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**Abstract:** *The United States' population is growing and diversifying rapidly. The nation is also experiencing an increase in the frequency and magnitude of disasters. Yet, most organizations that respond to these disaster events operate with a homogenous volunteer base – largely, white, middle class, and older. To improve program reach and effectiveness, diversifying volunteer pools is increasingly important. This article presents an evaluation of one response organization attempting to diversify its volunteer base geographically, ethnically, and linguistically, to better serve disaster survivors. Drawing on interviews with program leadership, the results highlight two needs: 1) clear communication about the definition and rationale of diversity throughout the organization and 2) implementation of volunteer recruitment methods to address these goals.*

**Key Words:** *Diversity, Personal Networks, Implementation Evaluation, Faith-Based Organizations, Volunteers, Volunteer Recruitment, Disaster, Telephone Interviews*

## PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY: EVALUATION OF A VOLUNTEER DISASTER RESPONSE PROGRAM

**D**isaster volunteers represent a crucial link between informal community resources and established government response organizations (Britton, 1991). As government social services continue to be transferred to non-governmental entities, such as faith-based organizations, responsibility is increasingly falling to volunteers to meet the health and safety needs of disaster survivors (Brudney and Gazley, 2009). Indeed, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2012), volunteers will play a central role in disaster response in the near future. It is thus important to evaluate the operations, management, planning, and training of disaster volunteer organizations. One area of disaster

organization operation that is rarely studied is volunteer pool diversity and the organizational strategies that may be implemented to address diversity needs and goals.

This issue is important because the United States is becoming more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (Parrillo, 2009) while disaster response volunteer organizations most often operate with a homogenous volunteer pool of largely, white, middle to upper class, and older individuals. To increase program outreach, inclusion, and effectiveness, diversifying the volunteer pool has grown more important to a range of disaster organizations. Leaders from the public and private sectors have acknowledged the benefits of diversity within their organizations and have begun to work in earnest to diversify their pools of workers and volunteers, especially in terms of racial and ethnic representation (Fine 1996; Berthoud and Greene, 2001). Further, awareness of the benefits of volunteer diversity on service delivery and funding opportunities in nonprofit organizations continues to grow (Hobbs, 2001; Roessler et al., 1999; Weisinger and Salipante, 2005). Yet, many organizations struggle to recruit and retain diverse volunteers (Berthoud and Greene, 2001; Chavez and Lyons, 2010; Roessler et al., 1999; Weisinger and Salipante, 2005).

Although these opportunities for growth and issues with inclusion have been identified, research to understand *how* volunteer organizations attempt

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to define diversity goals and ultimately diversify their volunteer pools is limited. This article adds to the available literature by presenting the results of an implementation evaluation<sup>1</sup> of a diversity initiative in one faith-based, nonprofit disaster volunteer program, referred to as "DVP" throughout the remainder of the article.<sup>2</sup> Based on the analysis of telephone interviews with 27 members of program leadership and staff, our results highlight two concerns for organizations planning to diversify their volunteer pools: 1) the need for clear communication about the definition and rationale of diversity throughout the organizational leadership, staff, and current volunteer base; and 2) the importance of a concerted and ongoing effort to understand how volunteer recruitment methods, especially those reliant on personal networks, affect these goals.

### THE NONPROFIT AND DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

The central mission of DVP is to serve children and families affected by disasters in the United States. DVP is a nonprofit Christian-based organization that was created as one component of the broader religious and service mission of the church. DVP trains volunteers to provide free childcare services in the aftermath of disaster so that adult family members can complete necessary tasks (e.g., filling out assistance paperwork, repairing homes, removing debris from affected communities, etc.). Since their founding in the 1980s, over 3,000 DVP volunteers have provided general social support services to nearly 90,000 children in the aftermath of floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, tornadoes, mudslides, terrorist attacks, aviation incidents, and other crises.

Working in cooperation with local and national disaster relief organizations, DVP typically serves families at a disaster site per the request of the American Red Cross, FEMA, and/or other local emergency organizations. DVP management staff mobilizes trained and certified volunteers from across the country and coordinates their travel to the disaster area. Volunteer teams in the field are typically composed of four to eight individuals including one volunteer leader who directs operations and coordinates with other response organizations in the field.

At the time of our evaluation, the national program office employed four full-time, paid staff members. These staff members coordinate approximately 50 unpaid, regional volunteer leaders and program managers across the United States. The regional volunteer leadership communicates with, recruits, and trains a pool of local volunteers ready to deploy to a disaster situation. This pool includes a national network of approximately 600 active trained and certified volunteers.

DVP is officially open to recruiting people of all races, ethnicities, genders, and religious beliefs and backgrounds (DVP staff, Personal Communication). This openness is underscored in written materials published and disseminated by organizational leadership as well as in the 27-hour in-person training that all volunteers must complete before becoming certified. However, despite this official stance, DVP's volunteer pool is overwhelmingly white, middle to upper class, over the age of 50, and drawn from the religious denomination that founded the program. Our characterization of the volunteer pool is based on our interviews with DVP

leadership and our analysis of data included in the private volunteer database.

When we began working on this evaluation project, three representatives from DVP's national office and regional leadership expressed a concern about the diversity of the volunteer pool. From an organizational perspective, DVP leadership recognized three inter-related external pressures that have affected their service capacity and provision. First, the number and scale of disasters in the U.S. is growing, thus creating greater demand for emergency response services of all kinds, especially in highly disaster-prone areas (also see Sever 2005). Second, recognition of DVP has continued to increase over the last decade, which in turn has created greater demand for its services (DVP staff, Personal Communication). DVP has deployed volunteers to an average of nine disasters per year from its inception, but the ten-year average since 1998 increased to 11 disasters annually. The days deployed per volunteer also has increased from an average of two days per deployment in 1989, to an average of five days more recently, with even longer average deployments recorded during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Third, and most relevant to the current study, the U.S. has become more racially and ethnically diverse, and DVP national staff has noted a corresponding increase in the need for culturally-sensitive and multilingual volunteers to ensure continued quality service provision in disaster-affected communities (DVP staff, Personal Communication).

In response to these pressures, DVP leadership identified and integrated the following overlapping diversity goals in their strategic planning activities: 1) expand the volunteer base in hazard-prone areas to fulfill the increasing demand for services, and 2) increase the diversity among volunteers, particularly in terms of racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition (DVP staff, Personal Communication). The evaluation was designed, in part, to assess key factors necessary for the DVP to achieve these goals.

### LITERATURE REVIEW: DIVERSITY AND VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

Cultural diversity is defined as the representation of a range of people with different cultural group affiliations (Cox, 1994). Leaders of non-profits have long recognized the importance and benefits of diversifying their organizations (Ivancevich and Gilbert, 2000; Page, 2007; Thomas, 1990). In particular, diversity expands a volunteer base and allows an organization to understand the priorities of the individuals and groups it serves as well as that of potential funders. Given that community- and faith-based organizations usually provide services to diverse clients (Aron and Sharkey, 2002), increasing diversity among staff and volunteers may enhance cultural competence and responsiveness to individuals through improved and more culturally-appropriate service provision. More diversity among staff and volunteers may also reduce the stress on leadership to be fluent in the needs of all groups an organization serves (Chavez and Lyons, 2010; Hamilton, 2011). Internally, diversity allows for increased creativity through the incorporation of diverse perspectives, improved decision-making, and effective problem solving (Hobbs, 2001; Weisinger and Salipante, Jr., 2007).

To highlight the growing need for diversifying volunteer pools, we draw from literature focusing on the effects of volunteer demographics and recruitment strategies on volunteer group composition. In the U.S., there have been numerous studies that characterize rates of volunteerism by race and income. Higher-income and white individuals have commonly been found to volunteer more than lower-income and racial minorities (Wilson, 2000). Yet, evidence indicates that demographic differences in volunteering, in general, are due to variations in personal networks (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Emerson and Smith, 2000; Musick, Wilson, and Bynum, 2000; Putnam, 2001). For example, some studies find that white populations volunteer at higher rates than racial and ethnic minorities; other work has suggested that the lower rate of volunteering among racial and ethnic minorities, in particular, may be explained by varying levels of social capital and lack of connections to organizations that are primarily white in terms of organizational leadership and volunteer structure (see Wilson, 2000, for a review).

Personal networks represent important pathways for volunteer-based organizations to recruit new volunteers (Netting et al., 2005). There are three main reasons why this occurs. First, interaction with a current volunteer or member of an organization increases the likelihood that any individual will volunteer (Wilson, 2000). Second, personal ties are a mechanism for the dissemination of basic information regarding volunteer opportunities. In turn, receiving a direct request to volunteer increases the probability that a person will say yes (Musick, Wilson, and Bynum, 2000). Third, recruitment through personal networks decreases risks because potential volunteers receive important information about program requirements prior to joining (Weisinger and Salipante, 2005).

One social capital link—central to volunteering among all major demographic groups—is religious adherence. In the United States, being in close contact with church members increases networking opportunities and the likelihood of being recruited from within the religious organization (Becker and Dhingra, 2001; Netting et al., 2005). The networking connections resulting from church attendance, and other religious activities, make this form of recruiting a common method for faith-based organizations. As Berger (2003, p. 20) states, "Religious organizations have access to extensive social and resource networks by virtue of the long-standing presence of religious establishments and communities around the world."

While the use of congregations for recruitment appears to be particularly effective in attracting volunteers, this may not be the best method for increasing organizational diversity. Church-based social networks, like many personal networks, are highly prone to homophily, especially in terms of race; churches are usually less diverse than the neighborhoods in which they are located and remain among the most racially segregated institutions in the U.S. (Falk, 2004). Indeed, Emerson and Smith (2000) found that nine out of ten religious congregations are "racially homogenous" (i.e., at least 90% of congregants belong to one racial group). Faith-based volunteer organizations that use personal network recruitment techniques may face serious challenges in diversifying their volunteer pool, especially

when relying heavily on word-of-mouth recruiting. While such organizations may be able to leverage both financial and volunteer resources to support a variety of service missions, if their congregation is homogenous, their reliance on these individuals may seriously limit diversity.

Thus, recruiting through personal networks offers many advantages, but also has various drawbacks when it comes to diversity. This raises the question of how organizations—especially faith-based organizations—can effectively implement approaches aimed at increasing volunteer diversity. Much of the research on recruitment is related to volunteer motivations and how to align these motivations with organizational strategies (Wei, Donthuand, and Bernhardt, 2012). However, Dass and Parker (1999) found that successful strategies include a clear definition of diversity, regular and frequent communication about diversity goals, and the formal creation and implementation of diversity programs within the organization (also see Berthoud and Greene, 2001).

## METHODS

Our team was invited by DVP to conduct a full evaluation of their volunteer program (also see Lueck and Peek, 2012). At the request of program leadership, one component of this larger evaluation effort focused specifically on the diversity goals and related implementation strategies. Our team ultimately completed an implementation evaluation (Love, 2004; Lynch et al., 1998) in order to assess the strategic design and potential success of achieving these ends. Our project was developed in collaboration with DVP national and regional staff leaders. Before beginning the formal evaluation, our team reviewed and analyzed pertinent DVP program materials, including DVP's volunteer training manual, website, professional publications, and the internal volunteer and disaster deployment database.

## Sample

Our final population of interest included: paid national staff ( $n = 4$ ),<sup>3</sup> regional coordinators ( $n = 20$ ),<sup>4</sup> program managers ( $n = 30$ ),<sup>5</sup> and senior volunteer trainers ( $n = 7$ ),<sup>6</sup> for a total of 61 possible candidates. We attempted to contact all leaders and volunteer staff. Any individual who could not be contacted on the first attempt was called back at least three times. In the end, we interviewed a total of 27 individuals, for a 44% response rate. Given this, we do not claim that this is an organizationally representative sample, but rather one that is wide-ranging regionally in terms of DVP's organizational structure.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Our research team conducted in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews with the 27 respondents we were able to access. Our interview guide included 21 open- and closed-ended questions designed to understand a range of issues related to diversity goals and associated actions, communication with the national office and between regions, and volunteer recruitment and retention. Our interview questions were informed by: 1) the literature we reviewed for this project; 2) the discussions that we had with DVP staff; and 3) our review of DVP program materials. Two of the authors of this article conducted the interviews for this study.

Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Detailed typed notes were taken during each interview and then developed into a full interview transcript immediately following the close of the interview. Our entire research team met regularly during this time to discuss the emerging themes in the interviews.

Upon completion of these interviews we developed a preliminary codebook and then coded responses simultaneously and cooperatively. This was done to improve inter-coder reliability by reducing errors of interpretation common when multiple coders are used in data analysis (Saldaña, 2009). We used a two-cycle coding method (Saldaña, 2009) to review open-ended qualitative responses for common themes related to defining diversity, recruitment, and communicating the diversity goal both within and outside the organization. The first cycle involved open coding and assigning codes to all phrases and short sections. We reviewed and refined these initial codes, then moved to the second cycle of coding where we developed more general themes related to the evaluation questions. Where relevant, we also went through and did simple counts so that we could characterize the frequency of particular responses to specific questions, as reported below.

### Limitations

Although this study offers practical recommendations gleaned from the evaluation, there are obvious limitations. First, this is the evaluation of one volunteer program and thus our ability to generalize is limited. Second, although DVP national staff informed individuals of our evaluation efforts and potential telephone calls through an email newsletter, many interviewees indicated they did not remember receiving the notice of our study. These issues likely affected our ability to contact some volunteers and diminished our overall response rate.

### RESULTS

We organize the following results section into two overarching themes that emerged from the interview data. Specifically, we discovered that there was a lack of communication between national staff and the rest of the leadership on: 1) the meaning of diversity, and 2) the processes involved in recruiting for diversity. As we detail in subsequent sections, these two challenges had important implications for the organization meeting its ultimate diversity goals.

### Understanding and Articulating the Meaning of Diversity

DVP's strategic goal focuses on diversity based on race, ethnicity, language, and geographic location. We asked interviewees to define diversity and to discuss whether they believed their personal definition corresponded to the program's definition. The responses varied widely. To begin, a majority of the interviewees indicated that they were unaware of a specific DVP diversity definition and goal. This, in and of itself, is an important finding, as members of the national staff believed they had clearly articulated this goal to the broader leadership involved in the program. Nonetheless, our interviews revealed a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding, and even a total lack of awareness when it came to this goal. When asked to elaborate on

**Table 1. Respondent Definitions of Diversity**

| Diversity Defined As:       | Number/Percent |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Race, ethnicity, skin color | 21 (78%)       |
| Religious                   | 10 (37%)       |
| Gender                      | 9 (33%)        |
| Age                         | 8 (30%)        |
| Education or ideas          | 8 (15%)        |
| Economic class              | 7 (26%)        |
| Linguistic                  | 6 (22%)        |
| Disability                  | 5 (19%)        |
| <b>TOTAL RESPONDENTS</b>    | <b>27</b>      |

\* Respondents often offered multiple definitions of diversity, and thus the table does not sum to 100%.

the topic of diversity, respondents identified many different characteristics including race, ethnicity, or skin color; religious affiliation; gender; and age (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, the most common response to the question about the meaning of diversity had to do with race, ethnicity, and/or skin color. For example, one individual<sup>7</sup> responded: "It's not a vanilla world. It's rainbow sherbet. We're all God's children." Another said that diversity refers to race, or "the colors of many people." Many of the respondents had witnessed the need for racial or ethnic diversification of the volunteer pool while deploying to disasters, such as to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Some recognized that having volunteers who "looked more like" or "similar to" those who were being served could increase trust in the organization and help the children, in particular, feel more at ease during this stressful post-disaster time. Over one-third of respondents underscored the need for linguistic and regional diversity. As indicated in the following quote, interviewees drew upon personal experience in the field to emphasize the need for multi-lingual volunteers during disaster response efforts:

*Spanish speakers would be helpful. I volunteered during the Northridge Fires. I believe there is something like 120 different languages spoken in [Los Angeles, California]. We had children that had to interpret for their parents. We can only serve children and their families better if we are more diverse.*

In terms of the strategic goal of addressing linguistic diversity, six respondents specifically mentioned language in their definition. For example, one volunteer said, "Diversity in the volunteer group means people of diverse languages." Another respondent, while speaking of the need for an array of language skills, underscored what a challenge it is to find persons who can speak languages other than English:

*They [DVP] do need to look for people with language skills, but I don't know if they actually seek such people out. I remember once they called me to deploy to Puerto Rico, and I said, "Why? I don't speak Spanish." And they said, "But you live in Miami." It's not like Spanish comes in the water, you know?*

Just over one-third of respondents identified religious affiliation or religious ideology as another indicator of diversity. For instance, one respondent said, "Diversity would be... diversity of religious thought." This potential definition of diversity, however, was the most contentious among the interviewees. While the training materials created by DVP clearly state that religious affiliation is not a requirement, some members still believed this to be a central part of the mission, as one respondent expressed:

*From what I understand, because it is a faith-based program, it is expected that volunteers belong to some faith groups... to have some kind of faith that motivates them. I don't think anyone is forced to pray, but it pretty much shouldn't be a shock to anyone that prayer will be involved.*

A number of other respondents emphasized that religious diversity within the program would refer only to Christian diversity. One respondent explicitly stated that those who are not Protestant or who are non-white are not compatible with DVP:

Because we are a faith-based organization, we have the right to exclude people based on religion. If a potential volunteer is 180 degrees different from the Protestant faith, non-white Anglo-Saxon, they are not compatible, but it is not politically correct to say it.

Other respondents emphasized their preference in terms of religious affiliation: "other faiths are fine, but I prefer Christian-based faiths. I don't see where diversity would make a whole lot of difference." Another respondent flatly stated: "[DVP] is a Christian-based organization. If people are not comfortable with this fact, they should find somewhere else to serve."

Nearly one-third of respondents included gender – "It's both men and women even though many caregivers are thought to be only women." – or age – "There are lots of ways to look at [diversity] age-wise..." – as they defined diversity. An even smaller number spoke of education or income. For example, one respondent replied that diversity entails: "A group of people with different ideas, gifts, talents..." Another indicated that diverse volunteers should be accepted from any financial background: "It doesn't matter what economic base you come from." Finally, five respondents included ability and disability in their definitions: "No one is the same. Diversity can mean people with disabilities."

Regardless of which traits individual respondents included in their definition of diversity, a majority (63%) believed their definition mirrored DVP's definition. For example, one respondent stated: "They would define it similarly. I haven't seen it written down, but I know they [national staff] talk about it." Nearly a quarter of respondents (22%) admitted they were unsure altogether about DVP's definition of diversity: "I have no clue. If they did talk about it, it didn't sink in."

While the definitions of diversity varied and a substantial number of the interviewees did not know the official DVP definition, 24 of the respondents (89%) stated that increasing diversity by reaching out to volunteers of varying backgrounds was important. Typical responses emphasized the need for volunteers to better relate to the people they serve as the disaster survivors they

assist are often from different backgrounds culturally, economically, religiously, and racially. For example, one respondent said: "People are different. The people we work with are all from diverse backgrounds, religions, and cultures. Trust has to be built up. First, you trust someone that looks, talks, and acts like you. Then trust builds up quickly." Another asserted: "Yes, I think it [diversity] is important because we're dealing with diverse populations. When you look to the core mission, the need for diversity would be there."

### **Recruiting for Diversity**

As illustrated above, inconsistent definitions and confusion about DVP's stance on diversity did not prevent respondents from expressing an understanding of the need for diversity among the volunteer base. In fact, the participants' impressions of current and future outreach revealed concerns about the prospects of garnering a more diverse volunteer base, although as shown above, diversity is interpreted in multiple and often non-uniform ways.

Historically, DVP has gained new volunteers primarily through personal networking among current volunteers and church members (DVP staff, Personal Communication). At the time of this evaluation, DVP shared with our team that they planned to continue to rely on their usual methods of volunteer recruitment, which focus on word of mouth recruitment through existing volunteers and their networks, speaking engagements, website posts, and a published newsletter (DVP staff, Personal Communication). After talking with national staff about their approaches to recruitment, we asked respondents to describe volunteer recruitment and what they understood as the directives from the national office on recruitment. Interviewees identified only three strategies used to recruit volunteers: 1) word of mouth through current volunteers' personal networks, 2) official communication within the church to affiliated members, and 3) visibility of DVP at disaster locations. Two-thirds of the interviewees emphasized the centrality of personal network recruiting for DVP. As several respondents described, word-of-mouth from current volunteers is envisioned as an important recruitment strategy: "The volunteers themselves do public relations for the program!" Personal network recruiting is often dependent on individual volunteer initiative, as emphasized by another respondent: "We had a volunteer coordinator from a local hospital. I got a lot of recruits from the hospital. Recruitment depends on local volunteers...." These respondents emphasized that the personal network method of promoting DVP eliminated the possibility for more focused recruitment in diverse communities: "Because so much of it is word-of-mouth, I don't think it's real targeted."

Twenty respondents underscored that official communication through the parent church was central to recruiting volunteers: "There is some pretty heavy persuasion from within the church community." This persuasion included various official communications from the parent church, including via email and print newsletters and the organization website.

Five respondents described how DVP presence at disaster sites attracts volunteers. Because DVP often sets up their childcare operations in highly visible locations within disaster shelters and other response sites, this

allows disaster survivors and volunteers from other organizations to observe the various ways that DVP contributes to emergency response. One respondent put it this way: "People see us working at a site, they watch what we do and they want to serve too." Of the three major response themes, all relied on personal networks including ties with current volunteers, a tie to the parent church, and/or meeting and getting information on volunteering from those responding to a disaster.

Considering the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and ideological homogeneity of the parent church, we wanted to find out if the respondents knew about any outreach efforts—or had individually engaged in such efforts—to solicit volunteers from outside the church. Nineteen respondents said they were aware of or had contributed to such outreach. One respondent discussed these efforts, "We're constantly looking for... a diverse group of people... the racial or ethnic background in the church does not reflect the racial or ethnic background of the areas where we're doing the work."

Three interviewees (11%) indicated that there was no specific strategy for recruiting outside the church and five respondents (19%) were unsure, emphasizing a lack of communication from the central DVP office: "I couldn't tell you. It's never been communicated to me." However, 13 of the respondents (48%) believed that this effort was a specific goal of volunteer outreach. Almost all of the remaining respondents indicated that diversity was a goal based on their assumption of recruitment strategies rather than on evidence of these efforts existing. The following quotes illustrate this assumption and the confusion about whether recruiting for a more diverse volunteer pool is indeed a goal of DVP:

*Would hope it [diversity] is and I think it is... But I don't know what they're doing to achieve it... It should be a goal [here]... [DVP] needs a bilingual component otherwise it is limited... up a creek without a paddle... it limits you in some capacity from being as effective as they could be.*

*I don't know if it is a goal, but it needs to be. I'm glad to see the changes happening... Diversity is part of this necessary change.*

*Ask the office staff. It might be, but I have not been made aware of it.*

*I don't know. The door is open but don't know what the push is. I have not been made aware of this goal, but it should be. Why not?!*

Further, a majority of respondents did not know if DVP had plans to alter current recruitment strategies. Respondents sometimes indicated that regional leadership worked in isolation and without consistent communication from the national office: "No, I'm not aware of any. They may have some, but I don't know. I just keep plugging away on my own." Only eight respondents believed there were plans to change recruitment strategies. Two respondents were confident there were no plans to change recruitment strategies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our findings support prior studies that found volunteer diversification important to organizational goals while volunteers and staff often lack a common understanding of how to address this issue (Berthoud and Greene, 2001; Chavez and Lyons, 2010). While most respondents in our study discussed the potentially positive benefits of diversifying the volunteer pool in order to further DVP's mission of serving a diverse clientele of disaster survivors, they were unaware that diversification was a strategic goal of DVP. Consequently, they did not have clear or consistent ideas that would move the organization toward reaching this goal. The lack of awareness of DVP goal of diversity, the variety of definitions of what constitutes diversity, and the small but vocal number of respondents who did not believe diversity was important highlight the need for increased communication about this strategic goal. The following response exemplifies this need: "We have been going through transitions and not all of us are aware of these [changes], again this is a communication issue, but I can see how it [diversity] is a goal and see the need for this."

We found that this religious non-governmental organization was similar to many faith-based volunteer organizations in that it primarily relies on ad hoc, word-of-mouth recruiting, rather than planned and systematic strategies (Netting et al., 2005). Our interviews with national leadership and other staff also revealed that DVP was not aware of the potential failings of personal network recruiting when diversity is the stated goal. Yet, continued reliance on homogenous (white, middle-class, older, church-affiliated) volunteers to recruit through their personal networks will likely perpetuate the current volunteer pool's relatively homogenous racial, regional, and language characteristics. Without a common understanding of diversity, ad hoc interpretations of diversity will continue. Perhaps more worrisome, the potential for excluding entire groups of people (such as non-whites, religious outsiders, and so forth) could continue.

This inconsistent knowledge of the goal and a plan to achieve it is likely to negatively influence implementation, as recruitment strategies will be inconsistent. Our findings suggest that improved communication and relying on non-traditional recruitment methods will increase the likelihood of diversifying the volunteer pool. Because social ties are generally homogenous, organizations that are heavily or totally dependent on recruitment through personal networks may experience challenges in recruiting new volunteers outside of the cultural groups of existing volunteers. For example, researchers have argued that if volunteer organizations and social movements rely heavily on established networks, these organizations will likely remain relatively homogenous (McPherson et al., 2001). Yet, a mounting number of promising practices in this regard now exist. For example, one organization lacking male volunteers increased the gender diversity of its volunteer pool by encouraging each current male volunteer to bring in one new male volunteer (Green, 2007). The organization developed this strategy into an annual initiative, incorporating feedback from current male volunteers on how to best recruit other men. When incorporating diversity goals, organizational culture may prove to

be resistant and less supportive of particular forms of diversification. While some members may be open to enhancing racial diversity, others may not be as open to integrating religious outsiders and/or persons with disabilities into an existing volunteer pool. Getting input from current volunteers, especially those from under-represented groups, can result in greater buy-in and lead to useful suggestions for reaching diversity goals. Our research also suggests that the entire DVP volunteer base needs to be made aware of the lack of volunteers from various racial, ethnic, linguistic, faith, and regional communities and informed of the importance of a diverse volunteer base in order to improve service delivery. If individual volunteers are responsible for diversifying the volunteer network by serving as personal recruiters, they need to understand if DVP has needs for specific groups of volunteers and be encouraged to recruit such individuals. This will only be achieved through the national leadership developing a clearly written protocol, which includes explicit strategies for recruiting diverse volunteers. Indeed, the literature suggests that planning for diversity, including clear communication throughout the organization, is important when trying to incorporate diverse volunteers (Weisinger and Salipante, Jr., 2007). Organizational changes must involve strategies that promote effective communication between leadership at all levels.

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## End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> A graduate-level evaluation research methods class in the Sociology Department at Colorado State University was asked by program leadership to evaluate the Training Program from the perspective of participants and leaders. Six graduate students and two faculty members participated in the implementation evaluation. For additional details regarding the broader evaluation project, see Lueck and Peek (2012).

<sup>2</sup> To maintain anonymity of respondents, we use the DVP pseudonym throughout the article. We also do not identify the program or the church it is affiliated with in order to protect the confidentiality of the organization.

<sup>3</sup> The national staff are the only full-time paid employees in the organization; the rest work on a volunteer basis.

<sup>4</sup> Regional coordinators are the key figures in the DVP “phone tree.” They alert volunteers in their regions when there is a pending disaster deployment. Back-up regional coordinators step in if the regional coordinator is unavailable to perform his or her duties.

<sup>5</sup> Program managers administer disaster site operations, oversee volunteer work, and serve as liaisons with other disaster response organizations on site.

<sup>6</sup> The senior trainers manage DVP volunteer training workshops that prepare and certify new volunteers for the organization.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the small number of organizational leaders, we avoid identification markers in the quotations—such as including the professional status, educational background, or gender of respondents—to maintain confidentiality of particular respondents.



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