



The Leadership Ladder

Fostering Volunteer Engagement
and Leadership at New York Cares®





New York Cares commissioned this report and the survey upon which it is based to evaluate the effectiveness of its volunteer recruitment and retention strategies. The survey research was performed by the Baruch Survey Research Unit.

About New York Cares

New York Cares is New York City's leading volunteer organization. Founded in 1987, New York Cares develops and manages volunteer programs that enable 43,000 volunteers each year to serve on hands-on volunteer projects benefiting social service agencies, homeless shelters, public schools, and other deserving organizations. Last year, New York Cares volunteers helped 450,000 New Yorkers in need. For more information about New York Cares, visit www.nycares.org.

About the Author

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About the Research Director

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Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Executive Summary	v
Volunteer Management Challenges and Strategies	1
The Volunteer Engagement Scale SM	12
Survey Implications and Recommendations	21
Glossary	26
Appendix of Tables	27



Introduction

My first interaction with New York Cares was after 9/11 when Americans from across the country were streaming into New York City to help those in need. Over the next seven years, I would have the opportunity to see the wonderful work of New York City's leading organization that plans and manages volunteer projects. I saw this work firsthand around Ground Zero, throughout the boroughs of New York City, and on Ellis Island.

The innovation and creativity of New York Cares continues. With its new study, "The Leadership Ladder – Fostering Volunteer Engagement and Leadership at New York Cares," New York Cares takes the next important step in sharpening efforts to recruit, mobilize, train, engage, and retain volunteers to meet important needs. It also makes the deliberate connection between volunteering and deeper civic engagement, two traits that have defined us as a people since the founding of our nation. As importantly, the design and implementation of the Volunteer Engagement Scale provides new tools to measure results.

New York Cares continues to lead the way, and the result will be more Americans having more opportunities to do what they do best – give back and connect their personal lives to the story of the nation.

Sincerely,

John M. Bridgeland
Civic Enterprises, LLC



Introduction

More than two decades ago, a group of New Yorkers created an organization, New York Cares, to offer new possibilities for how people volunteered and were involved in their community. Over the last twenty-two years, New York Cares has been at the forefront of reinventing volunteer and civic engagement. Their work has literally rippled out over the country and become a model for organizations across the world. New York Cares helped inspire HandsOn Network, which now includes more than 360 affiliates and is the lead business unit of Points Of Light Institute. These HandsOn Affiliates, including New York Cares, are creating innovative pathways for citizen-centered problem solving and redefining the possibilities of citizenship in the 21st century.

It's fitting that a milestone study of volunteer engagement emerged from New York Cares. New York Cares continues as a vanguard leader in the civic arena. This study demonstrates how a nonprofit can take evaluation and research and apply it to create demonstrable and significant new impact. The study is a major contribution to the field and offers a unique and actionable set of learnings that can and should influence the larger nonprofit sector. The study implemented a creative approach to measure how and why volunteers become more committed to organizations – and perhaps even more importantly, retained by them – by incorporating leadership development opportunities into core programming. These efforts to foster leadership through volunteer programming ultimately resulted in dramatic increases in volunteer recruitment, retention, and improved service delivery. The study also introduces an important new way of measuring volunteer involvement called the Volunteer Engagement Scale. This innovation has the potential to help organizations that use volunteers think strategically about their long-term engagement and impact in communities.

This is a terrific report that demonstrates how research can be applied to great result in a single organization, but is important to the larger sector in its lessons for how personalizing and enhancing the volunteer experience can create new levels of engagement and leadership that can truly be measured.

Michelle Nunn

CEO, Points of Light Institute
Co-Founder, HandsOn Network



Executive Summary

What motivates people to volunteer? What keeps them coming back? Are there ways to move volunteers from participating episodically to becoming fully engaged community leaders? And is there a relationship between volunteering and other forms of civic engagement?

Answering these questions is a top priority for New York Cares®, one of the nation's leading volunteer organizations.

Founded in 1987, New York Cares has become one of the country's largest local nonprofit volunteer organizations. In 2003, New York Cares launched a new online system that, for the first time, allowed it to cull highly detailed volunteer data. These data challenged the organization's long-held assumptions that its projects were filled to capacity by showing that nearly 30% of volunteer slots were going unfilled.

This finding and others prompted New York Cares to probe more deeply into its operations to understand how and why people were volunteering with the organization. Research uncovered several factors contributing to volunteers' behavior, such as misperceptions about the application process, lackluster orientations, and a desire for more personal contact.

The organization made a decision to tackle these issues head on. The goal: To significantly increase recruitment and retention rates that would result in more volunteers, as well as more volunteers with the capacity and desire to become deeply engaged community leaders.

The first step New York Cares took was to make this effort – and the volunteer – a primary organizational focus. The changes that New York Cares implemented led to significant results:

- **Improved marketing and communications programs**, including an enhanced Web site that was more user-friendly and engaging to volunteers, had more efficient registration processes, and better promoted "Hot Projects" in need of more volunteers.

The result: In 2008, more than 32,000 people, on average, received a monthly e-mail newsletter featuring volunteer projects and urging them to volunteer, and more than 19,000 people received a weekly Hot Projects e-mail (increases over 2003 of 158% and 81%, respectively). Full volunteer projects increased by 181.6% from 2004 to 2008.

- **Revamped volunteer orientation process**, including personalized e-mails, more inspiring content highlighting volunteers' potential impact, increased staff support, and targeted outreach to volunteers with an interest in specific social issues or geographic areas.

The result: The number of new volunteers who joined New York Cares increased by 76.5% from 2004 to 2008; the percent of orientation attendees who signed up for a project within one year of orientation (project sign-up rate) jumped from 45% to 70%, respectively.



- **Ongoing and personalized communication** with every volunteer during each stage of their New York Cares experience, as well as public recognition and rewards for volunteer service.
The result: From 2004 to 2008, the average number of projects per volunteer rose from 4.5 to 5.3. This increase enabled New York Cares to fill 10,000 more volunteer slots in 2008 than would have been filled had the average remained the same.
- **Leadership development opportunities** for volunteers ready to deepen their engagement, including encouraging volunteers to lead projects for New York Cares, providing education, training, and other leadership opportunities, and celebrating exceptional volunteer leaders through public recognition.
The result: The number of New York Cares volunteer project leaders (Team Leaders) grew by 84.3% from 2004 to 2008. Eighty-eight (88) percent of Team Leaders are now in at least their second year of service, and 67% have done three or more years. The increase in Team Leaders led to more New Yorkers served – from 250,000 in 2003 to 450,000 in 2008.

Did New York Cares' new strategies also help retain volunteers? To better define goals for volunteer engagement and retention efforts, New York Cares created a Volunteer Engagement ScaleSM (VES), which measures whether and to what degree volunteers' commitment increases over time.

In 2007, New York Cares next commissioned a study that used the VES and the organization's database of information on more than 90,000 volunteers who had registered since 1997. The study¹ was designed to find out who volunteers were, what initially motivated them to volunteer and continue to volunteer, whether they became more deeply engaged, i.e., did they move up the leadership ladder, and whether there was a relationship between volunteering and other forms of civic engagement, including political participation.

Among the study's specific findings:

- Volunteers' interest in volunteering stemmed from wanting to help their fellow New Yorkers and make their communities better places to live, rather than from a moral commitment or workplace/institutional requirement.
- The reasons volunteers gave for staying engaged over time were the same as their reasons for initially becoming involved: To help their fellow New Yorkers and make their communities better places to live.
- Volunteers who became highly engaged and moved up the leadership ladder believed that their volunteering made a difference and expressed satisfaction with New York Cares.
- The strongest factors in determining whether volunteers became more involved over time were the same as for volunteers who were already highly engaged: their satisfaction with New York Cares and the belief that their service made a difference in the community.
- Volunteers who were higher on the VES had higher levels of life satisfaction and were more trusting of others.

¹ Study results are based on data from a twelve-month time period (January 1 to December 31, 2006) and records from 3,367 individuals.



- Volunteers who were higher on the VES were more politically engaged, i.e., they registered to vote/voted, wrote to newspapers and/or local politicians, and attended political events/demonstrations.

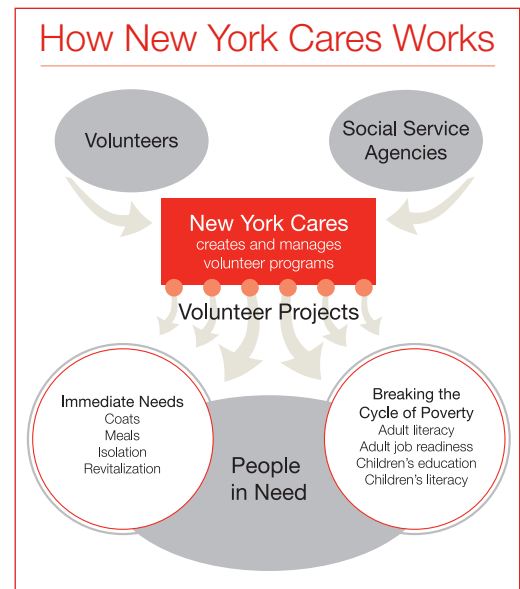
This study offers volunteer organizations important information that can help shape more effective volunteer recruitment and retention efforts. It also provides volunteer organizations with a new measurement tool – the VES – that categorizes volunteers according to their commitment level and assesses their movement from episodic to more engaged participation. The tool also can be used to help organizations assess how successful they have been in encouraging deeper commitment among volunteers. And it has helped to unearth new evidence that moving volunteers up the leadership ladder may increase the likelihood that they will be more politically engaged and serve as community leaders.

New York Cares’ Model

The following study is based on research and evaluation of New York Cares’ model of volunteering, which was created twenty-two years ago and inspired the creation of HandsOn Network and hundreds of affiliate organizations around the world.

How New York Cares Works

New York Cares provides comprehensive volunteer services to 1,000 nonprofits, city agencies, public schools, and other organizations each year. It designs and manages programs that enable more than 43,000 volunteers to give back, reaching 450,000 men, women, and children in need across New York City’s five boroughs. Each New York Cares Program Manager manages a caseload of approximately thirty organizations, working with them to identify critical needs they cannot address through their current resources. New York Cares creates volunteer projects to address those needs; then recruits, trains, and deploys teams of volunteers to deliver the programs.



New York Cares’ team-based volunteering, led by specially trained volunteer Team Leaders, supports individuals throughout their volunteer experience. Volunteer projects span a broad range of social issues related to poverty, including education, homelessness, hunger, unemployment, and more. While the organization has its roots in providing flexible volunteer opportunities (i.e., episodic), today it also offers a range of long- and short-term projects that enable volunteers to participate according to their interest and availability.



Section I: Volunteer Management Challenges and Strategies

Americans have been volunteering at historically high rates for several years – a trend that seemed to be unending. Recent studies, however, suggest otherwise.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, during 2005, the national volunteering rate dropped from 28.8% in 2005 to 26.2% in 2007.² A recent *Chronicle of Philanthropy* story indicated that nonprofits lose roughly one out of every three volunteers per year, costing them an estimated \$30 billion annually.³

This has sent nonprofits scrambling to recruit volunteers who often serve as the backbone of organizations in need of unpaid, highly-skilled labor. But recruiting volunteers is only the first step. Retaining them is another matter. As the *Chronicle* notes, “Some experts say that with all the perennial hand-wringing over the problem of volunteer recruitment, perhaps not enough attention has been paid to the grooming of... volunteers,” especially long-term volunteers.

As one of the most successful nonprofit volunteer organizations in the country, New York Cares has long understood that recruitment and retention are the cornerstone of successful efforts to engage people in volunteering. But like many nonprofits, it has grappled with finding the most effective ways to achieve that goal.

To tackle this issue, in 2004, New York Cares began developing a systematic and comprehensive process designed not only to increase the number of volunteers but to ensure their ongoing participation in more meaningful and substantive ways. The ultimate goal? To move volunteers from episodic participants to dedicated community and civic leaders ready, willing, and able to mobilize others in making New York City a better place to live and work.

That planning has paid off. In just a few short years, New York Cares has:

- Increased its volunteer numbers and sign-up rates to unprecedented levels. From 2004 to 2008, the number of volunteers rose from 27,000 to 43,000 – a 59% increase. During the same time period, retention⁴ rates increased by 12.7%, from 4.5 projects per volunteer in 2004 to 5.3 projects in 2008.⁵ Volunteer activation rates, i.e., new volunteers who attended at least one project after orientation, grew from 45% to nearly 70%.
- Attracted a significantly larger and more diverse base of nonprofit partners, for which it plans and manages high-quality volunteering opportunities. From 2004 to 2008, the number of nonprofit partners grew from 804 to 990 – a 23% rise.
- Developed the Volunteer Engagement Scale (VES) – one of the first instruments created to codify and measure different levels of volunteering – and then used that scale as part of a rigorous and comprehensive research study of 3,367 volunteers (respondents from a sample of more than 23,000 active

2 Corporation for National and Community Service, *Issue Brief: Volunteering in America, An Overview of Corporation Research*, Washington, D.C.: CCNS. Retrieved on 1/09/09 at <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov>.

3 Frazier, E. “Taking the Long View,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, February 2, 2008.

4 Retention is defined as volunteers who sign up for another project after completing at least one. The primary indicator used is the average number of projects per volunteer per year (excluding single-day, large-scale events).

5 Fiscal years (July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007 in this instance) are used throughout this report unless noted otherwise.



volunteers⁶) that revealed factors that motivate – and do not motivate – volunteers to participate over the long term. The study also examined whether and to what extent it is possible to help volunteers move up the leadership ladder – from episodic participation to deeper civic involvement and community leadership – and how New York Cares could facilitate that move through targeted programming and services.

- Created a unique Leadership Development Program to respond to volunteers' interest in deepening their commitment to, and involvement in, their communities.

These results are not a fluke; they are the direct consequence of building organizational capacity toward implementing and delivering carefully designed and focused strategies that now appear to be increasingly effective. But what are these approaches? What do they look like and how do they work? And what do the data show regarding their effectiveness?

New York Cares meets pressing community needs by mobilizing caring New Yorkers in volunteer service.

The following offers some answers that New York Cares believes may be helpful for other nonprofits to consider in their own efforts to recruit and retain volunteers – in ways that strengthen their leadership abilities and capacity to serve as civic leaders in communities, regions, states, and the country.

What is New York Cares?

Established in 1987 by a small group of friends eager to make a difference in New York City – and finding no single organization offering flexible, hands-on volunteer opportunities – New York Cares has become the city's premier organization focused on volunteering. Each year, New York Cares brings much-needed volunteer support to nearly 1,000 human service agencies, public schools, and other nonprofit organizations across New York City's five boroughs. More than 43,000 people volunteered their time and energy through New York Cares last year, while thousands of others contributed to its annual Coat Drive – an event that has become a signature campaign of the organization.

These and other efforts, which reach more than 450,000 disadvantaged New Yorkers annually, reflect New York Cares' simple yet vitally important mission: **To meet pressing community needs by mobilizing caring New Yorkers in volunteer service.**

To carry out this mission, New York Cares:

- **Creates year-round volunteer opportunities.** In a typical month, New York Cares plans and manages 1,000 volunteer projects addressing a wide variety of community needs and, thanks to a flexible scheduling process, allows even the busiest New Yorker the opportunity to make a difference.
- **Creates citywide service days.** Among these are two annual – and much publicized – events: New York Cares Day and Hands On New York Day, through which more than 14,000 volunteers work to revitalize schools, parks, gardens, and public spaces across the city.

⁶ This population comprised adults who had volunteered at New York Cares at least once during the twelve-month time period from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006.



- **Encourages corporate social responsibility.** New York Cares works closely with many of the city's leading companies to plan volunteer opportunities for their employees, which help them take a leadership role in meeting pressing social needs.
- **Prepares New York for disasters and crises.** New York Cares' Disaster Response Program helps to ensure that significant numbers of volunteers can be quickly and effectively mobilized in the event of a disaster.
- **Supports youth service.** New York Cares' award-winning Youth Service Clubs offer meaningful community service experiences to teens in more than thirty underserved schools and communities, helping to enhance students' leadership potential and academic success.
- **Organizes holiday gift and coat drives.** These annual holiday programs have provided more than one million coats and 300,000 holiday gifts since their inception to men, women, and children who would otherwise have gone without.
- **Promotes leadership by using volunteers as Team Leaders.** Every project New York Cares undertakes is overseen by a Team Leader who has volunteered on at least three projects, applies for the position, and participates in a rigorous training program. Team Leaders are responsible for planning and managing ongoing projects that run regularly for several months. Volunteers are also eligible to become Site Captains, who oversee work at one location on large-scale days of service.

"I can't say enough in favor of New York Cares. They helped immensely. New York City needs New York Cares."

- Mercedes Ruiz,
Eldridge Street Tenants Association

The Challenge: Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers

In 2003, New York Cares faced a challenge that many organizations face: Recruiting and activating a sufficient number of volunteers to meet the growing needs of understaffed and under-resourced nonprofits. The goal of meeting that challenge emerged after New York Cares discovered that its longstanding perception of its fullness rates (the percentage of volunteers who volunteered during a given month divided by the available number of available project slots) – as 100% (and even more) – was inaccurate.

This realization grew out of data revealed by a significant enhancement New York Cares made to its Web site that same year. By linking the Web site's functionality directly to the organization's volunteer database, it was able to automatically track sign-up rates and project participation over time. What it found was that fullness rates actually were below 100%, with an average of 30% of slots unfilled during some time periods. Sign-up rates after orientation were also less than originally thought, hovering around 45%.

Determined to reverse this trend and increase volunteer participation rates, New York Cares worked with a consulting firm on a pro bono basis to undertake a comprehensive situational analysis to pinpoint factors that influenced these rates. First, there was a widespread assumption among the public that New York Cares



was “overbooked” and “hard to get into,” which dissuaded many would-be volunteers from applying. Second, many potential volunteers found the orientation sessions required before participation to be didactic, dry, and uninspiring, which led to a disinterest in following through. Finally, a significant percentage of volunteers who did participate in events lost interest eventually because there were few programs or activities designed to respond to their needs and/or recognize their leadership.

The Strategy: A Proactive Approach

Based on these findings, New York Cares embarked on a five-pronged strategy of modifying existing practices and developing new ones that focused on increasing recruitment and retention rates. This strategy flowed from a decision by the organization’s Board and senior leadership to target – at least initially – the volunteer and his/her experience with New York Cares (rather than on the larger community or other stakeholders). By focusing on the volunteer, New York Cares was able to establish a clear and concrete starting point in its efforts to strengthen volunteering across the city. It also allowed the organization to streamline decisions about where its limited resources could be directed most effectively and establish clearer benchmarks and outcome goals.

“It’s refreshing to see how many people are committed to improving the world. It’s a boost of energy... and is the best ‘tired’ you can feel.”

- Volunteer

Pinpointing the target audience, however, required a major shift in the way in which New York Cares operated – from being reactive to proactive. Traditionally, operating under the assumption that its projects were full, the organization had operated with a mindset of responding to people who indicated an interest in volunteering. Now, the organization would be more focused on reaching out to potential volunteers across all five city boroughs, supporting and inspiring them, and providing them with incentives to continue their commitment over time.

This proactive stance extended to New York Cares’ nonprofit partner agencies. In the past, New York Cares had received requests from agencies in need of volunteer assistance and then planned volunteer projects in response. Under the new plan, New York Cares would continue to respond to these requests but would also reach out to agencies in communities, especially those most in need of resources, and help develop programs that meet their needs and recruit volunteers living in those communities as well as motivate volunteers from other neighborhoods to travel there.

In short, New York Cares turned the traditional notion of “if we build it, they will come” on its head. Under that framework, programs are developed under the assumption that people will respond to and fill them. Instead, New York Cares began focusing on recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of volunteers to fill available programs first and then developing new initiatives.

Using the five strategies outlined on the following pages, New York Cares set as its ultimate goal: Attracting 40,000 volunteers by 2010 and raising sign-up rates by at least 25%.



Strategy One: Improving Marketing to, and Communications with, Potential Volunteers

The first step toward this goal was enhancing New York Cares' Web site, one of the essential tools the organization used to attract potential volunteers to projects. Prior to 2003, New York Cares had used the Web site primarily as a platform to provide the public with information about the organization and upcoming projects. Now, the organization would link the Web site to its volunteer database, which allowed for quick and accurate data about who signed up for which project, as well as who was interested in becoming a Site Captain or Team Leader. It also gave New York Cares valuable information about which projects were most popular among would-be volunteers.

From the volunteers' perspective, the newly-designed Web site provided much more detailed information about upcoming projects, including "Hot Projects"—events that were at risk of being cancelled for lack of a sufficient number of volunteers (defined as less than 50% of slots filled). A Hot Projects list was compiled each week after surveying all project Team Leaders who were asked to designate events most in need of volunteers.

During 2004, New York Cares continued to enhance the site's functionality. Volunteers, for example, could now register for projects immediately after orientation through the site. Once registered for a project, volunteers, who had always received an e-mail confirming their participation, would now receive one that was more personalized and welcoming. Volunteers' information was then immediately sent to project Team Leaders, who, consequently, now had at their fingertips a list of participants, allowing for easier tracking. Team Leaders – all of whom are volunteers themselves – were also able to report attendance and impact data for each project. In addition, the organization invested in a significant graphical redesign to market the organization and projects in more inspiring, compelling ways. These design enhancements and the backend database functionality make it easier for volunteers to find and be inspired by projects.

Today, more than 32,000 people across New York City receive the monthly calendar of events and 19,000 people per week receive the "Hot Projects" list by e-mail. This strategy – and others focused on improving and diversifying communications to reach a broader audience – has led to a significant increase in the fullness rate of New York Cares' projects.

The result: Volunteer projects in which all slots were filled increased by 181.6% from 2004 to 2008.

Shifting Priorities

1. Strategy: Improve Communications with Potential Volunteers.
Result: Full volunteer projects increased 181.6% from 2004 to 2008.
2. Strategy: Revamp Volunteer Orientation.
Result: Seventy-seven (77) percent increase in new volunteers from 2004 to 2008.
3. Strategy: Communicate with Every Volunteer.
Result: Average projects per volunteer rose 12.7% from 2004 to 2008.
4. Strategy: Move Volunteers Up The Leadership Ladder.
Result: The Team Leader corps has grown by 84.3% from 2004 to 2008. Eighty-eight (88) percent of Team Leaders are in at least their second year of service in that position. Sixty-seven (67) percent are in at least their third year of service.
5. Strategy: Increase Organizational Capacity.
Result: Filled volunteer slots increased 101% from 2004 to 2008, while new volunteers only increased by 77%.



Strategy Two: Revamping Volunteer Orientation

One of the factors that New York Cares found was contributing to the gap between volunteer sign-up and actual participation was that its traditional orientation was seen as overly instructive and less than inspiring. Participants were also “overwhelmed by the number of choices” they were given during the forum and “didn’t know what to do after leaving.” Orientation attendees did not necessarily feel that their help was needed or valued. Moreover, there were few strategies or enough staff members to send that message after orientation.

Facilitators opened orientations with a clear statement of the overarching goal: To encourage each attendee to commit to participating immediately.

Based on this feedback – and the organization’s decision to make the volunteer its primary focus – New York Cares dramatically revamped its volunteer orientation to respond to volunteers’ needs, and in turn, encourage more individuals to participate in one or more service projects. The redesigned orientation included several new components:

- All of those who signed up for an orientation immediately received a confirmation e-mail that would ignite excitement about volunteering.
- Upon attending the orientation session, participants were given a comprehensive and contextual overview of New York City’s most pressing needs and issues and the important role that volunteers play in addressing them.
- Facilitators opened orientations with a clear statement of the overarching goal: To encourage each attendee to commit to participating immediately. The message behind the orientation was: “If you don’t know what you’re going to do when you leave this room, we want you to stay and talk with us.”
- At special Project Sign-up orientations, a list of events that Team Leaders and staff members believed would be of particular interest to first-time volunteers was distributed. Volunteers were able to sign up immediately at orientation. This led to a jump in the sign-up rate at these orientations to more than 80%, on average.
- Follow-up with all orientation attendees was significantly improved. Within one week of attending an orientation, participants received a welcome e-mail thanking them and encouraging them to sign up to volunteer. Included in these e-mails was a list of projects that would be interesting and/or appropriate for new volunteers.

In addition to changing the sessions’ content, New York Cares diversified the types and locations of orientation it provided to make it easier for people – and for people with different interests – to attend. Sites for holding standard orientations (about 30-35 people) were expanded to different venues such as public auditoriums, community centers, and religious institutions. Individuals interested in specific issues such as



homelessness, health care, education, or hunger were able to attend orientations that offered information about these issues and related volunteer opportunities. An express model (Orientation Express) that allowed volunteers to be oriented at the actual project site before the project began was expanded to more projects in more boroughs. New York Cares also expanded the reach of its orientations by holding sessions in communities in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, which made them more accessible to volunteers' homes or workplaces.

The result: New volunteers increased by 76.5% from 6,282 in 2004 to 11,090 in 2008. One-year sign-up rates jumped to 70% from 45% during the same time period.

Strategy Three: Communicating With Every Volunteer

No one likes to be treated like a number or go unrecognized for the time and energy they give to their communities – and that includes volunteers. While this may seem to be common sense, it is easy to forget in the whirlwind of day-to-day demands that many volunteering organizations, including New York Cares, face.

Designing personalized communication for each volunteer, therefore, became a top priority in New York Cares' efforts to retain volunteers. To meet this goal, the organization developed a multi-tiered program to recognize and reward every volunteer who participated in a New York Cares event and at every level (see box below).

"I'm new to New York City and see how it would be easy in such a big place to just do your own thing. But after working with New York Cares, I see the problems here and want to do something about them."
-Volunteer

The result: From 2004 to 2008, the average number of projects per volunteer rose from 4.5 to 5.3. This increase enabled New York Cares to fill 10,000 more volunteer slots in 2008 than would have been filled had the average remained the same.

Volunteer Recognition Program

The first project: Volunteers are personally called and thanked, and asked about their experience. They are also asked for feedback, ideas, or any thoughts they have about it and the process overall.

Five projects: Volunteers receive an e-mail thanking them for their commitment and letting them know that they can apply to become a Team Leader.

Ten projects: Volunteers are sent a letter from the Executive Director, thanking them for their commitment.

Twenty-five projects: Volunteers are sent a letter from the Director of Volunteer Relations thanking them for their commitment.

Fifty projects: Volunteers are sent a letter from the Executive Director and added to New York Cares' scrolling honor roll on the Web site.

One hundred-plus projects: Volunteers receive all of the above, as well as a modest gift to recognize their service.

Five or ten years with New York Cares: Volunteers receive a handwritten card from the Director of Volunteer Relations.



Strategy Four: Moving Volunteers Up the Leadership Ladder

Many volunteers, after participating over time, want to go further with their commitment to service and volunteering but have few opportunities to do so. This is especially true with volunteers who become project Team Leaders but lack the support or training to strengthen their leadership skills and abilities.

Interviews with Team Leaders, in fact, revealed that many were frustrated about not having access to leadership development training and/or the chance to learn more about the issues on which their projects were focused. They also wanted more opportunities to network with their peers. Some said that they would like more recognition for their efforts.

When Team Leaders felt supported, they would be more satisfied and committed. And when Team Leaders felt satisfied and committed, so would their volunteers.

Recognizing that Team Leaders often serve as the public face of New York Cares and that the experiences of volunteers working under the guidance of these individuals can and do influence volunteers' future participation, the organization created a Leadership Development Program exclusively for Team Leaders. The program emerged from analyses indicating that Team Leaders may unwittingly have been contributing to decreased volunteer retention rates because they had tended to focus more on getting the job done, rather than engaging and inspiring volunteers to participate over the long-term. In short, they had served more as managers, rather than as leaders who could inspire other volunteers to deepen their commitment to volunteering.

Considering all of these factors, New York Cares' new Leadership Development Program focused on leveraging Team Leaders' commitment to the organization by offering them more responsibility, as well as education, training, and leadership opportunities. The assumption was that when Team Leaders felt supported, they would be more satisfied and committed. And when Team Leaders felt satisfied and committed, so would their volunteers.

Raising the Expectations of Team Leaders by Focusing Less on Project Administration and More on Leadership

In 2005, New York Cares stipulated that a primary expectation of Team Leaders would be improving volunteer retention rates not only by administering the projects in which volunteers were involved, but also by inspiring and supporting volunteers in ways that would drive their future participation. This message was conveyed to would-be Team Leaders at the onset of a significantly redesigned training protocol.

The training stressed that Team Leaders would be expected to call or e-mail volunteers before each project to encourage them to attend, provide them with information, and establish a rapport; greet volunteers at the project; and create a welcoming atmosphere and team environment. Team Leaders would also make themselves available to answer questions volunteers had during the experience, thank them personally for their participation, and follow up with them after the project's conclusion. Most important, Team Leaders were asked to become – and became – a more integral part of the New York Cares organizational project management team by providing substantive feedback about the projects and recommending improvements.



Overhauling the Team Leader Application and Training Process

New York Cares realized that if volunteers were to take leadership seriously, it must convey a stronger sense of purpose and commitment in every step of its Team Leader recruitment and training process. Much of this process had been in place prior to 2003; what changed was a more proactive and deliberate approach to reaching out to individuals who have the potential to become Team Leaders. The organization also began identifying volunteers living or working in neighborhoods with the most pressing needs and asking them to consider becoming Team Leaders. The Team Leader induction process was also modified so that volunteers must complete a formal application, interview with a New York Cares staff member, undergo a background check, attend a three-hour training, and shadow a more experienced Team Leader.

“New York Cares’ training of the Team Leaders is very good so I keep coming back. They make me feel comfortable and important and teach us how to get even more involved. I feel appreciated!”
-Volunteer

In addition to cultivating and educating Team Leaders, New York Cares also recognizes and rewards their commitment by:

- Providing incentives and rewards for increased leadership capacity – not only as a volunteer but, ultimately, as a leader in the broader community.
- Holding an annual conference that gives all Team Leaders the opportunity to meet one another and New York Cares staff members, network, and share strategies. Each conference focuses on an issue of particular importance in New York City such as poverty, housing, or HIV/AIDS. Team Leaders have the opportunity to hear from leading experts, as well as learn more about how the projects in which they are involved help to address those issues.
- Establishing a Team Leader Council, a body of Team Leaders that meets bi-monthly to advise New York Cares staff on ways to strengthen the Leadership Development Program. The council also develops strategies to better support Team Leaders, makes recommendations to improve the Web site, offers ideas about volunteer management tools, and helps to plan the annual conference.
- Providing educational workshops and seminars that, in partnership with institutions such as Barnard College and the New School University, help to advance Team Leaders’ knowledge about program areas and their professional development. These events focus on social issues and feature prominent speakers, who offer expertise and insight into topics ranging from poverty and homelessness, to child welfare and public education.
- Publicly recognizing Team Leaders through an annual leadership celebration event that attracts hundreds of volunteers and representatives from partner organizations. At the event, Team Leaders are personally recognized for their dedication and commitment through an awards ceremony.
- Inviting Team Leaders to periodic informal gatherings to mingle and get to know one another, share best practices, ask questions of staff, and offer advice to peers.



- Providing additional educational resources on the New York Cares Web site. Information on the site includes sample e-mails and other communications with volunteers, the Team Leader Manual, tips for working with particular populations, and links to other sites and resources.

The result: The Team Leader corps has grown by 84.3% from 2004 to 2008. Eighty-eight (88) percent of Team Leaders are in at least their second year of service in that position. Sixty-seven (67) percent are in at least their third year of service.

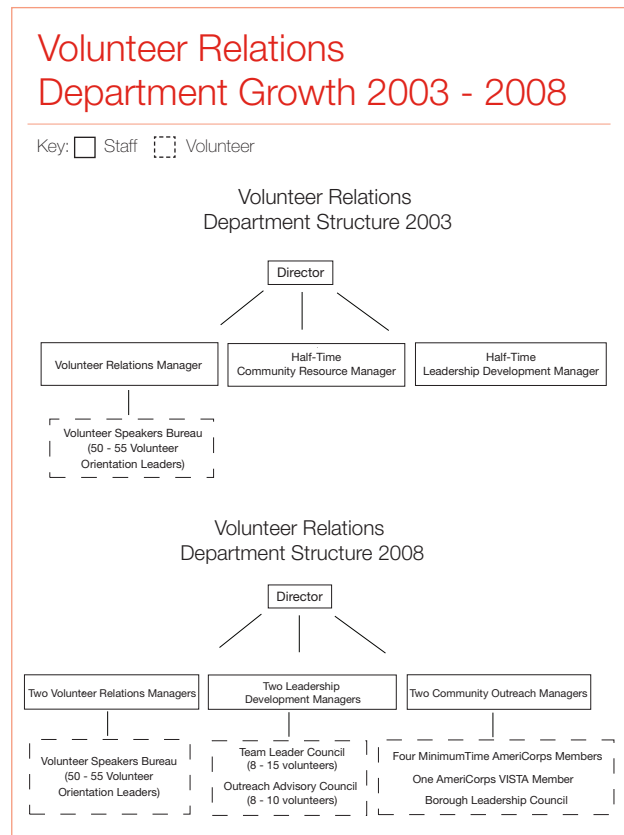
Strategy Five: Directing New Resources to Significantly Increasing Staff and Organizational Capacity.

None of these efforts was undertaken without first realizing that to be successful, New York Cares was going to have to dedicate significant financial and staffing resources toward ensuring it had the capacity to meet the goals it had set for itself. At the top of the list was adding staff members to what was initially a small department responsible for reaching out to volunteers.

With the decision to take a more personal and individualized approach to recruiting and supporting volunteers through a new orientation process, leadership development training, educational sessions, and many other activities, New York Cares had to staff up. And so it did – moving from three full-time and one part-time employee in its Volunteer Relations Department in 2004 to seven full-time employees by 2008.

This included three new positions, including one position focused exclusively on community outreach, allowing New York Cares to better recruit and train volunteers in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. One additional Volunteer Relations Manager was hired to provide post-orientation follow-up to volunteers as well as to support outreach to potential volunteers. A full-time staff member was also added to oversee the newly-expanded Leadership Development Program. The two Leadership Development Managers train approximately 400 new Team Leaders each year, while also providing leadership training, opportunities to share best practices, workshops on topics such as conflict management, and educational sessions on a variety of community issues.

The result: New York Cares filled 65,937 volunteer slots in 2008, a 101% increase from 2004, while only increasing new volunteer recruitment by 77% in the same period.





Section II: The Volunteer Engagement ScaleSM

Recruiting and Retaining a Record Number of Volunteers: So What?

Numbers and head counts are important but insufficient when it comes to determining the motivations and reasons people volunteer, and whether or how volunteers' experiences prompt them to participate again – not only as volunteers but, eventually, as community leaders deeply engaged in broader civic life.

To date, most research has focused on volunteering rates, with little attention given to examining whether there are relationships between volunteering and civic engagement, leadership, and other factors. The relatively few studies that have been conducted to determine such relationships have usually been inconclusive and/or found little or no relationship among or between factors. Other studies have focused primarily on volunteers' satisfaction with their experiences, a measure that can be limited – or fail – to link this factor with whether and to what extent they continue to serve over time.

This has made volunteering open to criticism that it is a “nice thing to do” but does not necessarily lead to deeper civic engagement. This debate has continued to churn in the civic engagement field, leaving many of those who care about volunteering frustrated about not having access to hard data that goes beyond head counts or assessing whether volunteering is episodic or regular.

In 2007, New York Cares undertook an unprecedented effort to tackle that gap – one that emerged from the organization's desire to understand more about its volunteers, what keeps individuals coming back, and most important, what moves them from volunteering once in a while to wanting to do more as leaders in their communities.

Two groups of volunteers had always stood out as clear cohorts and served as brackets for the volunteer participation continuum New York Cares was attempting to develop: 1) individuals who had attended a volunteer orientation but had not yet signed up for a volunteer project, and 2) individuals who had been involved with New York Cares for several years in leadership positions. What was not as clear was information about the thousands of people who fell somewhere in between these extremes. Who were they? And were there distinctions that could be made as to their different levels of participation?

Answering these questions required a two-step process:

1. Conducting a rigorous analysis of 27,000 prospective and active volunteers from New York Cares' database that has tracked and monitored more than 90,000 volunteers who have registered with the organization since 1997. The focus of this analysis was twofold:
 - To measure background characteristics, motivations, satisfaction, and other attitudes that could help predict volunteer engagement levels with New York Cares;
 - To measure possible social and psychological outcomes of volunteering, specifically, life satisfaction, civic engagement, political participation, community attachment, and social capital (defined as trust in others).
2. Creating a Volunteer Engagement Scale (VES) that codifies levels of volunteering in terms of individuals' involvement and their leadership activities.



The Volunteer Engagement Scale: A New Measure of Commitment

The first step in mining New York Cares' rich volunteer database was determining how and whether information about the thousands of individual volunteers in it could be categorized, not only in terms of general factors such as demographics but also, their level of participation in New York Cares' activities.

After conducting a search to identify measurement scales or typologies that could help it segment volunteers, New York Cares discovered that few, if any, such standardized instruments or tools existed.

New York Cares created its own scale to assess where volunteers fell on a continuum of various levels of participation.

As a result, New York Cares decided to create its own scale to assess where volunteers fell on a continuum of various levels of participation. Categories for the scale emerged from a series of focus groups, interviews with, and surveys of, volunteers and New York Cares staff.⁷ Based on the information gathered, New York Cares' staff and an independent consulting firm identified six levels of volunteer engagement. Each level describes volunteer activities typical of that level, among them: duration of volunteer activity, amount of volunteer activity, and level of volunteer leadership assumed. Metrics were also devised for each level to measure volunteer progress up the leadership ladder (see Table 1).

New Measures for Old Questions: Who Are Volunteers, What Motivates Them, What Moves Them to Leadership, and Is There a Relationship Between Volunteering and Civic Engagement?

The Volunteer Engagement Scale (VES) was used as one of several variables incorporated into a landmark, large-scale study commissioned by New York Cares and conducted by researchers at the Baruch College Survey Research Unit. This study asked: Who are volunteers? What motivates them to volunteer and continue to volunteer? How and do they move from managers to leaders? And, is there a relationship between volunteering and other forms of civic engagement?

7 Developed in conjunction with an outside consulting firm, the tool reflected a "Scales and Ladders" framework—a matrix-based system developed by the Results Oriented Management and Accountability system (ROMA). The scales in the ROMA are continua that describe different states of conditions and have beginning and ending points with increments in between. Factors and variables that describe the conditions are then inserted in between these two points sequentially.



Table 1

The Volunteer Engagement ScaleSM: A New Measure of Volunteer Commitment

Level One: Shoppers

Individuals who call for information and/or attend an orientation session, but do not sign up for an event or project.

Metric: Number of orientation attendees who don't participate in a volunteer project.

Level Two: Episodic Contributors

Volunteers who participate in only one project annually.

Metric: Number of volunteers who participate only once per year.

Level Three: Short-term Contributors

Volunteers who complete two to four projects per year for only one year and/or become Site Captains for an Annual Event.

Metrics: Individuals participating in two to four projects during one year and first-time Site Captains.

Level Four: Reliable Regulars

Volunteers who complete five or more projects for one year or two to four projects per year for more than one year.

Metrics: Number of individuals who complete five or more projects for one year or participate in two to four projects per year for at least two years.

Level Five: Fully Engaged Volunteers

Volunteers who participate in five or more projects per year for more than one year, become Team Leaders, and/or assume other leadership roles such as serving as a Site Captain, assisting in volunteer orientation by joining New York Cares' Speakers Bureau, or serving on an organizational fundraising or steering committee.

Metrics: Number of individuals working on five or more projects per year for more than one year, number of first year Team Leaders and first year Site Captains who have completed three or more projects with us prior to a leadership role, committee members, and/or Speakers Bureau participants.

Level Six: Committed Leaders

Volunteers who have committed to more than one year serving as a Team Leader, Site Captain, Speakers Bureau or committee member, and/or helping to cultivate contacts/donors.

Metrics: Number of Team Leaders, Site Captains, Speakers Bureau members, and committee members active for more than one year.



Survey Methodology

Subjects for the study comprised adults who had volunteered through New York Cares at least once during the twelve-month time period of January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006 and who had provided e-mail addresses – a total of 27,000 individuals.

After eliminating records with bad e-mails, duplicates, and those under 18 years of age, the population for the survey totaled 24,062 volunteers. The survey⁸ was conducted using e-mail notices sent and received between January 23 and February 6, 2007. Of these, 3,367 were fully completed by respondents.

The survey collected data in four areas:⁹

- Background characteristics (i.e., age, gender, race, employment status, education, income).
- Reasons for starting to volunteer (i.e., to help out fellow New Yorkers, make New York City a better place, learn new skills).
- Reasons for continuing to volunteer (i.e., using free time productively, learning about the city, fulfilling faith or spiritual commitment).
- Satisfaction and other attitudes (satisfaction with New York Cares, belief that volunteering makes a difference, satisfaction living in New York City).

Three assumptions drove the selection of these variables:

- That volunteering levels are, to some extent, a function of volunteers' background characteristics.
- That the initial and continuing motivation for volunteering – the reasons volunteers give for joining and continuing with New York Cares – may help to predict their level and movement on the VES.
- That satisfaction with New York Cares – as well as satisfaction with New York City as a place to live and the belief that volunteering makes a difference – would be possible predictors of higher levels of engagement.

Data analysis began with bivariate analyses among the variables to determine whether and where relationships existed, as well as their strength and direction. Researchers then employed a multiple regression analysis with the VES as the dependent variable and the factors listed above as independent variables. Due to the large numbers of independent variables (predictors), a stepwise regression procedure was used whereby background characteristics were first entered and then followed by significant predictors from the list of motivations and other attitudes.¹⁰

⁸ To obtain a copy of the survey administered to volunteers, please contact survey@nycares.org.

⁹ Average response based on four-point importance scale. For a detailed list of the data collected, see Table 3 in Appendix.

¹⁰ This section is based on a working paper by Gary Bagley and Gregg G. Van Ryzin, entitled "Predictors of Volunteer Engagement: The New York Cares Experience."



Survey Results

Volunteer Profile

The profile of the average New York Cares volunteer during the time period studied was similar to the national profile of the average volunteer today:¹¹ female (79%), white (65%), and educated (81% of respondents had completed a college degree, and 37% had participated in post-graduate coursework). Nearly half (48%) of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years of age. Fifteen (15) percent described themselves as Asian; 10% as African-American, and 7% as Hispanic. Twenty (20) percent were born overseas. About half (48%) of the respondents lived in Manhattan, followed by 18% in Brooklyn and 15% in Queens. Nearly all were employed (85%) or full-time students (9%). In fact, 19% of those employed reported working sixty or more hours in the week they took the survey (five people reported 100+). Respondents' incomes were spread out smoothly between \$0 and \$150,000-plus, with the most common reply being \$60,000 to \$99,999 (29%).

Level of Volunteering

Respondents indicated that they had been participating in increased levels of volunteering during 2006, with 36% saying that they had "done more than last year," compared with 18% who said they had "done less." Nearly half (49%) reported volunteering "more than I did five years ago," compared to 22% who volunteered less, and 29% who stayed at the same level. Nearly all of the respondents (98%) received no compensation for their volunteer work.

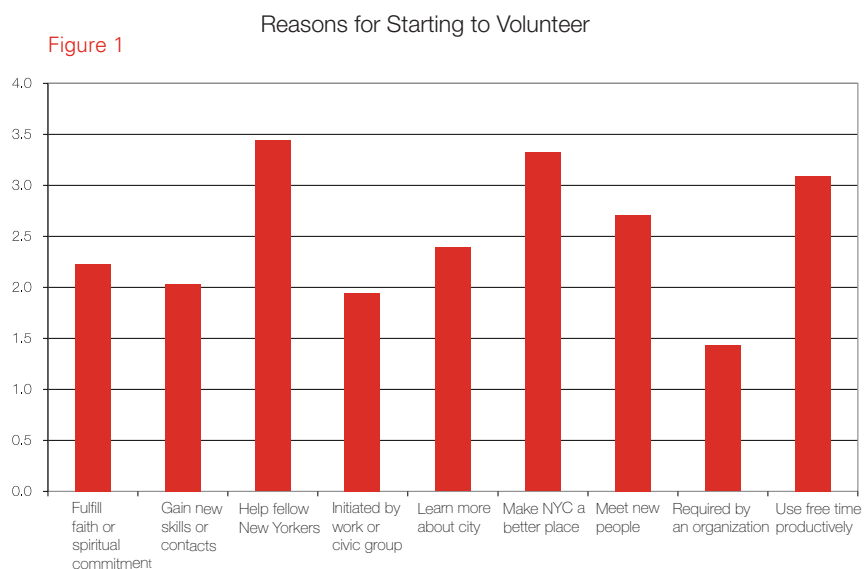
One interesting finding is that half of the respondents said they participate in volunteer work outside of New York Cares. This may offer a challenge to the often-debated notion that volunteering is frequently episodic or something that is done sporadically. If half of all those surveyed are engaged in other volunteering, however, it suggests that these individuals are committed to volunteering on a more regular basis both with New York Cares and beyond.

Why Do Volunteers Volunteer...?

The most commonly cited reasons volunteers said they engaged in service were to:

- 1) Help out fellow New Yorkers.
- 2) Make New York City a better place to live.
- 3) Use their free time productively.

In short, wanting to volunteer stemmed more from contextual concerns, rather than from a sense of obligation or moral commitment (see Figure 1).



¹¹ Based on pooled CPS data from 2005-06-07, nationally, 58.0% of all adult volunteers (age 16 and over) are women, 86.2% of all adult volunteers identify themselves as white, and 39.9% of all adult volunteers aged 25 and over have at least a bachelor's degree or the equivalent (compared to 25.2% of all adults).



...and Why Do They Continue?

The top three reasons volunteers indicated that they continued to serve were exactly the same as those cited as their reasons for volunteering in general (see Figure 2).

Do Volunteers Value Their Experience?

Overwhelmingly, New York Cares volunteers said that they were either somewhat or very satisfied with their volunteering experiences, and more than three-quarters (78%) said that they believed their volunteer work “makes a fair or great deal of difference.” The same percentage added that they had at one point referred someone else to New York Cares.

Where Did Volunteers Fall on the Volunteer Engagement Scale?

Using the VES, researchers plotted where survey respondents fell in terms of their volunteering levels during 2006 (see Figure 3).

The predominance of Level 2 (Episodic) volunteers was due to a large number of individuals who participated in a single day of service, either New York Cares Day (approximately 8,000 people) or Hands On New York Day (about 3,500 individuals) during the year of the study.

According to the regression analysis, younger volunteers (under 35 years of age) were somewhat less likely to be found higher up on the VES.

White volunteers appeared somewhat higher on the VES. People who regularly attend religious services were somewhat less likely to be high on the VES. Gender, employment status, hours worked, education, and income had little influence on volunteers’ current engagement levels. The strongest background influence was the number of years people had lived in New York City, with long-term residents more likely to appear higher on the VES ladder (see Table 4 in Appendix).

Figure 2 Reasons for Continuing to Volunteer

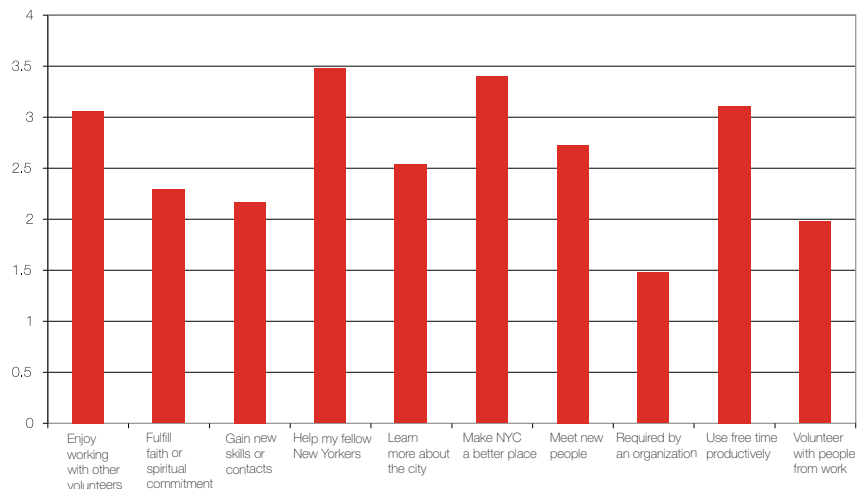
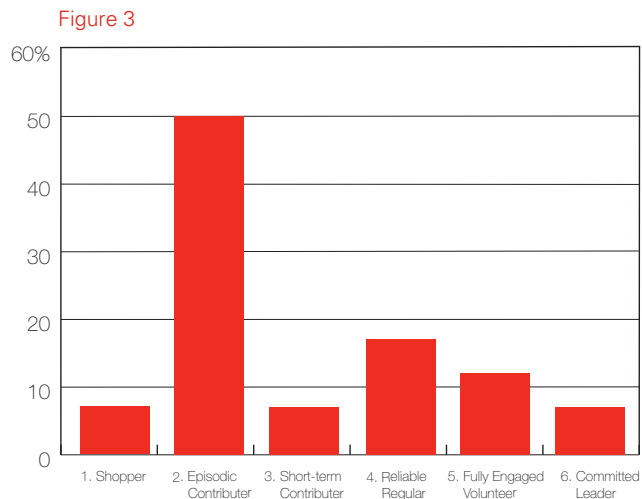


Figure 3 Distribution of New York Cares Volunteers on the VES





The most important factor that influenced volunteers' current engagement levels was their expressed satisfaction with New York Cares. Those who were more satisfied with their volunteer experiences were higher on the VES ladder, presumably because those who are (or were) less satisfied dropped out or otherwise held back on their engagement.

Another important finding was that volunteers who initiated their volunteering through work or a group were more likely to fall on the lower rungs of the VES ladder, presumably because they joined for just one special activity or an event sponsored by their workplace or group. Those who believed that volunteering "makes a difference in the community" and those who enjoyed working with other volunteers were more likely to appear higher on the VES. In contrast, those who volunteered to meet new people were lower on the VES ladder (see Figure 3).

Do Volunteers Do More Than Volunteer In Their Communities?

Researchers also examined whether and to what extent the intensity of volunteering, as measured by the VES, correlated with several social and psychological factors. The assumption behind this analysis was that volunteering may have beneficial consequences not only for the volunteer (e.g., increasing feelings of well-being or self-esteem) but also for the community (e.g., encouraging civic and political participation).

To address these issues, researchers performed a series of regression analyses in which the VES was the independent variable and a set of social and psychological outcomes were the dependent variables. These were political participation, life satisfaction, social capital, civic engagement, and community attachment (see Table 2).

To separate out effects of individuals' backgrounds from these variables, researchers controlled for background factors such as age, gender, race, employment, and others noted previously. (It is important to note, however, that there are unmeasured variables that are related to social and psychological factors – from utilizing parks and other community spaces to measures of self esteem, for instance – so effects of volunteer engagement as an outcome of these factors should be interpreted with caution.)

Table 2

Measures of Social and Psychological Factors

Life Satisfaction

Scale of 1-7 (1 = very dissatisfied and 7 = very satisfied)

Civic Engagement

Checklist of seven types of civic engagement: attending neighborhood/community group meetings, working with others to address neighborhood/community problems, participating in social groups or clubs, providing help to neighbors, taking part in artistic activities with others, donating blood, and/or playing a team sport.

Political Participation

Checklist of five types of political participation: calling or writing local politicians, writing to newspapers, attending political events or protests, registering to vote, and/or voting in the last election.

Social Capital

Standard "trust" question: "Do you think that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

Community Attachment

Sum of two questions that asked about how close the respondent feels to "the city" and "to the neighborhood," both with responses ranging from 1 = not close to 4 = very close.



As Table 5 (see Appendix) shows, volunteers higher on the VES were significantly more likely to be politically engaged as well, i.e., registering to vote and voting, writing to newspapers, attending political events or demonstrations, and/or calling/writing local politicians. This group also expressed more satisfaction with their lives and were more trusting of others (social capital).

What Factors Influenced Changes in Volunteers' Levels of Engagement?

One of the most important issues New York Cares wished to explore with the VES was whether and how Episodic and Short-Term volunteers (Levels Two and Three) rose up the ladder to become Reliable Regulars or above (Levels Four, Five, and Six on the VES). To that end, researchers selected a subset of volunteers who were at Levels Two or Three in 2005 and examined what influenced their movement up the scale to Level Four (or above) in 2006. Specifically, researchers measured changes in volunteer engagement from Episodic or Short-Term to more regular volunteering.

Only a few of the background characteristics seemed to influence this change. Females, for example, were somewhat more likely to become a Reliable Regular over the year studied, and religiously active individuals less likely.

Once again, the strongest factor in predicting whether volunteers would move up the leadership ladder was whether they believed their service made a difference as well as the level of satisfaction with New York Cares – the same reasons volunteers who were already highly engaged gave for starting and continuing their service. Those seeking to fulfill a faith-based or spiritual commitment were also more likely to become Reliable Regulars even while the religiously active were less likely to move up the ladder – a finding that suggests that there is a segment of volunteers who seek alternative expressions of spirituality in their engagement. Conversely, leadership jumpers said that being required by another organization or asked by their workplace to participate were low on their list (see Table 6 in Appendix).

Does Tenure Matter?

Researchers also measured whether there was a relationship between the level of volunteer involvement and the number of years volunteers had been involved with New York Cares using, again, a similar set of variables.

Age, employment, race, marital status, income, and education levels were related to volunteers' tenure with New York Cares. Gender, being a student, and being born outside the U.S. had no relationship to volunteers' tenure with the organization.

"Helping out my fellow New Yorkers" as a reason to start and continue volunteering was also strongly positively correlated with the length of time volunteers had been with New York Cares. Fulfilling a spiritual commitment, learning more about the city, and meeting other social obligations were negatively correlated (see Table 7 in Appendix).



Survey Findings

- Volunteers' interest in volunteering stemmed from wanting to help their fellow New Yorkers and make their city a better place to live, rather than from a sense of moral commitment or workplace/institutional obligation or requirement.
- The reasons volunteers gave for staying engaged over time were exactly the same as their reasons for initially becoming involved: To help their fellow New Yorkers and make their city a better place to live. The least likely reasons for staying engaged were a sense of moral commitment or workplace/institutional obligation or requirement.
- Volunteers who are higher on the VES had greater life satisfaction and were more trusting of others.
- Volunteers who were higher on the VES were more politically engaged, i.e., they registered to vote/voted, wrote to newspapers and/or local politicians, and attended political events/demonstrations.
- The most important factors influencing volunteers' engagement levels – in particular, those who were highly engaged – were their belief that their volunteering made a difference and their satisfaction with New York Cares. Volunteers who initiated their service through work or a group or were motivated to meet new people were more likely to be lower on the VES.
- The strongest factor in whether volunteers moved up the leadership ladder over time was their level of satisfaction with their New York Cares experience, as well as their belief that their service made a difference in the community – the same reasons cited by highly engaged volunteers.
- The least likely leadership jumpers were volunteers who were required by an other organization to participate.

This study affirms several of New York Cares' programming strategies, suggests areas of new recruitment or further program development, and also raises interesting questions about future research on volunteerism among organizations more broadly.



Section III: Survey Implications and Recommendations

The survey data uncovered findings that may be helpful in developing recruitment and retention efforts. Individuals, for example, who expressed satisfaction with New York Cares tend to have higher levels of engagement, indicating that organizations wishing to retain more volunteers should take serious steps to ensure that, from the minute volunteers walk in the door, they are cared for, appreciated, and responded to as individuals. Providing volunteers with substantive information, materials, and resources about the volunteer organization, the service agencies, and local issues that volunteers are helping to address; offering high quality orientations; and allowing more choice in service projects, are just some of the ways in which volunteer organizations can help volunteers feel appreciated and satisfied and, in turn, secure their ongoing participation.

One of the most important findings of this study is that volunteers who are higher on the VES are more engaged in politics, have greater life satisfaction, and higher levels of trust.

Individuals who believe their volunteering makes a difference also tend to be highly engaged – and higher on the VES – and this, too, has practical significance. Recruitment messages, for example, might emphasize this benefit to attract more volunteers. In addition, providing educational opportunities that help volunteers understand the impact of their work may have retention benefits. In the meantime, future studies might attempt to tease out exactly how and why highly engaged volunteers see their service as making a difference, which might help volunteer organizations hone their recruitment messages in ways that would resonate more with specific audiences and constituencies.

Efforts to reward and recognize volunteers and Team Leaders – and provide evidence of their impact in communities – also help to enhance volunteer commitment and engagement. Offering volunteers opportunities to deepen their leadership skills and interests not only helps to increase their interest in service but also helps to ensure that volunteer organizations have highly qualified and effective leaders who are able to serve as direct links between volunteers and the organization. As the representatives of volunteer organizations, these leaders are important factors in ensuring volunteers' satisfaction – the major factor influencing whether volunteers will continue to work with the volunteer organization.

Those who enjoy volunteering with others also tend to be highly engaged and higher on the VES; however, there are still questions as to whether these individuals are motivated more by a desire to work in groups or to lead those groups. Importantly, individuals who feel obligated or required by organizations to participate tend to be lower on the VES. Motivation to volunteer as a result of a spiritual – but not religious (as measured by attendance at religious services) – commitment also appears to correlate with higher levels of engagement, but is only one of many that could and should be examined with ongoing research.

One of the most important findings of this study is that volunteers who are higher on the VES are more en-



gaged in politics, have greater life satisfaction, and higher levels of trust (social capital). In recent years, there has been much debate in the civic engagement field as to whether volunteering leads to deeper civic engagement, usually defined as political engagement. This study suggests that more highly engaged volunteers are more likely to vote, write to newspapers, attend political rallies or events, and/or write to local politicians about issues. Organizations interested in moving volunteers into political engagement, therefore, might be encouraged to first take steps to ensure that volunteers have opportunities to move up the leadership ladder – either through leadership development programs or highly satisfactory volunteer experiences – which, data indicates, is related to higher levels of political engagement.

Organizations wishing to retain more volunteers should take serious steps to ensure that from the minute volunteers walk in the door, they are cared for, appreciated, and responded to as individuals.

Whether and to what extent highly engaged volunteers are more civically engaged – defined in this study as participating in neighborhood meetings or social clubs, helping neighbors, working with others to address community concerns, taking part in artistic activities with others, donating blood, and/or playing a team sport – rendered mixed results. Although an initial set of bivariate analyses revealed that volunteers who were higher on the VES tended to indicate higher levels of civic engagement, a more rigorous regression analysis failed to find a significant relationship between the two.

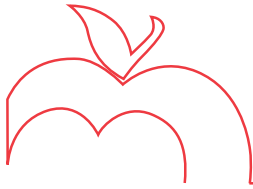
Given ongoing debate about whether and to what extent volunteering leads to civic engagement (as it is defined in this study), it will be important to pursue additional research and tests to determine whether there is, in fact, a relationship and, if so, its strength.

This study also raises interesting questions about whether a commonly held notion of volunteering as something that is done episodically or cursorily is true. This study revealed that one half of all respondents indicated that they participate in volunteer work outside of New York Cares, suggesting that these individuals may be more deeply engaged in volunteering in their communities beyond what just one organization may offer. Further research that looks at volunteers' commitment across organizations and venues, therefore, may be useful in answering the question about whether volunteering is more episodic or ongoing.

It is important to note that individuals' motivations for volunteering is only one factor in determining whether they, in fact, volunteer. There are practical factors that may restrict a person's ability to volunteer, such as health problems, job changes, relationship status, or parenting. Such factors were not addressed by this survey but could be in future research.

What Does it All Mean?

New York Cares undertook all of the activities detailed in this report with one goal: To recruit volunteers and then, using a set of carefully designed strategies, increase their commitment to the organization and, ultimately, the larger community. Thanks to the development of a new and rigorous Volunteer Engagement Scale, New York Cares will not only be able to assess whether these strategies are working, but also identify which volunteers and why.



These efforts have clearly shown that there are different types of volunteers and that their reasons for volunteering – and continuing to do so – vary according to their level of commitment to the organization. In turn, that commitment stems from and can be bolstered by the organization through personal communications, rewards and recognition, leadership development opportunities, and other incentives to deepen participation. Moreover, these tactics and strategies can and should be tailored, depending on the stage at which volunteers are participating, to help individuals move up the leadership scale.

Doing so, according to the research commissioned by New York Cares, can help move volunteers from ad hoc participation to serving as dynamic community leaders. As this research suggests, highly engaged volunteers tend to become more actively involved in other spheres of civic and political life, which, in turn, has the potential to create and strengthen civic engagement and social capital across communities.

Clearly, this study and these strategies are not the final word on whether there is a link between volunteering and other forms of engagement. As with any study, there are limitations to its ability to make definitive declarations about this issue. Future studies, for example, should be repeated at different time periods and over a longer duration. Multivariate analyses might be incorporated to control for demographic factors. Since the survey was a self-report – and a significant number of people dropped out after they started the survey – there could be a positive sample selection (i.e., respondents may be those who already are more interested in being engaged). Questions about this could be mitigated by comparing this group to a sample from New York City based on the Current Population Survey supplement.

Despite these limitations, the study is still one of the most rigorous undertaken in the field and reveals some surprising and not-so-surprising information about volunteering that digs deeper than what has previously been conducted. It has also informed – and will continue to inform – New York Cares’ efforts going forward. Now, success will no longer be defined solely by what New York Cares does, but also by the way in which those efforts move volunteers up the commitment scale. With the VES and related measures, the organization can now set outcome-based targets and milestones for each stakeholder group overall and for each segment within the main groups.

Most important, New York Cares will be better equipped to verify whether the organization has been successful over a given period of time, especially in reaching more people in need of services and ensuring that these services are of the highest quality. Does use of this scale and the other strategies that New York Cares has created ultimately help the organization realize its mission – to meet pressing community needs by mobilizing caring New Yorkers in volunteer service – more effectively? How does deepening volunteer engagement help New York Cares improve on the services it provides? And how are the communities in which New York Cares is operating seeing positive changes as a result of volunteer engagement?

Those are tough questions to answer. But, they will be priorities for New York Cares as it moves forward, armed with a set of new strategies and resources aimed at strengthening the ways in which it recruits, retains,



and encourages volunteer leadership. Working with other volunteer organizations engaged in similar efforts, New York Cares and its partners are well positioned to increase not only the numbers of volunteers but the depth of their involvement, and ultimately, their willingness and capacity to advance as community leaders and take an active role in strengthening their communities. That leadership could lead to civic engagement being more deeply ingrained in communities and a part of everyone's daily life is a goal to which those in the civic engagement field aspire.

Glossary

Annual Events: Large-scale single days of service that occur yearly.

Calendar Projects: Ongoing programs created with schools, social service providers, and other nonprofit organizations. The communities served by Calendar Projects reflect a wide range representative of underserved populations in New York City, and vary in terms of commitment levels.

Community Outreach Manager: New York Cares' Volunteer Relations staff member responsible for outreach to engage nonprofit partners and a diverse population of volunteers.

Hot Projects: Volunteer projects at risk of being cancelled for lack of a sufficient number of volunteers (defined as less than 50% of filled slots).

Leadership Development Manager: New York Cares' Volunteer Relations staff member responsible for recruiting, interviewing, training, and placing new Team Leaders, and providing all active Team Leaders with professional development and educational opportunities, workshops, conferences, and recognition events.

Minimum Time AmeriCorps Members: AmeriCorps volunteers who work with New York Cares a minimum of 300 hours over the course of a year. Managed by Community Outreach Managers, they lead orientations and information sessions throughout the city and lead several projects.

Project Partners: Schools, social service providers, and other nonprofit organizations that have been screened and selected to partner with New York Cares to develop single days of service or ongoing programs.

Queens, Bronx, and Brooklyn Leadership Councils: Three councils, one for each borough, made up of active members recruited from New York Cares' volunteer, Team Leader, and Project Partner base. Each council meets regularly with Community Outreach Managers, supports outreach to the boroughs, and advises on programming in those communities.

Sign-up Rate: The percentage of orientation attendees who volunteer with New York Cares within one year of their orientation. Also called activation rate.

Site Captains: Volunteer project managers for large-scale single days of service.

Speakers Bureau: New York Cares' volunteers with strong public speaking skills who volunteer to lead orientation sessions for new volunteers.

Team Leader Council: A group of active and engaged Team Leaders who meet regularly with the Leadership Development Managers and advise on all aspects of Team Leader programming.

Team Leaders: Volunteer project managers for ongoing Calendar Projects. These individuals are volunteers who have attended at least three projects and are screened and trained to manage programs.

Volunteer Project: An opportunity for a group of volunteers, led by a Team Leader, to give their time to help a Project Partner deliver services to the community it serves.

Volunteer Relations Manager: New York Cares' Volunteer Relations staff member responsible for the customer service aspect of the organization, including responding to telephone inquiries and e-mails, administration of daily volunteer orientations, data entry, and recruitment and training of Speakers Bureau members.

Volunteer Slot: An opportunity for one person to serve on a team of volunteers participating in a volunteer project.

Appendix of Tables

Table 3: Data Collected in Volunteer Survey

Background characteristics

- Age (under 35 vs. over 35)
- Gender (female vs. male)
- Race (white vs. non-white)
- Employment status (employed vs. not-employed)
- Hours worked
- Education (college-educated vs. other)
- Household income
- Religiosity (how often one attends religious services)
- Immigrant status (U.S. born vs. other)
- Years living in New York City

**Motivations for joining
(on four-point importance scale)**

- Help out my fellow New Yorkers
- Make New York City a better place to live
- Find a way to use my free time productively
- Fulfill part of my faith or spiritual commitment
- Learn new skills or make job contacts
- Meet new people
- Learn more about the city
- Required by another program or organization
- Activity initiated by my work or a group I am a part of (school, club, church)

**Motivations for continuing
(on a four-point importance scale)**

- Help out my fellow New Yorkers
- Make New York City a better place to live
- Find a way to use my free time productively
- Fulfill part of my faith or spiritual commitment
- Learn new skills or make job contacts
- Meet new people
- Learn more about the city
- Required by another program or organization (school, work, other)
- Enjoying working with other volunteers
- Volunteering with people from my work or group (school, club, church)

Satisfaction and other attitudes

- Satisfaction with New York Cares
- Belief that volunteering makes a difference
- Satisfaction with New York City as a place to live

See page 15

Table 4: Predictors of Current Level of Engagement

Background Factors	Beta wgt.Sig.
Under 35	-0.051 **
Female	0.008
White	0.055 **
Employed	0.028
Hours worked	-0.009
College graduate	0.028
Household income	0.026
Attends religious services	-0.042 **
U.S. born	-0.006
Years living in New York City	0.086 ***
Other predictors (in order of stepwise entry)	
Satisfaction with New York Cares	0.131 ***
Volunteering initiated by work or group	-0.100 ***
Thinks volunteering makes a difference	0.102 ***
Wants to meet new people (continuing)	-0.068 ***
Enjoys working with other volunteers (continuing)	0.050 **

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01

Note: Listwise N = 2324, R-square = .077. Coefficients shown are standardized (beta) coefficients. Background factors entered first as a block, followed by stepwise entry of 22 possible predictors. Only the stepwise-selected predictors are shown above, in order of entry.

See page 17

Table 5: Relationship of VES with Various Outcomes of Interest

Background Factors	Life Satisfaction	Civic Engagement	Political Participation	Closeness to Community	Social Capital (Trust)
Under 35	0.029	-0.057**	-0.162**	-0.001	-0.118***
Female	0.036*	-0.034*	-0.006	0.076***	-0.002
White	0.000	-0.008	0.111***	0.135***	0.126***
Employed	0.011	-0.135***	0.058*	0.025	-0.061*
Hours Worked	-0.045	0.050	-0.112***	-0.013	0.031
College Graduate	-0.016	-0.039*	0.062***	0.012	0.085***
Household Income	0.082***	0.008	0.010	0.028	0.026
Attends Religious Services	0.085***	0.149***	-0.031*	-0.031	0.028
U.S. Born	0.027***	0.054***	0.113***	0.047**	0.014
Years living in NYC	-0.013	0.042*	0.253***	0.242***	-0.088***
Volunteer Engagement	0.051***	0.026	0.043**	0.028	0.040**
Volunteer Engagement Scale (VES)					
R-square	0.017***	0.049***	0.164***	0.084***	0.055***

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01

Note: Listwise N = 2687-2693. Coefficients shown are standardized (beta) coefficients.

See page 19

Appendix of Tables

Table 6: Predictors of Becoming a Reliable Regular

Background Factors	Beta wgt.Sig.
Under 35	-0.019
Female	0.052**
White	-0.001
Employed	0.032
Hours worked	-0.046
College graduate	0.033
Household income	0.032
Attends religious services	-0.069**
U.S. born	0.011
Years living in New York City	0.019
Other predictors (in order of stepwise entry)	
Satisfaction with New York Cares	0.087***
Learning more about the city (continuing)	-0.072***
Thinks volunteering makes a difference	0.074***
Fulfilling faith or spiritual commitment (continuing)	0.069**
Volunteering initiated by work or group	-0.062**

* p < .10 ** p < .05 *** p < .01

Note: Listwise N = 1562, R-square = .038. Coefficients shown are standardized (beta) coefficients.

Background factors entered first as a block, followed by stepwise entry of 22 possible predictors.

Only the stepwise-selected predictors are shown above, in order of entry.

See page 19

Table 7: Correlates of Years of Involvement

Reasons for starting to volunteer	r	Reasons for continuing to volunteer	r
Helping out my fellow New Yorkers	.054**	Enjoying working with other volunteers	.017
Making NYC a better place to live	.004	Helping out my fellow New Yorkers	.052**
Using my free time productively	.013	Making NYC a better place to live	.004
Meeting new people	.019	Using my free time productively	-.008
Learning more about the city	-.079**	Meeting new people	-.034
Fulfilling a faith or spiritual commitment	-.025	Learning more about the city	-.121**
Gaining new skills or job contacts	-.089**	Fulfilling a faith or spiritual commitment	-.024
Initiated by work or a group I am in	-.185**	Gaining new skills or job contacts	-.101**
Required by another organization	-.125**	Volunteering with people from work	-.176**
		Required by another organization	-.149**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

See page 20



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