Assessing the Volunteer Infrastructure Program using the Volunteer Capacity Assessment

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Value of **thought.**
Value of **solution.**

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Introduction

The Napa County Office of Education's (NCOE) CalSERVES AmeriCorps Volunteer Infrastructure Programs (VIP and VIP-SE) support AmeriCorps members who work with 140 community-based organizations in building volunteer infrastructure and capacity. AmeriCorps members work as teams to provide infrastructure support for volunteer programs in service organizations across California. The aim is to build sustainable volunteer management systems at partner sites.[1] The program began in 2010 and has supported service organizations for varying numbers of years, some have been enrolled for one year and others for multiple years.

In this report, JBS International provides a summary of analyses conducted using the CalSERVES AmeriCorps Volunteer Capacity Assessment (VCA) and its three scales.[2] The data that NCOE collected from partner sites using the VCA, both pre and post participation in VIP, were utilized to assess the following research question:

How did the rate of growth in organizational capacity growth differ comparing sites that have had one year of participation to those that have had more?

Methods

CalSERVES staff collected data used for this analysis with Version 3 of the VCA; only organizations using Version 3 for pre- and post-VIP assessments were included in this analysis. Administration of the VCA began when the community-based organizations (program sites) were enrolled in VIP or VIP-SE (2010-2018) and at a single follow-up point in Summer 2018. Requests for follow-up data were sent to all past and current VIP participants. The information used for the analyses included:

- Site identification
- Site status (current or past participant)
- Date of program entry
- Date of program exit
- VCA preservice and post participation scores for all three scales and overall

Data were collected on three scales of the VCA: Volunteer Plan Development (16 individual items), Volunteer Plan Implementation (16 items), and Volunteer Plan Sustainability (15 items). The VCA asked program sites to self-report their progress, using the same VCA instrument, at two periods in time, pre- VIP participation and during a 2018 follow up. Program sites indicated their achievement on each item by responding 'No', 'Somewhat', or 'Yes'.

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[1] Source: https://serviceyear.org/calservesamericorps/

[2] JBS tested the validity and reliability of the survey in 2016. The results showed that the VCA has good test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and external validity.

Sample

Of the programs served by VIP and which had a pre-test VCA (220), 55 responded to and completed the 2018 post assessment. The sample of 55 programs comprised 37 programs sites that had completed only one year of VIP participation (one-year programs), including both current participants and participants that completed VIP during any single year since 2015. The sample also included 18 programs sites that have participated in VIP for more than one year (multi-year programs). Those that participated for more than one year were mostly two-year participants. In fact, the sample contained 16 two-year programs and only two programs which had participated for three or more years.[3]

Statistical Approach

Using data from 55 programs, JBS conducted a descriptive analysis and assessed to what extent program sites increased achievement levels after enrollment in VIP or VIP-SE. JBS also examined how much programs enrolled in VIP for more than one year improved in comparison to those that had completed only one year in the program. Due to the small sample size, it was not possible to impute any missing data, therefore, researchers only included programs with complete follow-up data.

JBS cleaned and analyzed the data using SPSS, a statistical software program (Version 22). The cleaning steps included converting missing responses to 'No', checking for duplicate cases, and finding any out-of-range responses. Researchers then divided program sites into one-year and multi-year variables to conduct the analysis. The analysis examined pre and post means for each item on the VCA and for each of the three scales as a whole. Finally, the two groups (one-year and multi-year) were compared using change scores, tabulations which measured the difference in the mean from baseline to final.

Results

Results of the descriptive analysis show a statistically significant change (or, 'growth') from baseline VCA scores to the summer 2018 VCA follow up scores for program sites overall. The average mean for each of the three scales improved over time, indicating a higher average achievement score among all program sites after at least a year of participation in VIP. Program sites chose more 'Somewhat' or 'Yes' responses on a majority of the items in the VCA during the post-participation survey in Summer 2018. Generally, VIP participants made the most improvement on Scale 2, the Volunteer Plan Implementation, followed by Scale 3, Volunteer Plan Sustainability, and then Scale 1, Volunteer Plan Development. All of these changes showed statistical significance at the $p<.00$ level.[4] Figure 1 demonstrates the overall change in mean on each scale for the total sample (N=55).

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[3] One of the three-year programs enrolled during the 2014-2015 year, making it a four-year program, but since it participated in the VCA Version 3, it is included in this analysis.

[4] This was assessed using dependent means t-tests, which can assess whether mean values on a continuous variable are statistically different from one another at two time points.

Figure 1: Overall Growth by Scale
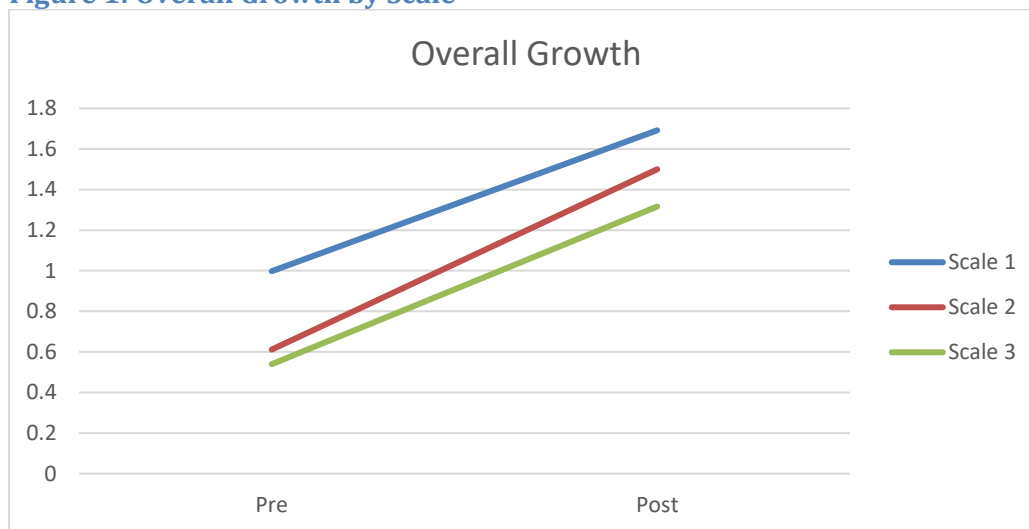
Note: All VIP programs (N=55); Change in all scales was significant at .00 level, per dependent means t-tests.

When divided into two groups, one-year and multi-year, both groups' means independently exhibited statistically significant improvement from pre to post on all three scales. Table 1 demonstrates the changes from pre to post VIP participation means for one-year and multi-year programs as well as the total for all programs combined.

Table 1: Overall Growth (means)

| Years Enrolled	Scale 1: Volunteer Plan Development		Scale 2: Volunteer Plan Implementation		Scale 3 Volunteer Plan Sustainability	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
One Year N=37	.95	1.64	.57	1.44	.51	1.30
Multiple Years N=18	1.10	1.80	.69	1.62	.60	1.34
Total N=55	1.00	1.69	.61	1.50	.54	1.32

After assessing the level of change in each group independently, researchers examined whether the mean scale change significantly differed for one-year programs and multi-year programs.

The analysis revealed that the improvement in achievement scores from pre to post appeared quite similar for both groups across all three scales. Researchers tabulated the change score, or average change in means by group, and the difference between the average change scores did not exhibit statistical significance. Of the scales, Scale 2 displayed the largest difference between the groups, with the multi-year group demonstrating a higher degree of improvement than the one-year group. Table 2 and Figure 2 show the average change in scale scores by group.

Table 2: Change Scores by Scale

Years Enrolled	Scale 1: Volunteer Plan Development	Scale 2: Volunteer Plan Implementation	Scale 3: Volunteer Plan Sustainability
One year N=37	.69	.87	.79
Multiple Years N=18	.70	.93	.75
Total N=55	.69	.89	.78

Figure 2: Change Scores by Scale
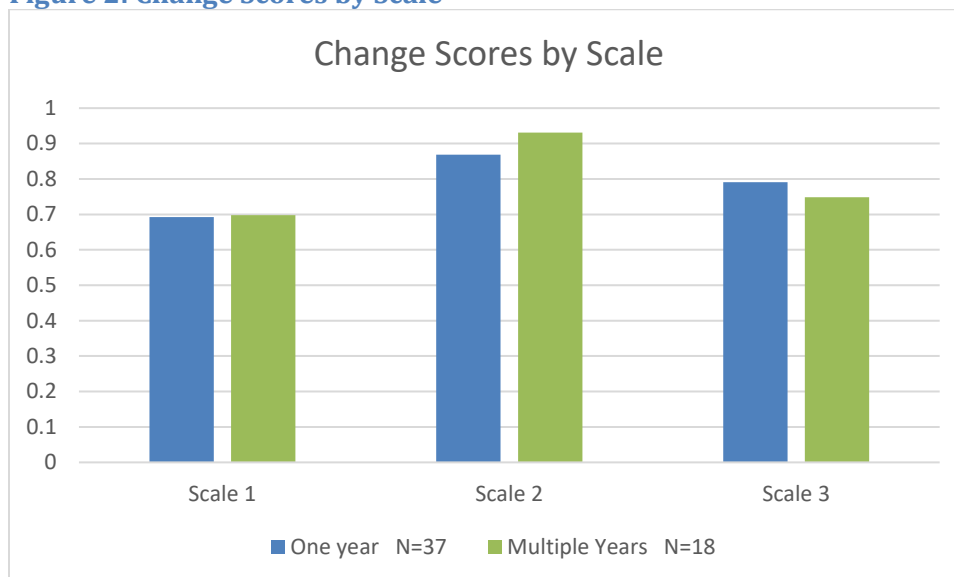
Conclusions

Overall, pre to post VCA results show that program sites that participate in VIP for one year or more show substantial improvement in volunteer plan development, implementation, and sustainability. See Appendix A for the mean change for each indicator on the VCA.

Though the analysis results did not reach statistical significance (i.e., the findings were 'null'), the observed differences in 'growth' means was concordant with researchers' expectations. First, Scale 1 means are perhaps less likely to rise more with additional years of participation, since volunteer plan development mostly takes place during the first year of enrollment. Results indicated that 'growth' means for Scale 2 were greater than either of the other scales, which could be due to the additional time to execute implementation activities.

Scale 3, which is focused on sustainability, showed a slightly higher gain for one-year participation versus multi-year participation. Though this result was unexpected, the lack of programs in the sample with over two years of participation in VIP could explain the stall in multi-year programs in achieving additional volunteer plan sustainability. Only 18 programs sites had more than one year of participation, and 89 percent of those had just two-years of participation. Most two-year programs have not had time for the long-term planning that sustainability requires. Further, some of the one-year participants (N=37) may have had some of the sustainability infrastructure in place already or were in a position to implement these measures more easily during the first year of participation. A larger sample of participants with three years or more of implementation is needed to draw conclusions about improvements in volunteer plan sustainability.

The promising improvement in overall ratings among programs sites demonstrates positive gains for VIP participants, which is consistent with the past quasi-experimental study of the program impact.[5] The small group sample sizes and low response rate for the current study limits generalizability and potential reliability of results that could show differences in one-year versus multi-year programs. The upward trend resulting from VIP involvement could be further validated with higher VCA participation rates, especially among long-running VIP enrollees. This could be achieved through more active follow-up with non-respondents and emphasis on the benefits of the program evaluation for future VIP programs.

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[5] See https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/AmeriCorps-VIP for the 2012 AmeriCorps VIP 2012 Volunteer Capacity Study.

Appendix A

VCA indicators and means, baseline to final.

Scale 1: Volunteer Plan Development

	Indicator	Mean: Baseline	Mean: Final
1a	Benefits and challenges related to volunteer involvement inside the organization have been identified.	1.35	1.89
1b	Organizational leadership has defined volunteer engagement as a priority.	1.47	1.93
1c	There is a plan in place to dedicate appropriate resources (e.g., financial, space, training, supervision, etc.) to the organization's volunteer program.	1.25	1.76
1d	A recruitment plan for volunteers has been created, including marketing to community organizations (e.g., outside organizations, businesses, service clubs) and diverse populations.	.67	1.65
1e	Potential community partnerships for recruitment have been identified (e.g., outside organizations, businesses, service clubs).	.91	1.80
1f	Human resources and risk management policies that relate specifically to volunteers have been developed.	1.13	1.67
1g	A volunteer waiver form that addresses potential risks is signed by all volunteers.	1.20	1.67
1h	Needs for volunteer roles throughout the organization have been identified, including opportunities for skilled volunteers or volunteer leaders.	1.04	1.82
1i	Volunteer position descriptions that include performance goals or expectations have been developed.	.69	1.62
1j	A volunteer application form and application process is in place (e.g., system for distributing, collecting, and reviewing applications and conducting interviews as appropriate).	1.16	1.76
1k	An interviewing and screening process, including appropriate criminal and/or motor vehicle background checks when applicable, has been developed and implemented.	1.18	1.60
1l	Volunteer orientation trainings and materials have been created and implemented (e.g., handbook, emergency procedures plan, etc.)	.80	1.53
1m	A supervisor has been identified for every volunteer role.	1.20	1.76

1n	A volunteer retention and recognition plan that includes formal (e.g., celebration, gifts) and informal (e.g., organizational culture of appreciation) recognition has been developed.	.53	1.55
1o	A system to receive volunteer feedback has been developed.	.45	1.29
1p	Volunteer tracking mechanisms (e.g., tracking of volunteer hours, tasks accomplished, etc.) are in place.	.93	1.76

Scale 2: Volunteer Plan Implementation

	Indicator	Mean: Baseline	Mean: Final
2a	A purpose statement has been developed for the organization's volunteer program.	.45	1.33
2b	Resources (financial, space, training, supervision, etc.) have been allocated for a volunteer management program.	1.04	1.58
2c	A plan has been created to incorporate community organizations (e.g., outside organizations, businesses, service clubs) in regular volunteer activities.	.56	1.51
2d	Strategies to develop potential partnerships with community organizations (e.g., outside organizations, businesses, service clubs) have been identified.	.67	1.65
2e	A volunteer recruitment plan has been implemented.	.60	1.71
2f	All volunteers and staff have been trained in appropriate human resources and risk management policies that relate specifically to volunteers.	.44	1.18
2g	Diverse volunteer roles that include a wide range of abilities, ages, and interests have been established.	.85	1.65
2h	Volunteer roles have been documented and communicated to appropriate staff.	.82	1.67
2i	A system to provide feedback and evaluation on the work of individual volunteers has been developed.	.38	1.18
2j	A responsive communications process is in place so volunteers are contacted within a reasonable time after they apply.	.95	1.80

	Indicator	Mean: Baseline	Mean: Final
2k	An ongoing volunteer training plan and materials have been developed.	.56	1.35
2l	Volunteer supervision responsibilities are included in staff and higher-level volunteer position descriptions (e.g., providing support, opportunities for communication, accountability).	.67	1.42
2m	Strategies (e.g., events) are in place to build relationships between staff and volunteers.	.53	1.55
2n	A system is implemented for volunteers to receive formal (e.g., celebration, gifts) and informal (e.g., organizational culture of appreciation) recognition of their contributions.	.49	1.47
2o	A system to receive volunteer feedback has been implemented	.27	1.27
2p	Volunteer tracking mechanisms are maintained and checked for accuracy on a regular basis.	.49	1.67

Scale 3: Volunteer Plan Sustainability

	Indicator	Mean: Baseline	Mean: Final
3a	A plan for integrating volunteers into the organizational structure at multiple levels has been developed.	.47	1.36
3b	The organization's annual budget reflects detailed expenses for volunteers (e.g., staff time, recruitment, training, supplies, space, recognition, etc.)	.67	1.25
3c	At least two community organizations (e.g., outside organizations, businesses, service clubs) have been approached in efforts to build partnerships for volunteer roles in the organization.	1.15	1.87
3d	Recruitment efforts are regularly evaluated for their effectiveness and adjustments are made to strategies accordingly.	.44	1.47
3e	The organization has a plan to ensure that volunteers represent the diversity within the community, including a system for recruiting and meeting needs of diverse groups.	.53	1.22
3f	Volunteer supervisors are held accountable for ensuring that their volunteers are complying with applicable human resources and risk management policies.	.73	1.51

3g	The organization conducts an annual review and update of all volunteer position descriptions.	.31	1.22
3h	A system to provide feedback and evaluation on the work of individual volunteers has been implemented.	.29	1.07
3i	Volunteers are matched with appropriate positions based on their abilities, interests, and level of commitment.	1.13	1.78
3j	Ongoing training plan and materials have been implemented.	.45	1.11
3k	Staff and volunteer leaders are trained in volunteer management best practices that include varied approaches appropriate for diverse individuals and groups.	.49	1.16
3l	Conflicts between staff and volunteers have been anticipated and addressed by organization administration.	.49	1.29
3m	The organization's volunteer retention rate (e.g., number of volunteers that completed their original commitment to the organization) is tracked, recorded, and analyzed.	.40	1.22
3n	There is a process in place to analyze volunteer feedback and to make adjustments to the program.	.27	1.24
3o	An evaluation plan has been developed to utilize the data obtained using the volunteer tracking mechanisms.	.27	.96