

# Recruitment Evidence: Summary Narrative

Overall, available research findings are consistent in providing support for the Recruitment Standard of the Third Edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice*<sup>™</sup>. However, only a low number of studies have addressed this topic. Furthermore, the methodological rigor of these studies is low with respect to being able to provide the types of evidence that are most needed to clarify support for the Standard and its associated Benchmarks and Enhancements.

The available studies are most notable for addressing the ways in which different recruitment practices (e.g., PSAs, word-of-mouth campaigns involving mentors and staff) may have varying usefulness for engaging prospective mentors based on the extent to which they convey relevant information about the program (e.g., requirements and expectations for mentors) and, in doing so, dispel potential misconceptions (e.g., that mentors must be highly educated). Findings address the relevance of such practices to both male and female prospective volunteers as well as those from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds. Evidence is more limited with respect to the breadth of practices and program models that have been the focus of research to date.

Systematic literature search and screening yielded three studies that have examined variation in a practice related to the Recruitment Standard of the Third Edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice*<sup>™</sup> in relation to indicators of program effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and/or safety. Both studies report findings that are pertinent to one of the two Benchmarks (B.1.1) for this Standard.<sup>1</sup> Study findings primarily address outcomes related to program efficiency and sustainability (more efficient and successful recruitment of mentors), although outcomes with potential relevance to program effectiveness (e.g., greater success in recruiting racial/ethnic minority group members as mentors) also have received attention.

The relevant findings of the identified studies provide qualitative evidence (Evidence Level 3A in DuBois, 2007), meaning that the potential implications of a practice are examined using non-quantitative data such as interviews, focus groups, or field observations. In an evaluation of recruitment strategies and practices (Furano, Roaf, Styles, & Branch, 1993), researchers collected data on program operations of eight Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) agencies via site visits and observations as well as phone interviews with agency staff. Agencies identified “word-of-mouth” (matched volunteers telling their families, friends, and acquaintances about the program) as the most effective recruitment strategy (p. 19). One potential advantage of this strategy is that it may be especially amenable to conveying accurate and detailed information about the program and what is expected of mentors (B.1.1). With further relevance to this

**Extent of Evidence Base**  
Low

**Favorability of Findings**  
High

**Rigor of Methodology**  
Low

**Scope of Findings**  
Low

consideration (B.1.1), one agency that had some success recruiting low-income and less educated volunteers took care to "portray the role of the volunteer as 'friend' rather than 'role model' in an attempt to dispel preconceived notions of mentors as wealthy or highly educated" (p. 21). Finally, the study also reported data suggesting that having Board members and/or staff who were minority group members was associated with greater success in recruiting minority volunteers. Minority representation may be helpful in accurately conveying information about program goals and expectations to prospective minority volunteers and, thus, facilitate recruitment of minority mentors (B.1.1).

In another study (Roaf, Tierney, & Hunte, 1994), researchers conducted focus groups with 73 volunteers at four BBBSA agencies during site visits. Separate focus groups were completed with different volunteer groups as follows (fifteen focus groups in total across sites): Female Inquiry (women who had inquired about the program, but had not submitted an application), Male Inquiry (same as Female Inquiry, but male volunteers), Applied-In Process (volunteers who had submitted an application, but had not been matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister by the time of the focus group) and Matched (volunteers who had been matched for less than a year). Analysis of the focus group data suggested that a failure of advertising campaigns (e.g., PSAs) to provide information about program requirements or expectations (including information that would dispel myths such as the need to be a professional or have a certain level of income) inhibited some prospective and qualified volunteers from applying to the program (thus, in turn, potentially detracting from program efficiency, sustainability, and effectiveness) (B.1.1). Conversely, practices more likely to provide such information – specifically engaging existing mentors and program staff and Board members in "word-of-mouth" recruitment efforts – were suggested to facilitate prospective volunteers making informed choices about whether to pursue involvement in the program. Similarly, insufficient practices for ensuring awareness about the program within minority communities was discussed by focus group participants as a factor believed to be limiting representation of minorities among program volunteers.

Finally, in a study conducted on behalf of BBBSA, a total of 5 focus groups were conducted with African-American male "Non-Bigs" (2 groups), "Contemplatives" (2 groups) and current Big Brothers (1 group). Non-Bigs focus groups consisted of middle class, African American men who had no contact with a BBBSA affiliate, whereas the Contemplative focus groups were conducted with African American men who had contacted a BBBS affiliate with an interest in potentially volunteering. Participants were recruited from Black communities in St. Louis, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. A principal conclusion of the study, based on analysis of the input received during the focus groups, is that the biggest obstacle to successfully engaging more African-American men as Big Brothers was a lack of desired information, early on in the recruitment process, regarding the commitment (both time and financial) involved with being a Big Brother as well as a range of other related concerns, including program rules and regulations, the nature of the relationship between a Big and a Little (mentee), profile of mentees, and support services for Big Brothers. Public service announcements were discussed as a particularly common way in which African-American men heard about the program. Although viewed as having valuable elements, such advertisements were regarded as insufficient for providing the preceding types of desired information about volunteering in the program (B.1.1).

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<sup>1</sup> When findings are pertinent to a particular Benchmark or Enhancement for this Standard, the number of the Benchmark or Enhancement is provided in parentheses. Please note that such references are provided regardless of whether the findings involved are consistent with (i.e., provide support for) the relevant Benchmark or Enhancement.

# References

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