

**The Value of Feeling Included:**

**The Impact of Inclusion on Teen Volunteers' Organizational Satisfaction**

Denise Sevick Bortree, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Advertising and Public Relations, College of Communications

Penn State University

0115 Carnegie Building

University Park, PA

Tel. 814-865-1274 \* FAX 814-863-8161 \* E-mail: dsb177@psu.edu

Richard D. Waters, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Communication, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

North Carolina State University

Winston Hall 201, Box 8104

Raleigh, NC 27695

Tel. 919-515-9736 \* FAX 919-515-9456 \* E-Mail: rdwaters@ncsu.edu

**Abstract**

*Volunteerism has been linked to the development of teamwork, political-moral identities, and social capital among teens. The challenges volunteer managers face include retaining teen volunteers and creating an environment that encourages developmental benefits. The study presented here measures the perceived inclusion that teens feel in*

*their volunteer experiences and tests the impact of inclusion on organizational satisfaction. Results indicated that males experienced more inclusion than females, and teens who worked with adults experienced more inclusion than teens who worked with other teens. Inclusion was a strong predictor of satisfaction with the organization. The level of inclusion of teen volunteers has implications for continued volunteerism and for the realization of developmental benefits.*

**Keywords:** Teenagers, volunteers, inclusion, workgroups, supervisor, decision-making, satisfaction

## **The Value of Feeling Included:**

### **The Impact of Inclusion on Teen Volunteers' Organizational Satisfaction**

#### **Introduction**

In 2004, 15.5 million teens participated in community service in the United States (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2005) contributing to a dramatic increase in teen volunteers of over 200% from 1989 to 2004 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007). Volunteerism has been linked to important developmental benefits for adolescents such as building teamwork skills and developing political-moral identities (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Larson, Hansen & Moneta, 2006). Additionally, the quality of teens' experiences with a volunteer organization has been linked to their long-term intentions to volunteer (Bortree, 2007). Encouraging teen involvement in volunteerism and community service is clearly an important goal (Safrit, Scheer, & King, 2001; Safrit, 2002).

Given that one in three volunteers do not continue their service with an organization from year to year (Corporation, 2005), retaining teen volunteers and managing their experiences is critical for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations that create an atmosphere that promotes high quality volunteer experiences for teens stand to benefit through increased satisfaction and retention of teen volunteers (Safrit, Gliem, & Gliem, 2004). One approach to this continued involvement may involve the degree to which nonprofit organizations make teens feel included in the organization, i.e., creating an atmosphere of inclusion in the organization may lead to greater teen volunteer satisfaction.

In the course of volunteer activities, teens may work with adults and teens, as well as interact with a manager of volunteer resources and/or senior management. This study examines the degree to which inclusion by peers, management and the organization as a whole impacts teen volunteers' satisfaction with the nonprofit organization for which they work.

### **Teen Volunteerism**

Community service work can lead to key benefits in interpersonal development among adolescents including the “development of teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital” (Larson, Hansen & Moneta, 2006, p.849). Volunteering impacts teens' perceptions of self and of others (Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2001), and can be a formative source of information for young peoples' understanding of the work environment (Johnson, Bebe, & Snyder, 1998). Adolescents who volunteer experience growth in the areas of social responsibility and personal competence as well:

...service can provoke youths to think about themselves in relation to others who are less fortunate than they ...it can stimulate them to think about the political and moral dimensions of society and their role in making that order change so that it comes closer to representing an ideology that those students believe is just and achievable. (Yates & Youniss, 1996, p. 282-283)

By working with community organizations, adolescents benefit from relationships the association brings. For example, adolescents who engage in community service build peer relationships with others who serve with them (Youniss et al, 2001) and benefit from the adult networks they build through associations with adult organizational employees and volunteers (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). It is possible that the benefits of these

relationships are mediated by the degree to which teens feel included by these individuals and included by the organization itself.

### **Inclusion**

Research has suggested that the feeling of inclusion is a critical factor in bridging individuals' differences in age, race and gender in the workplace (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998). Inclusion may lead to the feeling of acceptance in an organization which links to satisfaction with the organization and commitment to it (Lawler, 1994; Lawler, 1995; Deming, 1986). Subsequently, exclusion may result in segregation within an organization and less productive outcomes of workgroups, departments and holistic organizations. Individuals who are excluded from the decision-making process of their organization are more likely to intend to leave the organization (Mor-Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006).

Nonprofit organizations are comprised of myriad workgroups and departments in which volunteers may serve. Some volunteers work exclusively with employees of an organization; some work primarily with other volunteers; and still others work directly with the organizations' clientele. In nonprofit organizations there may be a tendency to exclude volunteers from decision-making processes. When volunteers are only contributing time to fulfilling a requirement, they may be perceived as temporary and less valuable an asset. Young volunteers, and especially those who lack or are developing initial workplace skills, may also be perceived as having less to contribute to the decision-making process; they may be perceived as not as invested in the organization, and therefore, not as important to include in organizational events.

According to Mor-Barak and Cherin (1998), personal inclusion in an organization can be defined in three ways including: (1) being included in the decision-making

process, (2) being included in an information network, and (3) having a high level of participation. Workers who perceive an organization as soliciting their opinions and asking for their advice on decisions are more likely to feel included in the decision-making process. If they feel the organization keeps them well informed about important organizational activities, announcements and events, then they also feel included in the organization's information network. If they feel that they are invited to important meetings and events at the organization, then they have a higher level of participation inclusion. Organizational inclusion can be measured at five levels of the organization (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998) including: (1) department or workgroup level, (2) supervisor level, (3) higher level management level, (4) organizational level and (5) social group level.

This study explores the relationship between inclusion and satisfaction that volunteers feel for their volunteer organization. The literature suggests that males in the workplace tend to experience more inclusion than females (Mor-Barak, 2005). It is possible that the same is true for volunteers. Thus, the first research question proposed by the authors explores gender differences in inclusion:

*RQ1: Is there a difference in the level of inclusion experienced by male and female teen volunteers?*

Young volunteers may experience a difference in the level of inclusion they feel along the lines of age as well, and more specifically, differences in inclusion from adults vs. other teens. Some teen volunteers work primarily with adults, including employees, other volunteers, or clientele; others work primarily with other teen volunteers. Though teens may benefit from the relationships they develop with adults (Larson, Hansen &

Moneta, 2006) and with other teen volunteers (Youniss et al, 2001), as mentioned earlier, that benefit may be mediated by the degree to which they feel included by these individuals. Consequently, the second research question explores the differences in inclusion based on the age of the individuals teens work with:

*RQ2: Do teen volunteers experience a different level of inclusion when they spend more time working with adults, more time working with other teens, or an equal amount of time with both teens and adults?*

Finally, prior research has suggested links between the level of inclusion one feels in the workplace and satisfaction with the organization (Lawler, 1994; Lawler, 1995).

This link is tested here for teen volunteers:

*RQ3: Does the level of inclusion that teen volunteers feel with an organization influence their satisfaction with the organization?*

## **Methodology**

This exploratory research utilized a quantitative survey methodology to collect data in spring 2007. A pen-and-paper questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of teen volunteers from three library systems in the southeastern United States. Study participants under the age of 18 were required to secure a parental/guardian signature to participate. Survey packets were distributed and collected by volunteer coordinators at library branches. Of the 800 teen volunteers in the library systems, 317 completed usable surveys, achieving a 39% response rate. While the sample was a convenience sample which limits the generalizability of the results to only the study participants, the three library systems were chosen because of the cultural and socio-economic diversity of participating teenage volunteers. This sampling procedure ensured

that a wide variety of teenage perspectives were collected. No attempt was made to follow-up with non-respondents.

The survey designed for this study used Mor-Barak and Cherin's (1998) 15 measures of inclusion that can be grouped in two ways. First, the measures give an indication of organizational inclusion on five levels (1) workgroup level, (2) social groups level, (3) supervisor level, (4) higher management level, and (5) organizational level. Each level is measured separately and contributes to the overall organizational inclusion. The second way in which the measures are grouped is by type of personal inclusion, including (1) decision-making process inclusion, (2) information networks inclusion, and (3) level of participation inclusion.

In addition to measuring inclusion, the survey measured the teen volunteers' satisfactions with the volunteer organization through a 9-point Likert-type scale question, "I am happy with the library where I volunteer." Satisfaction has been linked to inclusion in the workplace for adult employees. Participants also anonymously provided information about their demographics, including gender and age.

## **Results**

The respondent group was 69% female and 31% male. The mean age of the participants was 16 years, ranging from a low of 13 years to a high of 19. Of the 317 teen volunteers, 28.4% (n = 90) reported that they worked primarily with adults, 33.8% (n = 107) reported that they worked primarily with other teens, and 36.9% (n = 117) reported to spend approximately an equal amount with both teen and adults.

All measures used in the study yielded moderate to high reliability with Cronbach alpha scores ranging from .70 to .82, except for social group inclusion which earned an



alpha score of .58. This may be the result of applying workplace measures to teen volunteers. The importance of social groups among teens may have caused teens to respond to the questions about social groups in a way inconsistent with their original intent. Because of its low reliability, this variable was not considered in subsequent statistical analyses.

To examine research question 1, which asked about the impact of gender on inclusion for teen volunteers, differential statistics were run for males and females. For organizational inclusion, males rated their inclusion higher than females in all four inclusion categories, workgroup inclusion, supervisor inclusion, higher management inclusion and organizational inclusion. The three categories of personal inclusion were also calculated for differences along gender lines. Again, for all three categories, decision-making, information networks and level of participation, males scored higher than females. In general, it appears that male teen volunteers feel more inclusion in their volunteer organizations than do female teen volunteers (Table 1).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The second research question asked whether the age of individuals in teens' primary workgroup impacted the perception of inclusion among volunteers. Specifically, it asked whether working more with adults or more with teens impacted the degree to which teen volunteers felt included. Respondents indicated that they fell into one of three categories: (1) work primarily with teens, (2) work primarily with adults, or (3) work about the same amount with each. To explore this research question, a one-way ANOVA

was run with category of primary workgroup acting as the independent variable and the categories of organizational inclusion and personal inclusion acting as the dependent variables. Significant differences were found for two categories of organizational inclusion, workgroup ( $F(2, 314) = 12.59, p < .01$ ) and supervisor ( $F(2, 314) = 6.52, p < .01$ ). For personal inclusion, all three categories indicated a significant difference based on age of primary workgroup, decision-making ( $F(2, 314) = 2.98, p = .05$ ), information networks ( $F(2, 314) = 5.36, p < .01$ ), and level of participation ( $F(2, 314) = 5.97, p < .01$ ) (see Table 2).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Post hoc tests revealed significant differences in perceptions of inclusion between teen volunteers who worked primarily with adults and those who worked primarily with teens. In all cases, volunteers who worked with adults felt more included than those who worked with other teens. In workgroups, those who worked with about the same amount of adults and teens indicated a significant difference in inclusion as well. Those who worked with adults felt the most included; those who worked with about the same amount of teens and adults felt significantly less included than those who worked primarily with adults, but they felt significantly more included than those who worked primarily with other teens. For the other categories of inclusion, there were no significant differences between those who worked with equal numbers of adults and teens and other groups. Overall, results indicated that teen volunteers who worked with adults felt more included than teens who worked with other teens.

Research question three asked about the relationship between inclusion and satisfaction with the volunteer organization. What categories of inclusion predict the satisfaction a teen volunteer feels with the volunteer organization? To address this question, two multiple regression analyses were run, one with organizational inclusion categories as predictors of satisfaction and one with personal inclusion categories as predictors of satisfaction. Results showed that two categories of organizational inclusion were significant predictors of satisfaction with the organization – organization level inclusion and supervisor level inclusion – with organization level inclusion acting as the strongest predictor,  $F(2, 314) = 287.25, p < .001$  (see Table 3). Together the two categories of organizational inclusion explain 65% of the variance in overall rating of satisfaction.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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For personal inclusion, one category was a significant predictor of satisfaction with the organization, decision-making process inclusion,  $F(1, 315) = 839.52, p < .001$  (see Table 4). This single category explains 73% of the variance in the rating of satisfaction. These results indicate that inclusion in the decision-making process, especially at the organizational level and supervisor level, is a strong predictor of satisfaction with the volunteer organization.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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## **Discussion**

This study found differences in the level of perceived inclusion along the lines of gender, with males feeling more inclusion than females, and along the lines of peer age, with teens feeling more inclusion when working with adults than working with other teens. It also found that inclusion is a strong predictor of teen volunteers' satisfaction with their volunteer organization. In general, these findings suggest that nonprofit organizations should examine their practices of inclusion at all levels of the organization and make adjustments that will create an environment that fosters inclusion of teen volunteers.

Male teen volunteers in this study tended to feel more inclusion with their volunteer organization than their female counterparts. Males more than females indicated that the organization does a good job of communicating about upcoming events and providing work-related information to them. Results indicated higher levels of inclusion for males in decision-making and level of participation. This suggests that males are more likely than females to feel that they are included in the decision-making process at their volunteer organization and are more likely to feel that they are invited to participate in important events and activities at the organization.

It appears that on many levels and in many ways, male teen volunteers feel more included in the organization than do female teen volunteers. This difference is found in the workplace as well and may be an indication that organizations, intentionally or not, seek the opinions of male more often than females and invite participation of males in meetings and events more often than their female counterparts. To make teenage volunteers, particularly females, feel more included in the organization, managers of

volunteer resources need to make sure that teen volunteers are invited to relevant meetings about the volunteer program. Additionally, they need to actively listen to teenage volunteers when their ideas are expressed, and they should ask teen volunteers about their opinions when the volunteers remain quiet on timely issues affecting the volunteer program.

Teens in this study who worked with adults tended to feel more included than those who worked with teens. This was true at the workgroup level and the supervisor level. Teens who worked with adults more than those who worked with teens felt that they were more included in the decision-making process, the organization did a better job of communicating work-related information to them, and they were invited more often to participate in meetings and events sponsored by the organization. Differences in inclusion between the age groups could be the result of teens having a higher expectation of inclusion from other teens, but likely it means that adults do a better job of making teen volunteers feel involved in the organization. Managers of volunteer resources should strive to make sure that teen volunteers should have interaction with other teenagers to maximize their social comfort, but also encourage interaction with other adult volunteers to boost their feelings of inclusion and involvement with the organization.

Differences detected at the supervisor level could be, in part, due to the way some organizations manage teen volunteers. Organizations that segregate teens rather than integrating them into groups with adults may be less likely to consider teen volunteers as valuable participants in the organization. It is clear from the results that teens who work primarily with other teens do not experience as much inclusion as those who work with adults. These results suggest that nonprofit organizations should actively seek ways to

integrate teen volunteers into mixed-age departments or workgroups. By offering teen volunteers the opportunity to work with adults, the organization will enable teens to build their adult networks, which appear to result in greater feelings of inclusion in the organization. At the same time, nonprofit organizations should promote more inclusion among teen volunteers at the workgroup level. One way this could be accomplished is through encouraging teamwork among peers. This, too, will improve the experience of teen volunteers, which leads to greater satisfaction with the nonprofit organization.

Inclusion acted as a strong predictor of organizational satisfaction in this study; this was particularly true when teens felt included in the decision-making process at the organization and supervisor levels. Considering that many volunteers are directly supervised by managers of volunteer resources, this has implications for the volunteer management department. Seeking the opinions of teen volunteers on issues that impact their assignments and responsibilities likely gives them a greater sense of inclusion in the organization at the supervisor level. Inclusion leads to satisfaction, which has been linked to commitment to the organization. In the case of the teen volunteers in this research, commitment means a greater likelihood of continuing to contribute time and energies to the organization. More research is needed in this area to test the link between satisfaction and intended behavior among teen volunteers.

Key developmental benefits of volunteerism for teens include learning teamwork, making gains in personal competence as well as learning about the workplace (Johnson et al, 1998; Larson, Hansen & Moneta, 2006). One may see how inclusion in the organization may influence the degree to which these benefits are realized. For example, the degree to which teens are included in their workgroups could impact learning about

teamwork; inclusion in the decision-making process would likely influence gains in personal competence; and observing a difference in the level of inclusion among genders would influence expectations of treatment in future work environments. One thing is certain; inclusion creates satisfaction, which leads to commitment to the organization (Lawler, 1994). By creating an environment of inclusion, managers of volunteer resources are encouraging ongoing volunteerism among teens, which allows teens to continue to realize developmental benefits.

### **Conclusion**

This study offers managers of volunteer resources insights into the way teen volunteers evaluate their inclusion in the sponsoring volunteer organization. Male teen volunteers reported greater inclusion than females, and teens working with adult experienced more inclusion than those who worked primarily with other teens. The level of inclusion predicted the amount of satisfaction that teen volunteers felt with the organization.

In general, the authors encourage leaders and managers of nonprofit organizations to create an environment of inclusion toward their teen volunteers. This means ensuring that teens are included in decision-making processes, they are invited to important meetings and events, and they receive regular communication about the organization. These types of behaviors should be encouraged at all levels of the organization from workgroups and departments to the organizational level. Improving the inclusion of teen volunteers into the organization will result in more satisfied individual volunteers and a greater likelihood of teens continuing to volunteer.

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Table 1

*Differences in Levels of Inclusion Based on Gender*

Type of Inclusion	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Organizational Inclusion				
Workgroup*	female	218	6.23	1.02
	male	99	6.53	1.18
Supervisor	female	218	5.25	1.10
	male	99	5.52	1.20
Higher Management	female	218	3.81	1.02
	male	99	4.01	1.23
Organization	female	218	4.52	.91
	male	99	4.72	1.16
Personal inclusion				
Decision-making	female	218	6.61	.76
	male	99	6.78	.89
Information networks**	female	218	6.77	.66
	male	99	7.00	.78
Level of participation	female	218	6.91	.72
	male	99	7.08	.95

Table 2

*One-Way ANOVA of Inclusion Based on Primary Work Group*

	Work with Teens Mean (SD)	Work with Adults Mean (SD)	Work with Both Mean (SD)	F (2, 314)	ss	p
Organizational inclusion						
Work Group**	6.01 (0.87)	6.75 (1.14)	6.29 (1.11)	12.59	27.25	<.01
Supervisor**	5.09 (1.02)	5.66 (1.24)	5.31 (1.10)	6.52	16.23	<.01
Higher Management	3.80 (1.03)	3.88 (1.24)	3.93 (1.02)	0.42	1.00	.66
Organization	4.42 (0.94)	4.64 (1.03)	4.70 (1.01)	2.36	4.66	.10
Personal inclusion						
Decision- Making process*	6.55 (0.76)	6.82 (0.84)	6.64 (0.81)	2.98	3.83	.05
Information networks**	6.68 (0.63)	7.00 (0.71)	6.88 (0.74)	5.36	5.20	<.01
Level of participation**	6.76 (0.72)	7.14 (0.82)	7.02 (0.83)	5.97	7.46	<.01

\*Significant at the .05 level. \*\*Significant at the .01 level.

Table 3

*Stepwise Regression of Satisfaction Predicted by Organizational Inclusion*

	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value
Constant	-.624		-2.716	<.01
Organization level inclusion	.71	.54	11.71	<.01
Supervisor level inclusion	.39	.34	7.35	<.01

$R = .80$ ,  $R^2 = .65$ ,  $F(2,314) = 445.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $n = 316$

Table 4

*Stepwise Regression of Satisfaction Predicted by Personal Inclusion*

	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value
Constant	-4.61		-14.18	<.01
Decision-making process inclusion	1.40	.85	28.97	<.01

$R = .85$ ,  $R^2 = .73$ ,  $F(1,315) = 839.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $n = 316$

## Appendix A

*Measures of Organizational Inclusion*

Organizational Level	Question Items
Workgroup level	<p>1. I have influence in decisions made by the volunteer coordinator regarding our tasks.</p> <p>2. The volunteer coordinator openly shares work-related information with me.</p> <p>3. I am typically involved and invited to actively participate in work-related activities by the volunteer coordinator.</p>
Organizational level	<p>4. I am able to influence decisions that affect my organization.</p> <p>5. I am usually among the last to know about important changes in the organization. (Reverse coded)</p> <p>6. I am usually invited to important meetings in my organization.</p>
Supervisor level	<p>7. The volunteer coordinator often asks for my opinion before making important decisions.</p> <p>8. The volunteer coordinator does not share information with me. (Reverse coded)</p> <p>9. I am invited to actively participate in review and evaluation meetings with the volunteer coordinator.</p>
Higher management level	<p>10. I am often invited to contribute my opinion in meetings with management higher than the volunteer coordinator.</p> <p>11. I frequently receive communication from management higher than the volunteer coordinator (i.e., memos, emails).</p> <p>12. I am often invited to participate in meetings with management higher than the volunteer coordinator.</p>
Social group level	<p>13. I am often asked to contribute in planning social activities not directly related to my volunteer work.</p> <p>14. I am always informed about informal social activities and events.</p> <p>15. I am rarely invited to join other volunteers when they go out for lunch or to take a break. (Reverse coded)</p>

Note: The variable of decision-making process inclusion was constructed using measures 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13. Information networks inclusion was constructed using measures 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14. Level of participation inclusion was constructed using measures 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15.

**About the Authors**

Denise Sevick Bortree is an assistant professor of communication in the College of Communication at Penn State University. Her research interests include relationship management, online communication, and youth and media. She is a former marketing and communications manager for a Fortune 500 company.

Richard D. Waters is an assistant professor in the Department of Communications in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at North Carolina State University. His research interests include the fundraising process, relationship management and cultivation in the nonprofit sector, and the use of public relations by nonprofit organizations. He is a former fundraising practitioner and consultant to healthcare organizations in Northern California.