THE INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER IMPACTS SURVEY

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\textbf{Background}

Many of the largest international non-profit organizations rely heavily on volunteers to provide services (Randel, German, Cordiero, & Baker, 2005; UNV, 2002). Due to a proliferation of international volunteer service (IVS) in recent years, it may be the most prevalent form of civic service today (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). Despite the high prevalence, IVS impacts are not well understood. A review of recent research suggests there is a critical mass of descriptive information about various forms, institutional contexts, and intended outcomes of IVS (Sherraden, McBride, & Lough, 2008). However, the overwhelming majority of research is based on case and cross-sectional studies, which do not permit scholars to draw conclusions about the impact of IVS (Powell & Bratović, 2007). This lack of knowledge about the field overall is compounded by the expansion of diverse program models that send volunteers overseas (Allum, 2007; Caprara, Quigley, & Rieffel, 2009).

The field has yet to adopt common research questions driven by theory, with rigorous research designs, data collection methods, and instruments that allow for comparison and the counterfactual (Commission of the European Communities, 2004; Hodgkinson, 2004; Perry & Imperial, 2001; Powell & Bratović, 2006). Although a number of volunteer measurement toolkits inform participatory appraisals and program evaluation, rigorous tools that measure impacts across IVS programs are unavailable. In order to build a comparative evidence base, standardized instruments implemented across IVS programs and contexts are required (Daniel, French, & King, 2006; Dingle, Sokolowski, Saxon-Harrold, Smith, & Leigh, 2001; IVR, 2004). Moreover, outcome measures with valid indicators need to be developed to rigorously measure impacts and unify future studies on IVS (Powell & Bratović, 2006).

\textbf{Methods and Findings}

This paper reports on the development and validation of a survey called the International Volunteering Impacts Survey (IVIS) that encapsulates a range of possible outcomes on international volunteers. The survey was developed following a comprehensive review of literature addressing the impact IVS on intended beneficiaries. Using multiple interviews, evaluation surveys, focus groups, observations, and reviews of agency records, researchers identified major areas where international volunteers may have an effect. This review and resulting conceptual framework were presented during the ISTR 8\textsuperscript{th} International Conference in 2008.

Building upon this review and following multiple pilot studies of the IVIS in 2008, we administered pre- and post-tests of the IVIS to a sample of 1,769 participants from two major international volunteer programs in 2009. Using exploratory factor analyses to determine the factor structure of the 95-item survey, we identify major subscales. Maximum likelihood estimations were performed to determine factor loadings for 11 extracted factors including, international contacts, open-mindedness, international understanding, intercultural relations, global identity, life plans, civic activism, community engagement, media attentiveness, financial contributions, and social skills. In order to build a standardized scale to assess impacts, we tested these subscales for reliability and validity.

By summing the scores of manifest variables under each factor, we created 11 composite variables representing the 11 factors. To assess theoretical validity of the IVIS, we also
evaluated the bivariate differences between prospective, alumni, and comparison volunteers using the mean score of the composite variables representing the eleven factors. The following subscales were significantly higher for IVS alumni than for prospective IVS volunteers and comparison non-volunteers: international contacts, international understanding, intercultural relations, civic activism, media attentiveness, and financial contributions.

Discussion

This study advances the development of much-needed research tools to identify the impacts of IVS on intended beneficiaries. A significant advantage of the IVIS is the ability to administer the survey longitudinally using quasi-experimental design. The survey instrument also includes questions that identify variations in program, service, and volunteer characteristics. As these attributes are compared with outcomes across programs, practitioners and policymakers can better understand how to effectively design programs to achieve desired outcomes. Widespread use of this tool will allow the field to move beyond participatory appraisals and case studies, which do not permit causal inferences about the impact of IVS on volunteers. As these instruments are further refined, shared with stakeholders, and administered with rigorous research designs, we can generate evidence about the impacts of IVS on volunteers.

References


