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A Case for Stipends in Volunteer Service

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A Case for Stipends in Volunteer Service

Long-term, intensive volunteer roles in civic service programs are often stipended, meaning volunteers receive monetary support for their time commitment that is considerably below market wages. The effect of stipends on role uptake, performance, and perceived benefits is not known. In this study, we seek to understand the role of stipends as an institutional facilitator. Using data from a longitudinal study of older adults serving in the national service program Experience Corps (N=263), we assess stipend status relative to volunteer socio-demographic characteristics, characteristics of the service experience, and volunteers' perceived benefits. Overall, we find that stipends may promote participant diversity. Stipended older adult volunteers also serve for longer periods of time than non-stipended volunteers and their motivations for serving are as altruistic as non-stipended volunteers. Finally, stipended volunteers report higher perceived benefits of participation than non-stipended volunteers. These results suggest that stipends may promote program inclusion, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Key words: *civic service, national service, older adults, stipends, inclusion*

A major policy agenda for President Obama's Administration is the promotion of civic service. Among the goals is the proposed increase in stipended volunteer roles in national and international service programs like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps (President Obama, 2009). The intention is to increase the tens of thousands of stipended volunteers already serving in nonprofit and public organizations. In exchange for part- or full-time commitment, volunteers may receive monetary support considerably below market wages from the federal government, local public organizations, and/or private sources (Tschirhart, 1998; Perry & Imperial, 2001; Perry & Thomson, 2004). There are social policy costs for stipends, but there may be gains as well. Despite the existence of and proposed growth in stipended programs, there is scant evidence about stipends. In this study, we examine the effect of stipends on who serves, for how long, and with what benefits.

We focus on the national service program, Experience Corps (EC), which brings older adult volunteers into public elementary schools to improve low-reading students' academic achievement through one-on-one tutoring, small group academic help, and teacher support. EC was started in 1995, and currently operates in 23 cities across the country. About half of the volunteers nationwide receive stipends from public and private sources. This program variability enables us to compare stipended and non-stipended volunteers and their volunteer experiences.

Background

A stipend is some level of financial remuneration paid to an individual for performing volunteer civic service. The service is not mandatory, and the remuneration is designed not to be equivalent to market wages. Some full-time service programs offer living allowance stipends, like

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AmeriCorps*State and National, which can be a part or full-time service commitment of up to 35 hours per week for a minimum of nine months and for which full-time members are given about \$1,000 per month. Other less intense programs aim to redress costs associated with volunteering, such as transportation, meals, and care for others, with more minimal financial stipends. In the following, we place stipends in the larger institutional context of service and review related research.

An institutional perspective of stipends

When President Obama or others say “service,” most understand the reference. Volunteer civic service is emerging as a known institution in American society (Sherraden, 2001), meaning that people have common understandings about service forms, goals, activities, participants, requirements, and supports. Particular institutional characteristics are believed to leverage service role uptake and service performance by the volunteer as well as service outcomes for the volunteer and those they serve (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Sherraden, & Rozario, 2001; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; McBride & Sherraden, 2007). Two institutional characteristics are most relevant for the study of stipends, incentives and facilitators.

For the purposes of this study, we focus on stipends as facilitators. A facilitator is an institutional characteristic that leverages volunteer role uptake, supports effective role performance, and promotes positive outcomes. Examples include volunteer role flexibility in response to volunteer constraints, stipends for service, and volunteer orientation, training, supervision, reflection, mentoring, and follow-up (Morrow-Howell et al., 2001; McBride, Sherraden, Benítez, & Johnson, 2004).

When stipends are viewed as a facilitator, the focus is on how they leverage participation. Stipends may promote inclusion of diverse populations in service, especially among those who have the desire to serve but face logistical barriers that prevent them from doing so (McBride, 2007). For example, there are opportunity costs to engage in volunteer service that is intense and of a long duration, and those who are of low-income may be particularly challenged to serve. Consequently, it is expected that the receipt of a stipend may help individuals stay in the role longer as it mitigates financial barriers.

The policy discussion around stipends has focused on stipends as an incentive (Evers, 1990). An incentive induces role performance by appealing to the individuals’ motivations for serving. There is concern that monetary remuneration for service may become the primary incentive for volunteer service over altruism, which when taken to scale, could potentially undermine the American volunteer ethos (Bandow, 1990, 1996). Those who view stipends as service incentives believe that instrumental motives for service stretch the conception of volunteerism beyond its boundaries (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Brown, 2000), and that stipended service may be more like a public works program than “pure” service. The fundamental premise is that volunteer service entails sacrifice, and when a volunteer is financially compensated—in any way—then a sacrifice is not made (Evers, 1990).

Related research

Little research has been conducted regarding volunteers’ perceptions of stipends or the possible effects of stipends. In fact, no study has been identified which compares stipended and non-

stipended volunteers. The research that does exist is focused on AmeriCorps, in which all members receive stipends.

Tschirhart (1998) examined perceptions of AmeriCorps service across four age categories with the upper range being 50 and over. The older stipended members were less interested in instrumental motivators, such as career development, and more interested in having a positive effect on others. They also viewed their work as civic duty. Additionally, stipended older adults who did not believe they were effective in their volunteer work were more likely to drop out. This was confirmed in further analysis by Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry, & Lee (1998) who found that the self-rated instrumental value of the stipend was not predictive of service duration across all age groups. Tschirhart, Mesch, Perry, Miller, & Lee (2001) also found that those who received stipends did not develop a stronger focus on instrumental goals than altruistic goals over time.

While these studies shed light on the importance (or lack thereof) that stipended volunteers may place on their stipend receipt as incentive for role uptake and performance, the designs and samples do not allow for comparison of differences between stipended and non-stipended volunteers. Moreover, we do not know about differences between stipended and non-stipended volunteers in their demographics, service performance, or perceived outcomes.

Research questions and hypotheses

Applying an institutional perspective and conceptualizing stipends as a service facilitator, we ask the following questions in this study:

- (1) Are there socio-demographic differences between stipended and non-stipended older adult volunteers in Experience Corps?
- (2) Are self-reported motivations to volunteer and recruitment methods different between stipended and non-stipended older adult volunteers in Experience Corps?
- (3) Are there differences in volunteer time commitment between stipended and non-stipended older adult volunteers in Experience Corps?
- (4) How do stipended older adult volunteers in Experience Corps rate the importance of stipends?
- (5) How do stipends relate to the extent to which expectations are met and the self-reported benefits of volunteering for older adult volunteers in Experience Corps?

As stated earlier, we propose that stipends facilitate volunteer role uptake and role performance. If, in fact, stipends serve this function, we hypothesize that those who receive stipends will be more diverse demographically than those who are not stipended and that stipended volunteers will serve for longer periods of time. Due to the infancy of this research, we take an exploratory approach to the relationship of stipends to motivations and to perceived benefits of volunteering. Furthermore, given that many stipended volunteer programs require a more intense, longer time commitment than other volunteer roles and that this increased exposure may increase the benefits experienced, it is important to examine the independent effect of stipends on benefits, above and beyond the potential effects of time commitment.

The Experience Corps program

The Experience Corps (EC) program has been in existence for over 13 years and currently operates in 23 cities, where a total of 2,000 adults over the age of 55 serve 20,000 elementary school students (Experience Corps, 2009). At each site, paid EC staff members coordinate the program. They identify elementary schools that want to participate; recruit, train, and monitor the volunteers; and assign low-reading students referred by the teachers to EC volunteers. The volunteer tutors are recruited from the local neighborhoods around the school through word-of-mouth and public advertising. In order to participate, potential volunteers must submit an application and references. They must pass a background check and be interviewed by EC staff members. Volunteers receive training on literacy as well as on relationship-building and behavior. Volunteers work with the children individually and in small groups as well as assist the teacher in the classroom as needed.

Of particular relevance for this study is how stipends are awarded to EC volunteers. EC programs across the country obtain stipend money from several sources, including the federal AmeriCorps program, private foundations, and school districts. There are no explicit income eligibility requirements in order to receive a stipend, and the programs award stipends in exchange for a commitment of a certain amount of hours per week for the entire academic year. For example, to receive the AmeriCorps stipends, members must sign up for 10 or 12 month “terms;” they serve 15 hours per week on average; and they receive a monthly, taxable stipend of about \$290. Those members receiving non-AmeriCorps stipends make similar time commitments; stipend rates vary from city to city, but are about \$2.77 an hour.

Methods

Design and sampling

We answer the research questions with data collected as part of a larger multi-method, longitudinal study of the EC program that assesses the effects of service on the volunteers and the children they serve (Morrow-Howell et al., 2008). At the beginning of the 2006 academic year, EC staff members provided research staff with the names of all volunteers joining the program for the first time. New volunteers came from all program sites (18 cities) and included both part- and full-time volunteers as well as those that received a stipend and those that did not. There were 322 members who met the criteria for inclusion in the study (being 50 years of age, able to conduct the interview in English, and did not drop out of the program before completing the interview).

Study participants completed telephone surveys at the beginning of their EC service and at the end of their first academic year. Interviews were conducted by trained interviewers from Mathematica Policy Research in Princeton, NJ. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Members were remunerated with a \$20 gift card upon completion of each survey. Institutional Review Board Approval from Washington University in St. Louis was obtained prior to the start of the study.

Of those eligible, 306 (95%) pretest surveys were completed. At post-test, we completed 263 interviews. This final sample is comprised both of those who completed the program (n=180) and those who withdrew from the program at any time (n=83).

Instrumentation and measurement

The pre-test survey included demographic information, including age, gender, race, education, income, marital status (married or not), and if the volunteer was looking for work or not. The racial make-up of the sample was 54% African American, 39% Caucasian, 1% Asian, and 5% multi-racial/other race. We collapsed this information into non-Caucasian and Caucasian for analytic purposes.

Respondents also reported their motivations for volunteering and how they learned about the EC program. Open-ended responses about reasons for volunteering were coded into seven categories, which were collapsed into two motivations for analytic purposes, altruistic and instrumental (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Mesch et al., 1998). Altruistic motivations included to help children, continue teaching, promote literacy, and give back. Instrumental motivations included attraction to program (looked interesting, well organized), self-benefit (keep mind active, feel needed), need money/part time job, and practical (convenient, had time).

To capture how volunteers were recruited, we collapsed open-ended responses into two categories, recruited by another person or by the media. Recruited by a person is defined as being approached by an EC volunteer, EC staff, or by someone else who knew about the EC program. Recruited through the media means they reported receipt of a letter, magazine, or flyer from AARP; read a newspaper advertisement; received a non-AARP mailing or flyer; attended a community presentation; or some another way.

The post-test survey included information about how many hours a week they volunteered (intensity) and how many weeks they volunteered (duration); number of days taken off during the academic year; and the extent to which expectations were met. Stipend status was recorded dichotomously (received a stipend or did not). Those who received a stipend were asked how important it was to their participation in the program and to what extent the stipend covered program costs.

Perceived benefits of participating in the EC program were captured through seven questions that addressed the following: contribution to others (2 items), meaningful activity (1 item), self-worth (1 item), socialization (2 items), and improved life (1 item). The items were worded to attribute any perceived change to program participation. For example, “I feel like I really helped children I worked with this year” or “I feel that I use my time more productively since joining EC.” All items were weighted on an ordinal scale (1=not at all true to 4=very true). Given the high internal consistency among these seven items, we summed them for a total benefit score (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$) with a theoretical range from 7 to 28 and an empirical range from 8 to 28.

Data analysis

When the question pertains to differences between the stipended and unstipended groups (research questions 1, 2, 3, and 5), chi-square and t-tests are completed. Perceptions about stipends (research question 4) are reported descriptively. To assess the relationship between stipends and self-reported benefits (research question 5), regression with robust standard errors analysis is used. This regression procedure adjusts for the clustering of observations within the 18 EC sites. We use self-reported benefits as the dependent variable and controlled for demographic variables, intensity, and duration

while testing the marginal effect of stipends. Given that volunteers must commit to a certain intensity and duration of service to receive a stipend, we test each of these variables independently before we test them jointly. In this way, we can examine the independent effect of receiving a stipend. When all three variables are included in the same model, tolerance values are all above .55, indicating that the variables are collinear but that estimates are not strongly affected (Berry & Lewis-Beck, 1993).

Findings

Socio-demographic differences by stipend status

Of the sample of 263, 146 receive stipends, whereas 117 do not (Table 1). The average age of EC volunteers is 65 years with a range of 50 to 87 years, and there is no difference between stipended and non-stipended groups. Volunteers are disproportionately female (89%), but there is no difference between the two groups. Most of the volunteers are non-Caucasian (61%), and there is a difference between the two groups in regards to race. A disproportionate number of stipended volunteers are non-Caucasians (70%). The sample is mostly not married/not partnered (64%), and there is no difference between groups on marital status.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of a sample of Experience Corps' volunteers

Variable	Total N=263	Stipended n=146	Non-Stipended n=117	Test Statistic
Average Age (SD, range)	65 (7.9, 50-87)	65 (7.8)	65 (8.2)	t=-0.31 p=.75
Gender				
Male	29 (11%)	12 (8%)	17 (15%)	$\chi^2=2.64$, df=1, p=.10
Female	234 (89%)	134 (92%)	100 (85%)	
Race				
Caucasian	102 (39%)	44 (30%)	58 (50%)	$\chi^2=10.33$ df=1, p=.001
Non-Caucasian	161 (61%)	102 (70%)	59 (50%)	
Average Educational Level (SD, range)	14 years (2.2, 5-17 yrs)	14.23 (2.15)	14.71 (2.22)	t=1.76 p=.08
Average Income (SD, range)	\$30,000-\$35,000 (2.9, less than \$5,000 to more than \$75,000)	6.40 (2.94)	7.51 (2.93)	t=3.04 p=.003
Marital Status				
Married/Partnered	94 (36%)	50 (34%)	44 (38%)	$\chi^2=.32$ df=1 p=.57
Not Married/Partnered	169 (64%)	96 (66%)	73 (62%)	
Employment Status				
Looking for Work	55 (21%)	32 (22%)	23 (20%)	$\chi^2=.20$ df=1 p=.65
Not looking for Work	208 (79%)	114 (78%)	94 (80%)	

The sample has an average of 14 years of education, with the stipended group (14.23) having fewer years of education than the non-stipended group (14.71). The sample has an average annual income of \$30,000-\$35,000 per year, though the stipended group earns less income (\$25,000-\$30,000) than

the non-stipended group (\$30,000-\$35,000). A majority is not looking for work (79%), and the two groups do not differ on this variable.

Differences in motivations and recruitment methods by stipend status

Both stipended and non-stipended volunteers report altruistic motives (68%) and instrumental motives (33%) for involvement (Table 2). There is not a statistically significant difference in volunteer motives between the two groups.

Table 2. Volunteers’ motives, recruitment methods, and expectations by stipend status

Variable	Total	Stipended	Non-Stipended	Test Statistic
Motives (n=262)				
Altruistic	117 (68%)	98 (68%)	79 (68%)	$\chi^2=.0001$ df=1 $p=.99$
Instrumental	85 (32%)	47 (32%)	38 (32%)	
Recruitment Methods (n=261)				
Media	149 (57%)	72 (49%)	77 (67%)	$\chi^2=8.17$ df=1 $p=.004$
Person	112 (43%)	74 (51%)	38 (33%)	
Expectations (n=256)				
Exceeded expectations	87 (34%)	54 (37%)	33 (30%)	$\chi^2=8.85$ df=2, $p=.012$
Met expectations	147 (57%)	85 (59%)	62 (56%)	
Failed to meet expectations	22 (9%)	6 (4%)	16 (14%)	

Most of the volunteers are recruited by the media (57%). However, there are more stipended volunteers that learn of the volunteer opportunity through a person (51%); while there are more non-stipended volunteers that learn of the volunteer opportunity through media (67%).

Differences in volunteer time commitment by stipend status

EC volunteers serve an average of 11.5 hours per week (Table 3), though there is a statistically significant difference between the number of hours served by stipended volunteers (average of 14.47 hours) and non-stipended volunteers (average of 7.81 hours). All volunteers serve an average of 6.44 months, but stipended volunteers (average of 7.37 months) serve longer than non-stipended volunteers (average of 5.27 months).

Most (68%) of the older adult volunteers complete the academic year. However, stipended volunteers are more likely to finish the program (80%) than the non-stipended volunteers (54%). Most of the volunteers took time off (57%), averaging about five days over the course of their service. There is no statistically significant difference between the groups in the amount of time taken.

Table 3. Volunteers’ self-reported time commitment by stipend status

Variable	Total N=263	Stipended n=146	Non-Stipended n=117	Test Statistic
Intensity				
Average hours of service per week (SD, range)	11.51 (6.17, 0.5-40)	14.47 (4.06)	7.81 (6.37)	t=-9.82 p<.0001
Duration				
Average number of months served (SD, range)	6.44 (3.32, 0-15)	7.37 (2.64)	5.27 (3.70)	t=-5.18 p<.0001
Completed program	180 (68%)	116 (80%)	64 (55%)	$\chi^2=18.42$ df=1 p<.0001
Took time off	131 (57%)	77 (55%)	54 (61%)	$\chi^2=.90$ df=1 p=.34
Average number of days off				
Number of days they took off for reasons other than school-related breaks during the service tenure	5.09 (5.67, 1-36)	5.67 (6.20)	4.27 (4.77)	t=-1.43 p=.15

Perceived importance of stipends

Many (43%) of the stipended EC volunteers state that the stipend is “very important,” followed by “important” (31%), “a little important” (13%), and “not at all important” (13%). A majority (63%) state that they could not have participated without the stipend or participation would have been hard. Even with the stipend, some (27%) report that the stipend does not cover the costs of participating in the program, while others (62%) report that the stipend helps meet their living expenses.

Relationship of stipends to expectations and perceived benefits of volunteering

On average, EC members report that their expectations are met (57%). However, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Stipended volunteers are more likely to report that the experience “exceeded” their expectations (37%) than non-stipended volunteers (30%).

Across the seven perceived benefits, stipended volunteers consistently report statistically higher benefits than non-stipended volunteers (Table 4). On a summative scale, the two groups are significantly different from each other in their perceived benefits. Stipended volunteers report more benefit (24.39) than the non-stipended group (21.53).

Table 4. Mean differences in volunteers' perceived benefits by stipend status

Variable	Total N=263	Stipended n=146	Non-Stipended n=117	Test Statistic
I feel like I really helped children I worked with this year	3.71 (.55)	3.83 (.37)	3.56 (.68)	$t=-3.85$; $p=.0002$
I feel that the teacher found my work with children had a positive impact	3.69 (.64)	3.89 (.42)	3.46 (.78)	$t=-5.33$; $p<.0001$
I feel that I use my time more productively since joining EC	3.32 (.87)	3.56 (.67)	3.01 (.99)	$t=-5.11$; $p<.0001$
I feel better about myself because of my involvement with EC	3.50 (.74)	3.65 (.61)	3.32 (.83)	$t=-3.59$; $p=.0004$
My circle of friends and acquaintances increased because of my involvement with EC	3.25 (.89)	3.42 (.84)	3.05 (.91)	$t=-3.43$; $p=.0007$
I feel my social activities have increased because of my involvement with EC	2.54 (1.08)	2.82 (1.00)	2.19 (1.08)	$t=-4.83$; $p<.0001$
I feel my life has improved because of my involvement with EC	3.07 (.93)	3.20 (.89)	2.92 (.95)	$t=-2.47$; $p=.0143$
Summative Benefit Score	23.12 (4.15)	24.39 (3.44)	21.53 (4.43)	$t=-5.71$; $p<.0001$

Note A Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Note B Summative Benefit Score Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$

Table 5 presents the estimates for the regressions where intensity, duration, and stipend are considered separately; the estimates are calculated when all demographic characteristics are controlled. Findings indicate that committing more hours per week, serving for more months in the academic year, and receiving a stipend are each associated with higher levels of perceived benefits. In terms of amount of variance explained in perceived benefits after controlling for all demographic variables, service duration has the strongest relationship with perceived benefits, followed by stipend receipt. Service intensity is marginally associated with perceived benefits.

Table 5. Regression coefficients associated with volunteer intensity, duration, and stipend receipt

	Intensity (hours per week)	Duration (months during academic year)	Stipend
Estimate (S.E)	.11 (.06)	.47 (.10)	2.52 (.60)
Probability	.07	.0002	.0007
ΔR^2	.02	.13	.08

Note A: Age, gender, race, education, income, marital status are controlled.

Note B: ΔR^2 is the change in the explanatory ability of the model when adding intensity, duration, or stipend.

Table 6 presents the regression model that includes all demographic covariates, intensity, duration, and stipend status. Individuals who receive stipends report more benefits to themselves and others than the non-stipended group, while controlling for all other variables in the model ($p<.01$).

Duration is related to perceived benefits of volunteering, with those who volunteered longer ($p < .001$) reporting more benefits. Intensity is not related to benefits when controlling for duration and stipend status. Those who are not Caucasian ($p < .05$) and those with less education ($p < .01$) also report more benefits. The model explains 29% of the variance in perceived benefits.

Table 6. Factors associated with volunteers' perceived benefits of participating in Experience Corps Program (N=263)

Independent variables	Estimate (S.E.)	t (p)
Age	0.06 (0.03)	1.77(.10)
Female	0.68 (0.74)	.92(.37)
Non-Caucasian	1.54 (0.57)	2.69(.02)
Education	-0.40 (0.13)	-3.18 (.01)
Income	0.11 (0.09)	1.31(.21)
Married	-.24 (0.53)	-.46(.66)
Stipended	1.56 (0.50)	3.12(.01)
Duration of volunteering	0.38 (0.19)	4.05(.001)
Intensity of volunteering	-0.00 (0.05)	.08(.94)
R ²		.29

Discussion

This study may be the first to compare stipended and non-stipended volunteers. Because of the unique program design in EC, we are able to examine stipend status relative to volunteer socio-demographic characteristics, characteristics of the service experience, and volunteers' perceived benefits. Overall, we find that stipends may promote program diversity, leveraging inclusion of historically excluded groups such as ethnic minorities and those of low-income. Stipended older adult volunteers also serve for longer periods of time and are more likely to finish the academic year than non-stipended volunteers, which may enhance program efficiency. Finally, stipended volunteers report higher perceived benefits to others and themselves than non-stipended volunteers, which speaks to program effectiveness.

It is important to review the limitations of this study. The sample is ultimately a self-selected group because volunteers chose to serve in EC, a tutoring program, and were eligible and selected to serve. While some older adults in this sample had functional limitations, a majority were relatively healthy. This limits the generalizability of the results to active older adults who are interested in volunteering in tutoring programs. It is important to note that volunteers were not assigned randomly to stipend or non-stipended status. Thus the groups may differ on characteristics that we did not measure in this study. Finally, the observation period is one year of service, and the longer term effects of the stipend cannot be observed.

Stipends and program diversity: Toward inclusion

In this sample, stipended volunteers tend to be older adults who earn less income or are non-Caucasian. While this study can not reveal if they would have volunteered without the stipend, they are the groups most likely to sign up for it, suggesting their perceived need for it. If stipends or some degree of monetary offset for volunteer service is provided by volunteer programs, then more low-income, minority older adults may be able to serve. Ensuring that these populations have access to volunteer roles, which the stipend may provide, promotes equity.

These results suggest that stipends may leverage service participation by groups not traditionally represented. This is important because it is well documented that the current labor force of older volunteers does not represent the older population: older adults of color and those from lower socioeconomic groups are underrepresented (Rozario, 2007; Tang, 2007). The exclusion of these subpopulations of older adults creates a disadvantage to both volunteer hosting organizations and to older adults themselves. Volunteers bring more diversity into organizations, and the integration of diverse populations may enhance social capital. In addition, formal volunteering has been associated with health benefits (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Carlson, et al., 2008) and previous research suggests that individuals with socioeconomic disadvantage experience more positive effects of volunteering (Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2007). Thus, this subpopulation of older adults may be losing potential health benefits as a consequence of low participation in formal volunteering. In sum, study findings regarding the role of stipends in increasing diversity among volunteers are indeed noteworthy at this time when there is heightened attention to creating more inclusive policies and programs (McBride, 2007).

It is important to note that reasons to volunteer are not different between stipended and non-stipended members, suggesting that stipends do not necessarily attract people who are less altruistic; but they attract people who might otherwise remain uninvolved. These data challenge the traditional sentiment that stipends undermine the altruistic nature of volunteering.

Despite existing knowledge about the underrepresentation of older adults of color and those from lower socioeconomic groups in the current volunteer force (Rozario, 2007), there is scant empirical evidence on effective recruitment methods of non-Caucasian older adults. The finding that stipended older adults, who are more likely to be minority or have lower income, are more likely to be recruited through a direct personal appeal than a general media appeal suggests that the source and channels of recruitment are important. Future research could aim to establish recruitment methods that are most effective with subpopulations of older adults currently underrepresented among volunteers.

Stipends and service longevity: Toward efficiency

At a time when nonprofit organizations are experiencing increased volunteer turnover (CNCS, 2008), stipends may reduce volunteer management costs. Stipended volunteers in this study serve nearly twice the number of hours per week, provide more months of service, and are more likely to complete the academic year. The implication of this finding for volunteer management is that the costs of stipends may produce greater savings. The amount of time and effort needed to recruit, train, and manage a new volunteer is substantial (Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Hager & Brudney, 2004). Excessive turnover dilutes the potential long term effect of the program, as stability

of the volunteer labor pool leads to better outcomes for the organization, the service recipients, and the volunteers themselves (Miller, Powell, & Seltzer, 1990).

Stipends and volunteer benefits: Toward effectiveness

The benefits reported by the volunteers are important. Many report that they help children and believe that the teacher finds their work with children to have a positive impact. They reportedly use their time more productively, feel better about themselves, increase their number of friends and acquaintances, are more socially active, and feel that their life improved because of involvement with Experience Corps. These are profound benefits that affect children, teachers, and themselves, and stipended volunteers report higher levels of these benefits than non-stipended volunteers.

The higher benefit levels reported by stipended volunteers are partially related to the fact that these volunteers served for a longer duration than the non-stipended volunteers. It is also important to note that the volunteer service “dose” or weekly commitment was not as important as the duration of time the volunteer experienced that dose. Simply put, more time may allow the volunteer to develop deeper relationships with the students, teachers, and fellow volunteers.

Given that stipend receipt has an independent effect beyond time commitment, there may be other meanings associated with stipends that influenced perceptions of benefits. Perhaps volunteers who receive stipends feel more recognized or feel more positive about the experience because the associated costs of volunteering are not so burdensome. Stipended volunteers may view the volunteer role more seriously, thus feeling they have more invested in the experience and expecting to get more out of it. Because the program is also “investing” more in them, they may feel obligated to experience positive benefits. Speculation aside, it is evident that in order to accrue the benefits mentioned, a commitment needs to be made, and stipends help facilitate that commitment. More research is needed to understand the causal mechanisms.

Conclusion

Given the increased worldwide prevalence of stipended programs and current domestic policy proposals to expand them further, study of the impact of stipends is timely. Within the context of this study and its limitations, the findings present a case for stipends as a policy and program instrument. Conceptualized and affirmed as an institutional facilitator, stipends leverage involvement of diverse populations in service, who serve longer and report more benefits. There is also evidence that stipends do not necessarily attract people who are less altruistic, but they attract people who might otherwise remain uninvolved.

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