

Increasing the Volunteer Retention Rate at Community-Based Literacy Organizations

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Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle

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Abstract

This paper examines the research on volunteer retention and how it affects community-based literacy organizations such as Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LVCA). As nonprofit organizations traditionally have limited resources, lowering the turnover rate among volunteers has the potential to provide a significant return on investment. Volunteer motivations can be understood through the lens of Clary, Snyder, & Ridge's *Volunteer Function Inventory* (1992), which seeks to determine what function volunteering serves in a volunteer's life. It is hoped that by understanding what need volunteerism fulfills in a tutor's life, LVCA can meet that need, retain more volunteers from year to year, and provide a meaningful volunteer experience.

Keywords: volunteers, adult education, retention, nonprofits

Volunteer Retention Rate at Community-Based Literacy Organizations

Organization

Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle (LVCA) is an independent, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that helps adults learn to read, write, and speak the English language through the use of trained volunteer tutors. Each student is matched with a volunteer for the duration of his or her study time with LVCA, or for a maximum of two years. In addition to meeting educational goals, friendships often develop between the pair. According to the organization's *Annual Report* (Literacy Volunteers, 2017a), almost 90% of the adult learners who seek services at LVCA are immigrants and refugees who speak a primary language other than English. In fiscal year 2017, the organization served 463 students with 391 tutors (*ibid.*), indicating a disparity between the number of people who deliver services and the number of people who use them. The organization requests that volunteers commit to serving two hours a week for an entire year because the students need consistency of relationship to encourage attendance and meet their learning goals (Tutor Requirements, n.d.).

The need for this service in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area is significant— in fact, of the 522 inquiries the organization fielded for help in 2017, the organization only accepted 221 new students (Literacy Volunteers, 2017b). Although the organization recruited and trained a significant number of new volunteers, 168, over the course of the year (*ibid.*), the unmet student demand demonstrates clearly that many more are needed in the program.

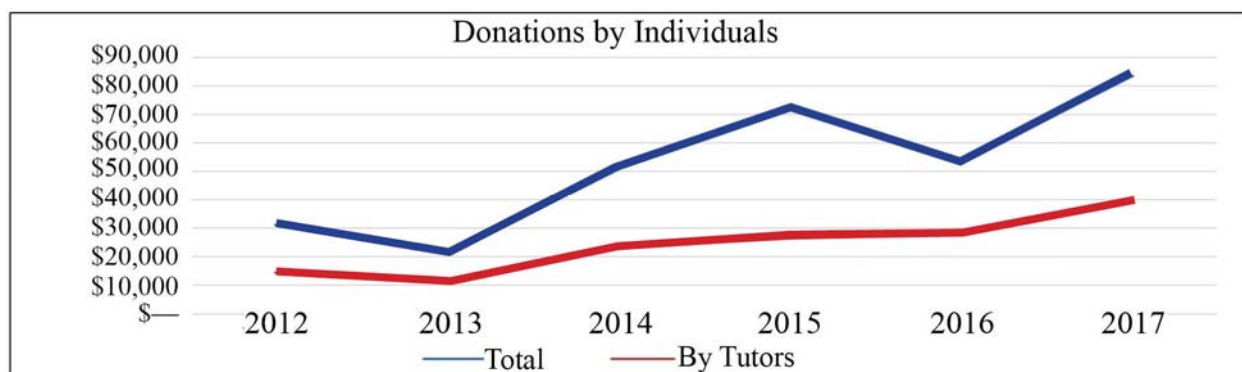
Rationale for Topic Selection

Personal reasons for selection. As executive director of Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle for the past 6 years, I have witnessed significant growth in numbers of volunteers and students in the program, and still the demand for our services is unmet. In an effort to increase recruitment and retention, the organization engaged a market research firm in 2012 to

conduct interviews with volunteers to understand their motives. From this study, I learned that the volunteer experience at LVCA met several needs: the need to feel connected, the need for retirees to fill their days, and the need to feel as if the volunteer gives back to the community (Quest-Insight, 2013). The volunteers themselves described needs for the organization as strong as the organization's need for them. Since learning these results, I have been intrigued with the idea of making volunteer fulfillment an equal part of the organization's mission, on par with educating our students. We have an excellent program manager who can focus on meeting the needs of the students because of his adult education expertise; I would like to focus on the needs of the volunteers who deliver the instructional service.

Significance of study. There are many community-based literacy organizations (CBLOs) in Virginia and across the nation that rely on volunteers to teach adult literacy skills on a one-to-one basis. While LVCA and similar type organizations will continually seek to recruit new volunteers, I believe there is a significant return on investment to retaining current ones. In my experience, long-term volunteers bring stability to nonprofit organizations and often donate financially as well. In my analysis of LVCA's donor records from the past six fiscal years, I see that between 38% and 45% of our tutors also donate money as well as time. In some years, donations from tutor volunteers has accounted for over 50% of the revenue from individual donations (Osborne, 2018). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Donations in FY2012-17 by all individuals and by tutors



The Problem Statement

Over the past 5 years as the organization has almost doubled in the number of students served and volunteers recruited, the volunteer retention rate has dropped from 67% to 64% (Literacy Volunteers 2012, Literacy Volunteers 2017a). I believe that Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle can experience better retention of tutors. The mission of LVCA is to help adults learn to read, write, and speak the English language—but should the mission be expanded to include *providing a meaningful volunteer experience*? I hope to discover what constitutes a meaningful volunteer experience in adult literacy organizations, determine if it is likely to have an impact on the volunteer retention rate, and identify the costs and benefits of instituting these changes. Many community adult education programs are descendants from Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), founded in 1962 (*Mission/History: Empowering adults*, n.d.). I believe volunteerism in the United States has changed over the last 50 years and I wonder if we are still applying practices of the 20th century to 21st century programs.

When Ruth J. Colvin became aware that 11,055 functionally illiterate adults lived in her hometown of Syracuse, New York, in the early 1960s, she thought someone should do something about it. After deciding she could take a few hours out of her week to find out how to solve the problem, she became an advocate for addressing the issue, and a short time later, Literacy Volunteers of America was established (Colvin, 1987, p. 4). Now there are approximately 7,000 adult education programs across the country addressing the issue (National Literacy Directory, n.d.).

Literacy Volunteers of America disbanded its system of chapters in 2002 when it merged with Laubach Literacy International (*Mission/History: Empowering adults*, n.d.), but in its heyday in 1987, there were 277 LVA programs in 34 states and 10 state literacy volunteer organizations that used the talents of thousands of volunteer tutors (Colvin, 1987, p. 49). Through my experience

with the Virginia Department of Adult Education and Literacy, I know that most adult literacy programs, whether independent nonprofit organizations or part of the government's educational system, welcome and use volunteers—primarily because adult education programs are often underfunded and cannot hire enough teachers. At LVCA, the 16,699 hours of volunteer teaching documented in its annual report (Literacy Volunteers, 2017a), has an economic value of approximately \$750,000. This is the equivalent of having 15 full-time teachers on staff. According to the *Independent Sector*, the value of a volunteer hour was \$24.14 (The Value of Volunteer Time, n.d.).

Delimitations

Obviously, a volunteer needs to be recruited before he or she can be retained, but this paper will not analyze the efficiency of particular recruitment efforts beyond conducting a cursory examination of recruitment costs vs. retention costs. While many nonprofits use volunteers to deliver services, this paper will primarily address retention efforts at community-based literacy organizations in the hope that the research will be useful to the network of literacy programs that depend on volunteers for instruction. Throughout this study, my intention is to explore the value of adding the concept of personal volunteer fulfillment to the mission of the organization, equal to student instruction, as a solution to improve retention rates.

Research of the Literature

The Volunteer Landscape in the United States.

During 2016 there were 62.8 million volunteers working in nonprofits across the country, which is 25% of the adult population donating their time to worthy causes (The Charitable Sector, n.d.). Across the United States, volunteerism has been on the decline for the past several years, with the highest rate being in 2003, 2004, and 2005 at 28.8% (Ebner, 2015).

Ellis and Campbell, authors of *By the People: A History of Americans as Volunteers*, believe that accounting for volunteerism in the United States is essential to develop a more complete picture of our American heritage. They make the case that sometimes volunteers underestimate the impact of their work and contributions to our shared history (2005, p. vii). For decades, when women were not in the workforce, they contributed untold hours toward the common good in many unpaid positions. In fact, when Ruth Colvin began recruiting and training tutors for Literacy Volunteers of America, the majority of them were middle-aged women “who continue to be the backbone of our organization” (Colvin, 1987, p. 32).

Ellis and Campbell maintain that volunteering has been perceived as “women’s work” or wrongly assumed as work done by untrained people (2005, p. viii). In the establishment of the Literacy Volunteers model, Colvin and her associates paid close attention to the training and equipping of volunteers—an emphasis which is still important to Literacy Volunteer programs. In fact, a small but dedicated industry addressing the curriculum and training needs of those in the adult literacy field has flourished with the establishment of the national organization, ProLiteracy, a descendant of Literacy Volunteers of America (ProLiteracy Education Network, n.d.).

Volunteers at Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle. In contrast to national data, Literacy Volunteers has experienced an uptick in the number of volunteers recruited and trained and the number of volunteer hours worked over the past six years as shown in Table 1

below. The only number that is declining is the retention rate—the number of tutors who come back for an additional year of tutoring after completing their current one.

Table 1

Comparison of Active Tutor Data, FY12—FY17

	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Active Tutor/Student Pairings	n/a	226	300	305	359	428
Total Number of Active Tutors	191	205	252	308	336	391
New Tutors Recruited/Trained	66	82	112	113	149	168
Tutor Retention Rate	67%	68%	69%	60%	65%	64%
Number of Volunteer Hours	14,452	14,899	17,357	19,147	23,805	31,074

(Literacy Volunteers Strategic Plan, 2017)

In 2013, the organization hired a part-time employee to actively recruit and support volunteers, and that position grew to a fulltime position in 2016. I realized early in my tenure at the organization that we would benefit from approaching the recruitment of volunteers from a marketing perspective and these recruitment tasks needed to be concentrated in one position. This accounts for the significant jump in new tutors recruited between FY13 and FY14. The staff offered four trainings for new volunteers per year in FY12 and increased those offerings to 10 by FY16, which provided more people opportunities to become volunteers.

Characteristics of Tutors

Age. Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle has consistently had a tutor base primarily of women, many of whom are retired or not in the labor force by choice. Many of these are in the generation known as “baby boomers,” born between 1946 and 1964. According to a study produced by the Corporation of National and Community Service in 2007, baby boomers have the potential to be valuable volunteers because of their high education levels, health, and

wealth (Foster-Bey, Grimm, & Deitz, 2007, p. 2).

The baby boomer years stretch across several of LVCA's age brackets in the data collection system, so for the sake of this study I examined the participation of tutors ranging in age from 45 to 74 over the past six years. When the baby boomer study was published in 2007, they were between 43 and 61 years old and are between 53 and 71 today. A report on the percent of tutors in this age bracket for the last six fiscal years, along with gender and employment status can be found in Table 2. A complete breakdown of tutor demographics can be found in Appendix A.

According to Foster-Bey et al. (2007), the retention rate of volunteers of the baby boomer generation in educational services is approximately 68%. Older generations in this field were retained at the rate of 64% (*ibid.*, p. 10, figure 4). In my experience, however, community-based literacy organizations are sometimes viewed as social or community services. In Foster-Bey and others' study, retention rates in the social and community services field were different than in the educational field, with baby boomers retained at the lower rate of 66% and older generations being retained at a higher rate of 72% (*ibid.*).

Also noteworthy in the baby boomer study was the finding that a "high attachment to volunteering" is indicative of a high retention rate (*ibid.*, p. 9). Volunteers who donated 100 or more hours per year had at least an 80% retention rate, regardless of whether or not they were a baby boomer or older (*ibid.*, p. 9, figure 3). This finding is significant for LVCA because the organization requests volunteers make an initial commitment of at least 2 hours per week for an entire year, which will be at least 100 hours.

While LVCA does not have data on retention rates broken out by the age of volunteers, I do know the overall activity hours of volunteers and their year of birth. In the data set of tutors provided by LVCA, of the 1,133 tutors who have participated in the program since their initial training in 2005—the first year for which data is available—465 were born in the baby boomer

years. Of the 465 boomers, it appears approximately 278 (60%) spent more than 365 days in the program, (Yadlowsky & Osborne, 2018), less than the national average for this age group.

Table 2

Age, Gender, and Employment Data of Tutors FY12—FY17

	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Total number of active tutors	191	205	252	308	336	391
Overall retention rate of tutors	67%	68%	69%	60%	65%	64%
Percent of Tutors who are Female	81%	79%	74%	75%	71%	75%
Percent of Tutors Aged 45-74	63%	70%	69%	74%	65%	64%
Percent of Tutors Retired or not in labor force	41%	41%	46%	55%	50%	49%

(Osborne & Overstreet, 2018)

Gender. Retention rates for LVCA dropped to an all-time low of 60% in 2015. The long-time program manager responsible for training and curriculum support, a middle-aged female, moved out of the area then and the position was filled with a middle-aged male. In my opinion, the staff change accounts for some long-time tutors, who had personal relationships with the departing staff member, leaving the program in 2015. At LVCA, tutors interact with the program manager at the initial training and at the first student/tutor meeting. After getting started, however, tutors can choose to find support from the male program manager or any of the female staff. Since the teaching field is heavily dominated by women, I imagine some tutors might be more comfortable with a female program manager.

Education level. Not surprisingly, the bulk of tutors at Literacy Volunteers are highly educated. In an analysis of 1,133 tutors who have engaged with the program since 2005, 490 (43.2%) have a graduate or doctorate degree. Another 500 (44.1%) have a college degree. The remaining 143 (12.7%) have an associate's degree, some college experience, or stopped their

formal education in high school (Yadlowsky & Osborne, 2018).

Best Practices in Volunteer Retention

Hager and Brudney, in *Volunteer Management Practices and the Retention of Volunteers* (2004), found strong differences in retention rates between organizations that relied on volunteers to sustain their direct-service work and organizations that used volunteers sporadically.

Organizations with sustained use of volunteers, such as community-based literacy organizations, had better retention practices overall. They focused on enriching the volunteer experience in three ways: recognition, training, and professional development, and screening and matching (p. 6).

LVCA follows these three recommendations with varying levels of success.

Recognition. The organization recognizes volunteers at an annual appreciation event, which varies in popularity from year to year. In 2017, approximately 70 individuals attended the recognition event (volunteers and their spouses). I wonder if one event per year is sufficient, because almost all of the literature mentioned the importance of recognizing volunteer work in a public setting. In particular, Fisher and Cole (1993) write of the importance of events: “Such events assist in the development of a climate that positively influences volunteer motivation and develops strong connections among volunteers within the organization, between volunteers and paid staff, and between the work of volunteers and the organization’s mission” (p. 69).

Training and professional development. LVCA offers on-going training and professional development opportunities, primarily because it is in the Literacy Volunteers heritage. Ruth Colvin, founder of Literacy Volunteers of America, believed strongly in providing adequate training and continually worked to revise and improve the training (Colvin, 1987, p. 37).

In FY17, 86 of the tutors in the LVCA program (22%) attended a professional development opportunity offered by the organization, spending a total of 251 hours receiving in-service training. In addition to in-house workshops, LVCA promotes other learning opportunities such as

the Georgetown University's *Teaching English as a Foreign Language* (TEFL) Certificate Program. Several other tutors have taken an *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) Basic Course offered by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). As some of the volunteers participating in these training opportunities are young professionals, they are likely to be using their volunteer experience and related credentials to strengthen their résumés. Clary et al would support this theory.

Newton, Becker, and Bell, in *Learning and development opportunities as a tool for the retention of volunteers: a motivational perspective* (2014), found that investment in professional development is a two-way street. Volunteers may be inclined to stay with an organization when they perceive the organization is investing in them by offering learning opportunities (p. 526). The “value-added benefits” of volunteering, such as these learning opportunities (ibid., p. 516) are similar to the “return value” discussed by Pidgeon in *The Universal Benefits of Volunteering*—the “overall benefit that an individual can receive from the volunteer experience” (1998, p. 34).

Along with training and development comes the issue of supervision. Hager and Brudney (2004), offer a finding that is surprising. In their study of 1,753 organizations conducted for The Urban Institute in 2004, they discovered that “regular supervision and communication with volunteers” is associated with *lower* levels of retention (p. 9). Steven Reid, program manager at LVCA believes the crux of the matter is accessibility:

I think the key is accessibility of the staff. When volunteers can stop by and ask questions at any time, they know they have the full support of the professionals who are on hand to assist them whenever they need. Some volunteers need lots of hand-holding; some need none. By having paid staff available all the time, the tutors know where to go if they need help (personal communication, March 17, 2018).

Musick and Wilson (2008) found that volunteer retention is likely to suffer if they feel there is too much bureaucracy within the organization. Volunteers tend to lose their motivation when required to complete specific tasks to the organization's specifications (p. 433). Literacy Volunteers requires that tutors submit a written report monthly on their activities with their student (Tutor Requirements, n.d.), and the organization has dismissed one or two volunteers each year for failure to supply this information in a timely manner.

I believe the balance between bureaucracy and independence, and between the concerns of paid staff vs. the concerns of volunteers is best achieved by examining individual volunteer circumstances. There is no one-size-fits all solution because staff and volunteers have different goals. Musick and Wilson (2008) sum it up best: "The paid staff gives priority to efficiency; volunteers give priority to the expression of values" (p.438).

Screening and matching. Screening and matching volunteers to the appropriate task is extremely important for creating a positive volunteer experience at LVCA. Not only do the volunteers self-select to match to the organization, the staff makes a concerted effort to match a tutor with a student who will be of interest to the volunteer. When making a student/tutor match, the program manager takes into account factors such as the type of learner the volunteer desires to teach (an English-speaker or one who has a different first language), and educational level of the student (low or high). The program manager also takes into account whether or not a student has a gender preference for a teacher, which is often based on cultural differences. The most significant consideration when making a student and tutor match is the availability of the tutor and student, as their schedules need to allow time for meeting together. Hager and Brudney (2004) found that organizations that use many volunteers for many hours are highly likely to adopt screening and matching as a volunteer management practice, and this indicates a greater investment in volunteers (p. 6, Figure 3).

Why Individuals Volunteer

Ruth Colvin, founder of Literacy Volunteers of America, saw firsthand the value of volunteering. She quotes one of the tutors in her program about the rewards:

My life has been enriched because I have greater understanding of the problems faced by many people in our country who are of another race and culture than mine. Whenever we give of ourselves in love, we always seem to grow... . (Colvin, 1987, p. 34)

The tutors at LVCA have expressed similar sentiments. Lindsay Daniels, who not only tutors a lower-level student from Mexico, but also works fulltime in a restaurant, expressed her gratitude for the opportunity:

I'm really grateful to be able to do this. ... Even though I might feel tired or overwhelmed a particular day, giving back to someone else helps revitalize me as a person. It makes my life better. (Literacy Volunteers, 2016)

While anecdotal experiences indicate the benefits of volunteering, there have been numerous academic studies about why individuals volunteer. The number one reason for volunteering given by 85% of the 1305 respondents in the *National College Graduate Study on Volunteering* in 1991 was self-satisfaction and helping others (Pidgeon, 1998, p. 37).

In my own experience of working with volunteer tutors at LVCA, I have seen individuals receive personal satisfaction when their student makes an educational level gain or achieves a personal goal. I see them finding value in the one-to-one contact with their student; I know that many tutors stay in contact with their student even after the match has ended. Tutors also enjoy making broader connections to other tutors in the program. In the Quest-Insight study of tutors at LVCA (2013), the “Emotional Drivers” for volunteering fell into three themes: *helping others*, *giving back*, and *feeling good*. Of the three emotional drivers, it was deemed most important that the volunteers “leave feeling better than they did when they arrived” (p. 11).

A group who created the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which described six motivating factors for volunteering (Clary, et al., 1998), put forth helpful insights. Through a series of 30 questions, they break volunteer motivations down into six categories: (1) values, such as helping the less fortunate; (2) understanding, where the volunteer is seeking to learn; (3) enhancement, whereby one is seeking to grow psychologically; (4) career, to gain experience to help in the workforce; (5) social, to fill one's need for interaction; and (6) protective, which reduces guilt over one's own lot in life. Clary and Snyder's (n.d.) "The Functional Approach to Volunteers' Motivations" handout and "Volunteerism Questionnaire" is Appendix B.

In some of Clary and Snyder's early work, "enhancement" is labeled as "esteem" (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992). Specifically, "Volunteering serves an esteem function to the extent that it enhances a person's esteem by making the person feel needed and important" (ibid., p. 338). This terminology most closely matches the results of the Quest-Insight study at LVCA where volunteers expressed a need to feel needed (2013, p. 11).

The inventors of the VFI suggest that to retain volunteers, organizations should understand the motivating factor for originally becoming a volunteer, and build upon it. Their studies found that "volunteers who received benefits congruent with personally important functions had greater satisfaction with their volunteer activity...and greater intentions to continue to volunteer in the future" (Clary, et al., 1998, p. 1528).

A systematic review of 48 research studies using the Volunteer Functions Inventory concluded that the VFI "adequately addresses the most common motives in most types of volunteers" (Chacón, Gutiérrez, Sauto, Vecina, & Pérez 2017, p. 315). Consistently in these studies, volunteers said they were primarily motivated by altruistic reasons, and the "Values" indicator on the VFI scale obtained the highest scores in almost all the studies. The scale with the second highest score was "Understanding" (ibid., p. 307). This study did not examine retention

rates of volunteers, but gave credence to the validity of the VFI as a reliable instrument for gaging volunteer motivation. I will use these concepts for examining volunteer motivation at LVCA because the VFI has become a standard research tool.

Newton et al (2014), conducted research on learning development opportunities among volunteers, which is related to the “understanding” function of the VFI, and found that these opportunities had some impact on retention because of the perceived organizational investment in the volunteer. They also discovered that “individuals motivated to volunteer to build their self-esteem (the enhancement function) were most likely to be retained, with higher organizational commitment and intentions to stay” (ibid., p. 526). These researchers suggest that the key to developing a long-term volunteer workforce is assessing one’s motivation at the recruitment stage. When a volunteer’s need is consistently met, he or she is likely to continue in the program. Furthermore, they suggest that an organization’s marketing language could be tailored to appeal to individuals with particular types of motivations (ibid.).

Other than the Quest-Insight study in 2013, LVCAs has done little to understand volunteer motivations, although the organization adopted a number of recommendations from the study. One suggestion that has not yet been implemented is “Communicate that volunteering with LVCA helps others with major goals but also benefits volunteers in multiple ways (social contribution, learning about different cultures, developing new relationships with students and other tutors, etc.)” (Quest-Insight, 2013). While LVCA’s marketing efforts have a broad reach, LVCA has not matched marketing messages to any motivations other than the values-based motivation of concern for others. I believe this should be addressed in future recruitment efforts.

Retention Rates at Other Community-Based Literacy Organizations

It is difficult to determine an “average” retention rate among community-based literacy organizations because services and clientele vary. At the READ center, in Richmond, Virginia,

Karen LaForge says the organization retained 76% of their tutors last year. However, 100 of their 130 tutors are working in classrooms, so they have a different experience than the one-to-one tutoring model. Last year they increased communication with tutors and offered two volunteer recognition events (personal communication, March 19, 2018).

Literacy Volunteers of Northern Virginia is in the midst of studying its volunteers to determine what they have in common, in order to better target its recruitment and retention efforts but do not have easy access to the data as a whole. In Winchester, Virginia, Literacy Volunteers does not track volunteer retention because they do not have a waiting list of students needing services. “We tend not to worry about it, recognizing that people will come and go,” said executive director Mark Sieffert. Volunteer retention rates are not kept at Literacy Volunteers of Rochester, New York, either (personal communications, March 19, 2018). I believe that as the nonprofit industry becomes more professionalized, organizations will begin to see the need for documentation. It is my hope that Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle can set the standard for data tracking and analysis of volunteers.

The Costs of Recruiting and Training Volunteers

Organizations that use volunteers to sustain their programs, such as LVCA, incur significant expenses for recruitment and training. The organization documents that 60% of its annual budget is spent on personnel (Literacy Volunteers, 2017a). According to internal budget breakdowns for the organization, approximately \$50,000 of staff time is allocated to the recruitment and training of volunteers. Additional costs for recruitment, such as advertising and training space, account for another \$20,000, for a total of \$70,000 in this department. If the organization is losing more than 1/3 of the volunteers each year, it is experiencing an enormous waste. It is in the organization’s interest to retain as many trained volunteers as possible.

Application

National data on volunteerism and specific data on volunteer tutors at Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle indicate that there are many motivations for volunteering and staying at a nonprofit organization. Organizations that can retain those volunteers will save on recruitment costs and enjoy the other benefits long-term volunteers provide, such as stability and financial donations. As the organization begins to recognize the volunteers as equal beneficiaries of services, I believe the retention rate can rise.

Steps to Implement the Change

Clary, et al.'s research on volunteerism makes clear that it is important for an organization to understand what motivates individuals to volunteer (1992). In the case of Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle, there is documentation of tutors engaging with the program because of all the reasons on the Volunteer Function Inventory (Quest-Insight, 2013). The Quest-Insight report predominantly discovered a general desire to help others (values), an interest in learning about other cultures (understanding), a need to feel needed (enhancement), and some volunteers have an interest in building a stronger social network (ibid.) While Literacy Volunteers has one line on their *Volunteer Intake Form* (Appendix C) requesting why a volunteer is interested in LVCA, the organization does not yet have a way to systematically analyze these responses yet. By understanding each tutor's motives for volunteering, the staff will be able to invite tutors to specific activities that align with their interests.

The first step to increasing tutor retention is to survey the volunteers and have them rank their reasons for volunteering. It is unlikely that volunteers will submit to the entire 30-question Volunteer Function Inventory, so I have designed a 3-question survey to acquire the information needed (See Appendix D). Question 2 on the survey is in the form of a matrix/rating scale, which

forces the participant to rank the reasons for volunteering between “most important” and “least important.” The tutors will also have the option to include their name and additional comments.

This survey should be done annually, because volunteer motives may change over time. Ilsley (1990), states, “the more deeply volunteers become involved with an organization and its mission, the more fluid their motives become” (p. 22). Ilsley warns that some organizations lose volunteers because they continually treat them as if they have the same motives as new volunteers (ibid., p. 31). In the case of LVCA, a volunteer’s motive may change over time because he or she may become emotionally attached to his or her student, the organization itself, or both. As executive director, I want the volunteers to be motivated by their students’ progress; yet, also be motivated to continue because he or she views the organization as well-managed and making a difference in the community. Ilsley (1990), explains that there are differences between client-centered volunteers and organization-centered volunteers (ibid., pp. 33-56). The task of surveying tutor volunteers can begin as early as May, 2018 and be part of the onboarding process for new volunteers. Volunteers are already surveyed after their participation in the initial training event for feedback, and these questions could be included.

Projected Cost of Changes

The volunteer motivations most likely within the control of LVCA are the “Social,” “Enhancement/Esteem,” and “Career” indicators on the Volunteer Function Inventory. In some cases, activities proposed to address the “Career” motivations will be the same activities the organization would offer to address the “Understanding” motivation. Professional development opportunities will appeal to someone who is interested in gaining experience teaching English as a Second Language for their career potential and also to a retired teacher who no longer has the occasion to sharpen his or her skills in the workplace. I am assuming there is a common thread of altruism throughout the volunteer base, which represents “values” on the VFI. Therefore, the only

VFI motivation we will not address is “Protective.” This category appears to have more psychological implications than the staff is willing to address.

The one-year costs to determine motivations are listed below. None of these activities are currently happening at LVCA and will be additional costs to the organization.

Table 3

Costs to determine motivations of volunteers

	Costs
Develop survey=	\$100
Printing=	\$20
Data input=	\$250
Administer survey 4 x per year in addition to administration at tutor training events=	\$330
Assemble and review data for dissemination to staff and board=	\$300
Total costs to determine motivations of volunteers=	\$1,000

Table 4

One-year estimated costs to address the social function of volunteering

	Costs
Tutor appreciation events=	\$1,600
Informal tutor social events at local establishments=	\$800
Tutor book group, planning and participation=	\$700
Total cost of activities addressing social function of volunteering=	\$3,100
Less current offerings=	-\$1,500
Projected NEW costs in this area=	\$1,600

Currently LVCA provides for one tutor appreciation event and the book group to fulfill the social function of volunteering. To fulfill the enhancement/esteem function of volunteering, the organization includes some current tutors in the new volunteer training events as instructors, and the organization creates a few videos highlighting tutors each year. See Table 5 for costs. To fulfill the career/ understanding function of volunteering, LVCA provides several activities to a lesser extent than outlined on Table 6.

Table 5

One-year costs to address the enhancement/esteem function of volunteering

	Costs
Staff time organizing volunteer participation in training events=	\$500
Capturing volunteer stories in video or written form for publication=	\$2,400
Board and tutor lunches, staff time to organize=	\$250
Board and tutor lunches, 12 x year=	\$350
Additional staff contact with volunteers regarding student progress=	\$3,000
Total cost of activities addressing enhancement/esteem function=	\$6,500
Less costs of current activities=	-\$1,300
Projected NEW costs in this area=	\$5,200

Table 6

The one-year costs to address the career and understanding functions of volunteering

	Costs
All-day tutor retreat with keynote speaker and workshops=	\$2,000
Tutor Roundtables: Opportunities for tutors to get together and share best practices=	\$600
In-service tutor workshops, 11 per year=	\$2,200
Publicizing outside opportunities for education=	\$300
Educational field trips to Monticello, Free speech wall, etc. Staff time, publicity=	\$1,600
Total cost of activities addressing Career/Understanding function=	\$6,700
Less costs of current activities=	-\$2,500
Projected NEW costs in this area=	\$4,200

To improve the volunteer retention program, LVCA will experience an increase in costs of approximately \$12,000. This is primarily in staff hours, approximately 8 to 10 more hours per week. Adjustments could be made in staff responsibilities, and a part time staff member could add the additional hours.

Projected Benefits

We have no historical data to indicate the effectiveness of any of these interventions, so we do not know how much we can reduce the turnover rate. There is not much data available regarding where retention rates should be, based on interviews with four other community-based literacy organizations; but LVCA has experienced a 69% retention rate in the past (FY14) with little effort put into the problem. Therefore, I will aim for a 70% retention rate, which is reasonable based on the organization's history and Foster-Bey et al's general analysis of volunteer retention (2007). Moving the needle from a retention rate of 64% to 70%, in terms of real people, means the organization will retain 274 volunteers next year instead of 250 (24 more individuals, a 10% improvement).

Based on the donation history of volunteers, 40% of these people (10) will probably also donate to the organization. Since the average individual gift from a volunteer is \$206 (Osborne, 2018), retaining these volunteers could bring in an additional \$2,060. This does not take into account any connections these individuals may have with private foundations or corporate donors, which yield larger gifts.

Table 7

Projected Benefits of Increasing Volunteer Retention Rate by 10%

	Value
Value of volunteer labor retained, 100 hours x 24 people x \$24/hour =	\$57,600
Elimination of wasted training dollars, \$400 x 24 =	\$9,600
Projected financial donations from retained volunteers =	\$2,060
Total benefits to be experienced by increasing retention rate by 10% =	\$69,260

Return on Investment

Current cost of retention problem. Based on FY17 data of recruiting and training 168 new tutors, it costs the organization approximately \$400 to recruit and train each new tutor. If this

were a paid job, it would be regarded as a “medium complexity job” and estimated costs of turnover based on published studies on ROIs would be 25% of an employee’s yearly salary according to Cascio and Boudreau (as cited in Leatherman, 2018, p. 28). For this study, however, we will use the costs known to the organization of the training and development.

It is important to note the difference between how a nonprofit organization and a for-profit organization will approach calculating a return on investment. Unfortunately in many nonprofits, cash flow is often tight, so actual dollars may be more valuable than volunteer labor, since volunteer labor cannot be used to pay the bills. However, for the purposes of this study, the standard value of the volunteer hour at \$24 is given the same weight as cash.

In FY17, with the tutors retained from previous years and the new tutors who came into the program, LVCA had 391 active tutors. The organization lost 140 tutors during the year. The table below shows the costs of having a retention rate of 64% (a turnover rate of 34%).

Table 8

Costs to LVCA for a volunteer retention rate at 64% in FY17

	Value
Lost training value of \$400 x 140 volunteers =	\$56,000
Unrealized volunteer labor, minimum 100 hours x \$24/hour x 140 =	\$336,000
Unrealized donor dollars, 56 potential donors @ \$206 =	\$11,536
Costs to organization for volunteers leaving at the current rate =	\$403,536

Projected cost of retention problem. If LVCA were to implement the changes outlined above and raise the retention rate to 70%, the loss to the organization will not be as significant. The turnover rate will be 30%, which means the organization loses 116 volunteers during the year instead of 140.

Table 9

Costs to LVCA for a volunteer retention rate at 70% in future FY

	Value
Lost training value of \$400 x 116 volunteers =	\$46,400
Unrealized volunteer labor, minimum 100 hours x \$24/hour x 116 =	\$278,400
Unrealized donor dollars, 46 potential donors lost (40% of 116) @ \$206 =	\$9,476
Costs to organization with a 10% improved retention rate =	\$334,276

Improving the retention rate by 10% will benefit the organization by a value of \$69,260, which is mostly volunteer labor and reduction in wasted efforts. The organization will need to spend approximately \$12,000 in real dollars to achieve this. The return on investment will be approximately 475%. The math can be outlined as:

$$ROI = \frac{\$69,000 - \$12,000}{\$12,000} = \frac{\$57,000}{\$12,000} = 4.75 \times 100 = 475\%$$

Suggested Follow-up Action

The organization can immediately begin to survey current volunteers to determine volunteer motivation. Often during the summer, the organization has temporary office volunteers who are in town on college break, and these volunteers can input the results of paper-based surveys and compile the survey data received electronically. Other activities can be worked into the annual tutor recruitment and retention plan, and board members can be put on a schedule to have more interaction with volunteers. In addition to helping with the retention plan, this type of activity can give board members a more robust picture of the organization’s work.

None of the suggested changes require skillsets beyond what is present within the organization. By deliberately increasing retention efforts, the organization can not only increase

the value of the volunteer work to improve student outcomes, but the volunteer experience itself can become more meaningful to the tutor.

The organization will benefit from further study of volunteer retention rates. I will approach the national organization, ProLiteracy, to see if they have access to volunteer retention data at literacy organizations in other states. While I have confidence in the LVCA data, I know that not many community-based literacy organizations in Virginia are particular about keeping accurate volunteer records. The Virginia Literacy Foundation (VLF) collects student and volunteer information from many of the literacy organizations across the state. According to Victoria Sanborn of the VLF:

There are no programs that I know of that keep a good record of tutor retention. Here's why. There is no common definition. Most programs in their VLF grants tell us that tutor retention is excellent, yet almost all report that they have kept up the same level of workshop trainings each year without a significant increase in their student population... So, what is the definition of good retention? Is it the one-year commitment or a two-year commitment, which would take the tutor past that first year? Does good tutor retention mean that a certain percentage remain with the program five years or longer? The VLF does not ask tutor retention questions, since the answers are subjective.

(Personal communication, March 27, 2018)

Another way to glean information on volunteer retention not examined here will be to conduct formal exit interviews with those volunteers who are leaving the program. While LVCA collects some data regarding volunteers who exit the program, it is not as descriptive as needed. For instance, one category for leaving is "dissatisfied with the program," but that could mean the individual did not think he or she was good at tutoring, the student he or she was matched with was unresponsive, or any number of reasons. This is an area for future research.

Dissemination. To disseminate what I have learned about volunteer retention in literacy organizations, I will submit this paper to the “Call for Conference Workshop Proposals” by the April 15th deadline for the Annual Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Conference. This conference will be held in Williamsburg in July 2018. I will take this data and research presentation and convert it to a workshop where participants are encouraged to share volunteer retention practices with the group. After receiving feedback from my Virginia colleagues, I will refine this presentation and submit it to ProLiteracy in the fall of 2018 for consideration at their 2019 conference.

This material was presented to a group of 8 self-selected LVCA tutors on April 12. During the discussion that followed the presentation, volunteers strongly encouraged more thorough “exit interviews” for departing tutors. Several tutors mentioned the need for a long-term volunteer to act as a mentor and be available for questions. The mentorship idea would fill the need for volunteer support but not feel as supervisory as a staff member. Participants also had many ideas for interest-based groups of tutors and students who could meet and learn from each other, fulfilling both the social and understanding motivations of volunteers (personal communications, April 12, 2018). More research is needed and I believe the current tutors at LVCA will have significant input on future volunteer retention efforts.

This research will also be adapted to create several grant proposals so that LVCA can obtain more funds for recruitment, training, and professional development of volunteers. Funders who have a strong interest in capacity-building grants will be approached. A small investment from a funder will yield measurable results, allowing the organization to serve more adult learners in the community.

Conclusion

Summary

I believe that more research is needed on volunteer retention in general and on volunteer retention at community-based literacy organizations specifically. Much more information can be gleaned from departing volunteers and accurately tracking data on departing volunteers over time. Through gaining a better understanding of volunteer motivations and organizational activities that are the most rewarding, Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle can expand its mission to provide a meaningful volunteer experience. A valuable experience for the tutors can result in more financial donations, more ambassadors in the community, and possibly a better learning experience for the students.

Managing volunteers as a Human Resource Management issue for nonprofit organizations is not the same as retaining employees at a for-profit company, but many of the principles are similar. Organizations invest in recruiting and training, and therefore it is in the organization's financial interest to have a low turnover rate. It is important for the organization to understand the return on investment that can be achieved by retaining quality volunteers. The estimates used in this paper are conservative; I believe there are many more benefits to having happy volunteers that cannot be enumerated, such as community goodwill.

Personal Learning

My discovery of the functional strategy for recruiting and retaining volunteers as described in the Volunteer Function Inventory (Clary et al., 1992) gives structure to solving the turnover problem at Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle. I believe it is important to look at data when making decisions about the organization, and the VFI can help me assemble the data in a manageable form. Looking at volunteer motivations categorized by these social science researchers is a helpful way of understanding why volunteers join LVCA and why they might

leave. I am reminded that what I think I know about the program needs to be checked by examining the data. The process of writing this paper has helped my organization develop a strategy for addressing volunteer turnover.

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Appendix A

LVCA Tutors FY12-FY17

		<i>FY17</i>	<i>FY16</i>	<i>FY15</i>	<i>FY14</i>	<i>FY13</i>	<i>FY12</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	99	98	77	66	43	37
	Female	292	238	231	186	162	154
<i>Age</i>	18-24	15	15	15	9	4	6
	25-34	55	42	30	27	29	31
	35-44	34	19	17	23	17	18
	45-54	36	37	34	33	28	20
	55-64	83	75	80	72	65	58
	65-74	131	108	96	70	51	43
	75-84	32	33	33	16	11	13
	85+	5	7	3	2	0	2
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Asian	13	10	10	7	8	6
	Black/African American	9	9	7	5	5	4
	Middle Eastern	4	0	0	0	0	0
	Hispanic/Latino	9	5	6	5	4	2
	White	356	312	285	235	188	179
<i>Employment Status</i>	Full-time	115	92	74	68	58	60
	Part-time	66	62	56	49	48	41
	Unemployed	17	14	18	16	15	10
	Not in labor force	27	20	25	21	19	15
	Retired	166	148	131	94	65	63
	Not Available	0	0	4	4		
<i>Total Tutors</i>		391	336	283	252	205	191
Tutors in Boomer Age Range:		250	220	210	175	144	121
Percent of Tutors in Boomer Age Range:		63.94	65.48	74.20	69.44	70.24	63.35
Retired/Not in Labor		193	168	156	115	84	78
Percent Not in Labor Force		49.36	50.00	55.12	45.63	40.98	40.84

(Osborne and Overstreet, 2018).

Appendix B

The Functional Approach to Volunteers' Motivations

Gil Clary **and** **Mark Snyder**
College of St. Catherine **University of Minnesota**

Assumptions

1. People are purposeful, planful, goal-directed -- Volunteers engage in volunteer work in order to satisfy important personal goals
2. Different people may do similar things for different reasons -- Volunteers performing the same volunteer activity for the same organization may have different reasons for volunteering
3. Any one individual may be motivated by more than one need or goal -- An individual volunteer may be attempting to satisfy two or more motives through one activity at your organization
4. Outcomes depend on the matching of needs and goals to the opportunities afforded by the environment – Successful volunteer recruitment, satisfaction, and retention is tied to the ability of the volunteer experience to fulfil the volunteer's important motives

The Motivations for Volunteering

<u>Values function</u>	the person is volunteering in order to express or act on important values, such as humanitarianism and helping the less fortunate
<u>Understanding function</u>	the volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world and/or exercise skills that are often unused
<u>Enhancement function</u>	the individual is seeking to grow and develop psychologically through involvement in volunteering
<u>Career function</u>	the volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering
<u>Social function</u>	volunteering allows the person to strengthen one's social relationships
<u>Protective function</u>	the individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems

VOLUNTEERISM QUESTIONNAIRE

Your organization is involved in a project related to volunteer's reasons and experiences with volunteering. On the following pages are two sets of items that concern your experiences as a volunteer with this organization. The first set, **Reasons for Volunteering**, presents 30 reasons that people volunteer and asks that you indicate how important each reason is for you for your volunteering at this organization. The second set, **Volunteering Outcomes**, presents 18 outcomes that can result from volunteering and asks that you indicate whether you have experienced each outcome. You do not need to put your name on the questionnaire.

Reasons for Volunteering

Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate how important or accurate each of the following possible reasons for volunteering is for you in doing volunteer work at this organization. Record your answer in the space next to each item.

- | | not at all important/
accurate for you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | extremely important/
accurate for you |
|---------------|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| <u>Rating</u> | | | | | | | | | |
| — | 1. | Volunteering can help me get my foot in the door at a place where I'd like to work | | | | | | | |
| — | 2. | My friends volunteer. | | | | | | | |
| — | 3. | I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself. | | | | | | | |
| — | 4. | People I'm close to want me to volunteer. | | | | | | | |
| — | 5. | Volunteering makes me feel important | | | | | | | |
| — | 6. | People I know share an interest in community service. | | | | | | | |
| — | 7. | No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it. | | | | | | | |
| — | 8. | I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving. | | | | | | | |
| — | 9. | By volunteering, I feel less lonely. | | | | | | | |
| — | 10. | I can make new contacts that might help my business career. | | | | | | | |
| — | 11. | Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others. | | | | | | | |
| — | 12. | I can learn more about the cause for which I am working. | | | | | | | |
| — | 13. | Volunteering increases my self-esteem. | | | | | | | |
| — | 14. | Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things. | | | | | | | |
| — | 15. | Volunteering allows me to explore different career options. | | | | | | | |
| — | 16. | I feel compassion toward people in need. | | | | | | | |
| — | 17. | Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service. | | | | | | | |
| — | 18. | Volunteering lets me learn through direct "hands on" experience. | | | | | | | |

- ___ 19. I feel it is important to help others.
- ___ 20. Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.
- ___ 21. Volunteering will help me succeed in my chosen profession.
- ___ 22. I can do something for a cause that is important to me.
- ___ 23. Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.
- ___ 24. Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.
- ___ 25. I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.
- ___ 26. Volunteering makes me feel needed.
- ___ 27. Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.
- ___ 28. Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.
- ___ 29. Volunteering is a way to make new friends.
- ___ 30. I can explore my own strengths.

Volunteering Outcomes

Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement you personally feel with each statement. Please be as accurate and honest as possible, so we can better understand this organization.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

Rating

- ___ 31. In volunteering with this organization, I made new contacts that might help my business or career.
- ___ 32. People I know best know that I am volunteering at this organization.
- ___ 33. People I am genuinely concerned about are being helped through my volunteer work at this organization.
- ___ 34. From volunteering at this organization, I feel better about myself.
- ___ 35. Volunteering at this organization allows me the opportunity to escape some of my own troubles.
- ___ 36. I have learned how to deal with a greater variety of people through volunteering at this organization.
- ___ 37. As a volunteer in this organization, I have been able to explore possible career options.
- ___ 38. My friends found out that I am volunteering at this organization.
- ___ 39. Through volunteering here, I am doing something for a cause that I believe in.
- ___ 40. My self-esteem is enhanced by performing volunteer work in this organization.

- ___ 41. By volunteering at this organization, I have been able to work through some of my own personal problems.
 - ___ 42. I have been able to learn more about the cause for which I am working by volunteering with this organization.
 - ___ 43. I am enjoying my volunteer experience.
 - ___ 44. My volunteer experience has been personally fulfilling.
 - ___ 45. This experience of volunteering with this organization has been a worthwhile one.
 - ___ 46. I have been able to make an important contribution by volunteering at this organization.
 - ___ 47. I have accomplished a great deal of “good” through my volunteer work at this organization.
48. One year from now, will you be (please circle your best guess as of today):
- A. volunteering at this organization.
 - B. volunteering at another organization
 - C. not volunteering at all.

Appendix C

Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle Volunteer Intake Form



Date: _____

Volunteer Intake Form

Name: _____

Education:

Date of Birth: _____

High school diploma/equivalency

Some college

Gender: Male: Female:

Undergraduate degree

Graduate degree

Address: _____

Field of Study: _____

Home Phone: _____

Employment Status:

Full-time

Part-time

Retired

Cell Phone: _____

Unemployed, seeking work

Unemployed, not seeking work

E-mail: _____

Occupation: _____

How do you prefer to be contacted?

Home Phone

Cell Phone

E-mail

Employer: _____

Professional certificate or licenses held:

Ethnicity:

American Indian/Alaskan Native

Asian

African-American

Hispanic

Middle Eastern

White (non-Hispanic)

Other: _____

Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

Yes No

If yes, please explain. LVCA will not deny volunteer positions to any applicant solely because the person has been convicted of a crime. However, you should be prepared to discuss during placement interview.

Native Language: _____

Any health conditions/issues that would impact your tutoring:

Other Language(s): _____

Literacy Volunteers of Charlottesville/Albemarle Volunteer Intake Form (continued)

Demographics:

Information is used when completing a match.

Marital Status: M ___ S ___ D ___ W ___

Are you a parent?: Yes ___ No ___

Number of Children: _____

Program Preference:

Check all that apply.

___ Basic Literacy

___ English as a Second Language

___ Math ___ High School Equivalency

Source of referral: (please provide details)

___ Other tutor/volunteer _____

___ Friend/family _____

___ Other organization _____

___ Internet _____

___ Newspaper _____

___ TV/Radio _____

___ Other _____

Other volunteer interests:

___ Administrative office help

___ Special events

___ Board of Directors / Committee work

___ Fundraising

___ Other: _____

Instruction Preference:

___ One-to-one ___ Small group ___ Either

Learner Preference:

___ Male ___ Female ___ Either

Location Preference: _____

Available to tutor:

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	_____	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____	_____
Saturday	_____	_____	_____
Sunday	_____	_____	_____

Why do you want to be a volunteer tutor?

Notes or other information we should consider before matching you with a student:

By signing this application, I hereby affirm that the information provided on this form is true and complete. I understand that the information is subject to verification. I understand that false or misleading information may result in dismissal.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Updated January 2018

Appendix D

Sample Survey for Volunteer Tutors at LVCA.

How long have you been volunteering at LVCA? *

- Less than one year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

What motivates you to volunteer at LVCA?

Below is a list of six standard motivations for why people volunteer. Thinking about your experience at LVCA, please rank them in importance to you, with "1" being the most relevant and "6" being the least relevant. Please pick at least your top 3 motivations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find that this experience enriches me personally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am very fortunate; so I want to "pay it forward."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This experience may help me in my career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to help other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to meet new people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like learning about other cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How likely are you to continue volunteering when your work with your current student ends? *

- Likely
- Don't Know
- Unlikely

Feel free to make any comments here.