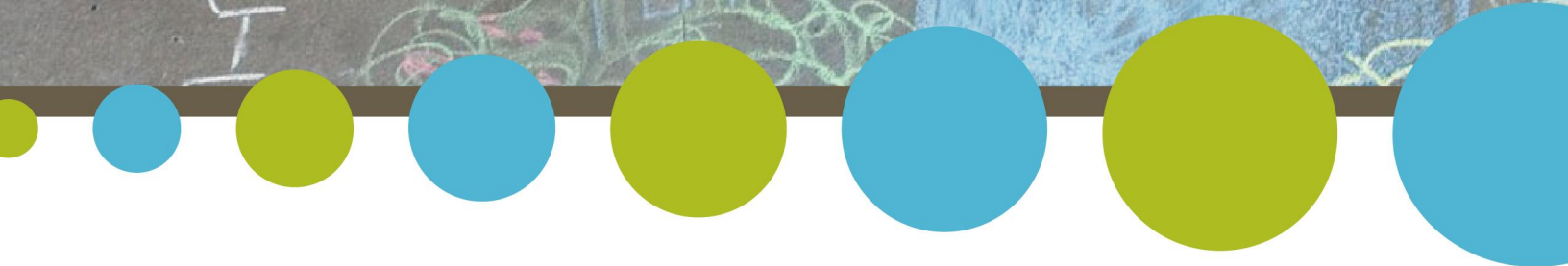





POINTS OF LIGHT INSTITUTE

Measuring the Impact of Hands On Network: Key Study Findings





Points of Light Institute advances innovative civic change strategies.

Hands On Network inspires, equips and mobilizes people to take action that changes the world.

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Measuring the Impact of HandsOn Network: Key Study Findings

Introduction: Points of Light Institute (POLI) commissioned a study to document the impact of HandsOn Network, its network of Affiliated member organizations (Affiliates), on the communities Affiliates serve. The study aimed to capture the first-ever outcomes profile of the newly merged network.

Problem statement: Affiliates can tailor programs to local needs, thus producing a diverse network. Further, the type of services Affiliates provide is often intermediary and indirect: Affiliates help organizations to serve clients and the community. In light of the varied, intermediary, and indirect network, past outcomes measurement largely comprised self-reports of output data, or counts of service. While important, these data often fell short of capturing the impact of Affiliates on people's lives and communities.

Theoretical Background: This study advances the state of outcomes measurement by moving away from past use of self reports of output data to stakeholder evaluations of direct impact of Affiliates on individuals and institutions. The study also assesses Affiliates' secondary impact by examining how they assist individuals and institutions to effect communities.

Methods: Data collection comprised surveys of and interviews with Affiliate-supported volunteers and community partner organizations. Researchers statistically identified patterns in survey data to create outcome areas. Researchers calculated the overall mean of the items constituting each outcome index. Four indexes emerged from this analysis: one for community partner outcomes (unidimensional), and three for volunteer outcomes (multidimensional). Researchers compared Affiliate impact on the four dimensions. Finally, researchers used interview data to enhance the interpretation of the quantitative data.

Representativeness: The study has two main parts. The stakeholders of 13 Affiliates participated in interviews designed to elicit a description of effective Affiliate performance.

Researcher also designed and implemented a survey study of all Affiliates. Forty-eight Affiliates participated. To evaluate the sample's representativeness, participating Affiliates were compared to non-respondents. The data suggest responding Affiliates are representative of the network with respect to size and governance, but over-represent duals (joint Points of Light Foundation and Hands On Network affiliation pre-merger) in terms of legacy type.

Network Outcome Analysis: To facilitate interpretation of the complex concepts the outcome indexes measure, researchers applied the standard grading scale depicted in Table 1. With scale points ranging between one and five, the higher the mean, the more positive the perception, or grade.

Table 1 "Grades" for Outcome Indexes

	Low	High
A	4.630	5.000
A-	4.130	4.625
B+	3.755	4.125
B	3.380	3.750
B-	2.505	3.375

Community partner outcomes

Index name	Community partner outcomes
Measures	How Affiliates directly impact respondent organizations, and through this support, indirectly impact the community
Comprises	9 individual survey items
Sample	2,687
Grade	B+ (Overall Mean = 3.99)

The collective message from the highest scoring items -- all pertaining to secondary impact -- suggests that **Affiliates fill a service void and amplify the quantity and quality of volunteer labor available in the community, thus helping to meet local needs.** Evidence is not as clear cut for direct impact; community partners are more hesitant in their assessment of how Affiliates effect their organization and clients. We attribute differences in direct and secondary impact evaluations to the possibility that Affiliate impact may be seen as incremental at the organizational level. When this incremental impact accumulates at the community level, it is then that respondents **may view Affiliates as powerful contributors to**

civil society, empowering volunteers and enhancing volunteer infrastructure.

Volunteer outcomes

Index name	Personal impact as a result of Affiliate-supported volunteering
Measures	How the volunteer was impacted and how the volunteer impacted the community
Comprises	5 individual survey items
Sample	5,119
Grade	B+ (Overall Mean = 4.06)

The data suggest that **volunteers who are mobilized by Affiliates are certain they are effective agents of community change**; the highest scores relate to volunteers meeting needs and improving lives. However, results show it is more difficult for Affiliates to impact volunteers directly, many of whom are educated professionals. **All in all, respondents seem to feel that they have greater impact on the community than they are impacted themselves by the volunteer experience.**

Index name	Affiliate impact on personal volunteer experience
Measures	How Affiliates supported the volunteer experience
Comprises	3 individual survey items
Sample	4,929
Grade	B (Overall Mean = 3.62)

Although far from negative, these index results are not particularly strong. For instance, **volunteers do not feel they operate in a vacuum, and are offered support.** The extent of the support, however, is not clear; the data are not strong in either direction. Lastly, whether Affiliates conduct follow-up achieved the lowest mean of the entire study. Affiliates may have limited capacity to follow-up. Yet this lowest scoring item signals that for even those Affiliates in which follow-up is a logistical possibility, it may not be occurring in a way that positively impacts the volunteer experience as reported.

Index name	Affiliate impact on others and the community
Measures	How Affiliates influence other's experiences and the community

Comprises	4 individual survey items
Sample	4,934
Grade	A- (Overall Mean = 4.49)

On the whole, the favorable results on this index indicate Affiliate programs and services increase the likelihood that people will locate personally meaningful volunteer opportunities. These opportunities, which pique interests and skills, encourage a regular commitment from volunteers. **Through the intimate matching of volunteer to opportunity, Affiliates directly meet community needs.** In addition, **through the work these volunteers accomplish, organizational partners also effect challenges and needs in the community.**

Conclusion: Taken together, the measures in this study indicate **Affiliates are impacting individuals and institutions, and through this support, the community.** In addition, results indicate that **the network is robust** and that, although Affiliate and stakeholder variations produce systematic and significant differences in some outcomes, more often than not, differences do not play a pivotal role. This finding suggests that a network of diverse Affiliates generates consistent outcomes on many measures.

Overall Grade	B+ (Overall Mean = 4.04)
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Next steps: Without a prescribed set of programs, measuring impact will be challenging for the network; it is a reasoned approach to frame impact around specific issue areas (e.g., preserving the earth). We recommend a strategic, regular and expected outcomes measurement process to trace outcomes over time and make participation more appealing to Affiliates (e.g., they can plan their own reporting needs around the national timeline and measures; they can review and comment on processes and measures).

In addition, through the application of multiple constituency theory together with the conceptualization of direct and secondary impact, this research provides an important framework for other intermediary organizations to begin to measure outcomes. We could find but little research attempting to measure the impact of such organizations: we hope that we have begun to make a contribution to that challenge here.

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