



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **VOLUNTEERS MENTORING YOUTH: Implications for Closing the Mentoring Gap**

*Corporation for*  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

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## BACKGROUND

To develop a greater understanding of the characteristics and traits that distinguish individuals whose volunteering includes mentoring youth from volunteers who do not mentor, the Corporation for National and Community Service conducted a close analysis of the 2005 Volunteer Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS).<sup>1</sup> Corporation researchers examined whether demographic, socioeconomic, or other observable factors could be used to distinguish between volunteers who mentor and the general population of volunteers who do not mentor, as well as to determine which of the above factors are most influential in predicting who is most likely to be engaged in mentoring activities. The expectation is that the information gleaned will help mentoring programs better identify and recruit the types of individuals who are most likely to be favorably disposed toward mentoring, and thereby help to reduce the "mentoring gap."<sup>2</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS:

### Mentoring Is a Common Part of American Volunteering

- 18% of all volunteers—or 11.5 million of America's 65.4 million volunteers—engage in some youth mentoring activities each year through an organization.

### The Propensity to Be a Mentor Declines With Age

- Volunteers 16 to 24 years old are the most likely group to be mentors.
- Volunteers 65 years and older are the least likely group to mentor.
- Still, 41% of volunteers who engage in mentoring youth are baby boomers—i.e., between the ages of 41 and 59.<sup>3</sup>

### Black Volunteers Are More Likely Than White Volunteers to Be Mentors

- 24% of black volunteers are engaged in mentoring, compared to 17% of white volunteers.
- However, minorities do volunteer at lower rates — 22% for blacks versus 30% for whites.

- Hispanic volunteers are slightly less likely to be engaged in mentoring compared to non-Hispanics. However, when all other factors are considered, there are no real differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic volunteers in their probability of being engaged in mentoring.

### Male and Female Volunteers Engage in Mentoring at Similar Rates

- 18% of male volunteers and 17% of female volunteers are engaged in mentoring.
- However, males do volunteer at lower rates—25% for men versus 32% for women.

### Substantial Mentoring Takes Place Through Religious Organizations

- Almost 43% of all volunteers engaged in mentoring volunteer in or through religious organizations (the next most prevalent site for mentoring is educational organizations, at 31%).

### Mentors Are Often Drawn From the Ranks of Current Volunteers

- 87% of volunteers involved in mentoring perform at least one other volunteer activity for their main organization in addition to mentoring, while only 40% of volunteers not involved in mentoring perform two or more volunteer activities.
- Volunteers who are engaged in mentoring serve a median of 80 hours annually, while volunteers who do not mentor serve a median of 40 hours annually.

### Mentors Regularly Work Full-Time

- 59% of all volunteers who engage in mentoring work full-time—a higher percentage than volunteers who do not engage in mentoring (53%).
- Despite having less discretionary time, these adult volunteers are as inclined to mentor youth as volunteers working part-time, and more likely than non-working volunteers.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The analysis shows that one of the most important determinants of which volunteers are also involved in mentoring activities is age. The probability of being a mentor declines dramatically after age 24; indeed, volunteers 65 years and older are the least likely to be engaged in mentoring activities compared to younger cohorts. This suggests that college age adults and even high schoolers are prime candidates to be recruited as mentors. While the data also suggest that enlisting more baby boomers and other older adults as youth mentors is more challenging, it is important to note that a large number of baby boomers and other older adult volunteers currently are involved in mentoring.

Another promising mentor recruitment strategy is focusing on encouraging more current volunteers to become mentors, particularly those volunteers who have already made a substantial commitment to their main volunteer organization. Moreover, the finding that mentoring takes place predominantly through religious organizations suggests that religious institutions are an excellent area to focus recruitment efforts.

This type of strategy may pose real opportunities for existing community-based mentoring programs. One approach is for traditional mentoring programs to do more partnering with other types of volunteer organizations, such as religious institutions. This approach is already being tried in several places. Another approach may be for mentoring programs to recruit volunteers to do other needed tasks. Once they've formed some attachment to the organization and its mission, these volunteers may be more amenable to becoming mentors.

The importance of providing mentoring opportunities at workplaces is another important strategy to reach more youth with mentors. Our research found that volunteers employed full-time—despite having less discretionary time—are actually as likely to mentor as people working

part-time, and a new poll by the nonprofit group MENTOR<sup>4</sup> revealed that mentoring at or near the workplace, as well as release time during work hours, substantially increased people's willingness to seriously consider becoming a mentor. Together, these reports suggest that providing convenient mentor opportunities at work are important for recruiting more mentors.

Race and sex also have an effect on who becomes a mentor. Although males and blacks volunteer in general at lower rates than do females and whites, it turns out that blacks are more likely than—and males are as likely as—their counterparts to engage in mentoring as one of their volunteer activities. This is an interesting finding since the general consensus in the field is that there is a shortage of male and minority mentors. It appears that one constraint may be the lower overall volunteer rates of men and minorities. Assuming that the relationship between volunteering, and volunteering as a mentor, remains constant, the number of male and minority mentors would increase if their overall volunteer rate rose. Thus, a promising approach to developing more black and male mentors is to invite and engage them in volunteering in general. If, for example, the African American volunteer rate increased by 2 percentage points (22.1% to 24.1%), there would be another 533,000 black volunteers, and an additional 125,000 black mentors.

Without more knowledge about the demographics of mentor waitlists, we do not know for certain the gender and racial characteristics of youths waiting for a mentor, though anecdotal evidence suggests that a disproportionate number are minorities and males. If this is the case, it is possible that doubling or even tripling the numbers of male and minority mentors may not be enough to meet the effective demand for such mentors. Instead it may require that mentoring programs not only increase the overall supply of mentors but employ more mentoring models that reach more kids with one adult mentor and other innovative mentoring approaches in order to close the mentoring gap.

<sup>1</sup> The CPS is a comprehensive and scientifically rigorous survey of 60,000 American households that is conducted each month by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. With the Corporation's support, the Census Bureau has administered a volunteer supplement each September since 2002. The September 2005 survey is the first time respondents to the CPS were asked whether one of their volunteer activities is mentoring youth. Unfortunately, the 2005 CPS volunteer supplement does not identify whether mentoring is the primary volunteer activity for those volunteers who say they mentor—a limitation that should be corrected in the next CPS survey.

<sup>2</sup> Other studies, including the National Mentoring Poll conducted by MENTOR, show that 14.6 million youth currently are in need of a mentor.

<sup>3</sup> Baby boomers are defined as those born between the years 1946 and 1964.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the report *Mentoring in America 2005*, go to [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org).

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