to describe her activity as "volunteering," or herself as a volunteer, even though she too is providing a valued but uncompensated service to the community.

This discrepancy does not suggest that the surveys are somehow flawed. Survey items that use words such as "volunteering" and "service" actually do capture forms of engagement that Americans describe with those terms. In that sense, such survey

questions do not appear to be biased per se; they produce accurate estimates of the volunteering rate for Americans of various races and ethnicities and social classes.[11] The concern however, as shown in the next section, is that such survey items tend to omit important forms of participation and engagement that Americans do not typically classify as "volunteering" or "service."

Gaps in Engagement

Volunteering and service are subsets of the broader concept of civic engagement. "Civic engagement" refers to individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Such actions might include: joining associations, attending meetings, raising and giving money, contacting officials, and protest and/or civil disobedience. It means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.[12] Placed in this broader context, real differences do exist in the rates of civic engagement among demographic groups.

Civic Engagement and Social Class: We often observe variations in the rates of civic participation by social class. Surveys consistently show that giving money, contacting public officials, working informally on community problems, and even protesting are all more common among the affluent than among the poor.[13] The American Political Science Association's Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy concluded:

> The privileged [those with more income] participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government. Public officials, in turn, are much more responsive to the privileged than to average citizens and the least affluent. Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar with the clarity and consistency that policymakers readily heed.[14]

To explore this further, we constructed the graph below by combining the results of two survey questions, one which queried the highest level of education that the respondent completed and another which captured the social class that the respondent considered himself or herself to be part of. The union of these questions produces our own

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[11] An experiment conducted in 2004 indicated that there was little bias in traditional survey questions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics randomly asked some respondents whether they had "volunteered," and others whether they had done various specific activities. The list of activities included coaching, serving food, maintaining and building facilities, etc. By asking these behavioral questions, instead of simply asking about "volunteering," the researchers raised the apparent volunteering rate by 6 percentage points. However, the increases were very similar for all the major racial/ethnic groups and for people with different educational backgrounds. (Chris Toppe, "Measuring Volunteering: A Behavioral Approach," CIRCLE Working Paper 43, December 2005) More research should be done using additional behavioral prompts. Questions, discussed below, about participation in community projects yield different results.

[12] Excerpts from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000

[13] National Conference on Citizenship in association with CIRCLE and the Saguaro Seminar, *Broken Engagement: America's Civic Engagement Index* (September 18, 2006).

[14] American Political Science Association, Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, *American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality* (2004), from http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/taskforcereport.pdf, p. 1

Hyman and Levine

composite measure of social class.[15] As shown below, the graph demonstrates gaps in civic engagement in a particularly dramatic way. Those who say they are both middle class and college educated are up to five times more likely to participate in all categories compared to those who say they are working class and have no college experience.

civic engagement by education and class   (National Survey of Civic Engagement CIRCLE 2002)


□ working class, high school grad or less, not in school   ■ middle class, college grad
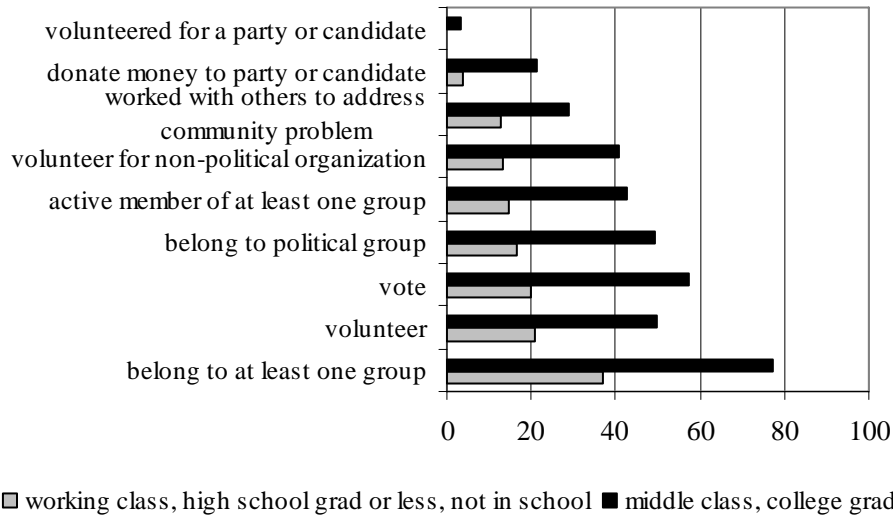
DDB (formerly DDB Needham) surveys allow us to track Americans' participation in community projects. What it means to "work on a community project" is not defined in these surveys, but we hypothesize that it means more than discrete acts of service -- survey respondents may be thinking of longer processes in which they set goals, express interests and goals, perhaps address controversies, and work to accomplish social change. Collaborating with neighbors over time to improve city services or to fight crime could be examples of community projects.

The following graph shows that Americans without college experience have been less likely than their college-educated counterparts over time to engage in community projects. And though participation has fallen for the population as a whole, it has become critically low for the less educated. This suggests that communities and neighborhoods with less well-educated residents are likely to have fewer people participating in civic projects and may, in addition, have fewer community projects underway.

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[15] Peter Levine, *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* (Tufts University Press, 2007), p 23.

## Participation in Community Projects, by Social Class
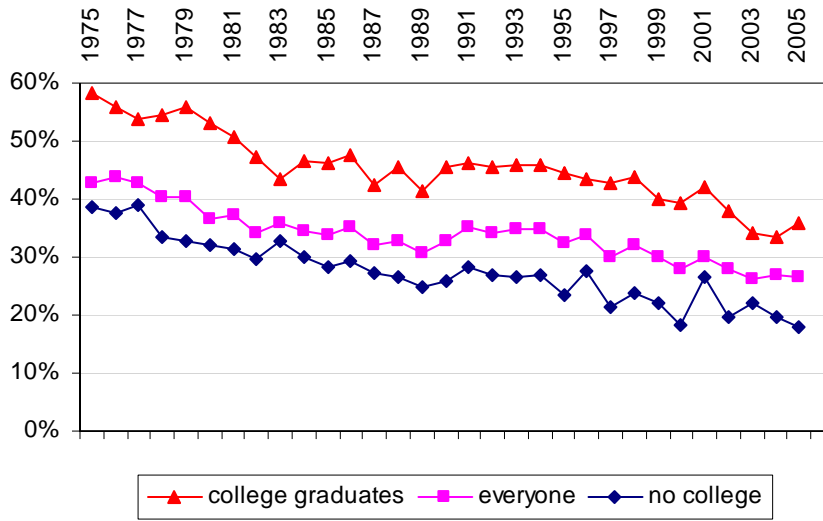
Racial and Ethnic Differences: Race is also a differentiating factor, but in ways that are fairly complex.[16] Groups may participate at above-average rates in some areas of civic activity while participating at below-average rates in others. An important example can be drawn from survey questions on community projects. Those data suggest that African Americans are more engaged than all other racial/ethnic groups in working on "community projects"[17]

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[16] Summary measures in National Conference on Citizenship, 2006.

[17] This graph shows "working on community projects" over time, using DDB data. Bey's paper uses the same indicator from the 2007 Current Population Supplement and finds whites slightly ahead of African Americans. The two findings are close enough to be consistent.

Hyman and Levine

## Community Projects by Race and Ethnicity
(DDB)
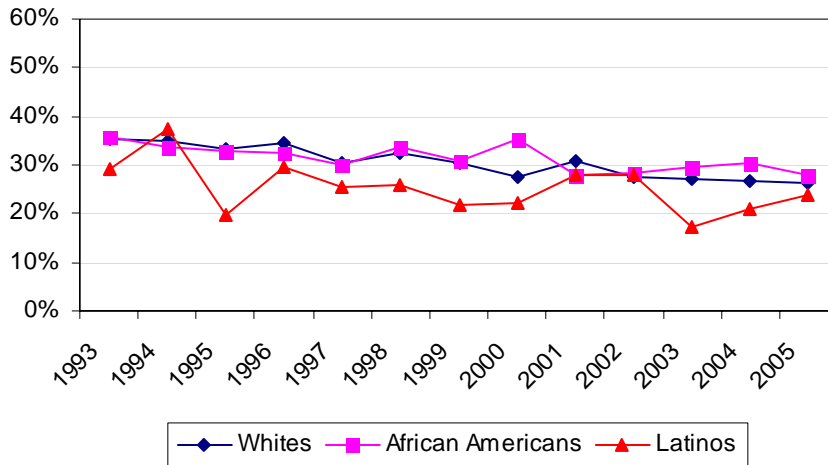
We suspect that these findings are coincident with the strong attachments to faith traditions in the African-American community. Many of the norms and networks that connect African Americans to these community projects originate within a church. Research has shown that African Americans have higher church attendance than any other racial and ethnic group in America. In the 2004 General Social Survey, for example, 70 percent of African Americans described themselves as frequent church-attenders compared to 46 percent of Whites and 49 percent of Latinos.[18]

Interestingly, although whites are less likely than blacks to be involved in community projects and other local civic work, they are much more likely than blacks (and Latinos) to report "volunteering." It may be that whites are more likely to choose forms of participation – for example, "service" activities such as serving at a soup kitchen or tutoring a child – that are classically *labeled* "volunteering" by the Corporation and other service institutions, whereas African Americans are more likely to participate in processes that involve expressing interests and organizing for social change. Such processes are more naturally described as "working on community projects" or "addressing community problems."

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[18] Authors' tabulations using the GSS Cumulative Data file (1972-2006) archived by University of California-Berkeley.

Hyman and Levine

Volunteering, by Race and Ethnicity (CPS)
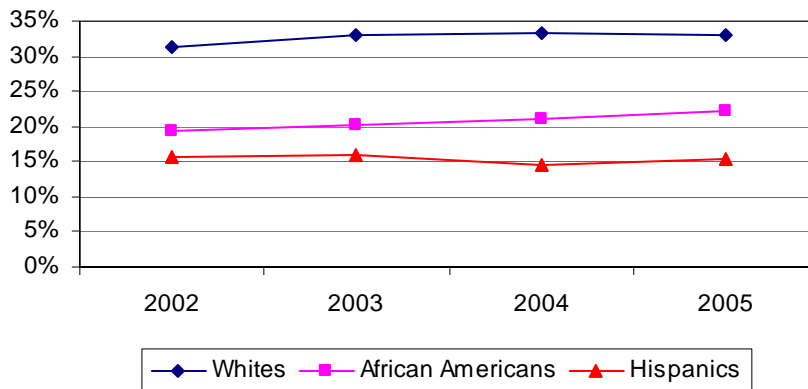
Keeter et al. find, "Much … volunteering is episodic, initiated by third parties or volunteer organizations, and decidedly nonpolitical in motivation."[19] An example would be an annual visit to a soup kitchen or to Habitat for Humanity organized by an employer without much input from the employees. By contrast, "addressing a community problem" seems to require a deeper level of ongoing participation and sometimes a more adversarial or political approach.

A 2007 report by the National Conference on Citizenship found that African Americans are the most philosophically committed to the kind of civic participation that is collaborative and involves discussion and planning as well as action.[20] When offered a list of ways to address community needs, African Americans were the most likely to choose participating in community meetings (there was a 16-point differential on this question compared to whites), and gathering with other citizens to identify problems and solutions. This relatively political, process-oriented approach to engagement is not conventionally considered "volunteering."

Hypothesis: Participation of the disadvantaged in recognized programs will increase if/when those programs can better recognize the various forms (including process- vs. service-oriented) that civic engagement actually assumes in some disadvantaged communities.

Implications: A diverse spectrum of civic activities opens national and community service programming to a wider audience of potential participants and sponsors in disadvantage communities.

Voter behavior also varies by race. Whites are somewhat more likely to vote than African Americans are, but the gap is not as large as one would predict based on differences in wealth and education. But this finding is somewhat nuanced by age.

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[19] Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* (released by CIRCLE, 2002),

[20] National Conference on Citizenship in partnership with CIRCLE and the Saguaro Seminar, *America's Civic Health Index 2007*.

Hyman and Levine

There is no gap at all in voter turnout between *young* whites and *young* African Americans (ages 18-25). Latino citizens vote at lower rates.

Voting, by Race/Ethnicity (CPS)
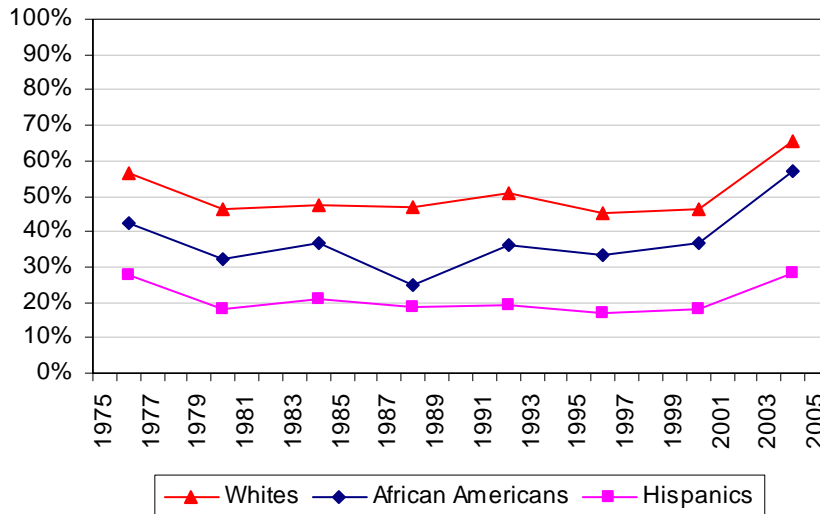
Gender: Gender is also relevant to civic engagement, although gender gaps are not especially large. Women are somewhat more likely to behave in civic ways, such as volunteering, and they also vote at higher rates than men. Men are more involved in some other political activities, such as persuading people to vote and donating money to candidates.[21]

One of the most noteworthy gaps is the relatively low level of participation by adolescent males compared to females. Girls and young women are ahead of boys and young men in most forms of voluntary community engagement.[22] They also outnumber their male counterparts in all school-based extracurricular activities except athletics.[23] Thus the engagement of young boys and young men requires special attention.

Given the differences we observe by education, race, ethnicity, and gender illustrated above, it may be challenging to increase the levels of volunteering and service within disadvantaged populations, especially among Latinos and people with little or no college education. The irony here is that the marginal benefits of service both to communities and individuals will be greatest for these very groups of people who are least advantaged to start with.   For instance, in their evaluation of the Teen Outreach Program (which involved service-learning), Allen and Philliber found, "The program had

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[21] Keeter et al., p. 27; Mark Hugo Lopez, Emily Kirby, and Jared Sagoff, "Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men," CIRCLE Fact Sheet (January 2003, updated July 2005).
[22] Karlo Barrios Marcelo, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Emily Hoban Kirby, "Civic Engagement Among Young Men and Women," CIRCLE Fact Sheet (March 2007).
[23] Catherine E. Freeman, "Trends in Educational Equity of Girls & Women," Education Statistics Quarterly, vol. 6, issue 4, table G, citing statistics from University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, Monitoring the Future study, 2001.

Hyman and Levine

the greatest impact in reducing future pregnancies among the group at highest risk of such pregnancies…. . For academic failure, Teen Outreach demonstrated greater efficacy for youths who had been previously suspended than for those who had not. The program was also found to be more effective for members of racial ethnic minority groups, who were also at greater risk for academic difficulty in this study." [24]

TOWARD A STRATEGY FOR INCREASING PARTICIPAION

Community Service: "Drivers" And "Inhibiters"

To meet this challenge of increasing participation, volunteer and service organizations need to formulate working hypotheses about the major factors that facilitate and/or impede engagement – hypotheses that they can then apply to populations of concern, disadvantaged or otherwise. To generate these hypotheses we pose two fundamental questions. The first is: What is it that determines whether individuals are more or less *willing* to volunteer? The second, and equally basic question, is: What is it that determines whether individuals have more or less *opportunity* to volunteer? We will explore these questions in turn – posing answers for each and generating hypotheses from our answers.

1.   Disparities in Motivation/Willingness to Serve/Volunteer: We posit three major factors that can act as drivers and inhibiters of an individual's willingness to volunteer: availability of discretionary time, personal preferences, and available personal resources. Efforts to increase participation in programs must be grounded in an understanding of both what motivates people to get involved as well as any barriers that might inhibit that involvement

Time As a Resource. Time is the primary resource that one "spends" when engaging in volunteering and service behaviors. Time is a finite, discrete commodity in that it is limited and usually committed to only one activity "at a time." As such, choices must be made about whether or not to do an activity or, at other times, which activity to do. This suggests that time is not a "free" commodity. It has an implicit cost; for instance, the value – psychic or material – that would be derived from an alternate use such as leisure, recreation, a second job, or volunteering. Economists refer to this value as the "opportunity cost" – meaning the value of an alternate opportunity. Theoretically, people are expected to select their highest valued choice and thereby minimize their opportunity costs.

People differ in the amount of time that is truly discretionary. For example, young single mothers with school-aged children who are participating in welfare-to-work programs may simply be unable to commit time to civic engagement. Older, retired persons, on the other hand, may.

Research suggests, however, that busier people are often more civically engaged than people who might appear to be less occupied. For instance, young people who are

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[24] Allen and Philliber (via NIH Public Access), pp. 9-10. Many of the impressive results from positive youth development programs have been observed in highly disadvantaged populations. Dávila and Mora do not find differences in the effects of required service on teenagers who are African American, Latino, and White, but they do find that boys benefit more than girls. This is noteworthy because girls are now achieving at considerably higher levels than girls in high school. Alberto Dávila and Marie T. Mora, "Do Gender and Ethnicity Affect Civic Engagement and Academic Progress?" CIRCLE Working Paper 53 (2007).

Hyman and Levine

enrolled in college full-time and who also work for a salary tend to be more civically engaged than their contemporaries who only take courses *or* who only work.[25] Several explanations are possible. It may be that student-workers are more energetic people. Alternatively, it may be that campuses and the workplaces may act as strong recruitment venues, allowing student-workers to be presented with more volunteer options and offers than their contemporaries.

Robert Putnam finds in general that working more hours does not reduce civic engagement.[26] An old adage holds that if you want something done, you should ask a busy person to do it. The implication is that scarcity of time is not always a barrier to civic participation. Indeed, we suspect that the *perception* of free time rather than the *fact* of free time is the central issue. And we further suspect that the existence of strong preferences is likely an overriding factor that can encourage individuals to "make time" for an activity – volunteering or any other.

<u>Personal Preferences:</u> As alluded to above, a second factor affecting motivation is the individual's "preference" or "taste" – the hierarchical order in which individuals place alternative choices – in this case, options for the use of their time. Preferences often come into play when individuals are considering several options for using their free time (as opposed to reacting to a specific proposal).   These preferences are determined by a myriad of factors that reflect perceptions of the associated material and/or psychic rewards.

One such factor is the **community context**. For instance, some of the typical forms of community service, such as beautifying the natural environment, may be lower priorities in communities that face pressing "institutional" and social challenges, such as poor schools and other public services, high unemployment, and the drug trade and its attendant problems. In such instances, these forms of community service may seem inadequate or irrelevant to the challenges of most concern to local residents. Consequently, preferences for "volunteering" (as typically defined) in these communities may be weaker. In fact, it is possible that the "agenda" of community priorities may be one of the factors involved in our earlier discussion about African-Americans and community projects.

Preferences for volunteering can also be influenced by **family messages** that are conveyed by parents and other family members. Keeter et al. note, "Parents and guardians, even siblings, provide critical role models for civic behavior …. Young people who were raised in homes where someone volunteered (43% of all youth) are highly involved themselves — joining groups and associations, volunteering, wearing buttons, or displaying bumper stickers at rates higher than of those who did not grow up with such examples. Youth with engaged role models are also more attentive to news of politics and government and more likely to participate in boycotts or buycotts." Among young people (ages 15-25) the volunteering rate is 31 percent if someone in their household volunteers, and 15 percent if no one does.[27]

Outside the family, preferences for engagement can also be shaped by **community messages.** There is evidence that preferences for engagement also vary among

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[25] Sharon E. Jarvis, Lisa Montoya & Emily Mulvoy, "The Political Participation of College Students, Working Students and Working Youth," CIRCLE Working Paper 37 (2005).

[26] cite

[27] Keeter et al., pp. 30-31.

Hyman and Levine

communities and cultural groups.   For example, the high rate of involvement in community projects in the African-American community is thought to be partly cultural – arising from powerful norms of "giving back" that were first nurtured in the periods of slavery and segregation.[28] Various groups of Americans are taught and encouraged to participate in different ways and perhaps to different degrees. These differences may help to explain differential rates of civic participation.

In truth, considerations of opportunity costs and preferences occur simultaneously. But how these considerations combine can be complex.

Hypothesis: Persons are more likely to volunteer if they perceive they have time that they can give to volunteer activity but, regardless of these perceptions, a more powerful, potentially overriding driver of volunteer activity may be the individual's preference for the specific volunteer opportunity being presented. Exciting volunteer opportunities can cause individuals to "make time" to participate.

Implications: The availability of an array of volunteer opportunities and an effective program of information dissemination about these opportunities may be critical components of a more proactive approach to increasing volunteerism within disadvantaged populations.

<u>Personal Resources</u>: The third factor we highlight as influencing the willingness, motivation and/or propensity to volunteer is personal resources – assets commanded by individuals that can be put to use in the volunteer activity. Two in particular are important – skills and money.

Verba et al. treat **_knowledge and skills_** as resources. Participating in meetings, contacting officials, and managing associations are skills that people need in order to organize volunteering efforts (which otherwise may not occur) and to engage in other forms of civic engagement, such as community problem-solving. These skills must be learned; they are not inborn.

But opportunities to learn such skills are unevenly distributed and have declined over time. Meetings, for example, are opportunities to learn skills and gain connections to other active citizens. Meeting attendance can be understood as a form of civic engagement,[29] and it may lead to further civic engagement if, for example, participants in a meeting organize a volunteering project. The following graph shows a strong link between education and meeting-attendance. College graduates are much more prone to attend meetings than same-aged young adults with high school educations or less. But the graph also shows that, overall, Americans today are less likely to attend even a single meeting during the course of a given year than they were in the 1970s.

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[28] Richard D. Shingles, "Black Consciousness and Political Participation: The Missing Link," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 75, no. 1. (March 1981), pp. 76-91; Michelle M. Charles, "Giving Back to the Community: African American Inner City Teens and Civic Engagement," CIRCLE Working Paper 38, August 2005.

[29] E.g., in the National Conference on Citizenship's Index of National Civic Health, via www.ncoc.net.

Meeting Attendance, by Social Class
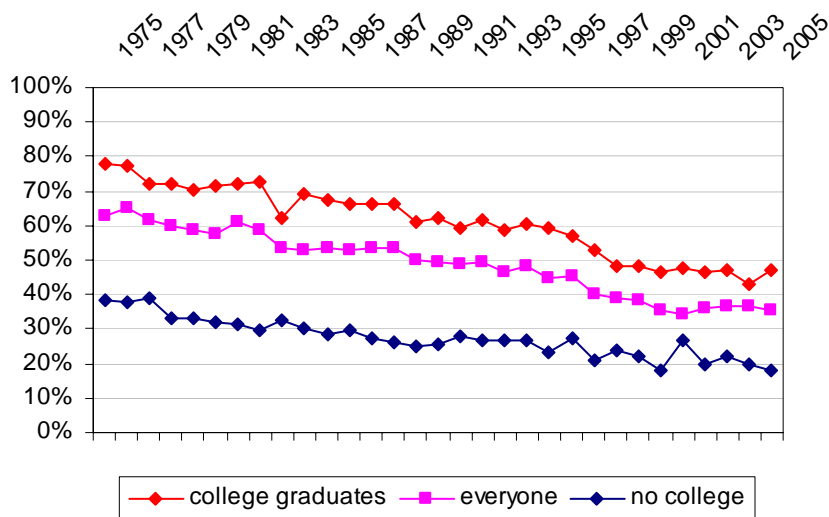
Another venue for civic "training" is education. Public schools are supposed to prepare young people for civic participation. But there are disparities in school-based civic training by income and race. Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh analyzed surveys of more than 2,500 California high school seniors and a nationally representative sample of 9th graders. They found that students in schools with wealthy student bodies are most likely to report having political debates and panel discussions. In addition, African American students are less likely than white students to have civic-focused government classes, current events discussions, and to participate in simulations of civic processes. Latino students also report fewer opportunities to volunteer, participate in simulations, and have discussion in an open classroom climate. These disparities in opportunities to learn civic skills may contribute to differentials in the rates of civic engagement by social class and race.[30]

Hypothesis: Individuals are more likely to volunteer if they feel they have the skills needed to allow them be successful in making a contribution.

Implication: Service and volunteer organizations should focus more attention on increasing opportunities for civic training in conjunction with schools, churches, non-profits and other community agencies in poor and minority neighborhoods.

Civic engagement may also cost *money.* When we recruit volunteers we are not only asking them to commit uncompensated time but we are usually asking them to bear the cost of volunteering – an implicit contribution of cash through the costs of their transportation, meals, childcare, appropriate attire and other expenses that may associate with their participation. This too may contribute to the disparities we observe since these associated cost will be more burdensome to the poor, to the less educated, and to segments of the African-American and Latino communities. Where time and

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[30] Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School," CIRCLE working paper 59 (February 2008).

Hyman and Levine

money are scarce in a household – for example, because members work long hours to pay for basic necessities – it may be harder for people to engage.

Hypothesis: Individuals are more likely to volunteer if the out-of-pocket expenses of community service are minimized.

Implication: Volunteer and service organizations should explore means of covering any ancillary cost associated with its volunteer and service programs or providing increased incentives such as an education award which the Corporation for National and Community Service provides to many of the members that serve in the programs they fund.

2.   Disparities in Opportunities to Serve/Volunteer: The other side of our formulation concerns the extent to which opportunities for volunteering and service are equally distributed across populations and communities. Here we posit that levels of opportunity will be driven or inhibited by issues of community capacity, marketing and information, and recruitment.

Community Capacity: Many low-income and minority communities lack a robust infrastructure of non-governmental organizations capable of mounting, administering and maintaining volunteer programs. The infrastructure that does exist in these communities is more likely to be comprised of organizations oriented to the service needs of residents (e.g., housing and health services, employment and training, etc.) than organizations providing civic opportunities for youth (e.g., Scouts, Camp Fire, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc) and adults (e.g., Lions, Kiwanis, Junior League, Elks, American Legion, etc.)[31] Moreover, because of the high needs and relatively low wealth in these communities, this infrastructure tends to be overtaxed and under-capitalized – suggesting that it contends with severe resource challenges in even meeting the community's service demands.

Some poor communities also lack adequate numbers of adults who can work with children. Daniel Hart and colleagues have found that youth volunteering rates are low in communities that have many children per adult and little wealth. In these communities (often located in inner cities), there is a shortage of adults who might run sports or mentoring programs, and there is not enough wealth to hire professional youth workers, as might be done in a suburb. Volunteering rates are higher in poor communities where there are more adults per child.[32]

Additionally, while volunteer and service programs represent net value-added to both individuals and communities, they are not without their own administrative costs and burdens. To be effective, volunteer organizations must have the people and financial resources to recruit, train, assign and monitor volunteers as well as be accountable to funding sources. These resource needs require that organizations have the capacity to meet them. The lack of a strong volunteer infrastructure may both reduce the number of

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[31] For instance, Lochner et al, p. 1800, find that membership in voluntary associations (fraternal, civic, ethnic, etc) is negatively correlated with poverty rates in Chicago neighborhoods. But the poorest neighborhoods may have various service-oriented nonprofit agencies.

[32] Daniel Hart, Robert Atkins, Patrick Markey, and James Youniss, "Youth Bulges in Communities: The Effects of Age Structure on Adolescent Civic Knowledge and Civic Participation," *Psychological Science*, vol. 15, no. 9 (2004), pp. 591-597; see especially p. 594.

Hyman and Levine

volunteering opportunities as well as reduce the likelihood that persons are asked to volunteer.

Information and Marketing: A second challenge to increasing volunteering and service is to assure that the opportunities for and benefits of participation in programs are well-disseminated across populations and communities so they are more accessible. Information and marketing should describe both available service opportunities and the outcomes and benefits of specific volunteer and service projects in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Recruitment: Most people who volunteer or engage in other ways (including voting) say that they did so because someone asked them to. People often develop durable commitments to service because someone asked them to serve and then the experience changed their values and preferences in favor of continuing to volunteer.[33] In fact, studies find that recruitment is an even more powerful predictor of volunteering than one's attitudes or values prior to serving.

But recruitment levels are not uniform across populations and communities. For example, research suggests that "whites are much more likely to be asked to volunteer than blacks."[34] Still as discussed earlier, African-Americans are more likely to be engaged in community projects than any other racial group – largely as a result of their relationship with the church. What is important, for our purposes, about church membership, for example, is that people are much more likely to volunteer if they belong to organizations or social networks that actively recruit members for civic engagement. Unfortunately, those organizations and networks are themselves unequally distributed, and they are also in decline.

Hypothesis: Americans' propensity to volunteer and otherwise participate in civic work depends in part on the prevalence of local civic groups and institutions that can recruit participants, market opportunities, and develop civic skills in young people.

Implication: More resources should be directed to to supporting nonprofits in low-income communities.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our purpose in this paper has been to explore issues that would increase our understanding of the factors that contribute to variations in service and volunteer rates and to propose strategies that might increase participation among underrepresented groups. A first-order question, in this regard, is: which population should be of most concern? We conclude that among groups participating at lower rates, priority attention should be given to black and Hispanic people in low-income communities and especially persons without college education. Three strategic observations are made about the challenges and opportunities associated with these populations.

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33 Matsuba, K., Hart, D., Atkins, R., & Donnelly, T. (2007). Psychological and social-structural influences on involvement in volunteering. Journal of Research on Personality,41 , 889-907. [Need to check this reference]

34 Marc A. Musick, John Wilson, William B. Bynum Jr. "Race and Formal Volunteering: The Differential Effects of Class and Religion, " *Social Forces*, vol. 78, No. 4, (Jun., 2000), p. 1554

Observation 1: We need to clarify our volunteering and service language in ways that expand to encompass the forms of volunteering and service behaviors typical of these communities – process-oriented community engagement.

Recommendation: Design service programs that are opportunities for collective problem- solving. Disadvantaged people have reasons to prefer problem-solving and meaningful, sustained projects that are aimed at serious issues that they care about. Therefore, programs should be structured so that participants have real opportunities to define and select meaningful problems and then address them collaboratively. If they are designed or advertised as "voluntary service," they will probably be less appealing. As Shirley Sagawa has argued, two factors that attract less advantaged youth to service programs are "meeting real needs" and "providing opportunities for youth leadership."[35]

Observation 2: We need to mount an array of strategies to increase the motivation and willingness to serve with an eye toward: 1) overcoming any reluctance to commit discretionary time, and 2) mitigating the out of pocket costs of participation.

Recommendation: Concerted effort should be made to define areas of service that will appeal to community needs in areas such as education, public safety, youth development, community cleanup and others that reflect the priority concerns of disadvantaged neighborhoods, and additional resources should be provided to sponsor agencies to subsidize the participation costs of volunteers or increase incentives for serving full time.

Observation 3: Third, we need to construct strategies that increase the levels of opportunities available to these communities and that make those opportunities more accessible.

Recommendation: Use service programs to support mediating organizations. One of the barriers to equal participation is the decline of mediating institutions—unions, religious congregations, fraternal associations, and the like—that once were more likely to recruit members who lacked college educations. Consideration should be given to deploying volunteers to strengthen civic groups that reach working-class Americans, especially youth who have left the educational system. If service can be a vehicle to strengthen organizations that involve working-class people in their meetings and other programs, numerous people will be recruited into civil society—more than just the volunteers themselves. This is a powerful form of leverage since many small nonprofit organizations have difficulties competing for or managing federal grants. There is a need to think about training, technical assistance, and streamlined or flexible procedures.

FINAL COMMENT

As stated at the outset, it is important that the benefits of volunteer and service programs be made available to Americans of all backgrounds. One overarching concern regards the disparities we observe by educational background. Individuals, and particularly poor minorities, with less education are less civically engaged. This presents a difficult challenge for national service because of the difficultly inherent in recruiting young

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[35] Summarized in Sejal Hathi and Bob Bhaerrman, "Effective Practices for Engaging At-Risk Youth in Service," Youth Service America (2008), p. 16

Hyman and Levine

adults once they have dropped out of high school or have completed high school without going on to college.

Without such institutional attachments, these young people cannot be reached through counselors and teachers or recruited in their school buildings or on their college campuses. Their peer networks are smaller and more detached from adult educators. Recruiting non-college-bound youth has become even harder in recent decades as other organizations, such as unions and religious congregations, have shrunk. It is therefore crucial to recruit youth while they are all still enrolled in educational institutions.

Invest in K-12 opportunities.   Consequently, and in addition to the recommendations above, we believe that early exposure to an "ethic of service" should be the cornerstone of national service strategies for increasing participation generally but particularly within poor minority neighborhoods where residents may be less likely to pursue higher education.   Service organized by schools seems to have positive effects.[36] This is not necessarily an argument for mandates and requirements, because the *quality* of service opportunities might not keep pace if everyone had to participate. But it is an argument for improving the size, quality, and reach of Learn & Serve America, the Corporation's main program that serves k-12 education.

We hope these explorations and the conclusions, and recommendations drawn from them, prove useful to policy makers and program operators interested in expanding the reach of volunteer and service programs to disadvantaged populations that are currently underserved and/or underrepresented in these programs.

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[36] Edward Metz and James Youniss used *mandatory* service programs to test the hypothesis that volunteers are more civically engaged simply because they are motivated *before* they volunteer. They find that service increases civic engagement even when it is required. "A Demonstration that School-Based Required Service Does not Deter—but Heightens—Volunteerism," *PS: Political Science and Politics, vol. 36* number 2 (2003), pp. 281-286.

Hyman and Levine