Advancing Civil Society through Creative Collaboration: A Community-Based
Initiative Engaging National Service and Faith-Based Entities

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Track 2: Emerging Scholarship in Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Research

Advancing Civil Society through Creative Collaboration: A Community-Based Initiative Engaging National Service and Faith-Based Entities

**Description**

This paper describes a study exploring the dimensions of a community-based initiative that engages national service in the work of faith-based agencies. These agencies serve predominantly low-wealth, minority communities whose social and political capital has been depleted after decades of disinvestment and marginalization. Collaborating entities included: the Archdiocese of Philadelphia via two of its affiliate agencies, Catholic Social Services and the Office of the Vicar for Hispanic Catholics, and the Corporation and National and Community Service (CNCS) through the AmeriCorps*VISTA program (Volunteers in Service to America, VISTA). These entities have negotiated complex institutional relationships to create an "incubation" process that grows small projects into ongoing program interventions.

The collaboration originated at a Catholic Social Services' community center and has since leveraged the work of 35 VISTAs over five years (2003-present) to expand programming and increase organizational capacity. The incubator structure was devised as a way to extend this resource to sites that would not otherwise have access to national service volunteers. The resulting activities have included: forming community coalitions to identify and address needs; creating a social services database; developing a micro-business program; and, forging university/community partnerships. Ultimately, the research speaks to the individual and collective function of these institutions in advancing

civil society in America. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on how third sector and public sector partners can increase the potential for similar projects.

**Relevant Research**

Research on faith-based initiatives (FBIs) has cast the urban church as a vital conduit for social service provision and community development (Bane, Coffin and Thiemann, 2000; Dionne and Chen, 2001; Gornik, 2002; Owens and Smith, 2005; Smith, 2001; Wuthnow, 1998). Yet, studies have also questioned the sustaining organizational (Farnsley, 2001) and political capacity (Leventhal and Mears, 2002) of churches to effectively provide services to or to forge meaningful connections with the surrounding community (Price, 2000; Smith, 2001). Despite the growing body of literature on FBIs, much of the discourse fails to address the historic foundations of the work and the range of contemporary iterations. In contrast, civil society literature offers a framework for understanding the role of religious institutions in the past and the present potential for American society. As alternative mediating forms, religious institutions and voluntary associations can empower individuals (Berger and Neuhaus, 1977) to seek stronger democratic communities (Barber, 1984) and in doing so, increase the overall efficacy of social structures (Mueller [on Aquinas], 1943).

In the field of public policy, research suggests that collaborative working relationships across and between mediating institutions and structures is becoming an increasingly common practice (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006; Miller and Ahmad, 2000), or in some instances even a "partnership imperative" (Wildridge, et. al., 2004). Conceptualization of partnerships and collaborations are broad and diverse, but have

some common elements, these include: sharing a mission or objectives (Lowndes, 2001), operating as a vehicle for collective resources (Bardach, 1998), and allowing the group to achieve something that one unit of the partnership or collaboration could not do singlehandedly (Huxham, 1996). This study considers the collaborative dimensions of a cross-sectoral partnership that involves a FBI (nonprofit sector) and a federal agency (public sector), exploring how a shared mission can facilitate the transfer of human and financial resources for the purpose of advancing civil society in inner-city Philadelphia.

**Research Questions**

The objective of this study was to explain how the partnerships were negotiated and how the collaboration functions to increase the capacity of incubator sites and the capital (social, political, spiritual, etc.) of disadvantaged communities. The author, with the guidance of the community partners, sought to answer:

1) How did the founding partners negotiate institutional relationships to secure national service volunteers for this faith-based community initiative?

2) What are the strengths of this collaboration? What are the challenges?

3) How did the incubator projects increase the capacity of the organizations in which the VISTAs were placed?

4) How do they increase the capital of the target communities?

5) What does this collaboration suggest about civil society in the post-industrial city?

**Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach was used to examine the research questions. Structured interviews with the collaborating partners were complimented by a web-based survey (Survey-Monkey) that was distributed via an email link to past VISTAs who had participated in some aspect of this collaboration. Document analysis was also conducted on materials that address the collaborative process, this included: meeting minutes, work plans, project reports, and correspondence.

The questions for the confidential and anonymous online survey were based on a focus group and previous research conducted in 2006 (Welch, Kerrigan, and Reyes-Bugg, 2006). At that time, the focus group participants expressed some confusion regarding how federal resources to fund national service were being applied in the context of a faith-based organization. The survey incorporated elements of this discussion as well as included a section on the Incubator Model that is a distinctive element of the CSS/CNCS partnership (See the survey protocol in the Appendix).

Of the 35 (fulltime and summer) VISTAs who have participated in national service with Catholic Social Services, the community partners could provide 27 names of past participants. Of those, 24 matching email addresses were identified. Three email addresses bounced back for a total of 21 possible responses out of the original universe of 35 former VISTAS. Out of those 21, ten responded to the online survey regarding their VISTA experience. This represents 48% of the available contacts and 28% of the universe of VISTA volunteers who have served through the CSS/CNCS partnership.

Six collaborating partners were identified by the research team. All six completed and returned the email interviews (100% response rate). The responses were

coded and synthesized using standard qualitative practice (See the appendix for the interview protocol).

**Description of the collaboration**

According to the interviews, Catholic Social Services approached the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2002 to obtain national service volunteers for a forthcoming community center. The Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center was a new CSS venture that would serve a low-income, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood. CSS capitalized upon the presence of an active community-organizing group and a strong Catholic parish identity in the neighborhood to define a new agency that sought to empower residents rather than provide traditional direct social services.

As one interviewee explained, this new agency became a suitable site for hosting VISTAs who are charged with:

> Strengthening efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty in the
> United States by encouraging and enabling persons to perform
> meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies,
> institutions, and situations where the application of human talent
> may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems"
> (Interview, March 14, 2008).

CSS staff who work at the Community Center believe that the VISTAs have met and exceeded these national service objectives. According to staff and other stakeholders, VISTAs have enabled the Center to provide a roster of programs to the community, helped the agency grow in sophistication and outreach, increased the agency's use of research and technology, forged connections with local colleges and universities, and garnered considerable funding from grant writing activities. Youth development was the

single most common primary work assignment identified by the VISTAs (44% of the

respondents), with community development, adult education, and technology sharing the

second most common primary work assignment. Other assignments included public

relations/marketing, translation/language support, and community organizing. As the

Center was building capacity, after the first year of their service; two out of the five first

VISTA volunteers were hired to work at the Center. They remain within CSS.


**Negotiating institutional relationships**

       Unlike some "inter-agency collaborations" that are initiated to remedy

inefficiencies or "inter-professional collaborations" to increase communication, the

CSS/CNCS pairing was designed to do what Miller and Ahmad (2000) refer to as

"working in partnership" (p. 11). In their view, this formation can, "mobilize external

resources that might not otherwise be available to any of the individual participants, and

enable partners to…consider new ways to tackle issues" (p.12). Indeed, the partnership

between a faith-based community organization (under the auspices of a leading religious

institution) and a federal agency allowed smaller units (like the local parish) to maximize

national service resources through the creation of the incubator model.

       The second principal lesson learned in negotiating this partnership was the

valuable role played by champions of the collaboration. A handful of key individuals

persistently tackled barriers to securing national service volunteers. For example,

Catholic Social Services Family Service Centers are largely driven by social work

practice that features a client and case manager relationship. Many CSS employees work

within the system for decades. The new Community Center, however, would be much

different. It was designed to host to a range of visitors and program participants who were guided and led by national service volunteers whose term of service was one year. Programs were to be responsive and dynamic, changing with the needs and talents of the community. The existing paradigm was not going to accommodate this new format. Wildridge et al. (2004) identifies this barrier as a cultural conflict where collaborating staff have to negotiate different views of the same situation. Considerable energy was spent to find ways to create this new arrangement, taking advantage of the national service volunteers, while recognizing the history of nearly two hundred years of charitable service provided by CSS in the state of Pennsylvania. As one collaborating partner from CNCS remarked:

> With limited resources for programming, the newly constructed center needed to establish itself as resource for the Kensington area in which it was located. The VISTA members built the capacity of the center to serve the community with excellent programming that addressed the poverty and poverty related problems in Kensington. They were able to tap into the community needs and develop programs that addressed those needs (Interview, March 14, 2008).

No other element of this partnership illustrates this concept better than the incubator sites.


**Incubator sites as a way to channel resources**

After several months of operating in close relationship with the local Catholic parish near the Center, one of the VISTAs in the very first cohort (2003-2004) was placed part time in the church to design a needs assessment around the issue of housing in the community. Three more sites were added in the next four years and the incubator model became a unique way to channel resources to sites that could not (or did not have the expertise to) apply for their own national service volunteers.

Of the ten respondents who completed the online survey designed to capture their perspectives on the VISTA experience, five reported serving at incubator sites. Of those five, two reported working with the Visitation BVM Parish and two with the Office of the Vicar for Hispanic Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. One did not identify his or her site. Of those who identified their affiliation, none mentioned being placed at the newest CSS/CNCS site, a family service center in a small struggling city adjacent to Philadelphia. The management and oversight of incubator VISTAs seems to have increased the efficacy of the model. 40% (or 2 of the 5 respondents) who were placed at incubator sites said that they felt they were effective "All of the time," while 40% said that the felt they were effective "Most of the time. One person felt "Somewhat" effective, but no one felt their service was in vain ("Not at all").

Despite the off-site model, VISTAs maintain that their supervision at the incubator sites was conducted by the Center director (60%). 20% identified another CBCC staff member as his or her supervisor and 20% identified the supervisor as the site coordinator at the incubator. The reporting relationship between the VISTAs placed at incubator sites and their supervisor was described equally (40%, 40%) as having "Minimal challenges" and as "Fluid." Only one person (20%) suggested that the relationship was somewhat complicated. 100% of the VISTAs serving at incubator sites felt that they were well connected to the Community Center throughout their VISTA year.

VISTAs who were placed at incubator sites largely felt that the incubator model was an "Excellent" way to meet the needs of the clients/community they served. When asked, "What did the 'incubator' offer to the community, if anything, that they

would not otherwise have access to without the partnership with the Corporation for

National and Community Service?" three VISTAs explained:

-"The incubator site has a wonderful connection to the Latin community."

- "Two very different things. Though different, they are linked. The first one is
their programs for the youth, seniors, and community at large. The second, the
relationships these programs promote.  Moreover, through the relationships, the
hope that growth for everyone involved."

-"Access to a dedicated part-time VISTA volunteer that had time and energy to
develop new programs that are needed."

VISTAs associated the strength of this model with human resources and then to enhanced

social capital. Collaborating partners at CSS and CNCS concurred. As one collaborating

partner expressed, "With the CBCC as the hub, the VISTA members were able to branch

out and extend the services beyond the walls of the center making the partnering

programs and institutions stronger" (Interview, March 15, 2008). A site supervisor of

VISTAs at one of the incubators stated that the volunteer served to connect the agency to

the "outside world," especially by bringing their skills in technological applications.


**Growing organizational and community capacity**

Increased capacity—both within the organization and in the community—is

not only one of the goals of AmeriCorps*VISTA, but it is also a major objective of the

Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center. 60% of the survey respondents rated VISTA

contributions to organizational capacity at their site as "Good" (on a scale of poor, fair,

good, excellent). 30% rated the contributions as "Excellent." When VISTAs were asked

to identify the top three activities that they felt increased capacity in the organization, the

response was overwhelmingly positive for "Building Relationships and Trust." (See Figure 1 in the Appendix).

Fewer respondents felt that VISTAs contributed to the capacity of the community in which they worked. 30% saw the contributions as fair, 50% as "Good," and 20% as "Excellent." Similar to organizational capacity, VISTAs felt that "Building Relationships and Trust" was one of the top three activities that increased the capacity of the community. However, VISTAs rated "Youth Programming" as ten percent more effective than that process. Also ranking high in this rating was "Adult programming." At the Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center, these activities included: a multi-cultural adult learning group, job training, computer classes, and a micro-entrepreneur class for budding business owners. (See Figure 2 in the Appendix).

**Mixed responses for sustainability**

Program sustainability is one of two key objectives of the AmeriCorps*VISTA mission (the other is capacity building). It is defined by the Corporation for National and Community Service as, "the ability of an AmeriCorps program to continue engaging a community's citizens to meet the needs of the community, through potentially changing circumstances and sources of support" (Toolkit, retrieved 2008). Using this understanding of the concept, implementing methods to achieve sustainability was cited by VISTAs as the weakest area of the CSS/CNCS partnership. And yet, collaborating partners (who are actually in the organization and community long after VISTAs depart) felt that program sustainability was reasonably successful for this collaboration.

In response to survey questions describing common program sustainability practices (such as train the trainer, mentoring incoming staff, and preparing folders/binders for future staff), only one VISTA felt that "All" the activities offered by his or her site had those components. The breakdown by incubator and non-incubator VISTAs demonstrates some clustering of responses (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Sustainability provisions[1]**

|  | **Non incubator VISTA** | **Incubator VISTA** |
|---|---|---|
| **All** | 10% | 0% |
| **Most** | 30% | 20% |
| **Some** | 20% | 10% |
| **None** | 0% | 0% |

Countering the VISTA feedback on sustainability is the response from several collaborating partners who identified tangible ways the investments made by national service volunteers were sustainable. Three collaborating partners mentioned that a handful of the 35 VISTAs have moved into full time employment with Catholic Social Services leading one to believe that sustainability might be measured in ways other than those defined and suggested by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

VISTAs did offer some suggestions on what they saw as the best way to ensure programs might continue after they had left. These ranged from trying to secure funding for the next year's work before your year had even concluded to training community leaders to pick up where your service would end. Funding and training were by far the most important elements that VISTAs identified as means to ensure

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[1] (One respondent, or 10% of the total, did not identify his or her VISTA site, that person responded that "Some" of the activities had sustainability provisions).

sustainability. Although mentioned to a lesser degree, they did also suggest engaging a wider range of investment from community leaders, setting realistic program goals, and connecting with CSS staff to have them carry the program forward at the end of the year.

**Challenges or weaknesses of the partnership**

When asked about what weaknesses of the CSS/CNCS partnership might prevent it from operating sustainable, capacity building programs, seven VISTAs replied. Two themes emerged:

1) One year service term and three year grant restricts real impact

2) Lack of mentoring/investment from professionals and past VISTAs limits sustainability

In terms of day-to-day operation of the partnership, VISTAs ranked "Confusion over workplans and goals" as the greatest weakness. They also identified the "complex reporting relationships" that exist inter-organizationally and the "Bureaucracy and red tape" that persists in this partnership between non-profits and a federal agency. A handful of VISTAs saw some issues relating to how the faith-based nature of the service sites might affect their experiences and the federal resources invested in those organizations. Three suggested that the partnership is weakened by an, "Inappropriate incorporation of faith and values in the workplace." Two experienced a, "Controversial use of national service volunteers in religious activities/context" while serving as VISTAs at sites associated with this partnership. Absent open-ended questions, there is not sufficient detail to understand the full nature of these issues. However, the questions were included

to expand on some of the themes that had been identified in the VISTA focus group in 2006.

Collaborating partners identified challenges in terms of recruiting, training, and keeping VISTAS engaged in the projects and sites. Some years or cohorts would yield strong volunteers who came with tremendous skills and energy while others faltered in their ability to stay engaged and active over the course of their service year. That being said, staff from the Corporation for National and Community Service and from the administrative level of Catholic Social Services noted that this site has had considerable success recruiting talented VISTAs. One respondent attributed that to having clear objectives and work plans, while others suggested it had a great deal to do with the inter-organizational support that came from within Catholic Social Services and the partnering incubator sites.

**Strengths of the partnership**

Human resources and social capital

VISTAs overwhelmingly cited the "Access to additional human resources (beyond CSS or incubator site staff)" as the strongest facet of the CSS/CNCS partnership that places volunteers in organizations/sites that might not otherwise have access to national service resources. "Enhanced social capital ranked" second (70%) and "Access to citywide institutions" (60%) ranked third. Social capital has been the subject of a generation of scholarship among researchers of neighborhood and community development (Jacobs, 1961; Briggs, Mueller and Sullivan, 1997; Kingsley, McNeely and Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Lang and Hornburg, 1998; Saegert and Winkel, 1998; Temkin

and Rohe, 1998). The research demonstrates that increased social capital leads to neighborhood stability and vitality.

Outcomes for career and civic engagement

A secondary outcome of the CSS/CNCS partnership is realized in how the VISTA experience affected the volunteers' views of future career and their relationship with their VISTA site, post-service. 90% said they would return to their site again as a visitor, volunteer, consultant, or for employment. 80% said they would recommend the partnership to someone else interested in serving as a VISTA. VISTAs reported that they were now more likely to consider careers in public service, human services, and public policy/advocacy. The VISTA experience through the CSS/CNCS partnership also seemed to be a logical interlude between previous employment and education and advanced higher education. 62% of the VISTAs said that they went on to graduate school after serving their year with the Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center and its affiliated incubator sites. 25% or two individuals went on to participate in a year of faith-based service.

**Implications for future research, policy, and practice**

In summary, the CSS/CNCS partnership owes a great deal to champions within each entity who persisted in securing the arrangement and the recruitment of talented volunteers. The primary program (the community center) has gained considerable capacity over time as have the secondary or incubator sites, but the partnership does need to continue to address some issues around sustainability.

Research

The study presents a very limited sample of the universe of national service volunteers serving in the United States and therefore cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, as a small longitudinal snapshot, it does shed light on an organizational/institutional collaboration on the eve of its 5th anniversary of operation. It also offers insight into new avenues of social science research on pluralism, volunteerism, and the role of religious organizations in advancing civil society. A larger sample size or comparative case studies could expand these themes with similar populations or program interventions.

Policy

This collaboration suggests that the modern cities require innovative, dynamic relationships to compel improvements to residents' quality of life. Many of the older public systems are not designed to be responsive to the quickly changing needs that emerge in a society where employment patterns, housing patterns, education, and even public spaces evidence decline and distress. The findings from this study imply that negotiating the terms of policy interventions (like youth development, adult education, community development, and even national service) can be a challenging process. Securing a federal commitment to public service will go a long way to ensuring that communities like the one examined in this study can continue to benefit from national service volunteers in the generations to come.

<u>Practice</u>

The elements that came together for the CSS/CNCS partnership embody the very best about working in partnership across sectors. In addition, it reflects the promise of human potential, catalyzed for increasing the common good rather than individual ends. According to a CSS staff person, "The legacy that most of the VISTAs left with us is a vivid example of welcoming everyone, building alliances, outreach, and culture sensitiveness." The findings also suggest that placing national service volunteers at faith-based organizations has long term implications for civil society, in terms of people, place, and practice. As one VISTA replied in the open-ended concluding question in the survey:
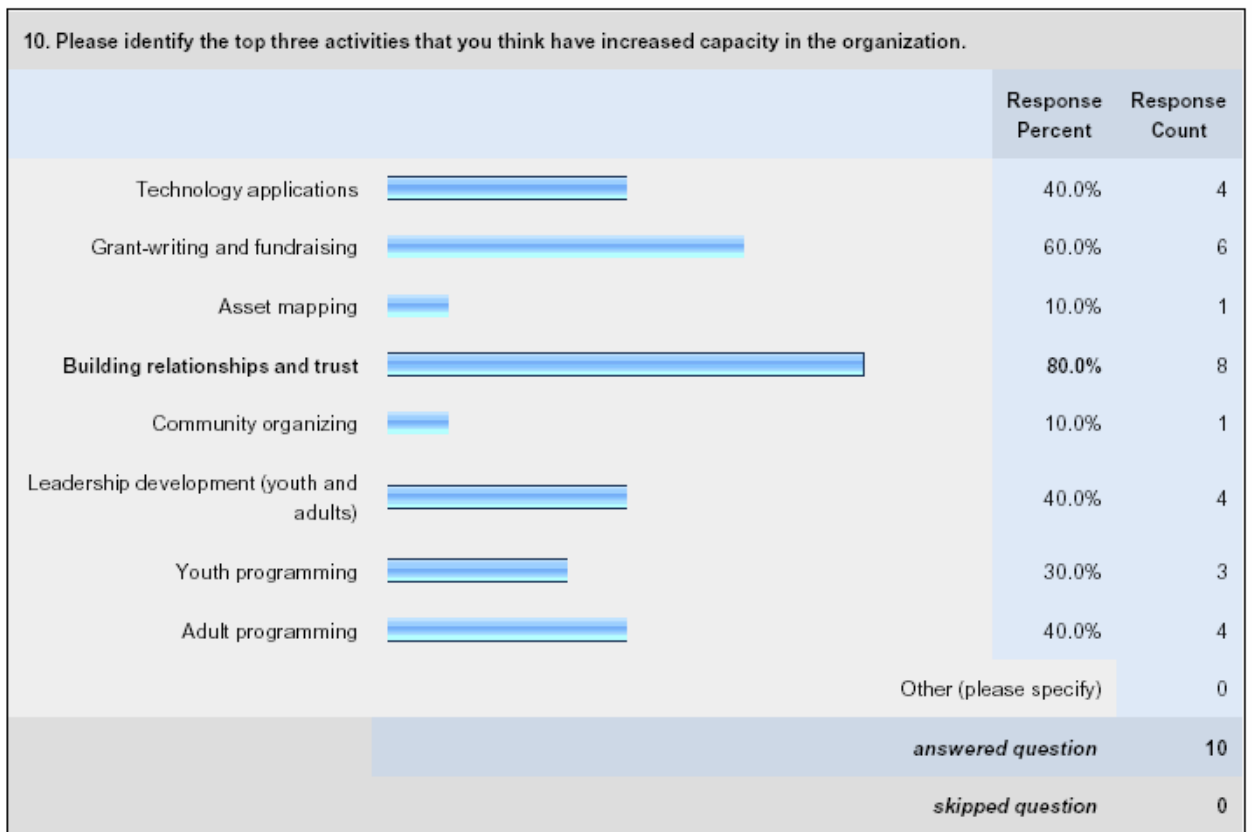
> To be perfectly honest, the fact that the community center was part of a faith based network had nothing to do with my decision to pursue a VISTA position there. But after witnessing the power of faith based community organizations, I'm a better nonprofit professional because I believe in the importance of these organizations. As we try to tackle amazingly complex and difficult problems in our world today, the only way to create a lasting difference is to call on all the resources at our disposal, bringing together the public, private and faith based sectors to work together to strengthen our endeavors (Interview, March 14, 2008).
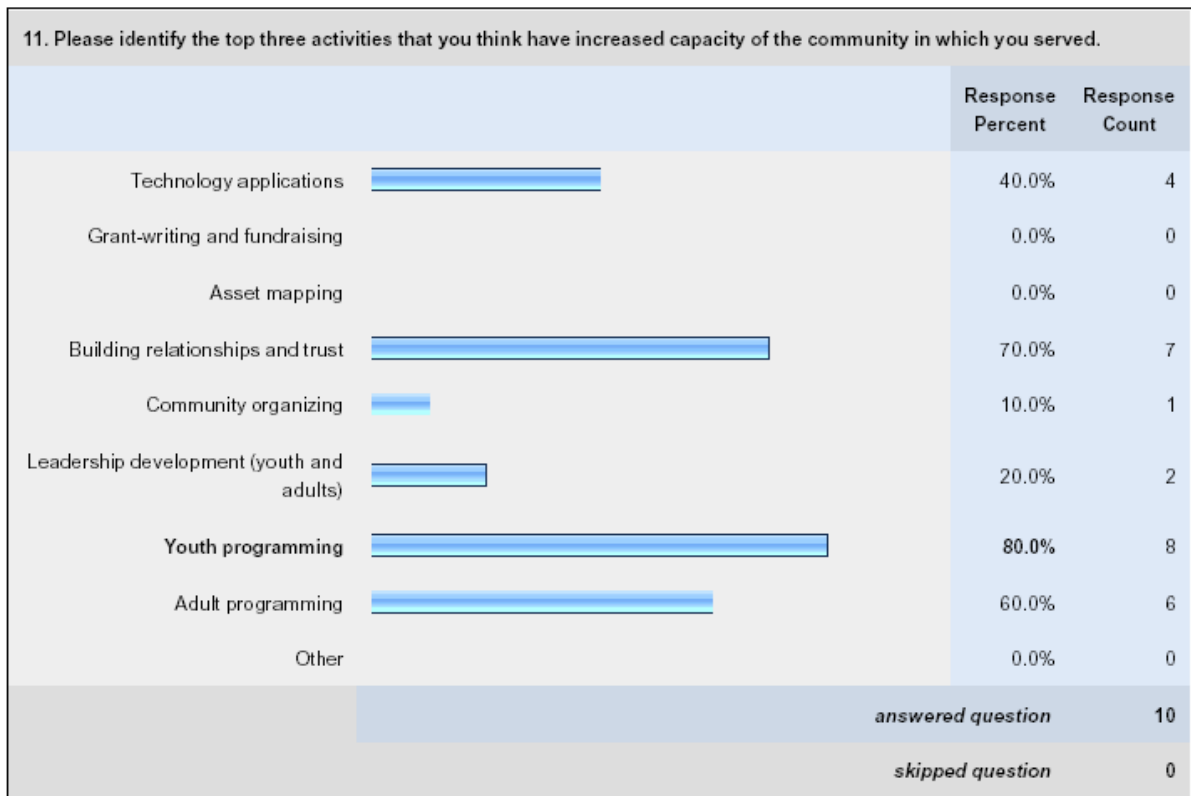
**APPENDIX**

**Figure 1: Increased Capacity in the Organization**

| 10. Please identify the top three activities that you think have increased capacity in the organization. | | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|---|
| Technology applications | | 40.0% | 4 |
| Grant-writing and fundraising | | 60.0% | 6 |
| Asset mapping | | 10.0% | 1 |
| **Building relationships and trust** | | **80.0%** | **8** |
| Community organizing | | 10.0% | 1 |
| Leadership development (youth and adults) | | 40.0% | 4 |
| Youth programming | | 30.0% | 3 |
| Adult programming | | 40.0% | 4 |
| Other (please specify) | | | 0 |
| | | answered question | 10 |
| | | skipped question | 0 |

**Figure 2: Increased Capacity of the Community**

11. Please identify the top three activities that you think have increased capacity of the community in which you served.

|  | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|
| Technology applications | 40.0% | 4 |
| Grant-writing and fundraising | 0.0% | 0 |
| Asset mapping | 0.0% | 0 |
| Building relationships and trust | 70.0% | 7 |
| Community organizing | 10.0% | 1 |
| Leadership development (youth and adults) | 20.0% | 2 |
| Youth programming | 80.0% | 8 |
| Adult programming | 60.0% | 6 |
| Other | 0.0% | 0 |
| answered question | | 10 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

**AMERICORPS*VISTA SURVEY PROTOCOL**

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*The questionnaire is completely anonymous and responses will be reported only in the aggregate. Please be completely honest in your responses.  Thank you.*

**I. Background Information**

**1.      Year of VISTA service with Catholic Social Services (Check those that apply if more than one)**

2003-2004
2004-2005
2005-2006
2006-2007
2007-2008

**2.      Your VISTA service site (Check those that apply if more than one)**

Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center
Visitation BVM Parish
Chester
Office of the Vicar for Hispanic Catholics, Archdiocese of Philadelphia

**3.      Your primary work assignment (Check those that apply if more than one)**

Youth development
Public relations/marketing
Community development
Adult education
Technology
Grant-writing/research
Translation/language support
Community organizing
Other program management

**4.      How did you learn about the VISTA projects with Catholic Social Services? (choose one)**

online
college/university career counselor
friend or family member

in the neighborhood
other

**5. What drew you to the site for your national service? (choose one)**

faith-based nature of CSS
mission of site/organization (CSS, OVHC, Visitation, etc.)
community-based programs
diversity of neighborhood
opportunity to use specific skills (Spanish, technology, etc.)
familiarity with program site
existing affiliation with site through staff or other connection

**6. Why did you choose national service through AmeriCorps? (choose one)**

to serve my country (civic duty)
to help people (empathy)
to serve in a disadvantaged community (social justice)
to earn the education award (funding)
to prepare for a future job (enhance skills)
to prepare for college or graduate school (gain experience)
to help me decide what to do next (transition)


II. GENERAL QUESTIONS ON CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

**1)      How would you rate VISTAs' contributions to organizational capacity at your site?**

Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent


**2)      How would you rate VISTAs' contributions to capacity of the community where your site was based?**

Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent

**3) To what degree did you feel you were an effective member at your VISTA site?**

Not at all
Somewhat
Most often
All of the time

**4) How prepared did you feel to take on the tasks in your workplan?**

Not at all
Somewhat
Mostly
Completely

**5) Did your supervisor, previous VISTAs, or other staff assist you with training to become better equipped for your position?**

Not at all
Sometimes
Often
Always

**6) Please identify the top three activities that you think have increased capacity in the organization.**

Technology applications
Grant-writing and fundraising
Asset mapping
Building relationships and trust
Community organizing
Leadership development (youth and adults)
Youth programming
Adult programming
Other

**7) Please identify the top three activities that you think have increased capacity of the community in which you served.**

Technology applications
Grant-writing and fundraising
Asset mapping
Building relationships and trust
Community organizing
Leadership development (youth and adults)
Youth programming
Adult programming

Other

**8) How many of these activities had a sustainability element (train the trainer, mentoring, preparing folders/binders for future staff, etc.)**

None
Some
Most
All

**9) How would you rate the actual sustainability of these activities? (through staff, community stakeholders, or other VISTAs)**

Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent

**10) What weaknesses in the CSS/CNCS partnership might prevent it from operating sustainable, capacity building programs?**

Open-ended question

**11) What would you identify as the best way to ensure programs continued after you left?**

Open-ended question

III. Site Specific Questions on Organizational Form and Capacity (ONLY APPLICABLE TO THOSE WHO WERE NOT BASED AT CBCC)

**1)      To what degree did you feel effective at your "incubator" site?**

Not at all
Somewhat
Most often
All of the time

**2) Who did you perceive to be your primary supervisor during your year of service?**

CBCC director
Other CBCC staff
a VISTA
Site coordinator (Vicar, priest, etc.)

**3) How would you describe your reporting relationship to your supervisor while you were at the "incubator" site?**

Consistently challenging
Somewhat complicated
Minimal challenges
Fluid

**4) How would you rate the effectiveness of the "incubator model" to meet the needs of the clients/community served by the incubator site?**

Poor
Fair
Good
Excellent

**5) How much was your workplan determined by the incubator site versus the CBCC?**

None
Some
Most
All

**6) Did you feel connected to the Community Center and other VISTAs while serving at the incubator?**

□ Yes     □ No

**7) What did the "incubator" offer to the community, if anything, that they would not otherwise have access to without the partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service?**

Open ended question

III. IMPLICATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

> **10) What do you consider are the strengths of the CSS/CNCS partnership that places VISTAs at incubator sites? (choose all that apply)**

Access to additional human resources (VISTAs) beyond staff
Enhanced social capital
Increased civic engagement
Access to citywide institutions (Archdiocese of Philadelphia, City of Philadelphia municipal services, etc.)

Fundraising potential
Increased capacity in technology
Expanded programs and projects that can be sustained by staff or volunteers (website, open-gym, etc.)
Unique application of federal resources to faith-based community organization
Other

**2) What do you consider are the weakness of the CSS/CNCS partnership? (choose all that apply)**

Bureaucracy and red tape
Complex reporting relationship
Confusion over workplan and goals
Lack of communication with main site
Isolation at incubator site (limited feelings of community within VISTA)
Inappropriate incorporation of faith and values in workplace
Controversial use of national service volunteers in religious activities/context
Misapplied federal resources (national service in a faith-based community organization)
Other

**4) Would you recommend this VISTA site to someone else**?
□ Yes      □ No

**5) Would you consider coming back to your site as a visitor, one time volunteer, consultant, or to apply for job?**
□ Yes      □ No

**6) Did your VISTA experience with CSS make you more likely to consider a career in public service?**
□ Yes      □ No

**7) Did your VISTA experience with CSS make you more likely to consider a career in human services?**
□ Yes      □ No

**8) Did your VISTA experience with CSS make you more likely to consider a career in public policy or advocacy?**
□ Yes      □ No

**9) What did you do after your VISTA year? (choose one)**

Another year of national service
A year of faith-based service
Started a job related to my VISTA position
Started a job in an entirely different field
Went to graduate school

Other

**10) Is there anything else you would like to add about the CSS/CNCS collaboration that you observed during your VISTA year or afterward?**

Open ended question

**INTERVIEW FOR COLLABORATING PARTNERS**

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**I. Background and negotiation of partnership**

1) Please describe your understanding of how Catholic Social Services came to secure AmeriCorps*VISTA members for the Cardinal Bevilacqua Community Center.

      B.  How did the subsequent the "incubator sites" such as Visitation BVM Parish and the Office of the Vicar for Hispanic Catholics come into being?

2) What was challenging or unique, if anything, about negotiating this partnership between a federal agency and faith-based initiatives?

**II. Capacity and Effectiveness**

1) How does the collaboration between the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and Catholic Social Services (CSS) of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia increase the capacity of the organizations in which VISTAs are present?

2) How does the collaboration between the CNCS and CSS increase the capacity of the communities in which VISTAs serve?

3) What have VISTAs done to promote sustainable programs at their sites through this collaboration?

4) What about the collaboration, if anything, makes it different from other sites where AmeriCorps*VISTA members serve?

5) How has the faith-based nature of Catholic Social Services and its incubator sites affected the partnership with the CNCS, a federal agency?

**III. Concluding thoughts**

1) What do you consider the strengths of the collaboration?

2) What are the challenges or weaknesses of the collaboration?

3) What lessons have you learned from being a part of the process of creating a new relationship between national service and faith-based community initiatives?

4) Is there anything else you would like to add about the CSS/CNCS collaboration that you have observed or experienced as a collaborating partner?

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