

Evaluation of
Grassroots Volunteer
Leadership Development Training
2003-2004
Conducted by
Points of Light Foundation

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School of Public and Environmental Affairs
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INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the follow-up evaluation of the Grassroots Volunteer Leadership Development Training conducted by the Points of Light Foundation (POLF).

The training program is part of POLF's initiative, *Building Connections: Transforming Neighborhoods and Strengthening Families*, which is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. To pursue this initiative, one of POLF's primary strategies is to strengthen the abilities of local leaders to mobilize volunteers. To accomplish this, POLF uses training programs and technical assistance to build the capacity of community leaders to mobilize residents in "neighboring" activities. The specific objectives of this training program include:

- cultivate community leaders' skills and talents;
- empower community leaders to identify problems on which they can focus;
- help community leaders identify and uncover their unique gifts and talents; and
- help community leaders acknowledge the "neighboring" that is already taking place in their communities.

Baltimore and Kansas City Training Programs

The training programs were held during the National Conference on Community Volunteering and National Service in Baltimore in 2003 and Kansas City in 2004. A total of 19 community leaders from several Baltimore neighborhoods were identified to participate in the 2003 Grassroots Volunteer Leadership Development Training, and 12 community leaders from several Kansas City neighborhoods participated in the 2004 training. Community leaders were selected based on their length of residence in their communities, level of involvement in their communities, and their abilities to convey a need for training and a need to identify resources for enhancing their communities.

In both programs, the training offered community leaders opportunities to meet and engage with one another and to gather new ideas for enhancing their communities. As the primary training tool, they used *The Leadership Skills Manual for Community Leaders: Increasing Leaders Capacity to Mobilize Volunteers* (Points of Light Foundation, 2001). This manual uses 10 training modules to address core leading competencies.



METHODOLOGY

The overall purposes for this follow-up evaluation were to determine the immediate and longer-term impacts of the training and illuminate areas for possible improvement. We also wanted to find out whether participants currently are utilizing the skills and techniques that were included in the training.

POLF designed the survey instrument, which consisted of 14 closed- and open-ended questions aimed at assessing:

- participants' perceptions of the training,
- use of materials post-training, and
- outcomes which are reflected by participants' perceived increase in their own capacity and personal efficacy.

The survey was distributed to all Kansas City and Baltimore training participants—37 percent of the Baltimore participants returned their follow-up survey, and 50 percent of Kansas City participants returned their surveys.



RESULTS

The overall response rate was 42 percent. The sample was too small to draw comparisons between the two groups so the data were combined.

Respondents Rate the Training Experience Highly

All participants rated the following aspects of the training as either 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high):

- well-organized, useful tools,
- appropriate time for presentation,
- effective delivery,
- quality of participation.

The participants valued the opportunity for interaction as well as the content of the workshop. The following excerpts from responses to the question, “*What did you like most about the training program?*” are illustrative:

- Because we covered a lot of topics it was really easy to see the inter-connectedness of it all.
- Opportunities (during breaks) to connect with other volunteers and network.
- The entire workshop was good and contained vital information that if put into use can transform lives in any community both national and globally.

Training Improved the Respondents’ Skills

As Table 1 illustrates, all respondents thought that the training helped them at least somewhat to improve their leadership skills, work more effectively with the community, and improve their communication skills, with 85 percent indicating that the training greatly improved or improved their ability to work more effectively in their community.

Table 1: Skill Improvement in Grassroots Training Responses

Question	Greatly improved	Improved	Somewhat improved	Not at all improved
Since the training, how has the introduction of core competencies for effective leaders been helpful in improving your leadership skills?	15%	54%	31%	0%
How has the training helped to improve your ability to impact and work more effectively with the community?	23%	62%	15%	0%
How have your communication skills improved as a leader since the training?	31%	38%	31%	0%



As Table 2 indicates, most respondents (77 percent) thought that the training was extremely effective or effective in helping them to think about and develop new partnerships and relationships, and most (53 percent) thought it was extremely effective or effective in imparting the necessary tools and techniques to help them mobilize volunteers from the community.

Table 2: Training Effectiveness in Grassroots Training, Responses

Question	Extremely effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not so effective	No answer
How effective was the training in helping you to think about and develop new partnerships and relationships with your community?	31%	46%	15%	8%	0.0%
How effective was the training in imparting necessary tools and techniques in helping you to mobilize volunteers from your community?	15%	39%	23%	8%	15%

Training Provides Tools for the Future

The training provided the participants with tools for their continuing work. For example, 69 percent said the decision-making model has been an effective tool in leading community efforts. Most (69 percent) said that they continue to use the *Leadership Skills Manual*. And 54 percent said that as a result of the training, they have reached out to other community members to mentor and develop them as new leaders.