

Combining Paid Service and Volunteerism: Strategies for Effective Practice in School Settings

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INTRODUCTION

The need for—and value of—volunteers has become increasingly apparent, both programmatically and politically. Volunteers are a source of inexpensive labor, and many institutions have come to rely on them to help accomplish a host of organizational objectives. Within the public schools, for example, volunteers often take on the crucial role of literacy tutor. While the introduction of parents and community residents into school settings is by no means a recent phenomenon, more attention is now being paid to increasing the number and effectiveness of volunteers who work with students.

The Clinton Administration's focus on childhood literacy—as reflected in continued federal funding for the America Reads Challenge, an initiative that seeks to “mobilize public and private resources to help all our children . . . read independently and well by the end of third grade”—has inspired the creation or expansion of tutoring programs across the entire service spectrum. Conceived in part as a response to the fact that 40 percent of the nation's fourth-grade students failed to attain the basic level of reading on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress, America Reads has sought, since 1996, to generate one million volunteer reading tutors within the space of five years. In addition, the Corporation for National Service (CNS) has made children and youth a priority for AmeriCorps, with the goal of broadening the emphasis on their learning and development.¹

Not surprisingly, these events have influenced the direction and focus of local AmeriCorps programming. It has also prompted many public school systems—financially strapped and under pressure to raise the standardized test scores of all students, including those who come to school with a challenging array of academic and personal needs—to open their doors and classrooms to volunteer tutors.

The kinds of things that volunteers are asked to do are becoming more complex, particularly as the federal government devolves responsibility for delivering a range of social services to states and localities. As a result, volunteers are not only asked to sell baked goods to support the purchase of new instruments for the school's marching band, they are also asked to come into the classroom to help teach children to read, or to be mentors who provide guidance and support. The volunteers who sign up to do this work arrive with a range of skills and experience that, when effectively harnessed, can play a significant role in a youngster's school success.

This is the second in a series of reports that examines approaches to uniting the efforts of paid national service participants and unpaid volunteers. Drawing on information generated through Public/Private Ventures' Spectrum of Service project, the reports are intended to illuminate the sometimes overly theoretical debate about the relationship between paid and unpaid service providers and the professional staff with whom they work, and to contribute useful information to program practitioners.

Directing the energy and skills of school volunteers can be particularly challenging for teachers and administrators whose professional responsibilities leave little free time for additional management duties. No matter how well-intentioned volunteers are, without an infrastructure to support and direct their efforts, they are less likely to be effective and, worse yet, may become disenchanted and withdraw.

In order to give necessary support and direction, paid service providers such as AmeriCorps members and VISTAs are being placed in schools where they bridge the gap between the students who require tutoring and the volunteers who wish to tutor them. While paid service providers tend to have more time to devote to this effort than do their volunteer counterparts, they are often inspired by the same desires—to give back to their communities and to make a difference in the lives of children. With a consistent presence in the schools, paid service providers can enhance the value of volunteers, enabling them to make a significant and lasting commitment by creating and maintaining the infrastructure required to support their work.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

At the heart of the Spectrum of Service (SOS) initiative is identifying, recording and reporting on how paid service providers support the work of their volunteer counterparts in school settings. Supported by The Ford Foundation, SOS is a three-year demonstration through which P/PV is gathering information about

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the strategies that programs use to effectively combine paid and unpaid service, and disseminating it to the field so that both practitioners and policymakers can benefit from lessons learned.

P/PV is working with seven sites across the country that vary in geography, budget, size and longevity, and were selected to represent a range of programmatic approaches to combining the work of school-based paid and unpaid service providers. During each of the initiative's two implementation years, P/PV is providing the SOS sites with grants to support the expansion and enhancement of this work, and the means to participate in a "learning community" where they gather—via a series of cross-site conferences—to exchange information, provide peer support and generate data that is made available to both the service and volunteer fields.

Selected because they combine the work of paid and unpaid service providers and because they work within school settings to provide either tutoring or mentoring support for youth, the seven SOS sites provided P/PV with plans for the first year of initiative activity. During Year 1, which ended in August 1999, all the sites indicated their intention to expand and/or improve program operations. Not surprisingly, the sites have opted to use the P/PV grants, which are highly discretionary, to explore options such as developing enhanced training for paid and unpaid service providers and staff, and to conduct more substantive program evaluation—things that categorical funds do not typically allow. The sites have also used the grants to begin working in additional schools, hiring staff and leveraging additional resources.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

All of the SOS sites work with schools, typically recruiting, training and supervising paid service providers who, in turn, work with and support unpaid volunteers. Typically working within schools, paid service providers—who may be full- or part-time AmeriCorps members, VISTAs, Senior Leaders from Experience Corps or work-study students—play an essential role as volunteer generators, supervisors and colleagues. The paid service providers reside at the junction where busy administrators and overworked teachers, dedicated

THE SPECTRUM OF SERVICE SITES

Campus Link

Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning—Jackson, Mississippi

Program Goals. To increase reading comprehension of Mississippi's elementary school students by creating one-to-one tutoring relationships between college students and elementary school students; to create a statewide network of college campus service centers.

Connect Tucson

Volunteer Center of Tucson—Tucson, Arizona

Program Goals. By working with clusters of agencies/organizations to form mentoring/tutoring programs and provide community service leadership, Connect Tucson seeks to ensure that every youth in Tucson will be connected to an adult mentor who can serve as a positive role model.

Experience Corps

Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning, in partnership with RSVP East
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Program Goals. To mobilize a corps of older adult volunteers to help elementary school children improve their reading and literacy skills; to establish a critical mass of volunteers to help partner schools achieve their stated educational goals; and to create partnerships among older adult volunteers, parents and schools to foster reading and literacy at school and at home.

Leaps in Literacy/After School Program

Generations Incorporated, in partnership with the Old Colony YMCA—Boston, Massachusetts

Program Goals. To improve the literacy skills of second- and third-grade students by an average of at least 2.5 reading levels, and encourage an enjoyment of reading.

Providence Summerbridge

Summerbridge National—Providence, Rhode Island

Program Goals. To provide academic and social support to motivated middle school students in the Providence public school system and to help these students enter and succeed in college preparatory high schools. Providence Summerbridge also provides opportunities to talented high school and college students to teach and contribute to community empowerment.

San Francisco AmeriCorps Collaborative

Volunteer Center of San Francisco, in partnership with the Urban Service Project and Linking San Francisco
San Francisco, California

Program Goals. To improve academic achievement, increase community involvement and expand leadership opportunities for San Francisco children and youth by developing and utilizing the talents of AmeriCorps members in public schools and community-based organizations.

Volunteer Maryland

Maryland Governor's Office on Volunteerism—Crownsville, Maryland

Program Goals. To develop sustainable volunteer programs in all national service issue areas; to call Marylanders into service; to develop service leaders.

volunteers and young students who need academic help and individual attention, intersect. According to a vice principal in a San Francisco middle school, “Any school that uses volunteers has to have someone to make it happen. In our case, that’s the AmeriCorps member.”

Getting In

Working effectively as an outsider in school settings, regardless of program content or format, requires a solid plan and the capacity to communicate it to administrators, teachers and other school personnel. During the first year of the SOS initiative, the seven participating sites shared some of the strategies they consider essential to initiating effective partnerships with schools.

Show how your program will help achieve existing educational objectives.

Prior to approaching the schools with whom they sought to work, the SOS sites identified the ways that their program designs could contribute to existing educational plans or priorities. The sites articulated this “fit” on several administrative and operational levels, from state departments of education to individual school buildings:

At the state level. The state of Rhode Island has devoted considerable time and resources to education reform efforts. This, in turn, has prompted the state’s service commission to focus all of its AmeriCorps programming on initiatives designed to enhance educational outcomes. Providence Summerbridge is part of this larger statewide educational reform effort. Volunteer Maryland initiated its outreach to schools at the state level as well, ensuring buy-in at the top, and assuming that schools would be likelier to pay attention to information coming from a source that they recognize and respect than from an outside entity.

At the district level. In San Francisco, enhanced literacy is a school district priority. The collaborative, of which the Volunteer Center of San Francisco is a member, exists in large part to improve literacy rates among public school students through service learning and

related activities. In Philadelphia, the School District has put its imprimatur on the Experience Corps’ work, partnering with Temple University to engage an increased number of elders in school-based tutoring efforts.

At the school level. When programmatic objectives align with school-level goals, outside providers are more likely to appeal to administrators. At one of the Brockton, Massachusetts schools where AmeriCorps members from Generations Incorporated and its partner, the Old Colony YMCA, work side-by-side with elders to tutor elementary school children through the Leaps in Literacy program, a reading specialist said, “[it] is an integral part of our developmental reading program.” In Philadelphia, another reading specialist remarked, “[The Experience Corps] knew our feelings as far as literacy is concerned. We have made a big investment in our new reading program, and this provides us with extra support.”

Articulate what your program will provide and accomplish.

While it is essential that programs seeking access to schools illustrate how they will contribute to student success, it is also important that they show prospective school partners who will benefit and what the outcomes will be. The SOS sites utilize a variety of strategies to promote their programs and demonstrate their effectiveness.

For service recipients. Using pre- and post-test reading score data, Campus Link shows potential partners how the reading comprehension levels of students in their existing tutoring programs have increased. The Experience Corps in Philadelphia also uses student pre- and post-test scores from schools it works with to show potential partners the program’s solid track record with students.

For school partners. AmeriCorps members from both the Volunteer Center of Tucson and Volunteer Maryland not only provide services to youth in schools

and community-based settings, they also work closely with staff at these partner institutions to build a lasting volunteer management infrastructure that will remain after their tour of duty is completed. The fact that these programs both enhance youth educational outcomes and build institutional capacity are what makes them attractive to potential partners.

Engage school personnel prior to program start-up.

School-based staff at both the administrative and classroom levels have to be fully invested in any outside program for it to be effective. This is particularly true in the case of the work being done by the SOS sites because they are typically asking not only to be allowed to operate within the school, but to have what could be a fairly significant effect on the school environment. In addition, teachers who are continuously faced with new instructional programs and models that may or may not prove to enhance student outcomes, are likely to be wary of the claims made by yet another outside provider. Paid service providers and volunteers, therefore, need to be mindful of the larger context within which they are operating, including the potential for resistance. By working with, and gaining the trust of, school personnel from the outset, the SOS programs have been able to effectively integrate their work into the school setting.

The SOS sites have used a number of strategies to ensure that school administrators and teachers are comfortable with their presence and amenable to their programs. In Boston, San Francisco and elsewhere, principals who have previously worked and had positive experiences with service-related programs can be effective ambassadors, espousing the potential benefits to the rest of their staff. In Providence, it was the Assistant Superintendent of Schools who brought together all the city's middle-school principals to discuss the soundness of Providence Summerbridge's approach, providing the program with a measure of legitimacy—based on its reputation elsewhere—before it had even been implemented locally.

Volunteer Maryland makes certain that all key stakeholders at a school are engaged from the outset. By bringing staff and parents together, asking for their input in defining student needs and including them in the program-planning process, Volunteer Maryland ensures a high level of investment from the start. Staff and parents thus not only contribute to enhanced educational services, they also own the outcomes. As such, they are likely to remain supportive of the program and highly invested in its results.

Take advantage of existing institutional relationships to access school partners.

While most programs seek to build partnerships with new schools in order to provide services to a broader range of students, some of the SOS sites have also taken advantage of existing partnerships to access schools. Generations Incorporated has been able to capitalize on its partnership with the Old Colony YMCA in Brockton to extend services beyond the Boston city limits. The Y not only provides AmeriCorps slots for the initiative, but has been instrumental in gaining access to the Brockton schools, where personal relationships with principals helped to open doors.

In San Francisco, the Volunteer Center acts as the fiscal conduit for the SOS grant and places AmeriCorps members in schools through a partnership with the San Francisco Urban Service Project. For purposes of program implementation, this relationship is strengthened by Linking San Francisco, which is working to bring service learning to all schools within the San Francisco Unified School District. Together, these organizations—along with the Child Development and Healthy Start programs, comprise the San Francisco AmeriCorps Collaborative, which has been able to extend its reach and expand its services.

Similarly, AmeriCorps members from the Volunteer Center of Tucson are brought into the public school setting through collaborations formed with other program providers in the Marana and Sunnyside Unified School Districts. A Volunteer Center partner,

the Family Resource and Wellness Program, has been working with the Marana School District for over four years. As a result of this relationship, the Volunteer Center has classroom access and an agreement with the school transportation department, making implementation of both in-school and after-school mentoring and tutoring programs relatively simple.

Be clear up front about programmatic processes, objectives and expectations.

All the sites have devoted significant time to providing program information and materials to prospective school partners. Prior to recruiting AmeriCorps members, Volunteer Maryland staff lay the groundwork for the program through an extensive process that includes the development of a written plan, site visits by Volunteer Maryland staff, and preservice training. As a result, programmatic goals and objectives, as well as each partner's roles and responsibilities, are clear to all involved.

In Boston, Generations Incorporated staff meet with school personnel the summer prior to program implementation and explain what the Leaps in Literacy program seeks to accomplish and exactly what the responsibilities are for each player. In Philadelphia, prior to program implementation, Experience Corps staff meet with the principal, reading specialist and all the teachers whose students will be tutored, to explain not only the program's structure and content, but also the recruitment and training process for service providers and volunteers.

At most of the SOS sites, it is made clear from the outset that the AmeriCorps members are simultaneously providing services and developing their own skills. Thus, school staff are urged to recognize the developmental nature of the position and adjust their expectations accordingly. At the same time, these staff are assured that the paid providers will be effective volunteer managers, thus mitigating any additional burden that teachers and administrators might otherwise expect. Said a San Francisco program manager,

“If the school leadership can look forward enough, and believe in the AmeriCorps member's potential, that's half the battle.”

Preparing Paid and Unpaid Service Providers for Work in Schools

While forging institutional relationships and ensuring schools' interest in program content and structure are important early steps in program implementation, so too is preparing paid and unpaid service providers to work effectively in the school environment. When providers are well-prepared, they not only know what is expected of them and what they are likely to face on-site, they can also be confident that their work will be meaningful and have value for the students they serve. What follows are some of the strategies that the SOS sites use to support the development of paid and unpaid volunteers.

Paid service providers require a fairly sophisticated level of competency so they can both provide quality direct service, and manage volunteers and negotiate relationships within schools. Not surprisingly, the paid providers, who are often AmeriCorps members, tend to receive more training hours than do their unpaid counterparts. This is due both to the mandate of the National Service legislation and to the need for training in a broader range of skill areas. Although SOS sites offer in-service training to both volunteers and paid service providers, often conducting joint trainings related to service content (e.g., mentoring and tutoring), most of the SOS sites devote more time to paid provider development at the outset, building a strong foundation of skills, including recruitment and oversight of volunteers. Skills development at the front end also builds confidence among paid providers who will likely be placed either alone or with one other paid provider in a potentially resistant school setting.

The training innovations described below were developed by the SOS sites in response to the unique needs of paid and unpaid service providers who work in school settings. Interestingly, while these strategies represent training approaches developed in different programmatic settings, they all share a common

element: input from successive groups of peers whose experience is intended to help strengthen the capacity of their successors. As such, the trainings are constantly changing so that providers can effectively respond to new situations, new objectives and new school settings. Having discarded the cookie-cutter approach, the sites are continuously responding to a changing environment; this helps to ensure that incoming service providers are getting the most up-to-date training possible.

Build on the experience of outgoing paid and unpaid providers.

Several SOS sites use the experience of departing paid and unpaid service providers to build training content and format. As the sites move into new schools, tap different funding streams, and become more adept at intentionally blending the work of volunteers and paid service providers, the trainings evolve—with input from outgoing personnel—to keep pace with the changing environment.

Generations Incorporated staff have put a significant amount of time into gathering feedback from paid and unpaid volunteers at the completion of their service cycles to ensure the relevance of subsequent provider training. At Providence Summerbridge, an incoming and outgoing paid service provider work together for an entire semester before the newer provider is expected to work independently. This on-the-job training benefits the new provider, who has an opportunity to learn from another's experience at the same site where s/he will be working, and benefits the exiting provider who gets some assistance at the point when s/he is preparing to transition out of the program. Because volunteers are likelier to stay on for more than a year, this approach also eases the transition from one manager to another for them. In San Francisco, an alumni panel participates in orientation meetings, leading small group question and answer sessions and describing their experiences for incoming providers.

In addition to communicating information on-the-job or during orientation sessions, veteran providers at

some sites also leave a paper trail. In San Francisco, school-based AmeriCorps members maintain a binder in which they place meeting notes, flyers, newsletters, memos, etc., throughout the program year. That notebook provides a starting point for the incoming AmeriCorps members, who can pick up where their predecessors leave off with a clear sense of what worked (and did not work) during the previous year. This continuity from year to year helps the paid providers operate effectively and indicates to school staff that the program is evolving rather than re-creating itself each year.

The SOS sites have also hired outgoing paid and unpaid service providers as staff, ensuring continuity and diminishing the learning curve considerably. For example, Connect Tucson has hired a former AmeriCorps member as the Assistant Program director and uses a second-year AmeriCorps member to help the first-year members adjust to their positions.

Tap into the expertise of specialists.

While most sites provide paid and unpaid volunteers with a tour of the school and an opportunity to meet administrators and teaching staff each fall, San Francisco takes the orientation process one step further. This site invites a School District representative to provide a “reality check” during the preservice training. The objective is to strike a balance between the enthusiasm of AmeriCorps members who are often young and highly idealistic, and the challenges that come with being an outsider with new ideas who faces an established system. As a result, the AmeriCorps members receive training in how to communicate their enthusiasm effectively—not so much to rein it in as to channel it.

The Campus Link program hires reading training specialists—usually professors from affiliated colleges and universities—to train volunteer tutors. In addition, some professors in Mississippi require that students in their reading instruction courses become volunteer tutors through Campus Link. In this way, the students can apply what they are learning to the field and reflect on their experience as it unfolds.

Fitting In

Having prepared the service providers and assured their host schools that the programs they offer will contribute to student learning outcomes, SOS sites not only have to begin providing quality programming, but also to integrate paid service providers and volunteers into the school day. According to the SOS sites, “fitting in” is as much about learning how to operate within a given school’s culture as it is about providing services. And, while the previous sections describe issues that off-site program managers typically address, what happens within the school building is, in large part, a function of what paid and unpaid service providers themselves are able to accomplish.

How well-prepared these service providers are, then, is just one part of the equation. Since they are typically the program’s central players, the paid service providers, in addition to supporting the work of the volunteers, must establish themselves within the school structure. Becoming aware of, and sensitive to, the school culture is therefore the first order of business. Knowing the procedures for bringing outsiders into the school setting, using the school equipment, honoring the dress code and understanding when and how to access teachers, are all considerations. Said one Campus Link provider, “We met with the principal, staff, teachers and the secretary—who was probably the most important person to build rapport with.”

Take the initiative.

In order to be taken seriously, the service providers need to have a substantial presence in the schools, but must avoid overwhelming teachers and administrators. Finding this balance usually requires that service providers be pro-active and take the initiative. One San Francisco AmeriCorps member said, “We put ourselves out there, and they come to us.” Echoed a Campus Link provider, “You need to make yourself available, be seen, and let them know you’re serious.”

AmeriCorps members at most of the SOS sites make it a point to get on the agendas of regular teachers’

meetings, often right from the start of the school year. This guarantees that information about their program is shared across the school, and that teachers become familiar with their work. While paid service providers and volunteers are not school employees per se, attendance at these meetings and at other regular school functions, such as assemblies, helps to demystify their presence and contribute to increased acceptance. In Mississippi, AmeriCorps members take the initiative when they first contact a school and introduce their Campus Link tutoring program to the staff. While most of the other SOS programs rely on program staff to develop relationships with schools, in Mississippi it is up to the AmeriCorps members, all of whom are college students, to initiate contact with elementary schools near their campuses, build relationships with school staff and implement programming.

Incorporate programming into the existing school structure.

How well the program becomes integrated into the school environment is another consideration. Does the school have previous experience with, and a real commitment to, working with outsiders? How much of a need does the program meet? How distinct is the program from the rest of the work being conducted at the school? Do teachers see how tutoring/mentoring can fit into their instructional plans? Is information being shared about student progress? Successfully fitting is, in large part, a function of the nature of the school itself. School structure influences “fit” in several ways:

Level of school openness. In addition to a school’s size, its receptivity may also be influenced by its level of openness. There are several indicators of this: the level of parent engagement; the strength and involvement of the PTA; the school’s willingness to have outside entities such as researchers, the press and community members visit and spend time within the building; and the extent to which the school is a community resource after hours. At least two of the SOS sites, for example, operate within community schools where the emphasis is on openness and accountability to local residents.

By contrast, another school, while supportive, remains somewhat tentative about the program's potential size and reach. Said an administrator, "We wouldn't want the program to be too big. I mean, I wouldn't want 100 tutors. After all, we can't have everybody tutoring."

The existence of other outside programs. Whether and how well a program "fits" can also be influenced by the existence of other programs being implemented within the building. SOS sites have found that they need to ensure that what they offer complements rather than duplicates existing programming. A reading specialist in one of the Brockton schools noted that a portion of the students receive Title 1 services. Therefore, he is careful to recommend students who are not already receiving those services to the Leaps in Literacy program as a means of "spreading the wealth." Being aware of and, where possible, collaborating with existing school-based programs makes it easier to integrate into the school and is likely to enhance the program's value.

Previous experience of staff and administrators with other outside programs. Too often, well-meaning groups and individuals approach schools with the intention of working with them, and then fail to follow through with, or fall short of, their original commitment. Schools, not surprisingly, can sometimes be wary of outsiders as a result. For example, a new principal in Brockton had worked with an outside service program at his former school. This program did not provide volunteers with the same level of on-site support that AmeriCorps members (from the Generations Incorporated program) do in his current school. While he appreciated the value of both programs, he had the added responsibility of overseeing the effort in his previous school. Needless to say, his appreciation of the current system has been considerable. If school staff are invested in, and students are benefitting from the program, it is likelier to stay.

Willingness to facilitate a "fit." There are several ways that schools take ownership of outside programs and ensure that they "fit." Schools sometimes contribute to the "fit" by including a line item in their budgets for

programmatic expenditures. While the level of monetary support provided is often relatively minor—funds for supplies, or buses for after school programming, for example—the fact that such a line item exists suggests significant buy-in on the part of school personnel, and is a tangible indicator of institutionalization. For programs, it is an indicator of confidence, and for schools it is a small investment that will likely yield a substantial return. According to Providence's Assistant Superintendent of Schools, "It's small money for big gains."

Some schools are asked to pay a nominal fee in order to receive program services. Typically, as is the case in San Francisco, those dollars go to defray the cost of the match for the AmeriCorps member's stipend. Other, newer, SOS sites that have only been in the schools for a year or two anticipate requiring payment for the services they offer in the coming years. One school principal, whose school already pays a fee for these services, said, "It's an investment, not a burden."

In addition to providing financial support, schools can help ensure "fit" in other ways. When the Campus Link program was first implemented at one Mississippi school, teachers were using the tutoring sessions as rewards for students' good classroom behavior. It was not until the principal made it clear that these sessions were part of the school's overall plan for increasing student literacy scores that this informal policy was changed. Understanding that the program was an integral part of the school day and not something that could be used to reward or punish students, teachers made it a point to ensure that students attended the sessions regardless of classroom behavior. They also began to interact more with tutors so that the tutors could better understand the specific literacy skill needs of the students with whom they worked. In another Mississippi school, the AmeriCorps members are invited to attend all the professional development trainings offered to the teachers, including those that take place out of town. At yet another Campus Link school, the service providers document each of the tutoring sessions and keep student files in a location that teachers can easily access.

At one Volunteer Maryland school, the program is explicitly written into the school improvement plan. A Philadelphia school provides each Temple Experience Corps volunteer with his/her own mailbox. As a result, these tutors receive all the mail the teachers do, including such important information as school schedule changes.

Use school resources strategically and diplomatically.

Often housed in a formerly empty office or classroom, paid service providers and volunteers have devised creative ways to use scarce resources. Limited space is often a particular challenge. In one San Francisco school, AmeriCorps members share an empty classroom with the school's bookkeeper. It is divided, using free-standing screens, into "offices" and meeting spaces. In a Brockton school, the Leaps in Literacy "office" was formerly the room of a Title 1 teacher who moved to another floor in the building. The service providers at this school share a phone jack with the reading specialist.

Other resource issues that can challenge outside service providers include access to supplies, fax machines, phones and copiers. Each school responds a little differently depending on what is available, the level of usage requested and the willingness of school staff to share. When the school sees providers as partners rather than interlopers, it is typically easier for them to access these resources. The providers themselves have devised strategies such as only asking certain individuals for permission to use the copy machine, or only using the fax machine after school hours or at less busy times of day. Often, it seems, simple courtesy goes a long way. The relevant issue here is that service providers must be aware of, and responsive to, the dynamics that surround the ownership and use of these resources.

Recognize and respond to barriers.

Barriers to effective practice in schools come in many forms. Even if programs are clear up front and service providers invest time and energy in gaining teachers'

trust and building partnerships with other school personnel, hurdles are likely to remain. These hurdles are manifested in several different ways.

Structural barriers. Some barriers are, quite literally, structural. How schools are physically configured can influence program practice. In one Brockton school, the environment is open, with few walls and doors to delineate classroom space. Volunteers, therefore, meet with youngsters at tables in common areas. Adjusting to the movement and noise level can be challenging but not entirely unmanageable. What is required is creativity on the part of the providers, who move tables to quiet corners and get to know their assigned students' capacities for concentration and focus.

In a Philadelphia school, where elders tutor youngsters, there are four flights of stairs. Some of the tutors have trouble making the climb, so the young people come downstairs to them. Also, for providers working with older students who tend to move from classroom to classroom for different subjects, scheduling tutoring sessions around this movement requires somewhat more attention than that needed for the younger students who tend to be in the same classroom for most of the day, and thus are easily located.

Transitional barriers. In addition to structural barriers, there may be transitional barriers in those schools where programs have been in place across multiple school years. Any service provider who arrives at a school after others have been there is likely to encounter one of two situations: (1) The previous provider was exceptionally gifted and is missed by the staff and teachers. The challenge for the new provider is to establish his/her own style and value rather than to try and convince school personnel that s/he is as good as (or better than) the person who came before; (2) The previous provider was focused on service delivery and spent little time building relationships with school staff. Despite her/his programmatic effectiveness, the school's experience was not especially positive. The new provider, then, is faced with having to overcome resistance based on the school staffs' previous experience. Here, the challenge is to find a

balance between delivering quality service and building relationships (and, in some instances, repairing them) rather than on “proving” one’s worth relative to another’s. In addition, the previous provider may have simply not performed well, leaving school staff uncertain about the new provider’s abilities. Again, it is up to the new provider to focus on the work at hand—and, ideally, for staff to remain open to the program’s potential.

Timing-related barriers. While it can be challenging to accommodate programs that operate during the school day (students are often taken out of the classroom to be tutored for example, and the teacher must manage the scheduling implications of this and other “extras” that result in students moving into and out of the classroom throughout the day), barriers are present in programs that work with children after school as well.

While it is apparent that relationship-building with school staff is an essential component of program success, it is a particularly difficult thing to do when providers are only in the building after most teachers have left for the day. Although relationships with office staff become critical in the after-school hours, it is more difficult to see teachers about students’ work. This is a challenge in Providence, where the after-school service providers are mostly college students who rarely have the extra time to visit the school building during regular hours because they are in their own classes during the day.

While these providers do not have to be as concerned with fitting into the school culture, they find that building relationships with teachers is somewhat more difficult. Said one, “I haven’t really felt comfortable seeking out teachers and asking questions about students.” Several strategies are employed in Providence to address these challenges. Some providers are able to fit time into their schedules to see teachers during the school day. Others contact teachers and parents by phone. The program manager also visits the schools regularly as a way to maintain institutional relationships and connect with teachers about students’ progress.

While barriers exist for outside service providers who seek to work in school settings, the SOS sites have been able to devise some promising strategies for overcoming these constraints. By becoming value-added resources to schools and creatively utilizing scarce resources, paid and unpaid service providers at the SOS sites continue to build on lessons learned, and to develop new and more effective ways to contribute to student outcomes.

Becoming a Value-Added Resource

Paid and unpaid service providers are present in the schools in order to enhance the teaching and learning that take place there. Because the teachers in the SOS schools often face a shortage of resources and an excess of students in the classroom, they are in particular need of outside support. This assistance clearly does not supplant the teachers’ work; it supports it. A program manager at one of the San Francisco partner agencies said, “They [the paid and unpaid providers] are not displacing people. If they weren’t there, it wouldn’t get done.”

This is particularly true for SOS programs because they utilize both paid providers, who typically manage the volunteers, and the volunteers themselves, who provide tutoring services. Having a paid service provider in the school is central to the success of SOS programming. When a volunteer tutor is late or unable to come in, the paid provider can either step in and cover what would otherwise be a missed session, or pair the child with another volunteer. One Campus Link AmeriCorps member carries a pager so that if a tutor is running late, she can fill in until s/he arrives.

Teachers have also found it useful to have only one contact (the paid service provider) when there is a classroom scheduling change. For example, planning a class trip does not require the teacher to call all the volunteer tutors scheduled for students that day. Rather, the teacher contacts the paid provider who, in turn, notifies the volunteers. By blending the work of paid and unpaid service providers, SOS sites are ensuring streamlined programming that is less burdensome to schools and more beneficial to students.

Most of the administrators and teachers with whom we spoke were extremely positive about hosting SOS programs in their schools. Several noted the consistency and quality of the services provided. Like the Brockton principal mentioned earlier, administrators especially appreciated the presence of paid providers as managers. Said one Mississippi principal whose school hosts a Campus Link program, “My first thought was, ‘Will I have to watch over these kids?’” She went on to note that it hasn’t been the case at all. Now in the second year of hosting a program, another Brockton principal commented, “It’s no burden at all. But for the progress of the kids, I wouldn’t even know it was here.” Vice Principals in San Francisco and Brockton both feel that the programs they host are “one notch up” and “by far the best” of any they have seen, in large part because neither they nor their staffs have to be concerned with volunteer management.

Noted a school Vice Principal, “Teachers are focused on teaching basics. The AmeriCorps members and volunteers do the extra work.” It is important to note that “extra” is not frivolous or add-on. Rather, the work of the SOS programs in the schools, as noted earlier, is intended to make a substantive contribution to youth learning. Program goals are explicitly directed toward making real, measurable academic progress as reflected, for example, in improved reading scores. This is the value-added aspect of what paid and unpaid service providers bring to the educational setting.

CONCLUSION

As we noted in the first paper of this series, programs have developed several strategies to effectively combine the work of paid and unpaid service providers. This paper takes a closer look at this process by examining the operational features of the seven SOS sites, all of which are school-based, and all of which combine paid service and volunteerism to achieve programmatic objectives.

As this paper suggests, it is nearly impossible to separate the implications that working in school settings has for any outside provider, and those it has for the initiative’s “blended” programs. The challenges that the seven SOS sites face are no doubt confronted by countless outside organizations and individuals seeking to enhance youth outcomes *via* in-school and after-school programming. And some of the strategies for effectively dealing with the challenges we note here are relevant to these programs as well.

Yet when we begin to look at *how* the SOS programs contribute to students’ learning, the *ways* that these programs are implemented and managed on site, and the *reaction* of staff and administrators to their efforts, it becomes clear that there are strategies for operating effectively in schools that are unique to programs that explicitly blend paid and unpaid service. These strategies are included here as a means of helping programs that have traditionally focused on one group or the other, work effectively with both.

Endnote

¹ *Literacy: New Frontier for AmeriCorps*, Ray Collins, AmeriCorps Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, at www.etr-associates.org/NSRC/rcv2n4/rdv2n4toc

While this paper focuses on program implementation, the next report in the series will address the operational challenges that often surface when staff, paid service providers and traditional volunteers, who are likely to possess different skill levels, time commitments, motivation and experience, attempt to work together to achieve programmatic objectives. The paper will examine how the roles of, and relationships among, these groups have evolved at the seven SOS sites and what the implications are for effective service delivery.